

EXPECTING A RING AND FINDING A ROUND:
SEQUENCE AND ORDER IN GEORGE HERBERT'S *THE TEMPLE*

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

August 2016

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the sequential nature of George Herbert's *The Temple*. By engaging with this volume of poetry as a cohesive unit with structures that extend beyond any one poem, it is shown that although Herbert's poetry is richly productive, it is also limited and self-undermining, expressing the ultimately contingent nature of human art. The structures examined are of two kinds, dealt with in turn: first, those that are typographical and emerge from the physical presentation of Herbert's poems on the pages of the first edition of 1633, and second, formal structures modelled by particular poems in the collection, which provide insight and reflection into the functioning of the whole. In the first category are poems that share common titles ("Love" (I), "Love" (II), "Love" (III), for example) as well as the particular arrangements of poems such as "Hope" and "Sinnes Round" on the page, which suggest connections and relationships between these poems that are not apparent when viewed individually or in the abstract. The second kind of feature examined is found in a wide variety of Herbert's poems, and is the tendency of these poems to model particular kinds of reading practice that are applicable to the reading of *The Temple* itself. Poems such as "Prayer" (I) and "The Sacrifice" exhibit modes of accumulation and revision that suggest how multiple poems may be combined to produce larger structures of meaning, while poems such as "The Flower" and "The Pulley" demonstrate how such structures are necessarily incomplete and flawed. Finally, a turn to the poems "Vertue" and "Love" (III) explores how Herbert's poetry engages with questions of finitude and conclusion.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished and independent work of the author, Matthew Warner.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support and encouragement of Patricia Badir, Vin Nardizzi, and Robert Rouse. Cassie Rasmussen and Brad McMullen were invaluable in the project's earliest stages. The supervision of Elizabeth Hodgson has been exemplary, and her patience with countless drafts has been phenomenal. Such errors as remain are, of course, the fault of the author.

Introduction

This thesis is about ways of relating poetry. Taking George Herbert's *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* as its subject, it focuses on the ways in which individual poems reflect, overshadow, rewrite, revise and combine with each other in order to create larger structures of meaning. It is not concerned with the totality of *The Temple*, or even of "The Church," the sequence of lyric poems with which most Herbert critics find themselves chiefly occupied. Rather, the effects I pursue are contingent and emergent; contingent because they represent ways of reading that are often against the grain, combinations and contrasts that the reader may or may not notice, and emergent because they clearly depend on a structure larger than in individual lyric, though they nevertheless are chiefly not products of the entire sequence of *The Temple*. These effects are both poetic (in the sense of the formal qualities of a certain type of language) and textual (in the sense of relating to the material aspects of printed type on the page) and ultimately a great deal of what I show is how these two aspects of *The Temple* are interrelated.

Much of Herbert's poetry is concerned with the relationship of the part to the whole, grappling with the relationship of the individual to a god whose "word is all, if we could spell."¹ My focus is ultimately not upon the theological ramifications of this idea, but rather upon the poetic ideas of harmony and unity in Herbert's poetry. A number of Herbert's poems explicitly concern themselves with questions of recurrence—"How fresh, oh Lord, how sweet and clean, / Are thy returns!" ("The Flower" 1-2)—or the relation of the part to the whole—"Thy power and love, my love and trust / Make one place everywhere" ("The Temper" 28) and it is this question

¹ "The Flower," 21. Herbert's poetry is quoted from *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Further references are in-text, by line number.

of the larger whole, the “one place everywhere,” that I take up first, by way of introduction, both because it is the question of the larger whole that has preoccupied much of Herbert criticism, and because it is this question that most clearly raises the theoretical issues surrounding poetic accumulation, accretion, and association that I will engage with more specifically through the rest of my project.

To collect and combine poems, however, requires a medium through which the collecting may occur. Many such media are available—even prior to the 20th Century resurgence in Herbert’s popularity, Herbert’s poetry has been available in a wide variety of forms and editions, and when we approach the question of what has been read before and what will be read after, the material substrate upon which we read Herbert’s poetry is vitally important. An online edition with hypertext links in alphabetic order is dramatically different from one of the early manuscript copies of Herbert’s poetry, and this difference affects the way that we relate the poems to one another. My first chapter, then, is devoted to the material context within which we necessarily approach *The Temple*. Here, I focus on the particularities and peculiarities of the 1633 first edition of *The Temple*. The kinds of device I track in this chapter are not unique to this edition (nor are they shared by all subsequent editions) but they are, as I hope shall be clear, specific and interesting bibliographical and textual features that guide the reader through *The Temple*. This is not, to be clear, a claim for the priority of the first edition—many scholars quite justifiably prefer the Little Gidding manuscript now held at the Bodleian—and my reasoning is rather that it is this edition from which nearly all subsequent editions of *The Temple* have descended, and that many of the idiosyncrasies in the presentation of Herbert’s poetry are the result of this particular version of the text. Whether or not these features are the manifestation of Herbert’s intentions is a question that is ultimately tangent to those I am asking.

In particular, I will look at two different features of Herbert's first edition, the typographical layout of Herbert's pages and the named groupings of poems ("Holy Scriptures" (I) and "Holy Scriptures" (II), for example) that work their way through "The Church." The first of these questions has been largely ignored by Herbert scholarship, but provides a rich and engaging avenue of approach for Herbert's work, suggesting connections where modern editions portray disjunction and suppressing or altering connections that seems intuitive in versions of Herbert's work such as Wilcox's. The second question, of Herbert's named poetic "clusters," to use Janis Lull's term, has been the subject of considerable critical inquiry.² I do not, however, wish to read Herbert's groupings in terms of their revisions and authorial construction (as Lull does), nor do I even wish to privilege the links between these poems above other interconnections of "The Church." Rather, my interest is in how Herbert's named poems—especially, but not exclusively, those that share names—work against a direct, linear reading of *The Temple*, and how they suggest that meaning is more diffuse and less teleological than it often seems.

With something of a sense of how Herbert's poetry shapes the reader's experience of it, then, I will turn, in my second chapter, to some of the formal features that guide the reader through and around the poems that comprise *The Temple*. Examining in turn accumulation in "Prayer" (I), repetition and difference in "The Sacrifice," reflection and revision in "The Flower" and continuation and elaboration in "The Pulley," I hope to suggest some of the ways that Herbert's poems depend on one another to produce complex poetic effects, and simultaneously model and describe that same dependence.

The reading practices I will explore, then, are hazy effects of particular kinds of reading; they depend on a certain kind of text of Herbert's work, on a certain kind of reader, reading in a

² Janis Lull, *The Poem in Time: Reading George Herbert's Revisions of The Church* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 20.

certain kind of way, and by way of conclusion, I will to turn to the ending of “The Church” itself, and return to some theoretical questions about the nature and function of Herbert’s poetry, focusing on Herbert’s three poems entitled “Love,” to suggest some of the ways that Herbert’s poetry resists grand narratives, makes itself contingent and individual, and ultimately relates itself to silence.

1. The Church Whole

The Temple, of course, is a work in three parts, and discussion of its individual elements would, absent engagement with those larger structures, be premature. The tripartite structure of *The Temple*, however, has been the subject of much critical disagreement. The relation of “The Church-Porch” and “The Church Militant” to the collection’s central body of shorter lyrics is not an obvious one, and while it has been seen as emblematic of *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, as Deborah Shuger suggests, it has equally been dismissed out of hand as a merely textual residuum, most notably by Chana Bloch, for whom “Love” (III) is *The Temple*’s ringing conclusion.³ It is an opinion, one suspects, that many critics secretly harbour: where “Love” (III), a simple 18-line lyric, has engendered dozens of articles and book chapters, the scholarly interest in the nether end of Herbert’s project has been considerably less enthusiastic—Louis Martz paradigmatically suggests that “The Church Militant” is “a rather desperate attempt to salvage, if only by way of appendix, a very early poem.”⁴ Yet, the relation of the “Church Militant” to the lyrics that precede it is of considerable interest—even if it is, as Daniel Rubey puts it,

³ Chana Bloch, *Spelling The Word: George Herbert and the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 101.

⁴ Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study of English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 289.

“notoriously difficult to document,”—for it suggests a great deal about how we consider the sequencing and juxtaposition of the individual elements of “The Church.”⁵

Barring the discovery of new evidence, an entirely secure textual argument as to whether Herbert intended this last poem to be a part of *The Temple*, related to it, or neither, seems beyond the realm of possibility.⁶ The relation of the two parts, however, is not so different from the less frequently examined transitions that comprise the main body of “The Church.” Both “The Church Militant” and the shorter lyrics of “The Church” provide two (or more) similar poetic units divided by a gap between them, though the critical methods relevant to each are quite different: where studies of “The Church Militant” have tended towards either the architecture of *The Temple*, the longer poem’s vision of church government, or bibliographic studies, the sequence, order and gaps of “The Church” have elicited more formalist approaches. Many of Herbert’s local combinations of poems within “The Church” are theologically suggestive, of course—the opening sequence of “The Altar,” “The Sacrifice,” and “The Thanksgiving” and the closing arrangement of “Death,” “Doomsday,” “Judgement,” “Heaven,” and “Love” (III) are often cited as examples—but many seem less clearly explicable in terms of Herbert’s context and period. These contrasts and juxtapositions, however, create meaning in their own particular ways, often by suggesting not conjunction but disjunction. These connections are not dependent, either, upon Herbert’s intentions or deliberate arrangement (a method applied, for example, by critics such as

⁵ Daniel Rubey, “The Poet and the Christian Community: Herbert’s ‘Affliction’ Poems and the Structure of *The Temple*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 20 (1980): 105.

⁶ Deborah Shuger’s remains one of the best arguments for the close relation of “The Church Militant” to the rest of *The Temple*, while the strongest case for the non-belonging of the “Church Militant” on textual grounds is made by Lee Ann Johnson. See, respectively, Deborah Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Lee Ann Johnson, “The Relationship of ‘The Church Militant’ to ‘The Temple,’” *Studies in Philology* 68 (1971): 200-206.

Johnson and Annabel Endicott in arguing that *The Temple* should not include “The Church Militant.”⁷

This is made clearest by reference to “The Church Militant:” to ask how “The Church Militant” contributes to the themes of *The Temple*, however, is fraught. The poem is a part of *The Temple*, as we have it now, and if it takes the whole in a quite different direction, then that direction is a direction towards which the whole must also veer. To detach the poem from the whole in order to say that it is unconnected from the whole is tautological, and to ask whether there is an “organic connection,” as Johnson puts it, between the three parts of *The Temple* presupposes a divide between those parts.⁸ One way to see this is to consider an edition of Herbert’s work such as that of George Herbert Palmer’s rearrangement, which shows that Herbert’s poetry can be re-arranged so as to produce, from its arrangement, many kinds of meaning that do not depend on the author’s approval.⁹ A number of the poems of “The Church” are linked by more than merely following one another, but even without these connections, the poems’ positions, one after another in an orderly sequence, ensure that each extends its meaning beyond its beginning and end, and even beyond its immediate neighbors. Each poem, in Jonathan Goldberg’s terms, echoes against each other poem.¹⁰ As Adam Smyth describes of the strange capital-letter sequences of “Paradise,” these smaller narratives “do not embody or epitomize the

⁷ Johnson, “The Relationship of ‘The Church Militant’ to ‘The Temple.’” Annabel Endicott, “The Structure of George Herbert’s *Temple*: A Reconsideration,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (April 1965): 226-237.

⁸ Johnson, “The Relationship of ‘The Church Militant’ to ‘The Temple,’” 205.

⁹ Barbara Leah Harman discusses Palmer and Herbert extensively in the introduction to her *Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert’s Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), where she refers to Palmer as a “notorious rearranger” of Herbert (3). Palmer’s approach is discussed from an editorial perspective in F. E. Hutchinson, *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), lxxvii-lxix. See also George Herbert Palmer, *The English Works of George Herbert*. 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905).

¹⁰ Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 118.

larger poem [or collection]; rather they provide a looser series of connections.”¹¹ Careful curation is one way of creating meaningful groups of objects, but piling them in a heap speaks volumes about how they go together too.

2. Beginning to End: Agamben and the Voice of God

For all of the exemplary interest of “The Church Militant,” however, this project will nevertheless focus on the internal dynamics of *The Temple* in a way that privileges the lyric poetry of “The Church” over the two longer poems. In part, this is because I share the critical preference for Herbert’s shorter works. In part, however, it is because insofar as my topic is not directly Herbert’s poems, but rather the ways that those poems relate to one another, “The Church,” with its dense accretion of shorter texts, is a more fruitful ground for inquiry. Perhaps still more to the point, however, it is possible to think of a sequence like Herbert’s as made up not just of a number of pieces, but of a number of transitions. Rather than thinking about “The Church” as a collection of individual lyrics, we can consider it as a series of shifts, deflections, evasions, continuations and elaborations that occur as the poems relate to one another—something rather hard to do with the longer poems. Each of these transitions begins with an ending, continues in silence—blank space, if we think in written terms—and ends with the resumption of speech. Strange though it seems, then, let us begin with the ending, a moment that, Giorgio Agamben has suggested, constitutes poetry itself. Poetry, according to Agamben, inheres in the break, the end of the line: “the possibility of enjambment constitutes the only criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose. For what is enjambment, if not the opposition of a metrical

¹¹ Adam Smyth, “‘Shreds of holiness’: George Herbert, Little Gidding, and Cutting Up Texts in Early Modern England” *English Literary Renaissance* 42, no. 3 (2012): 453-4.

limit to a syntactical limit, of a prosodic pause to a semantic pause?”¹² By Agamben’s definition of poetry something rather remarkable occurs at the poem’s end: the metrical and semantic limits of the poem coincide. There is no possibility of enjambment. “Does this mean,” Agamben asks, “that the last verse trespasses into prose?” (112). This ending, Agamben suggests, is a “fall into silence,” a site of ontological anxiety that shows the poem’s essential ephemerality.

The extent to which this is an *anxious* phenomenon, I think, is closely linked to questions about the importance of poetry; for a poet like Herbert, “it goes without saying,” Stephen Burt humorously notes in a piece entitled “Art vs. Laundry,” that there are “more important things (such as accumulated laundry)” than poetry.¹³ Indeed, there is a closer connection here (to Agamben, not laundry), for Herbert seems often to link the end of his poems with a kind of movement towards the divine, exploiting the human fallibility of poetry as a chance to defer to divine authority. The poem still falls, per Agamben, into silence, but in a way that makes room for another voice to speak. It would be wrong, however, to locate that voice *within* the poem itself: rather, it lies just outside it, evoked by, but not located in, the italicised lines that seem to speak from on high. It is this moment of deferral that makes Goldberg’s Derridean readings of Herbert so resonant—the voice at the end of *Jordan (II)* that tells the poet that “*There is in love a sweetness readie penn’d: / Copie out onely that, and save expense*” is not actually the voice of God, and divine presence is inevitably pushed—deferred—beyond the end of the poem. Herbert falls silent to let his god speak, reaching “that threshold of the text beyond which *The Temple* does not move.”¹⁴

¹² Giorgio Agamben, “The End of the Poem,” in *The End of the Poem*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 109. Further references to Agamben will be in text, to this edition, by page number.

¹³ Stephen Burt, “Art vs. Laundry: Is there More to Life than Poetry?,” *Poetry Foundation*, May 12, 2010, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/239328>

¹⁴ Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo*, 122.

This shift in ending away from the personal voice towards something—sometimes even marked by italics or capital letters—that gestures towards transcendence is characteristic of much of Herbert’s poetry. As a renunciation of poetic agency, of course, Herbert’s deference to something akin to inspiration fits neatly within the Protestant theology often seen in his work, which becomes, as in “The Holdfast,” a coming-to-terms with human insufficiency:

But to have nought is ours, not to confesse
That we have nought. I stood amaz’d at this,
Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse,
That all things were more ours by being his.
What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall. (9-14)

The “fall” at the end of this poem is certainly into silence: the poem does not continue, and links the thematic acceptance of having “nought” with a textual shift into “nought.” Yet, as the 12th line suggests, the disavowal of human capacity is hedged about by the fact that “all things were more ours by being his.” Indeed, the concluding couplet, ambiguously voiced, seems to make some claim on human ability, for though to “confess / That we have nought” is impossible, the poem remains haunted by the possibility of confessing precisely that we cannot “confesse / That we have nought.” There is an endlessness to this process, and the poem forestalls it by the simple device of ending, an effective device, but one which operates by throwing the resolution of this endless cycle beyond the end of the poem.

This is, indeed, the manner of many of Herbert’s poems, which capitalize on the “fall into silence” of the poem to defer meaning and resolution beyond the bounds of the poem itself. At the end of “Jordan” (I), for example, Herbert ‘answers’ the Platonic critique of representation with an appeal to plainness:

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for prime:
I envy no man's nightingale or spring;

Nor let them punish me with loss of rhyme,
Who plainly say, *my God, my King*.

As with “The Holdfast,” it is not, precisely, that Herbert’s reply is inadequate. But it is, rather, an appeal to outside authority that fails to resolve the poem’s problem. It connects the situation of the poem to a larger (metaphysical) context, but that context is not brought into the poem itself: “Christian truths,” Harman suggests, “are pressed outward—into the poem’s end or into its frame.”¹⁵ Herbert appeals, to resolve the poem, to what Ronald Hepburn calls “extra-poetic truth,” the religious doctrine that necessarily undergirds religious poetry.¹⁶ For, without the metaphysical value that Herbert attaches to “*my God, my King*,” his invocation is hollow and unsatisfying—there must be something special about *these* words, an additional quality that overcomes what Peter Sacks terms “the inefficacy of a merely formal renewal, however virtuosic.”¹⁷ We do not, of course, need to accept Herbert’s religious doctrines in order to make sense of the poem—but if we cannot make sense of the paradigm to which Herbert is appealing, the poem makes no sense either, a fact made clear on the page by the text’s italics. We need, at a minimum, to understand why these words are set differently from the rest of the poem (in this case, by being scriptural, though this is not always the case with Herbert). Regardless of the metaphysical import we attach—or are willing to grant for the sake of reading—to Herbert’s final “*my God, my King*,” Herbert’s invocation remains only words—held in abeyance by its own poetic form, but open to that future “loss of rhyme” that Herbert fears. There is, in the poem’s end, what David Ben-Merre calls a mediation of “the poetic object’s actual ending with the

¹⁵ Harman, *Costly Monuments*, 85.

¹⁶ Ronald Hepburn, “Poetry and Religious Belief” in *Metaphysical Beliefs: Three Essays*, ed. Alasdair Macintyre and Ronald Smith (London: SCM Press, 1957): 146.

¹⁷ Peter Sacks, “*No Room for Me: George Herbert and our Contemporaries*,” *The George Herbert Journal* 18, no. 1-2 (1994-5): 40-41.

subject's desire for or anxiety about such an ending."¹⁸ The verse itself does not guarantee Hepburn's "extra-poetic truth," even to those who have no issues with that truth—the force of the poem is pushed beyond it, to *both* doctrine and the divine. Agamben's anxieties, then return to haunt the poem in a way that is more metaphysical than ontological. The ephemerality of the poem has been secured, but by appeal to a framework that cannot reside within the poem itself, to which the poem can only gesture, "the divine space where the semiotic and the semantic can finally come together."¹⁹

3. "I am Finite, Yet thine infinitely:" Kierkegaard and repetition

The relationship between poetry and faith is one that has been pursued by innumerable Herbert scholars, but typically from the perspective of faith as a guide to poetry. Critics such as Louis Martz, Barbara Lewalski, Richard Strier, Gene Veith and Daniel Doerkson have written (and argued) extensively about how the particulars of Herbert's religious views inform his poetry.²⁰ These readings are often informative, providing cogent insights into some of the most perplexing moments in Herbert's verse, not to mention expanding our understanding of 17th Century English religious culture. I want to propose a quite different theological source for insight into Herbert's poetry: Kierkegaard. A number of Kierkegaardian ideas are applicable to *The Temple*, helping to explain the dynamics of Herbert's collection in terms of repetition and faith that augment an account founded solely on transcendental notions of the end.

¹⁸ David Ben-Merre, "Falling into Silence: Giorgio Agamben at the End of the Poem," *Mosaic* 45, no. 1 (March 2012): 99.

¹⁹ Ben-Merre, "Falling into Silence," 99.

²⁰ Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Richard Strier, *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Gene Edward Veith, *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1985); Daniel W. Doerkson, *Picturing Religious Experience: George Herbert, Calvin, and the Scriptures* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

Most importantly, Kierkegaard emphasizes an account of faith in which it is a *process*, not a state. Kierkegaard devotes considerable thought to “the man of faith,” of course, and such a man lives in faith, but what Kierkegaard emphasizes repeatedly is that this fate is attained and sustained through a particular kind of action that must be repeated. This repetitive motion is exactly what occurs in *The Temple*, which moves beyond telic ideas of transcendence to produce something more repetitive and complicated. Herbert does not simply depart for the infinite with “The Church Porch” and arrive there with “The Church Militant” (or any other poem, for that matter) and here, too, Kierkegaard is provocative, for he suggests, in a way that Agamben’s mysticism does not, that though the movement of faith begins with “infinite resignation,” it nevertheless returns wholly to the world; indeed, faith bears “a striking resemblance to bourgeois philistinism” (38). In Herbert, this is a movement that is often grounded the reflexive questions about the nature of poetry, but which follows the same structure. The realization that “Thy word is all” does not lead to silence, but to a return to speech. Even poetic endings like that of “A True Hymn”—where “th’heart sayes (sighing to be approved) / O, could I love! and stops: God writeth, *Loved*” (19-20)—do not mark a sustained silence, but rather a return to the poetic task at hand. *The Temple* espouses a theology in which “all things were more ours by being his,” (“The Holdfast” 12) a transactional account that Kierkegaard puts in terms of recuperation: rather than remaining with the infinite, the faithful recuperate through it something more personal and immediate. Through the mediation of silence and the projection of the poem beyond its end, Herbert is able to ground his poetry in the divine, without seeming removed from this world.

This is perhaps clearest on the level of language, for though Herbert sits poorly with Kierkegaard’s suggestion that the faithful person “is not a poet, and I have tried in vain to lure the poetic incommensurability out of him” he nevertheless lives up to Kierkegaard’s expectation of

plainness, famously celebrating those “Who plainly say, *My God, My King*” (“Jordan” (I) 15).²¹ Indeed, Herbert’s deceptive accords strikingly with Kierkegaard’s imagination of a Sunday in the life of the man of faith, who, though he “looks just like a tax collector!” or “the butcher across the way” is nevertheless imbued with a complex and laudable inner life (*Fear and Trembling* 39, 40). A.D. Nutall suggests that Herbert’s poetry creates a space in which “nothing less than the most perfect simplicity is tolerated,” and though his emphasis on perfection is infelicitous, both Herbert and Kierkegaard emphasize an aesthetics of faith grounded in simplicity.²² While “it is commonly supposed that what faith produces is not a work of art,” Kierkegaard writes, or “that it is a coarse and boorish piece of work, only for the more uncouth natures . . . it is far from being that. The dialectic of faith is the finest and the most extraordinary of all; it has an elevation of which I can certainly form a conception, but no more than that” (*Fear and Trembling* 36). Refined, difficult to explain and somehow still in accord with principles of simplicity, Kierkegaard’s account of the product of faith neatly fits *The Temple*.

In addition to these conceptual links between Herbert and Kierkegaard, however, there is a formal connection between the two, for both set themselves at one remove from their authorship. Herbert suggests that his writing is not wholly of his own devising, writing that “Although the verse be somewhat scant, / God doth supplie the want” (“A True Hymn” 17-18). Kierkegaard adopts a somewhat different approach, writing significant portions of his oeuvre pseudonymously. *Fear and Trembling*, for example, is the product of “Johannes de Silentio,” and is mostly filtered through the context of a commentary upon the story of Abraham and Isaac—both devices that call into question the ability of the text to represent what it claims to.

²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition* trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 39. Further references to *Fear and Trembling* will be to this edition.

²² A. D. Nutall, *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, Dante and St. John* (London: Methuen, 1980), 15.

Fundamentally, Kierkegaard, like Herbert, holds that the ability to communicate faith is questionable—Abraham, the man of faith, cannot justify his faith to the community, for to do so would reduce it to the level of the ethical (*Fear and Trembling* 70-71). Yet for neither author are incompleteness and inadequacy absolute negation: at the end of 500 pages of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Crumbs*, ‘Johannes Climacus’ denies his entire opus: “what I write contains an additional notice to the effect that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only a conclusion but a revocation into the bargain.”²³ Herbert never uses such strong language, but his poems often end with devices that seem similar, as in “The Collar:” “But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild / At every word / Methought I heard one calling, *Child!* / And I replied *My Lord.*” Indeed, the revisionary tendencies observed in Herbert by critics such as Vendler and Fish could be described in terms not unlike Kierkegaard’s, to whom “to write a book and revoke it is something else than not writing it; ... to write a book which does not claim importance for anyone is something else than leaving it unwritten” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 523).

For both Herbert and Kierkegaard, then, formal features move representation beyond the realm of the individual text: meaning is an emergent phenomenon, the product of revision and revocation and pseudonymity and sequence. The emergence of meaning from the whole, for both writers, happens only when meaning is pushed into a space beyond the text. Yet, by moving through this space (and here both writers diverge from Agamben) the faithful return to this world, expressing themselves not infinitely or incommensurably, but rather simply. After the silence at the end of the poem comes the next poem. The movement of faith is not a movement to be

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 522.

undertaken only once, but rather a series of repetitions, as ‘spiritual narrative’ readings of *The Temple* make clear.

4. Terminal Limits: Concluding Sequences

“The Church,” however, is not a sequence without end. The flow of the whole from one poem into the next serves to both repeat and suppress the disjunction of the poems’ ends, but it does not help the larger whole to escape from the fact that it, too, must come to a final conclusion. This final ending becomes a question not of the coincidence of metrical and poetic limits, but of poetic and *sequential* ones. The ending of each poem offers the potential for the ending of the whole, but that ending comes about only when the local ending of one particular poem coincides with the ending of the whole—when the poem is the last poem. There is, however, nothing internal to any one poem’s ending that precludes (or requires) the sequence’s ending there, and the sequence’s ending is therefore at once profoundly different from the hundreds of lacunae that precede it and radically similar: a silence that marks not so much *ending* as the failure to continue—a feature made clear in the Williams manuscript, where *The Temple* ends with a series of diminishing horizontal lines that trail away into nothingness and blank pages, a kind of terminal ellipsis.²⁴ “[T]he work,” Blanchot writes in an oddly apropos reflection, “the work of art, the literary work—is neither finished nor unfinished: it is. What it says is exclusively this: that it is—and nothing more. Beyond that it is nothing.”²⁵ The only thing that limits the work of art, that puts a terminus to it, according to Blanchot, is the death of the author, who dies at the moment that the work comes into being. This is a suspiciously grandiose way to

²⁴ See *George Herbert: The Temple: A Diplomatic Edition of the Bodleian Manuscript* (Tanner 307), ed. Mario di Cesare (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), xx-xxi.

²⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1982), 22.

view the always extant possibility of revision, but it captures the possibilities that open up at the end of the poem, at a point where, *contra* Agamben, Herbert makes room for continuation, modulation and revision. A poem like the one Herbert titles “Love” does not *conclude*, in the sense of closing off possibilities, of “falling into silence” with nothing else to say. Instead, it enables its own continuation, a poem titled only “II.” The two poems operate dialectically (“II” sends us back to see what “I” was), but for all the obviousness of their interconnection, they are just as entangled with the poems that precede and follow (respectively, “Antiphon” (I) and “The Temper” (I)), to “Love” (III), to the other numbered poems of “The Church,” to every other sonnet in *The Temple*, to the poems with which they share thematic and formal concerns, and so on. Blanchot is, in a sense, correct: not a single part of the work is ever done, and each is always subject to modulation by the newest addition, each new poem rewriting the whole in its own image. Goldberg’s echoes return.

What I want to attempt with this project, then, is to trace some of those echoes, describe their sounds and resonances—not find their sources or transcribe a faithful recording of endlessly receding reverberations. Goldberg is rightly skeptical of totalizing readings of *The Temple*, and I certainly have no desire to attempt to pin Herbert’s poetry to any particular doctrinal affiliation, I do believe that it is meaningful to ask questions of *The Temple* as a whole. This is, ultimately, as necessary, for to question what it means to combine two poems together leads inductively and inevitably to questions about the larger whole. Goldberg suggests that this is a dangerous practice, writing that “we do not know how to read [Herbert’s] book.”²⁶ It is not clear what this means—do we know how to read *Hamlet*? What about Goldberg’s own book?—nor does it seem like a terribly helpful observation. The question of whether *The Temple* is or is not a book is one that is most interesting in a context that has rather little to do with *The Temple*, and rather more to

²⁶ Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo*, 109.

do with the ontology of books. Better, then, to work on assembling Herbert's poetry into units that are meaningful and interesting, following the order in which they appear, or the orders they seem most organically to suggest. The question, as Richard Todd puts it of Herbert's puns, quips, quibbles and wordplay, is one of where to quit.²⁷ One pragmatic answer is the first edition of 1633—it is not a definitive answer in any way, but it shall suffice. Text and method in hand, we may set out to read *The Temple*, pace Goldberg. The reading will not be definitive or final, of course, but I hope that shall not preclude it being meaningful.

I will not offer a comprehensive account of how the processes of precedence, accumulation and sequence work, even in the more limited case of *The Temple*. What I wish to do, instead, is simply to suggest a few kinds of inter-poetic relationship that are poorly accounted for in the critical discourse on Herbert's poetry. Some of these are simple enough—patterns of juxtaposition and contrast, for example—but many of them cast new light on old and frequently interpreted poems, and all, I believe, highlight the fact that, taken as an organic whole, *The Temple* produces effects quite unlike those found either in its individual poems or in its sequential arrangement. Much ink has been spilled, for example, on the elusive "Love" (III), but only a small portion of that writing has looked to "Love" (I) and "Love (II)" in its attempts to unravel the later poem, even though, as Fredson Bowers puts it of the images in *The Temple*, "occasionally their significance, or application, in a poem cannot be fully understood except by reference back to their sequential development."²⁸ To read *The Temple* is necessarily to read it multiply, in ways both linear and not, and Bowers is right to suggest that our individual readings of each poem are no doubt intended to be informed by the larger contexts of the sequence as a

²⁷ Richard Todd, *The Opacity of Signs: Acts of Interpretation in George Herbert's The Temple* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), xv.

²⁸ Fredson Bowers, "Herbert's Sequential Imagery: 'The Temper,'" *Modern Philology* 59, no. 3 (February 1962): 203.

whole. Yet it is clear too that the same principles that make Love (I) relevant to the understanding of Love (III) will end up finally locating meaning in something more than either poem individually. That is not to say that reading any of Herbert's poems in isolation is meaningless or without value; I am in perfect agreement with Bowers when he suggests that "Herbert, quite properly, intended any separate poem to be read as a sufficient unit; but, in addition, that he planned large sections of *The Temple* for a cumulative effect that could be gained only by reading a sequence in order and understanding its larger theme."²⁹ Unlike Bowers, however, I do not wish to connect my reading practices to Herbert's authorial intentions; the fact that Herbert's sequence is authorial is interesting to me in that it points to a likely location of meaning, but there are many other ways of reading *The Temple*—exhibited by its many critics—that are as fruitful in their own ways.

²⁹ Bowers, "Herbert's Sequential Imagery," 202.

Chapter 1: Textual Matters

One of the faults of Bowers's reading of *The Temple*, and indeed of many critical studies that approach Herbert's work in sequential terms, is an over-reliance on this idea of linear order. *The Temple* is a group of poems, to be sure, and arranged in a way that, by conventions of the book that have nothing to do with Herbert, has a beginning and an end and a direction. Too often, however, these facts are allowed—perhaps because Herbert himself emphasizes the spatial quality of his collected poems—to suggest that direction is something integral and fundamental to *The Temple*, and that its meaning would break down if the poems were taken in any way other than the strictly linear (in the same way that reversing or scrambling the lines of a poem distorts the poem). Clearly, this is not the case—though critics since Eliot have emphasized the value of approaching Herbert from his “oeuvre entire,” few have thought that the entirety must be considered as a single unit.³⁰ Nevertheless, the conventions of the (printed) book are powerful guides to the interpretation of their contents and in the case of Herbert, Ramie Targoff has shown that a number of the subtler aspects of publication were in fact carefully chosen to associate Herbert's poetry with liturgical and religious texts, an effort that begins with the choice of publisher—“Thom. Buck, and Roger Daniel, printers to the [i.e., Cambridge] Universitie”—and extends as far as the typographical layout of the pages themselves.³¹ The printed form of Herbert's work does not, in fact, suggest that it is to be considered only in linear terms—indeed, suggests the very opposite—but it does, with Eliot, argue that it is complete and whole. It is to this idea of *shape* that this chapter is devoted: to the ways in which the printed form of *The Temple* guides the reader's experience of the collection in certain ways; the manner in which

³⁰ T. S. Eliot, “George Herbert,” *The Spectator* 148 (March 12 1932): 360.

³¹ Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 111-117.

poems can be said to follow one another; and what happens when they do. I will begin with a reading of “Hope” and “Sinnes Round,” considering the ways that the two poems are united and separated by their layout on the page as well as their formal content. My aim here is to suggest some of the intricacies that confront a reader attempting to navigate Herbert’s poetry, which I will then take up in the context of the short poem “Superliminare” that follows “The Church Porch.” This poem, I will argue, brings to the fore questions of liminality and the division of poems into single and double units in a way that leads us naturally to the consideration of Herbert’s groups of identically named poems. These groups, which are more varied and complicated than modern editions sometimes show, provide us, ultimately, with a sense of how *The Temple* works: the way that it works with the reader to produce context and connect its poems to one another, while still allowing them to be divided and considered individually.

1. Rings and Rounds

My title for this work makes reference to two Herbert poems that follow one another, “Hope” and “Sinnes round.” The former of these is a short 8-line lyric, a set of 4 couplets describing an exchange of gifts:

I gave to Hope a watch of mine: but he
 An anchor gave to me.
Then an old prayer-book I did present:
 And he an optick sent.
With that I gave a viall full of tears:
 But he a few green eares:
Ah Loyterer! I’le no more, no more I’le bring:
 I did expect a ring.

Empson, who reads this poem as emblematic of his third type of ambiguity, in which divergent (relevant) meanings are invoked by the same words, suggests that “Hope” may equally be read as a parody of an earthly love-lyric or a poem of secular patronage (the ring, in this light, being a

badge of office).³² These worldly rings perhaps helps to explain the poem's contrast with the following poem, "Sinnes round." In this poem, in place of the expected ring, the speaker finds a "round," the endless repetition of sin and repentance. The poetic interrelationship of the two poems goes beyond the mere coincidence of the latter's title, however: the later poem uses the language of the former to describe the poet's "offences [which] course it in a ring," (2) and the poem itself offers a formal "ring" or "round:"

Sinnes Round

Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am,
That my offences course it in a ring.
My thoughts are working like a busie flame,
Untill their cockatrice they hatch and bring:
And when they once have perfected their draughts,
My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.

My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,
Which spit it forth like the Scicilian hill.
They vent the wares, and passe them with their faults,
And by their breathing ventilate the ill.
But words suffice not, where are lewd intentions:
My hands do joyn to finish the inventions.

My hands do joyn to finish the inventions
And so my sinnes ascend three stories high,
As Babel grew, before there were dissentions.
Yet ill deeds loyter not: for they supplie
New thoughts of sinning: wherefore, to my shame,
Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am.

Over three stanzas, the poem returns full circle, with the last line, "Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am" identical to the first. The pattern in which the last line of each stanza is the first of the subsequent, however, means that the poem does not merely echo its opening, but rather suggests an actual return, making the first stanza anew as the fourth: the poem actually effects the circularity that it describes. In addition to this "ring," other parallels to "Hope" abound: Wilcox

³² William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966), 120.

notes, for example, an echo of the previous poem's "Loyterer" in the poet's statement that "ill deeds loyter not: for they supplie / New thoughts of sinning" (16-17).³³ The connection here is more than mere vocabulary, for in both poems, loitering has, unusually, a positive valence: in "Hope," Christ himself is the "Loyterer," while in "Sinnes Round," the behaviour is specifically one that "ill deeds" do not associate with. By associating loitering with the divine, however, both poems make an apt connection, for here, loitering contrasts with the poet who races madly in a cycle of sin and virtue while his "words take fire from [his] inflamed thoughts" (6 and 7). Taken together, the poems, through their common devices and formal conventions, suggest a particular view of human life, in which frenetic human activity is contrasted to the patient, loitering "anchor" and "eares" of heaven.

It is possible, however, to view "Hope" and "Sinnes round" differently, as the juxtaposition of printed textual objects. This could lead us, of course, to consider of the early history of Herbert's poetry, and perhaps to attempt to discern the relationship between the two manuscripts containing poems from *The Temple* and the printed text of 1633. But rather than attempting to make, from the early versions of Herbert's work, an editorial argument about how those versions relate to one another, we can instead look to these early texts for an alternative way to consider the formal effects of Herbert's poetry. For the presentation, in these editions, of poems like "Hope" and "Sinnes Round" creates a different set of relationships from those that are apparent when they are quoted in critical discourse. These effects, of course, are specific to the version of Herbert's work that we consult, but they are not generally unique.³⁴ That is, while

³³ Wilcox, *The English Poems*, 113.

³⁴ Some editions or even specific copies of Herbert's work are, of course unique—annotated, embellished or unusual (the Williams and Bodeleian manuscripts, notably, but the 1641 (6th) edition of *The Temple*, for example, includes additional ornamental borders, draws an arch around "Superliminare" and helpfully outlines the shape of "The Altar" for the the reader. See George Herbert, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, 6th ed. (Cambridge:

editors and printers have approached Herbert's work in a number of ways, many have remained close to the ordering and arrangement of poems found in the first edition of 1633 (which is itself nearly identical to the Bodleian manuscript version of *The Temple*).³⁵ This first edition, then, is a useful point of departure, in that it originates many of the peculiar and interesting features found in many Herbert editions. Ultimately, however, I hope to produce not merely a set of readings of one particular edition of Herbert, but a model for a kind of reading practice applicable to any particular version of Herbert's poetry. Details and pagination will differ by edition (sometimes radically—Wilcox's 740 pages are almost quadruple those of the first edition) but the layout of Herbert's work on the page will always have an effect of some kind on the way in which we read it, no matter the specifics. The first two editions of *The Temple*, for example, are nearly identical, but even their minor differences do matter: by changing the way that they attribute the volume's authorship (the title page adds the note that Herbert was "late Oratour of the Universitie") for example, they change the reception of the whole.³⁶

Let us turn, then, to the first edition spread—pages 114-5, see Figure 1—which includes "Hope," "Sinnes Round" and "Time." These pages produce an effect that is more than the individual effects of any one poem, and which depends on their simultaneous appearance before the reader. Though there is a clear sequence to the poems—suggested by catchwords, page numbers, and the final lines of the long poem "Providence" which intrude above "Hope,"—there is, too, a synchronic presentation of all three poems at once, in which the titles alone tell a tale, even before the reader arrives at any of the poems themselves. (A reader who arrives here via

1641), 17-8. I am grateful to Jessica Beckman for alerting me to the unusual features of this edition.

³⁵ This is, of course, less true of anthologies and editions such as Palmer's—see n9, above.

³⁶ Wilcox, *The English Poems*, xxxix.

Each thing that is, although in use and name
It go for one, hath many wayes in store
To honour thee; and so each hymne thy fame
Extolleth many wayes, yet this one more.

¶ Hope.

I Gave to Hope a watch of mine: but he
An anchor gave to me.
Then an old prayer-book I did present:
And he an optick sent.
With that I gave a viall full of tears:
But he a few green eares:
Ah Loyerer! I'le no more, no more I'le bring:
I did expect a ring.

¶ Sinnes round.

Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am,
That my offences course it in a ring.
My thoughts are working like a busie flame,
Unrill their cockatrice they hatch and bring:
And when they once have perfected their draughts,
My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.
My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,
Which spit it forth like the Sicilian hill.
They vent the wares, and passe them with their faults,
And by their breathing ventilate the ill.
But words suffice not, where are lewd intentions;
My hands do joyn to finish the inventions.
My hands do joyn to finish the inventions:
And so my sinnes ascend three stories high,
As Babel grew, before there were dissentions.
Yet ill deeds loyer nor: for they supplie
New thoughts of sinning: wherefore, to my sham,
Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am.

¶ Time.

¶ Time.

Meeting with Time, slack thing, said I,
Thy sith is dull; what it for shame.
No marvell Sir, he did replie,
If it at length deserve some blame:
But where one man would have me grinde it,
Twentie for one too sharp do finde it.

Perhaps some such of old did passe,
Who above all things lov'd this life;
To whom thy sith a hatchet was,
Which now is but a pruning-knife.
Christs coming hath made man thy debter,
Since by thy cutting he grows better.

And in his blessing thou art blest:
For where thou onely wert before
An executioner at best;
Thou art a gard'ner now, and more,
An usher to convey our souls
Beyond the utmost starres and poles.

And this is that makes life so long,
While it detains us from our God.
Ev'n pleasures here increase the wrong,
And length of dayes lengthen the rod.
Who wants the place, where God doth dwell,
Partakes already half of hell.

Of what strange length must that needs be,
Which ev'n eternitie excludes!
Thus farre Time heard me patiently:
Then chafing said, This man deludes:
What do I here before his doore?
He doth not crave lesse time, but more.

¶ Grate.

Figure 1: "Hope / Sinnes Round." George Herbert, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, facsimile reprint of 1st edition (London, 1876), 114-115.

“Providence” might of course finish that poem before noting the titles of the subsequent poems). These miniature narratives of reading govern our interpretative experience of the poem, guiding us to certain kinds of features by presenting the poems in one light or another: from the title of “Sinnes round,” the reader of “Hope” likely knows, for example, that that poem will not lead directly to assurance. Herbert was well aware of this interrelation of texts, noting in “The Holy Scriptures II” that “This verse marks that, and both do make a motion / Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie” (5-6).³⁷ The context, the verse before and after, the echo ten pages later, all contribute to our experience of reading a “verse,” whether scriptural or poetic—a distinction that, as Lewalski has noted, is hazy with a poet like Herbert, who believed strongly in “the poetic texture of scripture.”³⁸

It is not ultimately possible to account for all of the ways of navigating *The Temple*, nor of all of the ways that the “words do finde me out, & parallels bring, / And in another make me understood” (“Holy Scriptures II” 11-12). The lyrics of “The Church,” like the verses of the Bible, are an infinitely connected and endlessly extensible resource: understanding “Affliction” (I) leads us not just to poems “ten leaves off,” but to the other Affliction poems, and to poems ten leaves off from those. “[A]ll the meanings attached to the idea of Church,” Sara Hanley argues, “join to ‘erect’ a composite meaning, [and] the verse forms work toward a greater solidarity.”³⁹ For the sake of both brevity and clarity, however, it is helpful to begin with the networks of poems that are most closely and obviously connected, in the case of “Hope” and “Sinnes Round” by their printed proximity on the page. These two poems share the same leaf, and form an independent unit more self-contained than the leaf-trespassing “Providence” but one not yet as

³⁷ Doerkson, *Picturing Religious Experience*, 57-58.

³⁸ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 72.

³⁹ Sara Williams Hanley, “Temples in the Temple: George Herbert’s Study of the Church,” *Studies in English Literature* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1968): 131.

isolated as “Time,” which takes up the entirety of page 115. A reader attentive to the nuances of the catchwords will know that “Time” does not continue overleaf (indicated by the pilcrow in the catchword “¶ Grace”) but another might not, leading, interestingly, to a return of Agamben. The visibility of the subsequent page secures “Hope” and “Sinnes round” against continuation in a way that “Time” is more open to—as befits its endlessly extensive nature. Agamben assumes that the identification of the poem’s last line is trivial; the problem he proposes is ontological, not practical, but with *The Temple*, that is not always the case, and the end of the poem is secured not by the termination of the poem in itself, but by the commencement of the next poem, a necessity made clear by the need for devices such as the “FINIS” and doxology which follow “Love” (3). As J Hillis Miller puts it, “The second, the repetition, is the source of the originality of the first;” it is the existence of the second poem that makes the first whole and complete, a *that* and not a *this*.⁴⁰ In the absence of continuation, these devices serve a corresponding role to the pilcrow that precede (most of) Herbert’s titles, indicating definitively that the poem is over, creating a space within which a new poem may arise. More subtly, these devices, like Herbert’s use of past-tense narration—“I gave to hope”—in which action is presented retrospectively, as constituent of a present-tense state of being—“Sorrie my God I am”—suggest that the division of poem from poem is a part of a human process of meaning making, not something that is fundamental to any one poem. By imposing a schema for the beginnings and ends of his poems, Herbert suggests that such a structure is necessary, implying that poetry is not fundamentally imbued with such limits.

These effects are generally suppressed in modern scholarly interpretations of Herbert, both by the intrusion, in editions such as Wilcox’s, of extensive scholarly apparatus between the

⁴⁰ J. Hillis Miller, “Ariadne’s Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line,” *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 67.

poems,⁴¹ and more generally, by the critical tendency to refer to the poems in a more piecemeal fashion—even in writing about “Hope” and “Sinnes round” above, for example, I made no real reference to the connections with “Providence.” Often, then, these kinds of typographical effect are invisible unless specifically sought out—I know of no scholarly edition, for example, that indicates the lines that occur between the poems in the early editions. Yet these lines can be read productively, as a source of meaning and nuance in terms of how the poems of *The Temple* relate to one another. Other details, too, can inflect the kinds of formal observation made above: the dropped capitals that begin these poems, for example, break the symmetry of the first and last lines of “Sinnes round:” the poem begins and ends in a way that, while superficially different, is (perhaps) fundamentally the same—a suggestive gloss for a poem about the endless repetition of sinful habits.

2. Lines and Lintels: Superliminare

But let us return to the question of lines. Lines are, of course, metaphors for boundaries, but in early editions of *The Temple*, boundaries between poems are demarcated by actual lines. “The Church” proper begins with “The Altar,” the first item seen by the reader who enters the church through its front doors. John David Walker has used this fact to connect the altar with either “the sacrificial altar of consecration at the door of the [Hebraic] temple,” or the “altar of incense within the holy place,” which would have been directly visible upon entry, or perhaps both.⁴² As Johnson has observed, however, Walker’s architectural reading of *The Temple* is

⁴¹ Hutchinson’s 1941 edition, however, more closely follows the presentation of the 1633 editions, confining its apparatus to a few—mostly textual—footnotes, but it does not go so far as to mimic the poem’s earlier layout on the page.

⁴² John David Walker, “The Architectonics of George Herbert’s ‘The Temple,’” *ELH* 29, no. 3 (September 1963): 295.

strained at best, breaking down when it comes to its ‘holy of holies,’ “The Church Militant.”⁴³ The poem’s role in *The Temple*, then, is at least as symbolic as it is strictly architectural—as Mary Ellen Rickey rightly notes, in no configuration of a Christian Church is the altar the first element physically encountered by the entering parishioner.⁴⁴ Not all readings of *The Temple* will be linear, however—indeed, many will not even be complete. Certainly, *The Temple* can be read start to finish: the inclusion of “The Printers to the Reader” at the beginning of the book, for example, suggests a linear motion through the work, which is certainly not too long to be consumed in a single (lengthy) sitting. But the inclusion of devices such as poem titles and, crucially, an index, “The titles of the severall poems contained in this book,” (193, see figure 2) enable reading practices that are decidedly non-linear. The reader who consults the index and determines that “The Forerunners” is on pages 170-171 are unlikely, in seeking it out, to encounter “The Altar.” (This kind of reading, for example, closely mirrors much of academic practice—in constructing my local reading of “The Forerunners” (above) I consulted that poem, poems around it, and poems I felt might be relevant to it; I have not reread the entirety of *The Temple* every time I have referred to it) These non-linear approaches, of course, are chiefly useful to one who is already familiar with the texts in question, but as Harman has observed, rereading is central to much of Herbert’s poetry, which reveals, on reading, a meaning that lies only in subsequent readings, an “instruction to reread.”⁴⁵ So, while it is true that not all who enter “The Church” will see “The Altar,” as they do so, most *will have seen it* at some point, during the course of an initial, linear, reading. During this reading, the reader will have found, at the point between inside and out, the brief poem “Superliminare.”

⁴³ Johnson, “The Relationship of ‘The Church Militant’ to ‘The Temple,’” 203.

⁴⁴ Mary Ellen Rickey, *Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 9.

⁴⁵ Harman, *Costly Monuments*, 77.



¶ L'Envoy.

King of glorie, King of peace,
 With the one make warre to cease,
 With the other bleffe thy sheep,
 Thee to love, in thee to sleep,
 Let not Sinne devour thy fold,
 Bragging that thy bloud is cold,
 That thy death is also dead,
 While his conquests daily spread;
 That thy flesh hath lost his food,
 And thy Crosse is common wood.
 Choke him, let him say no more,
 But reserve his breath in store,
 Till thy conquests and his fall
 Make his sighs to use it all,
 And then bargain with the winde
 To discharge what is behinde.

*Blessed be God alone,
 Thrice blessed Three in One.*

F I N I S.



THE
 TITLES OF THE SEVE-
 RALL POEMS CONTAIN-
 ED IN THIS BOOK.

A		C	
A Aron	168	T he Call	150
A Affliction	38. 53.	C harms and knots	88
	64. 82. 89.	C hristmas	72
T he Agonia	29	C hurch-floore	58
T he Altar	18	C hurch-lock and key	57
A nagram of the Virgin		C hurch Militant	184
Marie	69	C hurch-monuments	56
T o all Angels and Saints		C hurch-musick	57
ibid.		C hurch-porch	2
T he Answer	163	C hurch-rents & schismes	
A Dialogue--Antheme	134		
	164	C hurch-windows	59
A ntriphon	45. 85	C lasping of hands	151
A rtillerie	132	T he Collar	147
A ssurance	149	C oloss. 3. 3. Our life, &c.	
A varice	69		77
B		H. Communion	43
T he Bag	145	C omplaining	137
T he Banquet	175	S elf-condemnation	165
H. Baptisme	36	C onfession	118
B itter-sweet	165	C onscience	98
T he British Church	102	C onfancie	63
T he Bunch of Grapes	120	C ontent	60
B usipesse	105	T he Crosse	158
		I.	T he

Figure 2: "The Titles of the Severall Poems Contained in this Book." Herbert, "Facsimile Reprint," 192-193.

“Superliminare” is not, of course, the only poem of an architectural entryway in “The Temple;” it shares that role with “The Church Porch.” As the latter’s prime place—it is the first poem in *The Temple*—and the progression of *The Temple* as a whole makes clear, even if there are many points of access to *The Temple*, there is a primary entrance into “The Church.”⁴⁶ But for the reader, having survived the proverbs of “The Church-Porch” does not yet entail entry into “The Church,” a transition from a poem that is deeply enmeshed in pragmatic and political concerns to one that resists those same concerns with an equal fervor—a “mysterious and much less than straightforward” shift, as Richard Strier puts it.⁴⁷ Yet, Anne Myers observes, it would be wrong to think of even the seemingly straightforward “Church Porch” as altogether linear: “The poem looks outward first, then in toward the sanctuary, but worldly and other-worldly concerns are never separated from one another, and that is the point. The poem suspends us in an eddy where the current swirls constantly back into itself, mixing the divine with the secular and the secular with the divine.”⁴⁸ In this place of transition, marking not the approach or a liminal *space*, but the precise line of demarcation, is “Superliminare.”

⁴⁶ Michael Schoenfeldt has described *The Temple* as marked by an “obsession . . . with entrances and exits,” which he connects to the work’s abiding interest in (alimentary and soteriological) “ingestion and purgation.” “Herbert’s Consuming Subject,” *The George Herbert Journal* 18, nos. 1 and 2 (1994-1995): 110.

More humorously, Anne Myers suggests that the tendency for critics to circumvent “The Church-porch” altogether and throw themselves directly on “The Altar,” or enter “The Church” through “The Windows” arises from both the unpalatability and contextual obscurity of “The Church Porch” in 17th Century literature as a whole. While she is speaking principally of the shallowness of critical engagement with *The Temple*’s first poem, Myers suggests, too, the ways in which (certain kinds of) readers can circumvent *The Temple*’s linear structure through processes of selection. Anne Myers, “Restoring ‘The Church-porch’: George Herbert’s Architectural Style,” *English Literary Renaissance* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 2010): 429.

⁴⁷ Richard Strier, “Sanctifying the Aristocracy: ‘Devout Humanism’ in François de Sales, John Donne and George Herbert,” *The Journal of Religion* 69, no. 1 (January 1989): 57.

⁴⁸ Myers, “Restoring the Church-Porch,” 438.

This poem serves as a lintel that consciously and clearly marks a division of spaces, notably with the horizontal line that divides its stanzas (see figure 3). This line, indicating variously the division between retrospection and warning, between within and without the church proper, serves, as Jonathan Goldberg suggests, as a kind of bar to the reader's progress.⁴⁹ This line is many things besides: a reminder that a poem's meaning inheres in more than merely the words of the poem as they appear on the page and an aesthetic device of a part with the rest of the 1633 edition of Herbert's work, which is replete with lines and frames (yet, the line here also occurs in the earlier MS B; it is something more than just a printer's addition to Herbert's text.)⁵⁰ But this line, this division of stanza from stanza, serves a more evocative role than the merely ornamental. As the demarcation of a boundary, it denies the possibility of liminality created by "The Church Porch." There is no "within" to the line; the line destroys the space "between" the stanzas, dividing it neatly into the first and second. The spatial sense of "The Temple" allows—even produces—a multitude of space, gaps and openings in which polyvocal meanings, emergent from the surrounding poetic "architecture," may flourish, but the line, like the physical architecture it evokes, denies this. The lintel abuts its supporters; the walls of the church are solid and continuous, stone upon stone in a complete, gapless whole. Such gaps as there are—deliberately, at least—in the walls are not gaps, but openings (we will return to these 'gaps' shortly). The line of "Superliminare," then, suggests not so much a breakage, as Goldberg maintains, but rather a kind of enforced movement, a sorting function to divide those who have progressed within from those waiting without.⁵¹ The line does not halt forward movement; it regulates it. By dividing one part of the poem from the next, the line actually serves to connect

⁴⁹ Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo*, 115.

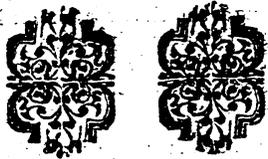
⁵⁰ di Cesare, *A Diplomatic Edition of the Bodeleian Manuscript*, 38.

⁵¹ Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo*, 115.

None shall in hell such bitter pangs endure,
 As those, who mock at Gods way of salvation.
 Whom oyl and ballames kill, what salve can cure?
 They drink with greedinesse a full damnation.
 The Jews refused thunder; and we, folly.
 Though God do hedge us in, yet who is holy?

Summe up at night what thou hast done by day;
 And in the morning, what thou hast to do.
 Dresse and undresse thy soul: mark the decay
 And growth of it: if with thy watch, that too
 Be down, then winde up both: since we shall be
 Most surely judg'd, make thy accounts agree.

In brief, acquit thee bravely; play the man.
 Look not on pleasures as they come, but go.
 Deferre not the least vertue: lifes poore span
 Make not an ell, by trifling in thy wo.
 If thou do ill, the joy fades, not the pain:
 If well, the pain doth fade, the joy remains.



Super-



Superliminare.

Thou, whom the former precepts have
 Sprinkled and taught, how to behave
 Thy self in church; approach, and taste
 The churches mysticall repast.

A Void profanenesse; come not here:
 Nothing but holy, pure, and cleare,
 Or that which groweth to be so,
 May at his perill further go.



The

Figure 3: "Superliminare." Herbert, "Facsimile Reprint," 16-17.

them by forbidding pause between them, in a space that would be neither-nor. The line denies the possibility of hypostasis. It marks a poetic architecture of always either-or, never both.

The distinction suggested—and concretized—by the line of “Superliminare” suggests, of course, the other kind of divide that occurs in *The Temple*, between one poem and the next (a division that, when it occurs on one page, is likewise marked by a horizontal line—see, for example, the line between “Hope” and “Sinnes round” in figure 1, p24). Here, too, there is a space, and a title serves, like the line, to absolutely divide this space into portions of “this” and “that” poem. Yet, both of these divisions, of title and line, are far less secure than they pretend. The divide suggested by the line, a kind of cut or incision across the page, is actually nothing of the sort—it, like the tittles of “The Church,” is actually just another typographical element, produced by the same means as any other letters in Herbert’s text—and, necessarily so, for were it to have been drawn with a razor, it would verge on illegibility. It is a mark *on* the page, not a divide passing *through* it or a cut *into* it.⁵² Formed from the impress of inked lead upon the page, it has thickness and size (it is, in fact, a thin rectangle, not a line); it bears the physical marks of its production, marks that can themselves be read and examined, dwelled upon and looked into—even felt: ink upon the page; the type pressed into it. Divisions and demarcations are themselves reified by the process of print (or even of manuscript) production, and as a result, there are more than two halves to the poem. It remains possible, of course, to think of “Superliminare” as a poem of two halves. But it is also a poem of three parts, and indeed also four: title, stanza, line, stanza. Categorization and enumeration can only pretend to absolute value; in practice, reading is always open to polyvocal possibilities. The poem can be a part of “The Church,” or sit on its edges, or outside of it (there is no running head to indicate whether “Superliminare” is in “The

⁵² Though, of course, the community of Little Gidding *did* work with such devices, or ones like them, when they cut and pasted together their Bible Harmonies. For cutting a a reading practice, see Smyth, “Shreds of Holinesse.”

Church Porch” or “The Church”). Like “The Altar” that follows it, which Paul Dyck has argued functions like a 17th Century Bible title page, the situation is analogous to an emblem—“title, image and text . . . comment upon each other.”⁵³ Meaning resides in more than just the words themselves.

3. Names and Indices: Poetic Groupings

The Temple, like its constituent poems, can be read as a single unified whole, as a tripartite structure, or in any of a number of other configurations. These arrangements at the highest level devolve, of course, into question about the unity of the whole, but within “The Church,” they can be asked more narrowly and more productively. To begin, the poems here are clearly already part of a larger structure—no critic has tried to argue that these shorter poems do not belong with one another—and the question is one of how, in considering them, to apportion them for analysis or appreciation. What matches what? What divisions are important, and which associations need to be considered? Which poems seem most important to the larger whole? These questions, of course, have many and highly subjective answers, but what makes them atypically interesting with Herbert is the extent to which *The Temple* itself provides (at least tentative) guidance. A number of Herbert’s poems form numbered series (“Love” (I), “Love” (II), etc.) creating formal unity where otherwise would lie only thematic (or sometimes sequential) connections. The nature of these series, however, requires qualification. The way these poems are presented in both the manuscripts and the the printed editions of the 17th Century is quite different from their presentation in modern editions. “Herbert,” as Rubey puts it, “did not number [all] the poems himself,” and “seems to have reserved the use of numbers for poems printed

⁵³ Paul Dyck, “Altar, Heart, Title-Page: The Image of Holy Reading,” *English Literary Renaissance* 43, no. 3 (September 2013): 550.

consecutively, like ‘Love’ I and II.”⁵⁴ Indeed, in the 1633 edition, in the case of such sequential poems, the second poem bears, in place of a title, *only* a numeral (see figure 2, p29). It is only with modern scholarly editions that all of Herbert’s identically named poems have come to be numbered, and while there is, to be sure, no guarantee of sequential development or non-development that arises from the way the poems are titled and numbered, the fact that the poem that closes “The Church” originally bore only the title “Love” situates the poem differently with regards to the others poems of “The Church” to which it is most obviously connected (see figure 3, p32).⁵⁵ “Love” (III) does not, in fact, point numerologically back to “Love I” or “Love II,” two sequential (and, therefore, numbered) poems from much earlier in the volume—but it shares an exactly identical title with the first of those poems—a relationship that is more revisionary and less sequential than it appears when the poems are numbered. The connections in the earliest texts of Herbert’s work, then, are quite different from those in modern editions.

I do not think, as Rubey does, that these poems can be wholly explained by reference to the other poems in their “clusters,” and an overly linear reading of the “Affliction” poems in particular seems to me to ignore those poems’ distinctly *non-ordinal* presentation.⁵⁶ That is to say, as *The Temple’s* index suggests (it includes no numbers for any poem in the volume), each of the poems is presented solely as “Affliction,” and one entry simply lists five page numbers. It is certainly possible to trace themes and narratives as they develop through the poems—and one of the effects of the index is to make it easier to find all the poems bearing the same title—but there is a strong sense in which the paradigm suggested by the early editions is one of recurrence, not iteration.

⁵⁴ Rubey, “The Poet and Christian Community,” 108.

⁵⁵ This modern numbering practice dates to Hutchinson’s edition.

⁵⁶ See Rubey, “The Poet and Christian Community,” 109ff.

What seem, in an edition such as Hutchinson's, to be iron-clad distinctions between one poem and the next are, in fact, far less certain and more malleable than their modern presentation suggests. Consider the first two "Love" poems: what makes these two poems two? Certain typographical conventions are of use: "II." is set as if it were a title, and preceded by the horizontal line that is used to divide the other poems of "The Church." But the pilcrow that normally accompanies one of Herbert's titles is missing, and in many ways, what we have is not so much a new poem as it is a second part or chapter. A number of these devices, Ramie Targoff has suggested, were imported from the printing of English Bibles and liturgical texts in the early 17th Century—the pilcrow, in particular, being a characteristic organizational feature of the book of common prayer.⁵⁷ And, indeed, the chapters of the Authorized Version simply read "CHAP. I" (or II or etc—see figure 4)—a practice not unlike Herbert's linked poems, and which suggests that, like biblical chapters, these poems, while distinct, do form larger units—and the fact that both poems are sonnets, a form often joined into larger structures, suggests that this might well be the case.

Reading these sequential, numbered poems as—potentially—one matters because it suggests their development be seen more in terms of continual moderation rather than something more akin to over- or re-writing—the very opposite of the shift undertaken by considering the "Affliction" poems unnumbered. Yet, what is more interesting about this possibility is that it suggests that the divide between two poems is *permeable*, that it can be stronger or weaker

⁵⁷ Targoff, *Common Prayer*, 117. The lines between Herbert's poems, too, evoke the lavish titles of the Authorized Version, which begin and end with a pattern of horizontal rules (and also include a more decorative vine-work scroll). See figure 4.

depending on circumstances, but that it always allows some level of traffic between one poem and the next. The poem's boundary gives a direction to the text (first "I" then "II") but it does not disallow backwards movements and rereadings; Agamben's transcendental end is, at best, reversible. Like the line in "Superliminare," the divide between poems such as "Love I" and "Love II" creates distinction while upholding a fundamental wholeness, as Herbert notes: "How hath man parcel'd out thy glorious name" does not affect Immortal Love's fundamental integrity. The parts, however close they may ultimately be, are definitively connected, just as they are, too, to the much later poem called "Love" (III), a poem divided from its predecessors by 139 intervening poems. Yet, "Love" (III) bears the simple title "Love"—does that make it the continuation of a series that begins with first "Love" and then "II."? Or is it rather an elaboration that goes beyond what the previous poems offer? Though the three poems are sequential, and the reader experiencing *The Temple* linearly, or searching out "Love" poems in the index, will likely encounter them that way, they also leave space for synchronic approaches. "Love I" and "Love" (III) come in order, but their identical titles make them in some sense the same; reading them one after the other (with or without "Love II") creates connections and point of contact between them, but so does reading them in parallel. In fact, however, the poems seem to emphasize an almost circular reading, suggesting that when our hearts are truly kindled (by the end of sequence, perhaps) "then shall our brain / All her invention on thine Altar lay, / And there in hymnes send back thy fire again." A self-referential reading here is strengthened, too, by the fact that, as Wilcox notes, "hymnes" could well be "Antiphon" (I), the poem preceding the "Love" sonnets.⁵⁸ All of these possibilities make clear the fact that, as Todd observes, "a reader's encounter with George Herbert's poetry ... will surely lead to the creation as well as the discovery of

⁵⁸ Wilcox, *The English Poems*, 192.

meanings.”⁵⁹ The poems’ typographical presentation (and their form in the manuscripts, for that matter) is an inseparable part of the ability of those versions of the poems to produce meaning, but such directions reflect and are reflected in the formal content of the poem’s themselves. Reading practices, *The Temple* makes clear, matter enormously, but deciphering the labyrinth, as Miller notes, requires the generation of a web of thread, a new network to navigate.⁶⁰

This process is, of course, precisely that undertaken quite literally in the Little Gidding community, where the reading of the Bible turned itself into the reassembly of that text into new configurations. The entanglement of reading with (re-)writing, however, extends beyond the particulars of the construction of Bible harmonies, emphasizing in Herbert’s poetry both a labyrinthine non-linearity, and a strong tendency to view the physical object of reading as itself a guide—a thread—to aid in the navigation of the text. The process of reading is generative, for ways of reading are not prior to the text or somehow integral to it. “*The Temple*,” Smyth observes, “is preoccupied with the ... exploration of alternative modes of conveying meaning, whether by shaping text into spatialized expressions (“Easter wings”; “The Altar”); scratching text into windows (“The Posie”); or offering “precepts” which are “sprinkled” (“Superliminare”), as holy water might be dispersed by a “Perirrhanterium.”⁶¹ *The Temple* is complex and polyvocal in its approach, and it suggests to the reader a myriad of ways to reduce, augment or rewrite this complexity through the organization of a reading experience, but it does not dictate the exact approach: the volume includes an index, but it does not tell the reader what to do with it.

⁵⁹ Todd, *The Opacity of Signs*, 194.

⁶⁰ Miller, “Repetition and the Narrative Line,” 62.

⁶¹ Smyth, “Shreds of holiness,” 468.

Chapter 2: Spatial Structure

1. “Things Understood and Implied:” Prayer (I)

No poem in *The Temple* so clearly shows the poetic capacity for accumulation as “Prayer” (I). Here, the addition of image upon image is governed only by the logic of ‘and’—it is pure parataxis with only a single instance of subordination: “a kind of tune, which all things heare and fear” (8). From its introduction in the poem’s first line, prayer remains an ambiguous and vaguely—though extensively—defined phenomenon. “Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,” (1) the poem begins, establishing the poem’s obscure, paratactic style: the line is verbless and syntactically striking. Narrative and personal experience—there is no first person anywhere in the poem—are absent, and whether the poem develops into an elaborate definition by circumlocution, as many critics have supposed, or, as Wilcox suggests, an apostrophe to prayer itself, the poem remains hard to parse.⁶² Whatever it is that the poem ‘understands’ in its conclusion (“...something understood” 14) it does not bring grammatical order to the poem, and there is no indication of any analogous resolution of content. If the poem’s last line solidifies the poem’s allusive meanings, it does so beyond the boundaries of the poem.

Just as poems on the pages of *The Temple* come together to create meaning beyond their individual elements, “Prayer” (I) suggests the way that a poem—especially a cryptic one like this—may find meaning not in any single image or line, but in their totality. But unlike the larger process at work in *The Temple*, the descriptions that make up “Prayer” (I) fail to *develop*, opting instead for sheer addition, and as a paradoxical result, the poem insists on a stronger kind of teleology than *The Temple* as a whole. The logic of accumulation that governs the poem’s images

⁶² Wilcox, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, 176.

clashes directly with the finite form of the sonnet: the reader may count down the lines, knowing that there is a point by which the poem must eventually cease to add. Where *The Temple's* poems are able to modulate and grow without obvious bound, "Prayer" seems only able to add. The poem's later images are not more clear or more elaborate than its first, and the sonnet's first line finds echo in its concluding couplet, with "the Churches banquet" matching with "Church-bels beyond the stares heard." While individual lines can be set in relation to one another, the whole does not move in any one direction, and it is hard to find much clarity in any of the poem's particular images. Each is evocative, but not especially meaningful:

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
 Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
 The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;

Engine against th' Almightye, sinners towre,
 Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
 The six-daies world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things heare and fear;

Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
 Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
 Heaven in ordinaire, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of paradise,

 Church-bels beyond the stares heard, the souls bloud,
 The land of spices; something understood.

What is "Reversed thunder," and how does I relate to prayer? Or "The milkie way, the bird of paradise"—two concepts there, or one? The accumulation of powerful imagery points almost immediately towards its eventual end, the need to bring order to a list that threatens endlessness. But the poem is finite, and the rhetorical strategy of the list brings with it "the expectation ... that

it will stop.”⁶³ But it is not just the poem’s structure that gestures towards its edges; so, too, do the images of the poem point outward and upward, to social institutions like the church and to “Heaven in ordinary” and its “Angels.” Much of the poem’s language, too, is dynamic and spatial: “The Christian plummet sounding heav’n and earth” and the “engine against the almighty,” all of which push against the boundaries of the poem and its self-contained world of noun phrases, neatly ordered quatrains (printed separately in early editions) and concluding couplet. There is within the poem’s diction an element of motion and action that belies its static grammar. The disjunction of syntax and image in such lines, however, only heightens a lack in the poem as a whole: each clause of the paratactic accumulation of “Prayer” (I) renews the expectation of a verb and forestalls the possibility of a device or image that could bring the poem’s disparate elements together. The poem’s accumulation denies the possibility of completeness at any particular moment, reiterating only the paratactic logic of ‘and.’ To operate as it does, however, the poem can culminate only with “something understood,” a seeming image that is, in fact, not an image. The clause brings neither a new syntactic order nor a conceptual paradigm of unity, while suggesting, with its vagueness, both. Instead of an attempt to recreate the poem as an enumerated list, the poem ends with “something understood,” a kind of anti-closure, in Smith’s terms, and a line that resists encapsulation or summary and does not attempt to supersede the poem’s already accumulated images. Nevertheless, this last image is special by simple virtue of being *last*—it cannot help but bring with it the idea that the poem’s images are

⁶³ Leonard B. Meyer, “The End of the Renaissance? Notes on the Radical Empiricism of the Avant-garde,” *Hudson Review* 16 (Summer 1963): 174, quoted in Barbara Hernstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 239.

images of prayer: the lack of a verb forces us to supply one. Where the line succeeds, then, is in absence, in a gesture beyond itself—a conclusion that only suggests a conclusion.⁶⁴

The finitude of the end, and its need to signal *ending* by something that is at once not another image, and also necessarily must function as another image, is mirrored by the poem's need to finish with poetry while still remaining poetry. In Agamben's poetics of enjambment, the poem's ongoing struggle is with the possibility of non-continuity, with the possibility that a line, otherwise unremarkable, might be strangely elevated (debased?) and "trespass into prose" simply by virtue of being *last* (112). Herbert's imagery only accentuates this, making the "fall into silence" that is the end of the poem ever more clearly an example of the coincidence of what Agamben calls "metrical and syntactic limits" (112). It is at this moment, at this dawning of silence, that the poem seems to escape the inevitable finitude of its catalogic poetics, and fulfill our expectation of ending. The poem closes with the threat to go on forever, and nevertheless goes nowhere, endlessly failing to come to completion: silence and the failure to conclude become something greater. The poem's concluding silence, however, is neither absolute void nor perfect clarity, but rather a Kierkegaardian return to the finite: "something understood" evokes the limitless, but is strictly limited (it is not 'everything'). By virtue of silence—in it, really, for it is after the poem concludes that we can bring it to order—the poem's individual images are recuperated and reinforced.

⁶⁴ Indeed, even when it comes to seemingly very 'open' poems, Smith suggests, that "while anti-closure ... is a recognizable tendency with interesting consequences, it is rarely realized as the total absence of closure effects." It is hard to finish a poem without finishing. See Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 244.

2. “Reading Backwards:” The Sacrifice

“The Sacrifice,” the longest poem in “The Church” itself models this developmental process. Like “Prayer” (I), it seems to model accumulation, but in fact, demonstrates a systematic pattern of modulation and revision. Composed of 63 4-line stanzas, “The Sacrifice” develops a single theme, Christ’s “grief” through a process of elaborate development towards the inevitable conclusion that “Never was grief like mine” (252). Along the way, the poem’s end is kept clearly in sight by the repeated refrain “was ever grief like mine?”—it will surprise no reader to find out that the answer is in the negative. Yet it would be too simple to suggest that the poem’s straightforward drive towards a conclusion that is both foreordained and obvious limits its scope for development. For, by considering Christ’s grief in a—large—variety of contexts, the poem presents that grief not just as greater than any merely human woe, but fully develops, by force of repetition, the idea that it is uniquely singular, that “never was grief like mine” refers not just to a difference of scope or context, but one of kind. The poem uses repetition and modulation to display the many ways in which Christ’s grief is unique; the poem’s refrain is a device that allows it to emphasize the connectedness of otherwise disparate subjects.

The repetitive use of the same line over and over, then, is an instance of recontextualization, not accumulation. The same idea is applied, against and again, to new and different circumstances, and each time it gestures towards the same conclusion. By situating one thing—Christ’s grief—against a vast array of others, the poem derives its meaning from a sequence of different contrasts and contexts. Unlike in “Prayer” (I), however, “The Sacrifice” does not operate in parallel; rather, the poem’s conclusion, with its vehement assertion of incomparability, surpasses all of the preceding stanzas, asserting something that relates to them but goes beyond them. These previous stanzas are, in their own way, both strikingly similar, and

surprisingly isolated. Rhyming AAx (where x is the “mine” of the refrain) and with an end-stop preceding the refrain, they make their formal interconnections only by their common fourth line. What is different between them, in other words, is also what is isolated and set apart. Yet, it would be wrong to think of the poem as merely an endless aggregation of images and scenarios, for it is, equally, a networking together of the diverse elements of the passion narrative, told from Christ’s own perspective. In this, Rosamund Tuve has emphasized, Herbert’s poem is a part of “a larger group, the Complaints of Christ to His People,” stretching from Renaissance back to medieval, and likely related to “the liturgical offices of Holy Week.”⁶⁵ The poem’s individual moments, however novel and isolated they may seem, come together to form a larger structure that if not necessarily conventional is at least of a recognizable type. This structure—whether we think of it as narrative or conventional (or both)—provides a template to explain how to assemble the poem’s individual units into a larger whole. It is in light of the climactic revelation that “Never was grief like mine” that we can work backwards through the poem to make sense of it—even if that revelation is obvious enough that we can begin to see the poem in this light before we actually reach it.

Yet it would be wrong to strip Herbert of too much agency here: the poem is unified by its narrative, but it is also held together by its careful thematic development, by features that ensure that it is never *merely* the poem’s sources that connect and unify the disparate stanzas of the poem. The connections we make between these stanzas work on multiple levels, predicated on a common title, their formal similarity, and their shared source material. It is because of the variety of these connections—and the expectations that they produce and manage—that the poem is able, in its 54th stanza, to declare:

⁶⁵ Rosemond Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952), 22.

But, *O my God, my God!* Why leav'st thou me,
The sonne, in whom thou dost delight to be?
My God, my God——
Never was grief like mine.

This stanza, of course, is different from the rest of the poem in several ways. Most obviously, the third line is incomplete. This is, perhaps, all the more striking given that the biblical text (indicated by the italics) is ready to hand. Indeed, for many readers, the line's conclusion is in some sense no doubt present even in its absence—a referential haunting at work in the biblical text as well, since “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Mat 27:46 and Mark 15:34) is itself the opening of Psalm 22. In Herbert, this sense of absence is accentuated by the text's incompleteness: it becomes necessary to refer to the biblical text—for Herbert, the text with absolute priority—in order to complete the line. Incompleteness becomes a model for deference, since the reference makes Herbert's poetry subordinate to the Bible in the same way that the rest of the poem becomes subordinate to this pivotal moment, but it also serves to model a new poetics of proximity, for the relationship between Herbert's text and the biblical passages it cites transcends the division between independent poetic production, gospel and psalm. The two absent texts come together in one verse in a place where they are not even complete.

Another kind of absence, however, haunts this pivotal stanza: the discordant refrain. This is not the poem's ending, a traditional place to break patterns and establish new ones, and one, in Herbert, that frequently makes use of surprising formal innovations.⁶⁶ The broken pattern here, however, reveals several things. First, the poem is unified in some formal way—we *notice* the loss of continuity. Second, however, that continuity does not depend on anything so obvious as a refrain or repeated rhyme scheme—it would difficult to argue on formal grounds that this stanza somehow does not belong in “The Sacrifice.” Nor is this the effect of Herbert's biblical

⁶⁶ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 151.

quotation—the altered refrain is the line in the stanza that is the *least* indebted to the Bible. The biblical quotation is incomplete and the poetic pattern broken—yet, somehow, the poem remains cohesive. The poem’s integrity, it is clear, is not dependent upon any one stanza, nor upon the similitude between them. Indeed, the stanza is unique; in representing Christ’s death, it represents an action that is itself unique—but part of a larger interpretive structure that clarifies (and justifies) the singular revelation that “Never was grief like mine.”

When this altered refrain recurs in the poem’s final stanza, the effect is almost eschatological, a second coming in verse that serves to tie the poem’s conclusion back to its representation of the moment of crucifixion. Simultaneously, however, the line’s repetition emphasizes the importance of poetic practices of quotation and repetition: meaning here, as earlier, is enriched by the incorporation of textual material from beyond the poem, and by the contextual connections that material brings with it. The poem presents a truth that it cannot surpass—the final line, after all, is merely a quotation—but it nevertheless suggests that the topic is not exhausted by the biblical telling. In “The Forerunners” Herbert skeptically suggests that “*Thou art still my God* is all that ye / Perhaps with more embellishment can say.” By bringing together a diverse set of biblical references and passages, however, “The Sacrifice” demonstrates that embellishment can be an aid to interpretation, a map to a narrative that would otherwise be divided into parts that “ten leaves off doth lie.” The individual, self-contained units that make up the poem are, of course, in continual dialogue with the poem’s sources, but they are also in dialogue with each other. Each stanza, with its combination of biblical narrative and universalizing moralism, advances a narrative that at once concerns what comes before and after in close textual and temporal space (the narrative concerns of pro- and analepsis), but also governs the interpretation of the larger whole, without regard for strict proximity. ‘Who’ and ‘what’ and ‘what next’ advance alongside a synchronic accumulation of references and individual

griefs that give shape to the poem's rhetorical question. By repeating and integrating biblical text within itself, "The Sacrifice" models a particular kind of relationship to the Bible, but it also presents a model for understanding *The Temple* as a whole, where individual poems reflect each other through quotation, proximity and similarities of theme, working both with and against the larger order into which they fall, but always towards a common understanding of faith.

3. Untimely Growths: The Flower

The Temple is a sequence that accumulates and builds up, but also asks its reader to work backwards, returning to what has been left in order to begin anew. One of the most important ways that this occurs is by remembering the past. Chana Bloch suggests of "The Flower," for example, that it follows an Old Testament paradigm of thanksgiving in memorializing and remembering past suffering even in the midst of joy.⁶⁷ And, indeed, a part of this effect is certainly the result of Herbert's biblical models (though Bloch perhaps gives short shift to the extent to which this theme is present in vernal poetry of any kind—it is hard to imagine spring without thinking about winter). Bloch's biblical model, however, brings to Herbert a paradigm that is fundamentally backwards-oriented, containing and commemorating the past: to combine joy and sorrow as Herbert does requires inhabiting one state and recalling the other:

How fresh, oh Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring;
 To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.
 Grief melts away
 Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing. (1-7)

⁶⁷ Bloch, *Spelling the Word*, 303.

The joy expressed here is comingled with the memory of grief, just as, later in the poem, “Thy anger comes, and I decline” (31) in a way that suggests principally the loss of a happier state. Time is mapped onto plant growth, and, by extension, the poet’s emotional state. In addition to the poem’s retrospection, however, there is significant forward momentum, both in the form of divine action, “Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell / And up to heaven in an hour” and the growth of the plant itself: “Many a spring I shoot up fair” (16-17, 24). In fact, teleology and retrospection are bound together: language like “shoot,” “quicken” and “growing and groaning hither” works together with the poem’s seasonal imagery to emphasize that the human process of faith follows that of nature:

Who would have thought my shriveled heart
 Could have recovered greenness? It was gone
 Quite underground; as flowers depart
 To see their mother-root, when they have blown,
 Where they together
 All the hard weather,
 Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
 Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
 And up to heaven in an hour;
 Making a chiming of a passing-bell.
 We say amiss
 This or that is:
 Thy word is all, if we could spell.

.....

And now in age I bud again,
 After so many deaths I live and write;
 I once more smell the dew and rain,
 And relish versing. Oh, my only light,
 It cannot be
 That I am he
 On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
 To make us see we are but flowers that glide;

Which when we once can find and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us where to bide;
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride. (8-21, 36-49)

Herbert's poem is not narrowly allegorical, since it does not precisely map vegetal language onto faith; instead, it mixes the two quite freely. There is nothing plantlike about the assertion that "We say amiss / This or that is: / Thy word is all, if we could spell." This melange emphasizes, however, in its alternation of topics, that both process follow the same repetitive cycles, the fitful and endless motions that Kierkegaard imagines constituting faith. Each poem ends only to be repeated in the next.

"Seen retrospectively," Harman notes, the eruption of speech from silence at the beginning of a poem such as "The Collar" "is just another false start—the first step in a pattern of behaviour as repetitious as the one it meant to escape," a pattern that will repeat itself again and again with each of the lyrics of "The Church."⁶⁸ Herbert's poems iterate endlessly, working with what has come before—attempts to inaugurate a new tradition ("no more / I will abroad!") are unable to complete this break with the past. It is this cyclical quality that explains the fact that Herbert remains, even in his most retrospective, grounded ineluctably in the present moment. The great "return" of "The Flower" is, after all, a return to writing, not a place or time: "I once more smell the dew and rain, / And relish versing"—a line that strikingly adds (plants?) poetry into the mixture of horticulture and salvation already present in the poem. To write is to encode something like memory, but Herbert's writing is expressed in a vibrant present tense: "And now in age I bud again / After so many deaths I live and write." It is not, of course, difficult to see Bloch's point here—Herbert does indeed (strikingly) incorporate past "deaths" into present

⁶⁸ Harman, *Costly Monuments*, 77.

exultation, but he does so in a way that is not properly memorial. Herbert is developing a contrast, but if there is anything “necessary” about the process he describes, it comes from the language of seasonal rebirth. Herbert is not so much remembering winter as he is using it to develop the idea of spring.

What Herbert produces, then, is a kind of atemporality, what Jonathan Gil Harris calls a “rematerializ[ing] of the past in the present.”⁶⁹ Harris, writing about the supersessionist narratives of poems such as “The Sinner”—narratives which make much of what they seem most eager to dispense with—suggests that Herbert ‘returns,’ to use a word of Herbert’s own, bring the past into the present. I want, however, to suggest that Herbert’s past is never really past at all. It is “while” he grows upward that Herbert declines, and God’s “killing and quickening” come “in an hour”—the past and present are as mixed as faith and flora. As with *The Temple* as a whole, where continual “returns” and retreats mark the possibility of future reengagement, whether through the numbered poems discussed in part I, or biblical paraphrases that explicitly invoke the possibility of further poems in the same vein (“The 23 Psalm”) Herbert ensures that what is finished is only ever set aside. “The Flower” articulates this pattern clearly: until we reach “a garden for us where to bide,” what finitude is only ever temporary. “To write,” Blanchot reminds us, “is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking.”⁷⁰

More generally, Herbert’s continual focus on the imperfection of his own writing ensures that all subjects remain open—there are few, if any ‘last words’ of Herbert’s own in *The Temple*. There are, of course, last words of very many other kinds in very many places in Herbert’s text, whether the final line of “The Sacrifice,” mentioned before, of the close of “The Collar” where the finality of “My Lord” seems to brook no questions. These biblical incorporations are, in their

⁶⁹ Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 38.

⁷⁰ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 27.

own way, untimely. Set off in italic type and used to bring an end to their respective poems, they knock Herbert's writing "out of joint" and into the synchronic space of quotation, a confused time made all the more so by Herbert's tendency to speak the Bible with his own voice, recasting present contexts in historical garb and dragging *present* contexts back into the past. Though the voice of God in Herbert's poetry is often climactic, it is nevertheless also always retrospective: when Herbert ends "The Crosse" with "*Thy will be done,*" Herbert sounds like the Bible, not the other way around (36). These transtemporal crossings work thematically, of course—Bloch devotes an entire book to their documentation, and she is far from the only critic to attempt to unpack them. But they also work more formally, teaching Herbert's readers to read differently, asynchronously—teaching them "to spell." For the kind of polychronic—Harris would suggest *palimpsested*—structure that Herbert produces with the Bible is one that he produces with his entire collection. Poems are never truly commemorated in *The Temple*, because they always remain alive to future returns. The griefs of the poet in "The Flower" are past, but they come alive again in the poem that documents them. The present, too, is marked by the same interrelation of joy and abjection:

And now in age I bud again,
 After so many deaths I live and write;
 And I once more smell the dew and rain,
 And relish versing: O my onely light,
 It cannot be
 That I am he
 On whom thy tempests fell all night.

Yet even for the seemingly justified soul, the "wonders" of God are "To make us see we are but flowers that glide," (44) fading and falling away, comingling past and present in the time when "I live and write."

4. Unsettled Rest: The Pulley

It is the play of past, present and future, and of the possibility of an eschatological uchronia, “a garden for us where to bide” (46) is the fraught subject of “The Pulley.”⁷¹ This poem, which centres the idea of “rest,” brings together biblical (and pre-biblical) time with both the present state of humanity and its potential (i.e., future) salvation. The poem, interestingly, and unlike “The Flower” does not mention the Garden of Eden nor, indeed, take any of its cues from the Genesis narrative of humanity’s origins. Instead, Herbert echoes the myth of Pandora, creating a teleological account of humanity that refers directly to future salvation. Closely entangled with the poem’s account of creation, however, is its account of time. Yet while critics have tangled over the idea of “rest” (it is one of the few words Wilcox deems complex enough to include in her glossary, for example) they have less closely examined the poem’s chronological implications.⁷² The poem presents itself first and foremost as a narrative tale, beginning “when God at first made man.” In this time, God, as he bestows his blessings on man, makes “a stay / Perceiving that alone of all his treasure / Rest in the bottom lay.” Rest, of course, cannot be poured forth—in addition to the strange paradox that would result from flowing rest, Herbert suggests that it would prevent humans turning their hearts to the divine. To bestow “rest” on God’s “creature” would result in a situation where “He would . . . rest in Nature, not the God of Nature.” Already, rest is a strange thing: it cannot be bestowed (and if it were, would it remain ‘at rest’?) and yet rest is withheld for fear not of restfulness on humanity’s part, but for fear of *wrong* rest. How rest-denied humans will “rest” in “the God of Nature” is unclear, obscured behind the poem’s polyvalent meanings. The theological implications of this withholding have been

⁷¹ Already, of course, the tensions of eternal rest are made clear in this line from “The Flower:” the Edenic moment of Adam and Eve, after all, was pre-chronic, but, paradoxically, did not remain so.

⁷² Wilcox, *The English Poems*, xliii-xliv.

explored by critics such as Strier, who have found troubling the suggestion of an already (deliberately) flawed creation, but I am more concerned with the linguistic circulation of rest through the poem.

Rest begins in God's hands, and, as he labours to make "man," he does not lose it. Indeed—he realizes that he cannot bestow rest, for in giving it to man, he would lead the the latter *away* from true rest, to something that would be somehow different from the blessing ultimately withheld. Yet, linguistically slippery "rest" seems almost to run through God's fingers as, looking on his creation, he says, "let him keep the rest." Yet, this transfer, too, is unstable; man keeps it in "repining restlessness." Verbally unstable, rest defies any attempt to keep it contained or fixed in time, place or possessor—has, in other words, all the qualities which is disavows. What rest suggests, however, is not just the negotiation of creation and salvation, but an account of time that blurs past and future into a vision of the present that both is and is not 'at rest.' Loosely, "The Pulley," in accounting for human salvation in terms of what is withheld and absent, models a paradigm of faith that is echoed in *The Temple* as a whole, and in which salvation depends on the "extra-poetic." Yet "The Pulley" focuses on the space that should be 'beyond.' It is as if, having concluded a poem like "The Crosse" and heard the voice of God, we have entered into his presence and hear him musing about the time when he created humanity. What is revealed about this space outside the poem—or between poems, to think in terms of "The Church" as a whole—is that it is a strange place indeed, one that operates outside the norms of human literary production, lacking a sense of space or coherence. The issue is not of sense— God can, presumably, make rest flow from a box if he wishes it to—but rather of how we relate poems to one another through the space that lies between them. "The Pulley" suggests that in this space, ideas about what comes first, what it means to move from one place to another, or indeed to be moving at all (and so likewise what it means to have a location in space at all) are at best flawed

ways of understanding the divine. After the poem has fallen into silence, in other words, it has begun to operate in ways in which connections work linguistically, by a cascade of puns on the polysemous “rest” rather than in terms of order and motion. Order and sequence are ultimately subordinate to thematic and divine concerns: space become continuous, in the sense that, as Herbert puts it in “The Temper” (II), “Thy power and love, my love and trust / Make one place ev’ry where.” Space is defined by the overlap of love, not division.

Conclusion: Love (III)

The Temple, as Helen Vendler observes, is “provisional” and revisionary—what is read one day being forever subject to revision by verses “ten leaves off” (Holy Scriptures II” 6). “My God, I read this day” is how Herbert begins “Affliction” (V)—a phrase that speaks directly to personally grounded, situationally produced critical readings—readings that are the product of “this” day, and ambiguously complete (texts that *are being* read, or texts that *have been* read?). Herbert, like his readers, must settle for a reading that is grounded in the dual subjectivities of “I” and “this day”—indeed, the two blur together, for “I read this day” applies as well to the reader of Herbert’s poetry as it does to Herbert.

Despite these ambiguities, however, it does not seem justifiable to hold, with Fish, that Herbert’s work is “self-consuming.” Indeed, as Peter Sacks observes, the positive qualities of Herbert’s work seem to be strengthened by their integration of denial, uncertainty and doubt, not diminished: “Herbert’s cheer is persuasive because of its adversarial capacity to integrate a fully registered ‘Thy root is ever in its grave, / And thou much die’ with an urgently received rejoinder regarding what ‘chiefly lives.’”⁷³ This rejoinder, the conclusion to “Vertue,” is itself something of a puzzle. Vendler spends an entire chapter with this poem, and while her explication is persuasive and complex, it only adds to the sense that the ending is fundamentally ambiguous, that it operates by principles not wholly open to logical explanation.⁷⁴ The poem’s refrain (“thou must die”) is, abruptly and simply, completely different, and the effect is decisive. That which “chiefly lives” (*chiefly?* what of the rest?—and why does chiefly seem like an intensifier rather than a qualifier?) has the last word. The thought is so inadequate, yet so effortlessly carries the

⁷³ Peter Sacks, “Herbert and Our Contemporaries,” 33.

⁷⁴ Helen Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 25.

rest of the poem—just as a good critical account of Herbert (or anyone else) seems entirely unburdened by its necessary incompleteness. Insufficiency adds to insufficiency to produce something that is equally inadequate but somehow transcends itself. Perhaps, as Kierkegaard suggests, there is a step beyond resignation in which that which was resigned is inexplicably recuperated—by accepting that the critical enterprise is necessarily incomplete, yet somehow still valuable, it becomes possible to accept that incompleteness. But this is making something rather mundane out of Kierkegaard, and in any event, it is difficult to say that there is anything “outside” the poem that justifies any transcendence of its poetic nature—the silence into which Agamben holds that the poem falls is, after all, just silence. Nevertheless, Herbert’s silences often seem to be something more, for although God is not immanent in a line like “Then chiefly lives,” there is something thrilling about the failed possibility that he might be. Presence is called to mind and then banished, but it leaves a trace behind. By passing, Kierkegaard might say, through the infinite before coming to rest in the finite, the last line of “Vertue” demonstrates something a kind of simplicity that the rest of the poem does not. The force of “Then chiefly lives” is in part the fact that the idea is so much vaster than the expression. The line embodies, as Gary Kuchar says of prayer, “an opening to a wider perspective of understanding—one that retrospectively reveals the real meaning of what one originally intended without fully knowing it.”⁷⁵ Yet there is still no successful embodiment of the transcendental here: the presence of the divine must wait until the poem is over; it remains extra-poetic.

Sacks suggests that “Vertue” “open[s] out, often with terrifying abruptness, to a language and dispensation that arrive as if from beyond the exhausted and often evacuated self, or from that previously inaccessible part of the self that has, according to Herbert’s belief, been pre-

⁷⁵ Gary Kuchar, “Prayer Terminable and Interminable: George Herbert and the Art of Estrangement,” *Religion and Literature* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 134.

possessed and inscribed by God,” and this account of the poem nicely leaves space for the ambiguities of the poem’s ending—there is a world of difference between arriving at an outlook and a destination.⁷⁶ Of course, there are definite features to “Vertue”—questions of language and poetics, and theology, and each of these contributes vitally to the poem as a whole: “the energy and power we respond to in much of this poetry,” Lewalski reminds us, “has its basis in the resources of biblical genre, language and symbolism.”⁷⁷ What “Vertue” does not do, however, is make a sustained movement away from the realm of the mundane—indeed, it describes its soul, “like a seasoned timber” in earthier terms than any other object it considers. Nevertheless, readers of *The Temple* often attempt to map it onto exactly such a movement. In a structural and architectural reading of *The Temple*, for example, Stanley Stewart has argued that the volume “is not a movement from one time and place to another, but from time to the timeless” and that “Space has no part in such a movement.”⁷⁸ Stewart is right to resist a strictly architectural reading of *The Temple*, but his suggestion that *The Temple* transcends spatial concerns, or could ever enact a successful movement towards the timeless, is simply untenable. *The Temple* may call into question the value of spatial distinctions to the question of the divine, but it makes pains to evoke the timeless from within the finite and time-bound.

Indeed, it seems odd to suggest that the ideas of poetic time and space could ever really be separated from Herbert’s poetry. Poetry is not a plastic art; reading is a temporal activity, but one that progresses spatially. Whatever our metaphors for the ‘passage’ of time (and most of them are spatial) it is undeniable that to move through a volume of poetry, one must *move*. To read the formal motions of a volume such as *The Temple* without reading the textual movements it

⁷⁶ Sacks, “Herbert and Our Contemporaries,” 35.

⁷⁷ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 5.

⁷⁸ Stanley Stewart, “Time and *The Temple*” *Studies in English Literature* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 105.

requires of its reader is to read partially. Within this physical object there are of course spatial relationships—the subject of chapter 1—but each poem is also a distinct temporal moment. “As Herbert writes in ‘Paradise,’” Stewart observes, “each moment is the beginning as well as the end of time.”⁷⁹ This kind of isolation, however, does not mean that the moments cannot be situated, temporally or spatially, in relation to one another, or that the volume as a whole moves towards timelessness. Certainly, as we have explored, the temporality of *The Temple* is not simple, and it might be wise to hold, with Arnold Stein, that *The Temple* is “a ritual that re-enacts a religious mystery of timeless recurrence.”⁸⁰

The end of “The Church,” then, is both a physical ending (marked, as noted above, with typographical features particular to ends) and also a temporal terminus. If the collection is a collection of echoes, as Goldberg argues, it is at “Love” (III) that many of them fade into silence. This poem, perhaps more than any other, encapsulates Sacks’s idea of an abrupt opening out—a motion that manages a delicate balance between tranquillity and irresistibility.⁸¹ “Love” (III), Anne Williams observes, is “as the climax of *The Temple*, a vision of the soul’s entrance into heaven, . . . remarkably untirumphant, unapocalyptic, unvisionary.”⁸² Going out with neither bang nor whimper, the poem insists on its speaker’s salvation, but in terms that are unfailingly courteous and gentle. Herbert plays, no doubt, with Renaissance conventions of courtesy, and perhaps also the language of romance and sexuality, but in ways that feel, as the whole poem

⁷⁹ Stewart, “Time and *The Temple*,” 104.

⁸⁰ Arnold Stein, *George Herbert’s Lyrics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 195.

⁸¹ See, for example, Strier, *Love Known*, 74, who calls the poem a “courtesy-contest,” or Michael Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 199-213, who contextualizes the poem against the courtly language of the time.

⁸² Anne Williams, “Gracious Accommodations: Herbert’s ‘Love III,’” *Modern Philology* 82, no. 1 (August 1984): 13.

that meaning, is immediately apparent. Nevertheless, the poem does not call attention to the nuances of its theology; indeed, it does not refer to God at all.

As is the case with ‘Vertue,’ then, the effects that secure the poem its coherence are effects that are poetic, not doctrinal. The poem’s easy, closed verse form helps to keep its lines from spilling over—enjambment, when it occurs, always leads into a swiftly closed trimeter. The abandonment, moreover, of more wordly forms such as the sonnets used for “Love (I)” and “Love (II)” lessens the poem’s entanglement in questions about the nature and use of language and poetry. If those early poems struggle to overcome a verse form associated principally with amatory idleness, and as a result, find themselves in some measure complicated by their status as poetry, “Love” (III) cannot help but serve as the completion towards which those earlier poems gestured. “Rather than accepting its own status as a literary artifact—a secondary text in which the operation of the Logos can be revealed,” Anthony Martin writes of “Love II,” “Love” (III) “attempts to present an ideal, unrealizable text. The consuming energy of a purifying fire cannot be assimilated to the literary work in which it is expressed; the work must necessarily itself be consumed.”⁸⁴ To suggest that “Love” (III) overcomes the dangers of secular erotic verse by virtue of not being a sonnet, however, is somewhat facile—not only are there sonnets in *The Temple* that seem distinctly separate from such concerns (“The Forerunners,” for example) but it seems simplistic to suggest that Love (III) transcends earthly concerns—indeed, much of the criticism surrounding this poem has been devoted to revealing the ways in which that transcendence is necessarily incomplete or abortive—this is, after all, a poem ostensibly about eating.

Indeed, what seems most powerful about “Love” (III) is the way that it enfolds and seems to overcome the possibility of its own failure. Structured around a series of failures and errors,

⁸⁴ Anthony Martin, “Herbert’s ‘Love’ Sonnets and Love Poetry,” *The George Herbert Journal* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 47.

the poem nevertheless seems to embody the possibility that failure is itself a necessary step leading to acceptance. Each stanza is structured around a fault of the speaker (“My soul drew back...”, “I the unkind...”, “then I will serve...”) but in each case the fault is overcome by Love—and in each case, too, the speaker seems complicit in his overpowering. The speaker objects to Love’s treatment of him, but is unfailingly courteous and does not resist Love’s advances. As in “The Forerunners” but more actively, then, the poem combines reticence and human error with the acknowledgement of the same. Unlike that poem’s paradox, that “all things were more ours by being his,” “Love” (III) unfolds in a way that comes to a simple resolution, but does not transcend it. The poem’s fall into silence is utterly conventional; the speaker sits and eats, nothing is forestalled; the poem unfolds narratively, in the past tense—if ends are ever simple, the poem is simply over.

Ends are never simple, however, and part of what I hope I have suggested here is how they combine with repetition and beginnings to allow larger structures of meaning to arise. Nevertheless, it is important not to see endings as exclusively the purveyors of an Agamben-esque space of profundity. As the reader who close the book is well aware, the ‘*hors-texte*,’ *pace* Derrida, is a world of labour and laundry and mundane obligation that has little to do with the text. For all that the silence between poems may be sliced and carved—and I hope I have done so in some interesting ways—it is still simply unprinted paper. One of the benefits of thinking about Herbert as ink on the page is that reading poems in their printed contexts dispels the illusion that Love will ever beckon the reader into heaven. That may be a powerful illusion, of course, but there is a space, too, for a poetry that never gets there.

Kierkegaard writes that transcendence is inexplicable from a return to the mundane, and in lieu of attempting to make my own transcendent claims about *The Temple*, I would like to end by proposing this idea as an explanatory force in Herbert. The motions of Kierkegaardian faith do

not account, of course, for all of Herbert's work, but they do, I hope, give some measure of how Herbert integrates religious experience and poetry. If we stop searching for an account that does more than this, I think it becomes easier to see the strange and fascinating ways that Herbert both suggests his own limits, and escapes them. In proposing a mode for Herbert that turns away from telic models of success and representation, I draw on what Jack Halberstam calls *The Queer Art of Failure*. Illegibility is an unlikely quality to ascribe to Herbert, but the failure to produce knowledge in traditional modes may lead, Halberstam suggests, to "unbounded forms of speculation, modes of thinking that ally not with rigor and order but with inspiration and unpredictability."⁸⁵ Herbert fails to make clear a comprehensive poetics and never fully articulates the divine in poetry, but by virtue of the local and particular, he begins a movement towards something larger and more universal.

Meaning in *The Temple* is the product of the whole, and the sequence operates on a level beyond the individual poem, but always has its roots in particular moments in particular poems, and it is inevitably undermined and turned against itself. Poems questioning the value of poetry go unanswered, or end by affirming only the value of the word of God (the "Jordan" poems, "The Forerunners," many others). Entry into "The Church" is difficult and always doubtful in the presence of the "Superliminare." Human virtue, to the extent that it is affirmed, is endlessly corrupted by "Sinnes Round". The voice of God meddles with human speech, which no amount of repetition can secure ("The Sacrifice"). The world is ultimately governed by a system of meaning that we will never learn to "spell" in "The Flower," and which is so strange to us that the world of the divine seems beyond the logic of space and time ("The Pulley). Ultimately, however, Herbert's poetry speaks to an endless process—Kierkegaard would no doubt term it repetition—of hope, change and amelioration. Improvement lacks a meaningful standard towards

⁸⁵ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 10.

which it may progress, but, Halberstam suggests, there is something liberating and profoundly powerful in letting go of the need for success and perfection. Or, to put it in Herbert's terms, the value lies in the ability to "turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul," for "God doth supplie the want."

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