'Then let me tell thee a strange storie.' An exploration of narrative in George Herbert's *The Temple*.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

'Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse.'

Conflict, Doubt and Narrative. The poems discussed are 'The Collar', 'The Rose', and 'The Holdfast.'

Chapter 2

'Oh Book! infinite sweetnesse!'

The Bible as a model and The Linear Narrative Explored. The poem discussed are 'The Pilgrimage', 'The Bag', 'Redemption', and 'Christmas.'

Chapter 3

' Pulpits and Sundayes, sorrow dogging sin.'

Linear Movement around the World.

The poems discussed are 'The Church Militant', 'The Windows', 'In Pacem Britannicum', and 'In Solarium.'

Chapter 4

'Alas poore mortall, void of store.'

The use of Dialogue, Plot and Lyric in Narrative. The poems discussed are 'Love-joy', 'Dialogue' and 'JESU.'

Chapter 5

' But not of speech in starres.'

The Unfamiliar and the Unexplained. The poems discussed are 'Artillerie', 'Our Life is hid with Christ in God', 'The Crosse', 'The Church-floore', and 'Confession.'

Chapter 6

' O that I could a sinne once see.'

Formal Shapes of Narratives. The poems discussed are 'Hope', 'The World' and 'Life.'

Chapter 7

'Lord thou art mine, and I am thine.'

Circular and Cyclical Narratives. The poems discussed are 'A Wreath', 'Clasping of hands', 'Sinnes round', 'In Alapas' and 'In Mundi Sympathiam cum Christo.'

Chapter Eight

'Death thou wast once an uncouth hideous thing.'

Endings and Closure in Narrative. The poems discussed are 'Love (III)', 'Mortification', and 'Vertue.'

Chapter Nine

'Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud, The land of spices; something understood': Conclusion

BIBLIOGRAPHY

All Biblical quotations are taken from the King James Authorised Version of 1611. The Poems are taken from C.A. Patrides, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, 7th edn (London: Dent & Sons, 1988), and *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. by Mark McCloskey & Paul R. Murphy (Athens; Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1965). C.A. Patrides, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne,* 4th edn (London: Dent & Sons, 1990). T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems 1990-1962, 9th edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1990). Ted Hughes, New Selected Poems 1957-1994 (London: Faber & Faber, 1995).

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND POEMS

USED IN THE THESIS

Images of George Herbert from 1679 to 2004 page

The English Poems of George Herbert

The Latin Poems of George Herbert

Miscellaneous Poems

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS submitted by Valerie Burgess for the degree of Ph.D. and entitled 'Then let me tell thee a strange storie.' An exploration of narrative in George Herbert's *The Temple.*

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My doctoral research concerns the use of narrative within the poetry of George Herbert. As Herbert is essentially a lyric poet; the use of story-telling in many of the poems is unique to this genre of poetry. Although the thesis is not biographical, I have concentrated on a parallel between *The Temple* and the structure of Herbert's life; however, as Herbert never dated his poems, it is difficult to be precise as to their creation. In order to demonstrate the connection between *The Temple* and his life narrative I have placed the poems into eight categories, dealing with each of them in corresponding chapters. These categories are: Conflict; Linear; Circular/Linear; Dialogue; Unfamiliar; Implicit/Explicit; Cyclical/Circular; and Endings.

My study begins with an analysis of three poems of conflict. I commence with this category because it seems to me that Herbert's conflict and doubts are a constant source of anxiety throughout his life. In the chapter, I explore the unique relationship between Nicholas Ferrar and Herbert; I also examine the parallels set by Ferrar in 'The Little Academy' with their dramatic productions, and the drama created by Herbert in the poetry. Herbert's obsession with time is a further consideration in view of Barnabas Oley's comments in the 1671 preface to *A Priest to The Temple.*

In the subsequent chapters, I aim to show how as Herbert makes his spiritual journey this mirrors the journey he constructs in the narratives. For example, in chapter three, the linear journey he makes is global, as he narrates the movement of the Christian faith around the world in his poem 'The Church Militant.' Similarly, in chapter five, I explore Herbert's gift of story-telling through his challenge of the familiar. In chapter seven, poems of either a cyclical or circular pattern are studied, as these further accentuate the psychological stress in which Herbert places himself. As Herbert travels towards his own death, the final chapter deals with poems of last things and immortality. Herbert is arguably the most important Christian poet of his age. To clarify his theological concepts, I have focused on corresponding appropriate Biblical texts (from the King James Authorised Version 1611), and also the works of St. Augustine to demystify the poems. Herbert, we know, read St. Augustine as it is recorded that he bequeathed his works of the saint to a colleague in his will.

As well as analysing the poems, and attempting to place the corresponding Biblical texts in context to them in order to understand the narrative better, I have turned my attention to the large body of work done by the structuralist and post-structuralist narratologists. Poetic narrative is a neglected field of research, all of the work having been focused on the development of the novel. Therefore, it is by examining the poems as miniature novellas, where there are characters, a plot, conversations, an

omniscient narrator and an ending, it is possible to see the beginnings of the novel as we know it today. Herbert, it is noted, often manages to compress a complex story into an economic poem of just ten lines long.

The aim of this dissertation is therefore two-fold; first to examine narrative as used in lyric poetry and so contribute to the understanding of the wider utilisation of the religious lyric; and second, to acknowledge that literary theory stimulates a more in-depth understanding of Herbert's poetry through a closer scrutiny of the words he uses, and the way he uses words. Throughout the course of my work I have been prompted to view the narratives in the Bible and how Herbert has 'borrowed' the ideas found there, giving them his own idiomatic spin. The application of narratology to the poems has allowed me to read them in a new light. I hope, therefore, to motivate other readers of Herbert's poetry to view his narratives as Bible stories that, although very familiar, were personal to him alone, which was the inimitable Reformation message.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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I should also like to thank Suzanne Eward (librarian and keeper of the muniments at Salisbury Cathedral) for her information about Herbert's portraiture, and the Bishop of Salisbury for letting me take a copy of the same picture. Grateful thanks are given to all those people who wrote to my pressing enquires regarding Herbert and his life; they include Alan Archer (Priest-in-charge of St. John's, St. Michael's and St. Andrew's, Herbert's church) for his informative letter; Aude Fitsimmons, assistant librarian at Magdalene College Cambridge for putting me in touch with Dr. Luckett; Steve Hobbs of the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office for showing me original documents related to Herbert; and finally Edward Smith, archivist of Westminster School, and Peter Goddard (historian) who put me on the trail of Herbert's education and the possible syllabus that he followed in 1609.

Last but not least, I cannot forget all those kind people who listened, sympathised and consoled me, and never let me feel that it was a waste of time. To Jan, Graham,

Margaret, Cathy, Lin, Liz, Dianne, Doreen, David, Peter, Helen, Mrs McCumiskey (who runs a B&B in Salisbury), and finally Sandi in Liverpool University Library, who found books and obscure Internet info. This thesis is dedicated to all these great people.

Heather Asals wrote somewhere that people who write about George Herbert have a very special kind of courage. Well, Ms Asals, I can definitely prove that you were correct there, but it was worth it.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

From 1986-88 the author completed her Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing at Liverpool John Moores University. She then went on to acquire her BA in Psychology and English at Liverpool Hope University. In 1991-93 she took an MA in Renaissance Literature under Professor Jonathan Bate at Liverpool University. Since gaining these qualifications she has taught mature students in both psychology and creative writing at colleges of FE.

Introduction

Writing in *The Countrey Parson* in the 1630s, George Herbert (1593-1633), a former Prælector in rhetoric at the University of Cambridge, described his homiletic method to his congregation in the following way:

> Sometimes he tells them stories, and sayings of others, according as his text invites him; for them also men heed, and remember better then exhortations; which though earnest, yet often dy with the Sermon, especially Countrey people; which are thick and heavy, and hard to raise to a poynt of Zeal, and fervency, and need a mountaine of fire to kindle them; but stories and sayings they will well remember.[1]

What is noted in this crucial account is Herbert's engagement with narrative, and more importantly with his congregation. It shows him as dynamic, sensitive, and perceptive to the understanding and needs of country people. It also discloses to his readers how he consciously embraces and adopts a narrative style that is idiomatic and unique. Nevertheless, the narrating voice that Herbert adopts is intimately tied in with the authorial voice. Roland Barthes points out that

> the author performs a function, the writer an activity. Not that the author is a pure essence: he acts, but his action is immanent in its object, it is performed paradoxically on its own instrument: language [...] the author is a man who radically absorbs the world's *why* in a *how* to write.'[2]

It is language that is Herbert's most powerful tool, and it is where the reinterpretation of his words occur, as I hope this thesis will demonstrate. Describing this re-creation by the reader, Barthes continues, saying that

> as soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice

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[1] *The Works of George Herbert*, 9th edn. ed. by F.E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 233. First published in 1652. To be referred to in the thesis as *Works*.

[2] Roland Barthes, 'Authors and Writers' in *Critical Essays*, trans. from the French by Richard Howard, 3rd edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp.xi -279 (p.144).

> loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins [...]. Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile[3]

It is this reconstruction by the reader that Herbert relies upon; his narrating voice is never very far away from his authorial voice. It is up to the reader to re-create his own unique interpretation of the narratives as they are presented to him, as both the narrator and author ask his reader, for example, 'Hast thou not heard, that my Lord Jesus di'd?/Then let me tell thee a strange storie' ('The Bag', 7-8).

Telling a story is at the heart of the poetry of Herbert. Often his poetic stories are dramatic, some are contemplative, but some are humorous, and some even challenge faith itself. Many poems focus on the self, and are so personal that they strip away all vestiges of a false persona, leaving the reader with many of the emotions the speaker also experiences. Few critics of George Herbert's poetry have trespassed into the area of narrative, preferring generally to focus their attention on the religious symbolism and spirituality of the poems. My thesis proposes to examine closely a number of poems within the main corpus of his work that specifically tell a story. When Herbert moved to Bemerton in 1630 to become a priest, the transition from the University of Cambridge to becoming a village parson can only be imagined, but it must have been stark and dramatic. Nevertheless, he knew that stories are also useful tools for a new preacher trying to understand his congregation as the above statement shows.

The narrating self that allows the poems to become so intimate and personal is often introduced by Herbert in the first line of a poem. This gives the poem a particular power to engage the reader's attention and hold him. By commencing his poems with the 'I' persona, as in 'The Collar' ('I struck the board'), or in 'Artillerie'

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[3] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image - Music - Text*, essays selected and trans. by Stephen Heath, 2nd edn (Glasgow: Fontana, 1982), pp. 7-217 (pp.143 &147).

('As I one ev'ning sat before my cell'), or in 'Affliction (V)' ('My God, I read this day) the reader is able to both empathise and discern a more abstruse meaning hidden within both the words and syntax. All Herbert's narratives are taken from his personal experience of the Christian life, yet often they are barely recognisable as they are so individualistic. Joan Webber states that for the Anglican

> literary self-consciousness [...] includes consciousness of the self as subject [...]. His 'I' is obscure, ambiguous, many-sided, because that is how he looks to himself. The complexity of his style initiates the complexity of the sense of himself [...] in illusion, paradox, and word play [...] 'he' need even not be the same person from moment to moment.[4]

The Bible was Herbert's principal model from which he constructed his poetry, as this thesis will show. Nicholas Ferrar, a close friend from his Cambridge days, also acknowledged Herbert's love of language and narrative. After preparing the fair copy of Herbert's *The Temple*, Ferrar wrote a lengthy eulogy on him, in which he says, amongst other things:

> Next God, he loved his Word: so that he hath been heard to make solemne protestations, that he would not part with one leaf thereof for the whole world, if it were offered him in exchange.[5]

Herbert is one of the best known English devotional poets of the seventeenth century.[6] His poetry has been read and enjoyed by the 'man in the street', offered to

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[4] Joan Webber, *The Eloquent 'I': Style and Self in Seventeenth-century Prose* (Madison: The University of Milwaukee Press, 1968), pp. 4&8. Webber differentiates between the two concepts of the literary 'I' in both Anglican and Puritan writings. She argues that 'the Anglican's view of himself is affected by his concept of the world as art [...] he knows that words committed to paper have a way of being read by others. The Puritan, on the other hand, is shaped by his sense of himself as an instrument of God's will [...]. And as God uses him, so the Puritan uses the paper on which he writes [...] it becomes an instrument rather than a reflecting mirror.'p.12.

[5] *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed by C.A. Patrides, 7th edn (London: Dent & Sons, 1988), p.31. Titled 'The Printers to the Reader.' N.B. All poems are to be taken from this edition.

[6] Despite the passage of time, Herbert remains one of the most well-known and endearing figures in the current Anglican church. Archbishop Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, devotes a chapter to Herbert in *Anglican Identities*, pp.v-149 (p.57); and

children as Sunday-school prizes, as well as being analysed, examined and disputed over by academics since they were first published in 1633 by Thomas Buck. Nevertheless, there is an important aspect of the poems that has notably been either ignored or at best glossed over by critics, and this is the storytelling or narrative that many of the poems present. My thesis addresses this storytelling area of the poetry, examining each poem in the light of current narrative theory. It also attempts to conflate Herbert's Christian views with his concept of selfhood together with the idiomatic story he creates in the religious *milieu* of his day.

1. Early Life

George Herbert was born the 3rd of April 1593 as the seventh child of ten children in Montgomery to a 'Generous, Noble and Ancient Family.'[7] His father died when he was three and his mother, Magdalene Herbert, raised her large family virtually single-handed, moving them from the country to the city as their circumstances changed. In 1609 Herbert's mother married Sir John Danvers, who was nearer Herbert's age, but, possibly because of this, would prove a good friend and confidant to his stepson for the rest of his life.[8]

Mrs. Herbert was a devoted mother to her children and deeply religious, so much so, that John Donne, a family friend, dedicated his cycle of sonnets *La Corona* to her. She also took an active part in the children's education, teaching them to read and write, and taking a keen interest in their religious development. Music was an important feature in the Herbert household. Both Edward and George were

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Herbert's narrative poem 'The Call'was taken as a theme for the Epiphany sermon in the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral 2005; whilst this same poem, set to music by Richard H. Lloyd (b.1933), was sung by the choristers.

[7] Amy M. Charles, *A Life of George Herbert* (Icatha & London: Cornell University Press, 1977), p.21. N.B. To be further referred in the thesis as *A Life*.

[8] Amy Charles, *A Life*, pp.56-.57.

accomplished lutanists, and George played the viol as well.[9] Mrs. Herbert was fond of entertaining and in 1601 several famous musicians visited the household, notably John Bull and William Byrd, who were crypto-Catholics, but who were both doctors of music and members of the Chapel Royal.[10] It appears, therefore, that the children were included in all of the household's activities, including meeting with important people of the day, and it seemed that no expense was spared on the children's happiness.[11] This then was the pleasant and enriching home in which Herbert had the good fortune to be raised.

As time went on, a strong bond developed between Herbert and his young stepfather, and this is evident in the numerous letters he wrote to Sir John Danvers. One in particular discusses his future plans and hopes, and particularly expresses his desire for reading matter. In the letter he says 'I want books extremely [...]. You know Sir, how I am now setting foot into Divinity.'[12] But before we consider this momentous decision, it is useful to get some idea of Herbert's gradual progress both through Westminster school and Trinity College Cambridge.

2. Historical Background: The Westminster School Curriculum

A prodigiously gifted child, Herbert entered Westminster school as a day pupil in 1604 when he was eleven, and became a residential pupil in 1605.[13] Generally, seven or eight years was the usual age for starting school and the course was planned to prepare 'the best witted children' for the university at fourteen or

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[9] Amy Charles, *A Life*, pp.42,44,46.
[10]Amy Charles, 'Mrs. Herbert's *Kitchin Booke*', *English Literary History*, 4 (1974), 164-173 fols 5v, 22v, 45v, 51v. In A. Charles, *A Life*, p.43.
[11]Amy Charles in *A Life* remarks that Sir Francis Bacon as well as Dr. John Donne were frequent visitors to the household. p.64.
[12]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*. p.364.
[13]Helen Wilcox, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthews & Brian Harrison, Vol. 26 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.677-685.

fifteen.[14]At Westminster, Herbert acquired habits of 'rising betimes and constant study' while being 'never permitted to know what idleness or vanity was by his own experience.'[15] The curriculum at Westminster school, as indeed at all grammar schools, offered an almost unrelieved diet of Latin and Greek, which to the scholarly such as Herbert posed little problem, but to the average child must have been an unremitting grind.

The first teacher associated with Westminster school was Edward Grant. As early as 1575 he had produced an outstanding Greek grammar for his pupils' use. Dedicated to Sir William Cecil (1520-1598) and entitled *Graecae Linguae Spiciligium*, this was the first such work to be published by an Englishman since the time of Richard Croke two generations earlier. Even before the publication of Grant's textbook, Greek had been taught in several grammar schools in the country. Horman's *Vulgaria* of 1519 included a few grammatical exercises Horman had probably assigned to his pupils before 1502. Among these were Greek phrases and a series of references to Greek writings and plays.[16]

A more detailed curriculum for Westminster is offered by William Laud (1573-1645). Known as *The Laud Document*, it states:

> After this we had 2. exercises that varied everie other morn: *the first morn*: we made *verses extempore lat*[in]: and gr[eek]: upon 2 or 3 sev[eral]: theames [...]. Then the *M.r himself expounded some parte of a Lat[in]: or Gr[eek]: Author* (one day in prose. an other in v[erse]) *wherein we were to be practiced in the aftrnoone* [...]. *Betwixt one* & 3. That *Lesson w[i]ch out of some Author appointed for that day, had bene by the Mr expounded unto them* (out of Cicero. Virgil. Hom[e]r. Eurip[ides]: Isocr[ates]. Livie[ius]. Saluste[tius].&c.)

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[14]*A Social History of Education in England*, ed. by John Lawson and Harold Silver (London: Methuen & Co, 1973), p.118.
[15]Thomas Plume, ed *A Century of Sermons ... Preached by ... John Hacket* (London: Printed by Andrew Clark for Robert Scott, 1675), pp.i-liv. In Amy Charles, *A Life*, p.52.
[16]Michael Van Cleave Alexander, *The Growth of English Education, 1348-1648: A Social and Cultural History* (University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p.188. N.B. William Horman was the first English Schoolmaster to teach Greek, Horman was headmaster first at Eton (1485-94) and then at Winchester (1494-1502).

> *was to be exactlie gone thorough, by construing* & other grammatical waies, *examining all the Rhetoricall figures*, & *translating* it out of verse into prose, or out of prose into verse, out of gr[eek]: into lat[in]: or out of lat[in]: into gr[eek]:/.[17]

Perhaps Herbert's love of proverbs came from the fact that,

> Betwene 4 or. 5. they repeated a leafe or 2. out of some booke of *Rhetoricall figures*, or choise *Proverbs* & *Sentences* collected by the Mr for that use.[18]

Herbert's poem on the sermon 'The Windows' comes to mind when Laud explains that 'For the after-noone they *made verses upon the Preach[e]rs sermon*. or epist[les]: & gosp[els].[19]

The Frowick document (which also specifies the curriculum for Westminster school) notes that:

> In ye 4th form D.r Busby's greek grammar. Sometimes att the Master's pleasure are used Aristophanes. Sophocles. Pindar and Theocritus.[20]

School reading was sometimes supplemented by the acting of the whole or part of a play. The Westminster Statutes state that

> the boys may with greater profit spend the season of Christmas and become better accustomed to a proper delivery and pronunciation [...], the master and usher shall cause their pupils to perform in the hall, in private or public, a Latin comedy or tragedy, and the master of the choristers an English one.[21]

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[17]Cited in James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and his World* (New Haven & London:Yale University Press, 1987), pp.521-2. N.B. Winn writes: 'Archbishop Laud, who installed [Richard] Busby as Master, took the trouble to copy out in his own hand an account of the Westminster curriculum by a man who had been in the sixth and seventh forms in the 1620s.' *J. Dryden & his World*, p. 37. (Herbert was at Westminster 1605-9). Laud himself had been educated at Reading grammar school. Laud rose through the church principally through the patronage of Richard Neile bishop of Rochester. Anthony Milton, [William Laud] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol.32 pp.655-670. It was on Dr.Richard Neile's recommendation that Herbert was an elected scholar at Westminster and became a residential pupil in 1605. Andrew Foster, [Richard Neile] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 40. pp.357-361.

[18]James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and his World*, p.522.

[19]James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and his World*, p.522.

[20]James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and his World*, p.524.

[21]Martin Lowther Clarke, *Classical Education in Britain 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge

The usual first reading-book in Greek was the New Testament, but otherwise school reading was exclusively pagan and followed roughly the same lines as Latin reading. The *Tabula* of Cebes and Aesop in Greek provided some simple morality and Lucian some lively dialogue.[22] Herbert as a gifted Westminster scholar could not have failed to be impressed by the input of Greek plays, both tragedy and comedy offered as part of the school's curriculum.

What is noted is a pattern emerging whereby the inculcation of drama and poetry represents an important role in the shaping of pupils' minds. Westminster would produce many outstanding scholars, including the playwrights Ben Jonson and John Dryden, and it quickly gained the reputation for being one of the finest schools in the land.[23] As well as a rigorous study of classics, religion was also studied. The canons issued for the Church of England in 1571 required all schoolmasters to teach their pupils appropriate selections from the Bible.[24] In *The Frowick Document*, the curriculum states that:

> In the third form a sacred exercise: that is, a chapter of the Bible to be translated into Lattin verse: or any verse or sentence therein to be so translated.[25]

Herbert was thus exposed to the narratives of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, as well as the drama of classical literature. The concatenation of the two must have formed an impression on his juvenile mind, for many of his narrative

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University Press, 1959), p.10. N.B. Clarke notes that: 'A similar provision (Statutes, 24) did not prevent the Christmas plays at Trinity College, Cambridge, from dying out [...].n. p.183. (Herbert was at Trinity from 1609-1624).

[22]Martin L. Clarke, *Classical Education in Britain*, p. 19. N.B. Cebes, Norwich and Rivington; Aesop, Norwich and Bangor; Lucian, Norwich and Westminster. Demosthenes at Westminster [and also] Homer. n. p.186.

[23]Michael Van Cleave Alexander, *The Growth of English Education, 1348-1648: A Social and Cultural History*, p.187.

[24]Michael Alexander, *The Growth of English Education*, p.189.

[25]*The Frowick Document*, cited in James A. Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, p.524.

poems appear as plays in miniature, and the narratives as displayed on the stage often mirror those displayed on the page. They toy with the concept of fantasy and fiction, as my chapter on defamiliarisation argues. In this brief introduction to Herbert's life it can be noted that the template of his early life is being created through rigorous self-discipline. This feeling, tempered with the conflicts of self-abnegation and self-subsuming, no doubt initially encouraged at school through constant study, can frequently be seen in many of Herbert's conflict poems. Both Christ Church and Trinity College were required to elect three promising graduates of Westminster school to existing scholarships each year. Herbert was admitted to Trinity College Cambridge on the 5 May 1609, and graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1613; he became a minor fellow of Trinity in 1614, and was promoted to major fellow in 1614, acquiring his Master of Arts two years later in 1616.[26]

Herbert's career at Cambridge proved meteoric. In 1618 he was offered the position of Prælector in rhetoric, and on the 21st of October 1619 he was appointed deputy of Sir Francis Nethersole, university orator. Herbert was just twenty-six. Herbert, however, was at this stage still considering reading Divinity and states in a letter to his stepfather,

> I understand by Sir *Francis Nethersols* Letter, that he fears I have not fully resolved of the matter, since this place being civil may divert me too much from Divinity.[27]

This anguishing about his future and an anguishing also about his relationship with God is a theme that Herbert returns to again and again in many of the poems. The letters to his stepfather are intimate and 'chatty', and as John Danvers was not a blood relative he was probably easier to talk to than his closer relatives. Perhaps he was less judgmental, for being judged was an important concept in Herbert's mind as

[26] Helen Wilcox, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, pp.677-685.
[27] F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.370.

the poem 'Judgement' implies, in the first two lines we read: 'how shall poore wretches brook/Thy dreadfull look [?].'

Herbert, then, intended quite early in his academic life that his study of divinity should take precedence over and above all other commitments. Amy Charles explains that

> the pattern for students like Herbert (who were Masters) had been well established [...] [they] were to be ordained deacon after seven years. Herbert would therefore have been expected to take orders as deacon in the spring of 1623.[28]

Nevertheless, it was not until 1630 that he became a priest in the small village of Bemerton a mile from Salisbury.

Although widely discussed, Herbert, as a man, remains, for the most part, a largely unknown figure. No diaries or journals survive, and even his sermons have disappeared. Family papers and letters addressed to Herbert, on the other hand, may have been kept by Jane Herbert (Herbert's wife of three years) during the years of her widowhood, only to be destroyed when Higham House was burned (during the civil war). It is difficult to account in any other way for the fact that not a single letter addressed to Herbert has survived. Certainly, Herbert must have received and preserved many letters important to him at various stages of his life.[29]

Nevertheless, it is his poetry that intrigues and fascinates most readers and allows them to appreciate his remarkable talents. As Herbert never dated his poems much controversy has arisen amongst academics as to when they were actually written. Helen Wilcox suggests a date as early as 1610 when Herbert sent two sonnets in English to his mother. Herbert would then have been seventeen.[30] Amy Charles, on the other hand, suggests that 1614 is a possible date for the composition

[28]Amy Charles, *A Life*, p.89.
[29]Amy M. Charles, *A Life*, p.180.
[30]Helen Wilcox, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, pp.677-685.

for 'The Church-Porch.' Her reasoning is speculative, but she argues that this poem may well have been addressed to George's brother, Henry Herbert, as it appears to echo the advice sent to him when Henry was in Paris in 1618.[31] It would appear, therefore, that his poetical output continued throughout his life from his days as an undergraduate at Trinity to his final days at Bemerton in 1633, although there is no definite date for just when his last poem was written. Herbert died at his home in Bemerton on 1 March 1633, and was buried the 3 March. Charles remarks that 'the propers for that day speak especially of love, compassion, faith and charity, the epistle being 1 Corinthians13.1-13:

> Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal [...]. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these *is* charity.[32]

This must surely be a fitting summation of Herbert's life, both as a poet and a person.

3. Critical Evaluation of Herbert

During his lifetime, Herbert wrote over one hundred and sixty-three poems, every one engaging in some facet of the Christian life. Some are contemplative, some abstract and complex, some prayerful, some discuss the human condition in a personal way whilst others challenge God directly. A third of these poems, however, retell the Christian story from the believer's perspective, and, what is more, retell it through a unique narrative style.

Clare Regan Kinney notes that

> poetic narrative, unlike prose narrative, is a neglected area of research, and it is remarkable that recent theoretical developments in narratology have by-passed poetic narrative, concentrating almost exclusively on prose fiction.[33]

She continues with her argument, stating that

[31]Amy Charles, *A Life,* pp.82-83.
[32]Amy Charles, *A Life*, pp.174-5.
[33]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) (Preface).

> a fiction (like a poem) is, quite simply, a linguistic 'making' of the imagination, and nothing in the original sense of the term prevents narrative verse, or, for that matter, non-narrative prose from being classified as fiction. In the last fifteen years, however, narratologists (particularly those enlightened by French structuralists) have been rather more insistent that the term 'narrative' need not necessarily and exclusively signify the novel.[34]

This thesis addresses the topic of storytelling in Herbert's poetry, and examines many of the poems with this point in view. Herbert, as a rhetorician, was keenly interested in words, their meaning and their etymology. Often as the poetry is read, Herbert appears to use words in an almost cavalier fashion, yet when that word is studied it appears to be artfully profound.[35]

To deal effectively with the formidable quantity of criticism on Herbert, it would appear prudent to subdivide the literature into six categories, and deal with each chronologically.

3i. Form

Early twentieth-century critics of Herbert tended to focus on his religious faith, acknowledging his use of emblems and imagery that connected with Christian worship. George Herbert Palmer, whose book was published in 1915, who came to be the first critic to discuss George Herbert's poems in any analytical depth. Of course Palmer also admired the poems for their spiritual context, rather than their literary merit, and he comments in the preface that

> There are few to whom this book will seem worth while. It embodies long labor spent on a minor poet, and will probably never be read by any one.[36]

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Palmer was, in fact, simply following the tradition of hagiography that had surrounded Herbert since the first publication of his

[34]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, p.1.
[35]This can be seen in his use of the word 'thick' to describe country people. 'Thick' - OE close together.OED p.1196.
[36]George Herbert Palmer, *The English Works of George Herbert*, 2 vols. 'Essays and Prose' (Boston & New York Houghton Mifflin Co.,1915), 1, p.xi.

poems in 1633, and did not expect the modern reader to be interested in religious poetry. Yet as Albert Mc Harg Hayes in 'Counterpoint in Herbert' (1938) points out, individuals did respond to the simplicity of his art, 'for clearness and exactness were his aim, and no irrelevant interests were allowed to distract the reader.'[37] Despite Herbert's wish to make his work simple and economic, he also had many conflicts that required expunging.

Joseph Summers in 'Herbert's Form' (1951) suggests that this disorder must be controlled before presenting oneself before God.[38] Rosemond Tuve in 'Essays by Rosemond Tuve' (1970) also agrees that form is an important aspect, particularly in the declaration of an intense emotion such as love. In the essay 'Herbert and Caritas' she argues: 'who ever heard of expressing the quality of the heart's motions [...] without attending to the *form* of the expression?'[39] She further proposes that 'Herbert [...] faced a whole set of questions concerned with love of God in relation to love of self.'[40] Tuve also suggests that it is the reader's activity to recreate a wholly subjective meaning of love, whether love of God or human love. This latter point is seen in a poem such as 'Love III' whereby the reader is never sure if there is an erotic overtone to the whole poem. Viewing *The Temple* as a whole is important to understand its autobiographical structure, and Stephanie Yearwood in 'The Rhetoric of Form' (1983) challenges the idea that many critics have seen Herbert as a lyricist rather than as a rhetorician.

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[37]Albert McHarg Hayes 'Counterpoint in Herbert', *Studies in Philology*, 35 (1938), 43-60 (p.46).
[38]Joseph Summers, 'Herbert's Form', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 66 (1951), 1055-1072 (p.1056).
[39]Rosemond Tuve, 'Essays by Rosemond Tuve', ed. by Thomas P. Roche Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p.168.
[40]Rosemond Tuve, 'Essays by Rosemond Tuve', p.169.

3ii. Rhetoric

Nevertheless, it is to Herbert's rhetorical skills that many critics have turned their attention. Rosalie Colie's text 'Logos in *The Temple*: George Herbert and the Shape of Content' (1963) focused on the Word itself and its importance for bringing order from chaos, for fitting, for balancing, for satisfying and for making content. Yet Herbert was frequently discontented, for contentment implied complacency. As discussed earlier, Herbert's education must have played a large part in his love of language. At Westminster school Herbert saw the rise of an anti-Ciceronian manner in prose and an anti-Petrachan manner in verse, and his awareness of this cultural shift is demonstrated in his 'Jordan (1)' poem where in the first two lines he states: 'Who says that fictions onely and false hair/Become a verse?' In the second 'Jordan' poem, he argues: 'Curling with metaphors a plain intention' (5).[41] Heather Asals in 'The Voice of George Herbert's *The Church*' (1969) points out how: 'there was a concerted movement to displace the new love poetry and the newly popularised pagan literature by a new poetry found in the Bible.'[42]

Words, with their subtlety and ambiguity, become Herbert's ammunition, they take the reader unawares yet tease and challenge him at the same time, as in 'JESU' for example. What must be remembered was Herbert's position for many years as Prælector in rhetoric at Cambridge. Words were his business. It therefore comes as little surprise to find Michael Gallagher in 'Rhetoric, Style and George Herbert' (1970) suggesting that 'Herbert was in fact the only major poet of his time to attain such prominence in the field of Rhetoric.'[43] Building on the theme of rhetoric, Frederick Von

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[41]Michael P. Gallagher, 'Rhetoric, Style and George Herbert, p. 499.
[42]Heather Asals, 'The Voice of George Herbert's The Church', *English Literary History*, 36 (1969), 511-528 (p.512).
[43]Michael P. Gallagher SJ, 'Rhetoric, Style and George Herbert,'*Studies in English Literature*, 37 (1970), 495-516 (p.495).

Ende's study on 'George Herbert's 'The Sonne': In Defense of the English Language' (1972) suggests that Herbert's poem

> is an assertion and a demonstration, in a concentrated classical oration form, of the capacity and the adequacy of the English tongue for glorifying the Son of God.[44]

In Stanley Fish's *Self-Consuming Artefacts* (1972) he argues that 'The Holdfast' is a quintessential Herbert poem; while the question and answer of 'first entertaining and then disallowing answers that would leave man with some measure of independence and efficacy demonstrates Herbert's skill in rhetoric.'[45] In 'The Holdfast' Herbert uses a third person to cross-examine: 'But I was told by one, it could not be.' He then uses the 'I' persona three times to defend his position, summing up his defence in the final two lines: 'What Adam had, and forfeited for all,/Christ keepeth now who cannot fail or fall.' This poem is an excellent example of Herbert's narrative art, and his expertise in introducing 'characters' who complement the story.

The desire by Herbert to converse directly with God, despite the consequences, is always a risk Herbert is prepared to take. Narration is always displaced by God's utterance, and this is obvious in 'Dialogue' where the narration is broken off by the speaker's interruption of God's words: 'Ah! No more: thou break'st my heart' (32). Speech was often a poor substitute for communication with God, and Barbara Harman in 'Herbert, Coleridge and the Vexed work of Narration' (1978) believes that speech replaces thoughts rather than generating more of them. Although attention to the rhetorical figures in Biblical text had always characterised Christian exegesis, Barbara Lewalski in *Protestant Poetics and the*

[44]Fredrick Von Ende, 'George Herbert's 'The Sonne': In Defense of the English Language', *Studies in English Literature*,12 (1972), 173-182 (p.173).
[45]Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artefacts*, (Berkley; London: University of California Press, 1972), p.176).

Seventeenth-century Religious Lyric (1979) proposes that 'the Reformation brought in its wake both a greater emphasis upon, and a more systematic analysis of, the tropes and schemes that made Biblical language radically poetic.'[46] This is apparent in a poem such as 'Redemption.' Here, the poet designs a story around the crucifixion, interpolating himself into that story with dramatic poetic skill, using words such as 'heaven', 'dearly', 'great birth' and 'murderers' to relate the crucifixion story. Herbert's self-criticism appears constantly throughout *The Temple*, and is a theme in Chana Bloch's study *Spelling the Word* (1985) as she observes how Herbert argues with God, yet always keeps the knife-edge of irony turned against himself.[47] Bloch also concentrates on Herbert's numerous references to the Bible, and points out how Herbert doesn't simply read the Bible, he believes in it.

On the other hand, Kathleen Lynch's article '*The Temple*, Three Parts Vied and Multiplied' (1989), notes that Herbert is acutely aware that his words fail to contain divine truths or to carry him to a state of contemplative union with God on their own. Artificiality was the last thing Herbert desired in his poems, and while he could create dramas as colourful as any on the stage ('The Bag' or 'The Rose') words were as important as the scenarios they conjured up in the mind's eye. Indeed, in 'Mortification' he argues for man to prepare for his death as soon as he sheds his 'swaddl[ing] sheets.' Herbert's use, in this poem, of the words 'soon', 'first', 'grows' and 'aware' indicates his obsession with time and the transient nature of mankind's existence.

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[46]Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.72.
[47]Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1985), p.162.

3iii. Time

The sense of time passing is an ever-abiding theme in *The Temple*, and Herbert's manipulation of tenses is frequently noted. Often he uses past, present and future tenses in one poem, as in 'Death', where the past, 'wast once' (1), moves to the present, 'thou art grown fair and full of grace'(15), and finally to the future, 'When souls shall wear their new array'(19). Stanley Stewart in 'Time and The Temple' (1966) suggests that like many of his Calvinist brethren, Herbert believed that the knowledge of this connection between time and change underlay man's anxiety giving rise to despair. Time passes and man seems to experience the same conflict over and over. Such changes indicated to man that change was a synonym for death. The theatricality of time, as in the poem of the same name, is noted by Valerie Carnes in 'The Unity of George Herbert's *The Temple*: A Reconsideration' (1968). She observes that Herbert's poems represent small pieces of theatre, whereby the living drama of the liturgy and the religious theatre is seen as part of a more overall view of narrative.

Helen Vendler in *The Poetry of George Herbert* (1975) suggests that 'the poems purport to retell yesterday's events, but seem to transport the reader back into yesterday through the manipulation of the tenses.'[48] This feature is often remarked upon in the thesis, as in the poem 'Vertue' where the final line changes tense from foreboding future to positive present.[49] Janis Lull in *The Poem in Time* (1990) makes a similar observation, noting how 'Herbert saw personal time, historical time, and God's eternity as three simultaneous eternities.' Lull observes how 'time moves

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[48]Helen H. Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1975), p.116.
[49]See Paul Ricoeur *Time and Narrative*, and his comments on narrative in chapter five in the thesis.

towards eternity, but it also issues from eternity; time has a *chiasmic* form.'[50] In Herbert's poem 'A Wreath' the movement backwards and forwards illustrates this *chiasmic* movement in the time it takes to read the poem: 'deserved praise,/Of praise deserved' and so on (1-2).

3iv. Conflict

Nevertheless, it is vital not to let the presence of the reader slip from view in the poetry and Stanley Fish in 'Letting go:The Reader in Herbert's Poetry' (1972) intimates that 'just those problems which engage Herbert's protagonists engage his reader also.'[51] The frustration of the speaker in 'The Collar', and the guilt-ridden guest in 'Love (III)' comes to mind. The reader is able to empathise with these 'characters' and to understand both their anxiety and relief at the end of the poem. The public face that Herbert presents to the reader is examined in Edmund Miller's book *Drudgerie Divine* (1979), with the suggestion that Herbert 'is backing away from the particular and the biographical in order to present a persona who can be the universal representative of all Christians in their day-to-day devotional lives';[52] while Daniel Rubey's remarks in 'The Poet and the Christian Community: Herbert's Affliction Poems and the structure of *The Temple'* (1980) chart the autobiographical aspect of a series of poems such as the five 'Affliction' poems, which can be seen as a metaphor for the writing of poetry itself.

Taking this concept of analysis one step further, Richard Strier in *Love Known* (1983) puts forward the idea that gaps from God ask more from man by speaking through his conscience. And in 'Artillerie' Herbert's conscience is tested when he is

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[50]Janis Lull, *The Poem in Time*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), p.75.
[51]Stanley Fish, 'Letting Go: The Reader in Herbert's Poetry,' *English Literary History*, 37 (!970), 475-494 (p.476).
[52]Edmund Miller, *Drudgerie Divine: The Rhetoric of God and Man in George Herbert* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1979), p.x.

told by God '*Do as thou usest, disobey*' (6). As Elizabeth Clarke points out in *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry* (1997), 'Herbert was more concerned with the human face of God than the divine nature of the soul.'[53]

3v. Music and Drama

As a music-lover, Herbert's poetry embraces the symmetry of words and their correspondence in musical notation. The poems also have a musical lyricism to them, and Alicia Ostriker in 'Song and speech in the metrics of George Herbert' (1965) remarks on the paradox in Herbert's work, and suggests that 'Herbert no doubt felt he could be more convincing if he seemed to be merely speaking his mind without adornment.'[54] Nevertheless, Amy Charles writing for the 'Viola da Gamba Society' (1967) observes how Herbert presents himself as an instrument that is tuned, that is tuned to obey God, as the instrument is tuned to obey the player. Louise Schleiner in 'Jacobean Song and the Metrics of George Herbert' (1979) directs the reader to this concept and proposes that many of the poems were very likely sung to a common tune. She argues that 'Herbert was a master in the creation and poetic use of this song-text periodicity, and he learned it from the songs he sang to his lute or viol.'[55] What is certain is that Herbert enjoyed the ceremony, liturgy and music of the traditional church. Izaak Walton records how he attended Salisbury cathedral for the weekday evensong, relishing the music he heard there, and of course Herbert was a practising musician, composing music and singing to his own accompaniment.

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[53]Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.69.
[54]Alicia Ostriker, 'Song and Speech in the Metrics of George Herbert', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* 80 (1965), 62-68 (pp.62 &65).
[55]Louise Schleiner, 'Jacobean Song and Herbert's Metrics,' *Studies in English Language*, 19 (1979), 109-126 (p.123).

The unity of Herbert's *The Temple* centres not only in the individual religious experience, but is also paralleled by the universal Christian drama of the Fall, redemption, and final reconciliation of soul and God. The drama of the Christian story and the multiple ambiguities of language Herbert presents is the subject of Heather Asals' book *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God* (1981). She argues that 'within the liturgy there is also a dramatic concept of Christ's blood (red) spilled for man's redemption, and the poet's ink (black) correspondingly spilled in writing the poems.'[56] Helen Wilcox also asserts in 'The Sweet Singer of *The Temple*: The Musician's Response to Herbert' (1987) that 'It is also clear that [...] initial acquaintance with the poems comes not through private reading but by participation, singing popular hymns like 'Antiphon (1).'[57] Vincent Duckles in 'John Jenkins Settings of Lyrics by George Herbert' (1962) supports this viewpoint, and states that: 'the largest single musical collection of Herbert's poems in the seventeenth-century is a set of six songs by John Jenkins [...] taking the form of declamatory madrigals.'[58] Music, therefore, was an important part of his poetic output and complemented the drama of the narratives.

This visual drama of sin and redemption comes together in Harold Toliver's book *George Herbert's Christian Narrative* (1993) which explores the religious exclusions that Herbert needed to practice in order to become a committed Christian

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[56]Heather A.R. Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp.7.9.10.11.
[57]Helen Wilcox, 'The Sweet Singer of *The Temple*: The Musician's Response to Herbert', *George Herbert Journal*, 10 (1987), 47-60 (p.47).
[58]Vincent Duckles, 'John Jenkins Settings of Lyrics by George Herbert', *Musical Quarterly*, 48 (1962), 461-475). In H. Wilcox, 'The Sweet Singer...'p.52. N.B. Madrigal - Texts usually secular [...] but there are *madrigali spirituali*. Madrigals were first sung in Italian towards the end of the 13th century. *The Concise Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Michael Kennedy 3rd edn (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1980), p.390. N.B. John Jenkins (1592-1678) wrote over 800 instrumental works including Fancies for viols or organ. *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Michael Kennedy, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.446. (Herbert was a viol player and no doubt played these difficult pieces).

poet.[59] Toliver himself concludes that 'whatever the fable says about the end, heaven and God's glory are beyond compare and thus beyond narrative transition.'[60] The drama of playing to a tripartite audience of others, self and God is picked up in Bruce Johnson's article 'The Audience Shift in George Herbert's Poetry' (1995). Johnson remarks that there is a danger and difficulty of playing to multiple audiences as it is especially demanding on both the poet and reader.

3vi. Ceremony and Sacrament

Herbert works through Scripture not against it. In *A Reading of George Herbert* (1951) Rosemond Tuve suggests that for Herbert the Bible and the self are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually illuminating. She further argues that Herbert's mind works by contraries. No doubt she is thinking here of Herbert's preoccupation with life vis-à-vis death which occupies many of his narratives; the Bible, Tuve recognises, allows Herbert to express himself more truthfully, allowing him to 'open the closets of the heart.'[61] Martin Elsky in 'George Herbert's Poems and the Materiality of Language' (1983) notes how there was a trend to view words in the Renaissance as material things that belong to the same network of resemblances that endows natural objects with allegorical meaning.This can be noted in the poem 'The Church-floore' where the floor, the base on which everything rests, becomes a hieroglyph for 'Patience' and 'Humilitie.' Now the visual symbol of the floor (which is rarely observed) transfers itself to become the 'guaranteed sign able to mediate between God, man and the world.'[62]

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[59]Bridget Gellert Lyons (Review author), 'George Herbert's Christian Narrative', *Renaissance Quarterly,* 49 (1996), 642-643 (p.642).
[60]Harold Toliver, *George Herbert's Christian Narrative* (Pennsylvannia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), p.7.
[61]Rosemond Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (London: Faber Ltd., 1951), pp. 81,91&113.
[62]Andrew M. Cooper, 'The Collapse of the Religious Hieroglyph: Typology and Natural Language in Herbert and Bacon', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45 (1992), 96-118 (p.97). N.B. Hieroglyph OED definition - a stylised picture of an object representing a word, syllable or

Nevertheless, no doubt because of the controversies on religion in the seventeenth century and elsewhere, Herbert's basic symbol of a temple became politicized. Graeme Watson in '*The Temple* in 'The Night': Henry Vaughan and the Collapse of the Established Church' (1986) notes that the changing resonance of the word 'temple' can be charted in the ideological literature of the period. Watson also suggests that 'it soon becomes apparent that the word could be used from the late sixteenth century for purposes of self-definition by both the established church and separatist groups.'[63] It is just this point that Amy Charles is making when she argues that 'Herbert never gave his book the title *The Temple*.'[64] 'For Herbert, the natural place of worship of God is a church, not a temple. During the seventeenth century, the little volume of Herbert's poems was generally referred to as *The Church*.'[65]

John Bienz picks up on this aspect of Herbert's life in 'Images and Ceremonial in *The Temple*: Herbert's Solution to the Reformation Controversy'(1986) as he points out that Herbert's admiration and glorification for both emblems and holy days put him in opposition to the iconoclastic Puritan calendar which rejected all holy days except the biblical Sabbath. Slowly but surely there was a move towards sacrament and ceremony in the 1620's and 1630's which was to support 'the inclusivist policies of a state institution' as Richard Whalen argues in 'George Herbert's Sacramental Puritanism' (2001). Whalen also points out that there was 'ambivalence in *The*

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sound.

[63]Graeme J. Watson, The Temple in The Night': Henry Vaughan and the Collapse of the Established Church,' *Modern Philology*, 84 (1986), 144-161 (pp.144-145). N.B. Members of Separatist groups were 'saints by calling', visibly manifesting and evidencing [...] their obedience unto that call of Christ. *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. by A.G. Matthews (1959), p.122. in *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700,* ed. by C. Durston & J. Eales. p.238.

[64]Amy Charles, *A Life*, p.185.

[65]John Polwhele's poem "On Mr Herbert's Devine poeme the Church. Jo Polw: post mortem author mestrispotuit" in Bodl. MS. Eng. Poet.f.16, fol.11. In A. Charles, *A Life*, p.185.

Temple towards public ceremony and sacrament.'[66] As well as being narratives, the poems also become visual symbols for the abstract concepts that Herbert presents to the reader. For example, in 'The Rose', the rose transfers itself to become both a hieroglyph for Christ's resurrection and a symbol of purity. To demonstrate man's frailty the poet deliberately and skilfully inserts *faux pas* into the poem to emulate natural fallible speech patterns.

Despite the serious and earnest nature of the poetry, one cannot describe Herbert's poems without commenting on his invigorating touches of humour, which might sometimes be described as 'gallows humour.' The reader is delighted to imagine the dead as in 'Dooms-day' where the awakened dust rubs its eyes, and the limbs nudge one another asking: 'Live you brother?'[67] or in 'Death' where the gaping skull 'couldst not sing' (4). In conclusion, through the poetry, the public and the private face of Herbert was an enigma. He was an academic and musician who embraced the simple and the mundane in his everyday life and work; an individual who was aware of the current controversies around him, yet whose poems encapsulate a personal and private Christian viewpoint that challenge his own faith, making it stronger thereby.

4. The Theological Climate in the Seventeenth Century

Although the different voices speaking within the poems have so far been discussed, there is a paucity of information on Herbert's position in the theological climate of the early seventeenth century. Ilona Bell in her study "Setting foot into Divinity': George Herbert and the English Reformation' (1977) argues that 'most critics have assumed that Herbert was devoted to the methods of Catholic and

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[66]Richard Whalen, 'George Herbert's Sacramental Puritanism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 1273-1307 (pp.1274-5).
[67]*George Herbert*, ed. by D.J. Enright (London: Dent, 1996), p.xvii.

medieval meditation.'[68] Bell presumes that Herbert's frequent use of Christ's (and God's) human voice points to this Catholic re-enactment. Individuals were, however, now thinking in a more creative, expansive, and tolerant way. Herbert's responses to the author John Valdesso testify to this. He judges him as one

> whom I conceive to have been a true servant of God [...] that God in the midst of Popery should open the eyes of one to understand and expresse so clearly and excellently the intent of the Gospell.'[69]

Helen Wilcox, however, suggests that 'The attitude of seventeenth-century readers of *The Temple* was thus similar in outline to the contemporary combination of freedom and reverence in respect of the Bible.'[70] Individuals were able to read, appreciate and interpret Herbert's poetry with the same freedom that they enjoyed in reading the Bible.

When the unlettered individual reads the poetry of George Herbert he is tempted to read it in the light of current theological beliefs, yet during the seventeenth century there were heated discussions regarding salvation, and debates on who was to be saved and how. Eminent theologians asked the vexed question - did Christ die for all or only an elected few? Reformation theologians argued that the initiative for human salvation or for any kind of religious action belongs to God. Seventeenth-century puritan theology was based on the divine promise of forgiveness and salvation, which was undeserved. It was rooted in a tradition that went back to St. Paul and St. Augustine which saw human nature as hopelessly

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[68]Ilona Bell, ''Setting foot into Divinity' George Herbert and the English Reformation', *Modern Languages Quarterly*, 38 (1977), 219-241 (pp.225-6).
[69]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, pp.304-5. From the one hundred and ten Considerations of Signior Iohn Valdesso. Written in Spanish, Brought out of Italy by Vergerius, and first set forth in Italian at Basil by Cœlius Secundus Curion, Anno 1550. 'Briefe Notes on Valdesso's Considerations'. A Copy of a letter written by Mr. George Herbert to his friend the Translator of this Book. This translator is N.F. (Nicholas Ferrar). Septemb. 29 1632.
[70]Helen Wilcox, 'Herbert's *Temple* and Seventeenth-century Devotion', in *Images of Belief*, ed. by David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.153-168 (p.160).

corrupt. The key slogans that became the rallying cry of the Reformation were: Grace alone (*sola gratia*); Faith alone (*sola fide*); Christ alone (*solö Christo*); and Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), thus for the Reformers, the concepts of grace, faith, Christ and the Scriptures were inextricably linked.[71]

The Anglican church of Herbert's time was both ceremonial in its liturgy and Calvinist in its theology.[72] Patrick Collinson suggests that: 'Calvinism can be regarded as the theological cement of the Jacobean church.'[73] Herbert's specific understanding of the Christian life was shaped by the theology of his day. Reformation theology, which was particularly concerned with the stages of Christian growth, helps to explain the sequence and the ordering of the poems of *The Temple*.[74] Herbert's structure of *The Temple* focuses on the creation of human nature 'cemented' by Christ:

> Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands [...] Hath not my hand made all these things? (Acts 7.48 & 50).

The idea that God has selected those to be saved and effects that salvation by His power over all things is the central tenet of Calvinism, and is named after its founder, John Calvin (1509-64). For Calvin, logical rigour demands that God actively chooses to redeem or to damn. Predestination is thus the 'eternal decree of God by which he determined what he wished to make of every individual. For he does not create all in the same condition.' The doctrine of predestination became the central nucleus of later Reformed theology, although it was not central to Calvin's thought. From about 1570 onwards the theme of 'election' came to dominate Reformed

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[71]Gene E.J Veith Jr, *Reformation Spirituality* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1985), pp. 24-25.
[72]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.30.
[73]Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of the Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625*, 4th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.82.
[74]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.55.

theology.[75] The theology of predestination, as a corollary of grace, was worked out in detail by Augustine.[76] Calvin's major innovation in the doctrine, differing from both Aquinas and Augustine, was in turning predestination into a doctrine of assurance. Calvin's argument rests on the assumption that if salvation is based not on human choice, but on God's, then it is impossible to fall from grace, to lose one's salvation, so that whatever sins or doubts a believer falls into, God will nevertheless complete His work of sanctification and will receive the believer into Heaven.[77] This allowed for the 'unspeakable comfort' alluded to in the *Book of Common Prayer* where in Article 17 it states that:

> As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons.

Article 11 in the *BCP* also states the conviction that: 'we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort.'

For Calvinists, salvation is acquired through the function of God's will, and as such, it is secure. Alternatively for Arminians, salvation is acquired through the function of the human will, and in this case God's compliance is assumed.[78] Herbert is assured of God's grace and acceptance, and this is noted in the upbeat endings of his poems, as in 'JESU' for example where he states: 'And to my whole is *JESU*' (10); or 'Deniall' where after 'My feeble spirit, unable to look right' the speaker allows

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[75]Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.125. N.B. The theme of 'election' came to dominate Reformed theology, and allowed an easy identification of the Reformed congregations with the people of Israel. Just as God had once chosen Israel, so he had now chosen the Reformed congregations as his people. From this moment onwards, the doctrine of predestination began to assume a major social and political function - a function it did not possess under Calvin.
[76]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, pp.83-84.
[77]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.84.
[78]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p. 27.Arminianism takes its name from Jakob Arminius (1560-1609), who reacted against the Reformed doctrine of particular redemption. For him, Christ had died for all, not merely for the elect. Alister Mc Grath, *Christian Theology*, pp.469-470.

God to 'mend my rhyme' (23 &30). It has often been remarked how Herbert never worries about hell.[79] Herbert's belief in eternal security is important, not only in understanding the poems of struggle, but also in accounting for some of the most characteristic qualities of his religious verse. Although Herbert clearly believes in a state of eternal punishment, hell is simply not a possibility for the true Christian.[80]

But the impact of reformed theology is further obscured by the categories of 'Anglican' and 'Puritan.' The term 'Puritan' in this period is reserved by some church historians for those of the established church who wished to 'purify' the church from within toward a more Presbyterian government and liturgy.[81] Spurr points out how

> in 1586, puritan leaders produced and distributed to clandestine meetings, the *Book of Discipline*, which set out a model for a reformed Presbyterian Church of England. In this model, only those who offered a confession [...] and submitted themselves to the discipline [...] [had] access to the communion.[82]

Herbert, as Veith points out, 'followed the older Anglican traditions of Calvinist spirituality, which in his time, was nearly always combined with a deep reverence for the ceremonial rites of the church.'[83] Herbert followed the *via media* or middle way in his Christian beliefs. This gave him the flexibility in his poems whereby he is able to discuss and dispute with God as in 'Dialogue' where he has the confidence to foretell God's reply: *'If I say, Thou shalt be mine;/Finger not my treasure'* (11-12).

Spurr notes that

> at first sight, the puritan of the 1580s was a very different person from those pious, respectable, individuals who in the 1630s suddenly found themselves tarred as puritans by Archbishop Laud. [...] This puritan was not necessarily different from the church-going conformist or, more anachronistically, the Anglican. [...] The puritan quality grew out of the individual's conviction that

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[79]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.34.
[80]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.101.
[81]Basil Hall, 'Puritanism: The Problem of Definition', *Studies in Church History*, ed. by C.J. Cuming (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 2:293-94.
[82]John Spurr, *English Puritanism* p. 55.
[83]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, pp. 27-28.

> they [had] been personally saved by God, elected to salvation by a merciful God for no merit of their own. Puritans were encouraged to seek salvation by looking into their own lives and piety.[84]

This is admirably demonstrated in Herbert's introspective poem 'Life.' Here, the speaker's short existence is embraced in the last lines: 'if/It be as short as yours,' the conjunction 'if' standing isolated as is the speaker's life without God.

Also within puritan culture there was a movement towards schooling one's family, including servants, in spiritual well-being, a process some historians have labelled 'the spiritualization of the household.'[85] Yet this was not exclusively a puritan trait, but more of a general Christian attitude. This desire to spiritually nurture is recorded in *The Countrey Parson*, in which Herbert writes,

> His servants are all religious, and were it not his duty to have them so, it were his profit, for none are so well served, as by religious servants, both they do best, and because what they do, is blessed.[86]

In this brief overview of the changing face of Christian thinking in Herbert's day, the fact remains that Reformation spirituality focuses primarily on the individual's personal relationship with God.[87] Although Herbert must have been aware of the current controversies and schisms in the church, Leah Marcus argues that Herbert's life as a country parson cut him off from

> the violent dissent which beset the church.This allowed him to live in peaceful conformity [...] because he had exiled himself from the troubling realities of Puritan and Anglican Controversy.[88]

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[84]John Spurr, *English Puritanism*, pp. 4-5, 47 & 166-167.
[85]Christopher Durston & Jacqueline Eales, 'Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700', in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, ed. by Christopher Durston & Jacqueline Eales (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp.1-31 (p.27).
[86]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.240.
[87]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p. 228.
[88]Leah Sinanoglou Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-century Literature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), p.119, in Sidney Gottlieb, 'Herbert's Case of "Conscience": Public or Private Poem?' *Studies in English Literature,* 25 (1985), 109-126 (p.110).

Nevertheless, the disturbances that beset Herbert still continued to be felt through his poetry as he struggled to express his contention within himself. The poem 'The Collar' describes such a warfare between Herbert the man, and Herbert the wilful child. Only in the final lines has he 'heard one calling, *Child,*/And I repl'd, *My Lord*', which the echoing, yet reversed, words of 'rav'd' and 'wilde' complement. This reversal mirrors Herbert's tolerance and working through of his uncertainties.

5. Literary Influences on Herbert: Including Greek Drama and The Masque.

As the narrative poems are closely studied, there were no doubt both literary and musical influences on Herbert.[89] Herbert himself says that:

> The Countrey Parson hath read the Fathers also, and the schoolmen, and the later Writers, or a good proportion of all which he hath complied a book, and body of Divinity, which is the storehouse of his Sermons.[90]

The only two books mentioned in his will were 'the Comment of Lucas Brugensis vppon the Scripture' which he left to Mr Hays, and also 'St. Augustines workes' to his curate, Mr. Bostocke.'[91] But it is the Bible that is the main template from which Herbert draws his inspiration. The plots originate in the stories of Jesus' life and Herbert manages to interpolate himself into the plot itself, as in the poem 'Christmas,' where he puts up at the same inn as Jesus and his parents: 'There when I came,

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[89]N.B. In a private letter from Dr. Richard Luckett to the author of the thesis he states: '[I, Dr. Luckett,] can assure you that there is nothing that casts the slightest light on Herbert's reading.' The Old Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge.(29/09/04).
[90]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*. p.229.
[91]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.382. N.B. *1. Concordantae Bibliorum Sacrorum Vulgatae editionis, ad recognitionem iussu Sixti V, Pont. Max. Bibliis adhibitam recensitae atque emendatae opera & Studio Francisi Lucae Brugensis, etc./ [by] BIBLE; 1617.2. In Sacrosancta quatuor Iesu Christi Euangelia Francisi Lucae Brugensis Ecclesiae Cathedralis Audomaropolitanae theologi & Decani commentararius: Alia eisdem auctoris ad S,. Scriptirae lucem opuscula / [by] Lucas , Franciscus, 1549-1619, et al 1606.* Lucas Brugensis, http://copac.ac.uk/copac/wzgw?fs=Search & form=lucas &c 27/09/2004

whom found I but my deare,/My dearest Lord' (5-6). The plot is familiar, the scene unique to Herbert. Commenting on plot Edgar Schell writes,

> Since a plot is the intelligible form of a narrative, it would appear that action is the intelligible form of the experience imitated by that narrative, whether it is drawn from life or history, from myth or simply from the imagination of the poet.[92]

Schell further suggests

> that plot, it can be argued, is the design of a narrative the principle of arrangement that determines which incidents will be included and which will not, where they are placed, which will be emphasised and which muted. Plot is the informing principle from which everything else takes its shape, character, thought, diction, rhythm, even spectacle.[93]

In his discussion of *Poetics* Schell suggests that

> Aristotle takes mimetic pleasure to be the end to which a poem is made, and he takes plot to be, as it were, a poem's soul. By plot he does not refer to either the separable story or the exciting manipulation of events, neither fable nor intrigue. What he refers to is the part of the poem that corresponds directly to mimetic pleasure on one side and to action on the other. Aristotle argues that poetry derives from two natural instincts in men, one an instinct for rhythm and harmony, the other an instinct for imitation. Both instincts survive and flourish in men's actions because the pursuit is pleasurable, rhythm and harmony for the senses, imitation for the mind.[94]

F.K. Stanzel argues that

> In the fourth century BC, for example, Aristotle could assert that the gradual development of Greek tragedy 'stopped on its attaining to its natural form' (*Poetics,* Chapter V1). As we now realize, his high point of theoretical observation was just one of several comparable summits in the historical development of drama.[95]

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[92]Edgar Schell, *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.4.
[93]Edgar Schell, *Strangers and Pilgrims,* p.3. N.B. Aristotle in *Poetics* says spectacle [...] attracts our attention but is the least artistic and essential part of the art of poetry. p.197.
[94]Edgar Schell, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, pp.2-3.
[95]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans.by Charlotte Gœdsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.x.

Often there are only two or three characters in the poems, as in 'Love-joy', the narrator and the 'One' and in this respect they resemble Greek tragedies. The main changes towards three characters in tragedy from just one or two were noted by Aristotle who states: 'the number of actors, [was] raised from one or two by Aeschylus, who made the choral part less important and gave speech the leading role; Sophocles added a third - and also scene-painting.'[96] In Herbert's poem 'Love-joy', for example, the reader gets a glimpse of Herbert's dramaturgy as he introduces the narratorial 'I' in the first line: 'As on a window late I cast mine eye.' Then he presents the reader with the 'One' in line three: 'One standing by'; while the introduction of the third 'character' of Jesus Christ in the final line: 'It figures JESUS CHRIST' is the summation of the poem. Or in 'Love unknown' where the speaker initially addresses the reader: 'Deare Friend, sit down.' He then proceeds to introduce a 'Lord' (3) and a 'servant'(9) and finally 'one' (55). Again, this poem admirably demonstrates Herbert's narrative technique as he presents conversations, action, asides, *faux pas*: 'some had stuff'd the bed with thoughts,/I would say thorns'(51-2), and reminiscences: 'I well remember all'(15). The introduction of characters allows the poems to have an immediate visual dimension, which simply talking about the subject matter would fail to achieve.

6. The Influence of the Masque

Given the strong influence of music in Herbert's life, often his poems can be likened to masques as in 'The Quip' whereby it is possible to recognise the 'merrie world' as a key player. Here the musical activities of the characters move the poem on the page to its dénouement, characters who, the speaker avers:

> With his train-bands and mates agree
> To meet together, where I lay,
> And all in sport to geere at me (2-4).

[96]*A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. by J.L.Ackrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.543.

Characters such as 'Beautie', 'Money', 'Glorie', 'Wit' and 'Conversation', who have an active part to play, all become alive and animated in the telling of the story of what happened to the speaker when 'his train bands and mates agree.'[97] The conventions of the masque spread beyond the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall to become part of the literature, or furniture, of praise. Ben Jonson's serious scholarly pursuits in the masques lead us to forget that these pieces of smooth and lovely *epideixis* were primarily structured occasions of the dance. The self-identification with the ordered world of the masque proper is put aside for the jocularity of misrule's topsy-turvy.[98] Herbert, it must be remembered, was both a practising musician and composer, and often refers to both music and the theatre in a number of poems:

> Sweetest of sweets, I thank you when displeasure
> Did through my bodie wound my minde
> ('Church-musick',1-2).

While in 'Redemption' the speaker then tries to find his Lord and:

> Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
> In cities, theatres, gardens, parks and courts ('Redemption', 10-11).

From these examples Herbert asserts himself as a man of the world, who states:

> I know the wayes of pleasure, the sweet strains,
> The lullings and the relishes of it ('The Pearl', 21-22).

Drama also played an important role in Herbert's later life as Prælector in rhetoric at Trinity. Royal and national interest in Cambridge plays was revived in 1612-13 when Prince Charles and the Elector Palatine witnessed Samuel Brooke's *Adelphe* and *Scyros* in the magnificent new Trinity College Hall. In 1614-15 King James himself actually watched four plays in as many days. Other performances for members of the royal family or visiting dignitaries were organized in 1622-3, 1624-5

[97]Mate - 1. habitual companion, XV one of a wedded pair. 2.at chess, state of the king when he is in check and cannot move out of it. *The Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, p.284.
[98]Joanne Altieri, *The Theatre of Praise* (London & Toronto: University of Delaware Press, 1986), pp. 74-75.&107.

and at other later dates.[99] Although it is purely speculative, Herbert, in the post as deputy Orator, must have witnessed many of the dramatic productions put on at Trinity. To prove how important the post was he wrote to his stepfather in 1619 saying,

> I am to make an Oration to the whole University of an hour long in Latin.The Orators place (that you may understand what it is) is the finest place in the University.[100]

Herbert took his role of Orator seriously as the above letter shows. His probable witnessing of the drama put on at Cambridge appears to have triggered an impulse towards presenting each narrative poem as a micro-drama, with himself as the principal actor.

7. Theories of Narrative

'Art is thinking in images' is the opening salvo of Viktor Shklovsky's book *Theory of Prose* (1990). He continues saying that,

> Poetry is a special mode of thinking - to be precise, a mode of thinking in images [...]. A poetic image is one of the means by which the poet delivers his greatest impact.[101]

Shklovsky explains that the reason for this hypersensitivity is 'intensifying the sensation of things' such as sounds of the literary work itself. The forms of art are explained by the artistic laws that govern them and not by comparison with actual life.[102] In the thesis I examine the writings and theories of a number of narratologists, and although none addressed Herbert's poetry, many of the theories about narrative can be applied to Herbert. His poetic 'characters' who have conversations, make

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[99]*Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, ed. by Alan H. Nelson, 2 vols (Toronto; Buffalo: London: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 11, 704-1502 (pp.713-712).
[100]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, pp.369-370.
[101]Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher (Elmswood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), pp.1&3.
[102]Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p.170.

slips of the tongue and employ asides, are all similar to those that are found in prose and drama. Herbert also constructs plots, utilises irony, and devises a number of narrative styles such as the omniscient narrator, the narratorial 'I', *emic* and *etic* openings, and narratorial comment. Narrative theory, I will argue throughout the thesis, is a useful tool with which to examine Herbert's narrative poems.

As noted earlier, poetic narrative is an uncharted field, although the study of narratology in the novel is well documented. It is therefore to these critics of the novel that attention has been drawn. It became more and more apparent, that what they said could, sometimes, very easily be applied to Herbert's poetry. Critics such as Roland Barthes, F.K. Stanzel, Helmut Bonheim, Paul Ricoeur, Paul Valéry, Georg Lukas, Gérard Genette and Frank Kermode have all contributed to an understanding of Herbert's narrative purpose. Other critics such as Adèle Berlin and Shimon Bar-Efrat, who specifically examine both poetics and Biblical narrative, as well as narrative art in the Bible, have also influenced the understanding of Herbert's narrative poetry.

A narrative is a story and the OED's definition confirms this; it states: '1, an account of connected events; a story. 2. The narrated part of a literary work, as distinct from dialogue'. According to Stanzel when 'a piece of news is conveyed, whenever something is reported, there is a mediator - the voice of the narrator is audible.'[103] He continues, saying that

> the central task of a theory of narrative is to systemize the various kinds and degrees of 'mediacy' *(Mittelbarkeit)* that result from the shifting relationship in all storytelling between the story and how it is being told.[104]

Herbert's poems have a unique energy and dynamism which makes them challenging yet accessible, and, although lyric poems, have within them either an

[103]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.4.
[104]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.xi.

explicit or an implicit narrative. Richard Waswo observes that: 'Whether among members of the same community or different ones, meaning is a transaction between an utterance and a hearer, a text and a performer.'[105] So it is to the question of why and how Herbert utilises narrative in his lyric verse that this thesis is also addressed. As the thesis unfolds I shall explore some of the poems of Herbert, examining the stories enclosed within, and showing how he is able to successfully incorporate narrative within the lyric form.

Margarlit Finkelberg writes,

> Plato [...] reduced almost all actual poetry to mimesis [...]. For Plato, therefore, the character of a work of poetry was strictly conditioned by its source - a work of poetry was 'true' and 'beneficial' if derived from divine inspiration, but 'false' and 'harmful' if derived from art.[106]

Hence the impetus that drove Herbert to tell the story of a doubting preacher in 'The Windows' was a dramatic narrative that was 'true' and 'beneficial' because it was spiritually inspired. Augustine discovered, unlike Plato, a kind of language that had a special guarantee of its meaning. He discovered it in just the form that Plato denied it could take - in the written scriptures. Augustine described the operation of scriptural language in Book Two of *De Doctrina Christiana* by adopting from Latin rhetoric the standard dichotomy of 'sign' and 'thing.' A sign is anything that makes something else come to mind. Some signs occur in nature and some are 'given', among which are words. Ordinary words simply signify things, in which they have meaning (literal and figurative); but the words of the Holy Spirit *are* the things themselves; only God can use things the way people use words. The dominant assumption remains that the meaning of words is to be sought and found outside language itself, above, beyond,

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[105]Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.15.
[106]Margarlit Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pp.10-11.

or through it.[107] This is important for an understanding of Herbert's use of the relevant words for the occasion, and also his use of *trompe l'oeil*. This latter device can be recognised in 'Prayer (1)', where he states 'The soul in paraphrase' (3) rather than what the reader 'sees' in his mind (the word paradise). The important issue for Herbert is how Christ can be communicated by means of human language. For there was an emphasis not only on the Word, but on the words themselves.[108]

Stanzel further suggests that

> in order to discover the fundamental possibilities of narrative mediation, one must enquire. 1.Does the narrator belong to the world of the story or does he/she abide in another postulated realm of existence? 2. Does the narrator directly convey information to the reader or does he/she filter it through the consciousness of one or several of the characters? 3. Does the narrator give the reader an external view of the narrated events or does he/she represent them, as it were, from within?[109]

In considering these last three points, it is possible to acknowledge the fact that Herbert often manipulates the images and conceits he uses to relate his story. He attends as witness to his own poem, as in 'Christmas.' Or in 'Redemption' he is there at the crucifixion, hearing what the 'theeves' and 'murderers' say. He hides his life in the poem 'Coloss.3.3'; while in 'Artillerie' God actually speaks to him personally.

In the opening line of 'Love unknown' he explicitly tells the reader a story is about to begin so make yourself comfortable: 'Deare Friend sit down, the tale is long and sad'. Herbert now invites the reader to explore with the speaker a story of uncertainty, loss and final resolution, within some seventy lines, introducing characters (the Lord and the servant), conversation, plots and the bizarre, all contained in one fantastic tale. The poem tells a story, a strange and somewhat gruesome story, yet it is a story that appears hauntingly familiar.

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[107]Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, pp.32.& 34.
[108]Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, pp.179 &181.
[109]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.xi.

> Afterwards he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart (Mark 16.14).

The desire by the teller of the story to place his stony heart before his Lord yet to have it discarded each time is a parable about the unbelief of the disciples. In each situation the speaker describes, there is the continual frustration of having one's faith challenged in the same way the reader is challenged.

Nevertheless, Herbert is a lyric poet, and lyric poetry is not usually associated with narrative. But the narrative lyric is a genre that Herbert adopts and develops, thus allowing for a more fulfilled plain mode of expression than hitherto explored. Paul Allen Miller describes lyric as

> a short poem of personal revelation, confession or complaint, which projects the image of an individual and highly self-reflexive subjective consciousness - which is only possible in a culture of writing.[110]

It is this revelation, confession, complaint, and self-reflexiveness that are explored in the poetry.

8. The Structure of the Thesis

I have proposed that Herbert's narrative poems should be classified into eight categories. These parallel the spiritual journey taken by the speaker and correspond to the journey through *The Temple.* In Chapter One the poems are those of conflict and doubt. I begin with poems of conflict because of the psychological struggle with conscience that Herbert frequently experiences. In Chapters Two and Three, the linear narratives are explored as he moves through life in a personal quest to understand God; Herbert's poem 'The Church Militant' is also examined in which the Christian narrative moves around the world. In Chapter Four Herbert's use of lyric is discussed, and I also examine his use of dialogue, plot and conversation in a

[110]Paul Allen Miller, *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p.1

selection of poems. In this chapter, in the poem 'Dialogue', Herbert converses with God. In 'Love-joy' he introduces different 'characters' known only as 'one' and 'a man' with which to converse.

In Chapter Five there is a dramatic change in the genre of the poems. Now Herbert explores the world of the unfamiliar, what the Russian formalists termed 'defamiliarisation.' The poems are strange and challenging, this corresponds to his own troubled emotions as he looks at a cross, as if for the first time, saying 'What is this strange and uncouth thing?'

Chapter Six is a very brief chapter on the implicit meaning in the narrative vis-à-vis the obvious or explicit meaning, which is an important feature in the poetry. In the penultimate chapter, Herbert's everlasting cycle of degenerative sinning is explored in both cyclical and circular narratives. This continual pleading to God in how 'Sorrie I am' finally reaches its apotheosis in the final chapter; now the end has arrived and the process of a funeral pageant is viewed. Nevertheless, in typical Herbertian style the last poem is one of hope and immortality, as the poem 'Vertue' is appraised, with its final line written in the present tense, 'Then chiefly lives.'

The final summing up in Chapter Nine draws together all these facets of the speaker's life through narrative. As I explain earlier in this introduction, the poems are explored in the light of a variety of narratologists, none of whom considered Herbert's poetry; yet it is apparent that all the theories can be applied to the narrative poems. Herbert utilises plot, conversation, temporality, and speech patterns, fusing them all into a personal and unique style of Christianity. It is this narrative element of my study that I hope makes it unique enabling the reader to see Herbert, not only as a deeply religious poet, but as a creator of drama and sophisticated character personæ.

As Terry Eagleton argues,

> Words are not just strung together for the sake of the thoughts they convey, as in ordinary speech, but with an eye to the pattern of similarity, opposition, parallelism, and so on created by their sound, meaning, rhythm, and connotations.[111]

Words are used by Herbert as an impressionist uses colour in order to capture the moment. Through language, Herbert crosses the centuries; his is the narrative voice that calls to the reader to re-create his own verbal landscape within the poems, and this is his inimitable legacy.

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[111]Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an introduction* 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.99.

Chapter One

'Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse.'

An exploration of narrative in George Herbert's *The Temple*.

Conflict, Doubt and Narrative

The poems discussed are 'The Collar', 'The Rose', and 'The Holdfast.'

1.1.1 The psychological framework for Herbert's continuous struggle with conscience.

Every human being has doubts and insecurities and Herbert was no exception. As so many of the poems echo this continual conflict and doubt, it would seem appropriate to commence with those which demonstrate this feature. The poems selected show Herbert's impulse to argument and defiance.

Story telling is the most basic of our childhood experiences and continues throughout life. Barbara Hardy argues,

> In our secret life narrative plays an important part [...]. Realism and fantasy are coexistent in our judgments of literary narratives We never complete our autobiographies, although we all know how it will end. [1]

Hardy, in this comprehensive overview of narrative, highlights the key concepts that this thesis will explore through the examination of Herbert's narrative poetry. For whilst many of the narratives are simple in execution, their implicit meaning is often intellectually challenging. Herbert explores realism and fantasy through the ingenious conceits he utilises; as in 'Artillerie', where a spark from the fire becomes a sign from God; this supports Gérard Genette idea as he suggests that

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[1] Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners: The Narrative Imagination* (London: Western Printing Services Ltd., 1975), pp. 3-4.

> within the sphere of literature, narrative may be defined simply as the representative of a real or fictitious event or series of events by language, and more specifically by written language.[2]

Herbert wrote his poetry in the lyric form, and narrative poetry is usually reserved for the epic genre.[3] This desire by Herbert to narrate his spiritual Christian journey pushes him into storytelling; time for him is an aspect of eternity.[4] His tales are simple, and his desire to influence through narrative has its origins in *The Countrey Parson.* In it he explicitly describes his reason for an impulse toward narrative by examining the text itself, and the exigency of viewing the whole rather than in part. He says:

> The Parsons method of handling of a text consists of two parts; first, a plain and evident declaration of the meaning of the text; and secondly, some choice Observations drawn out of the whole text, as it lyes entire, and unbroken in the Scripture itself.[5]

One of the earliest extant comments made about Herbert comes from Nicholas Ferrar. Ferrar entered Clare Hall, Cambridge, about the same time as Herbert, and the two became lifelong friends. Ferrar was known for his ascetic lifestyle at Cambridge (even though so young) and

> his chamber might be known by the last candle put out, and by the first lighted in the morning [...] so his industry was admirable, but his piety at his years was incomparable.[6]

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[2] Gérard Genette, 'Boundaries of Narrative', trans by Ann Levonas, *New Literary History*, 8 (1976), 1-13 (p.1).

[3] Lyric poetry fell out of fashion in the eighteenth century A social poet such as Pope preferred to explore his ideas through narrative verse or a social form such as the epistle. *Literary Terms and Crticism*, ed. by John Peck and Martin Coyle 5th edn (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1988), p.42.

[4] Joan Webber, *The Eloquent 'I'*, p.7.

[5] F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.235.

[6] Nicholas Ferrar, *The Story Books of Little Gidding,1631,1632,* intro by E. Cruwys Sharland (London: Seeley & Co Ltd., 1899), pp.xi. N.B. The name Ferrar (which is the correct spelling) was taken from Gwalkeline de Ferrariis who was Master of the Horse to William the Conqueror, and meant "of the Iron lands" or "Iron mines." In the *Introductory Sketch*, at the beginning of *The Story Books*, is the following comment, 'The following short history has

This devotion to God was a practice Ferrar adhered to all his days. Indeed, he practised a night vigil in later life, whereby

> at one o'clock they knocked at Nicholas Ferrar's door (if it was not his vigil), [...] for it was his custom to rise at that hour, go to his study, and continue in prayer and meditation until six o'clock [...] beyond that which was the usual practice or custom amongst men [...]. He was also acting "upon the invitation of that worthy servant of Christ, Mr. George Herbert, his most entire friend and brother (for so they styled each other)." [7]

What is also remarkable are the parallels in the two lives of Ferrar and Herbert, as indicated in the 'Introductory Sketch' at the beginning of the *Story Books* where it is said of Ferrar, that,

> Although noted for bodily activity and grace, and also possessed of a vigorous temper of mind, never enjoyed good health, being subject from infancy to aguish attacks [...]. When he was about to be sent to school (being then only in his eighth year) "it pleased God to permit a sore and grievous temptation to befall Nicholas Ferrar, that wonderfully perplexed his body and mind, 'Whether there was a God, and how to be served.' One night, which was cold and frosty, he riseth out of his bed [...] and goes down to a green grass-plat in the garden, and throws himself upon his face on the ground, and with extreme perplexity of grief, sobs, sighs, and abundance of tears humbly begged of God that 'He would put into his heart the true fear and care of His Divine Majesty, and that the fear of God might never depart out of his mind, and that he might know how he must serve him.'"[8]

What is noted is an individual who, though desiring to believe, experiences doubt, then moves into despair, challenges God by questioning, and finally submits to God's will.[9] It seems that Ferrar needed the reassurance of the fear of God so that he might

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been entirely derived from two biographies, edited by the Rev. J.E.B. Mayor at Cambridge, in 1855, entitled "Nicholas Ferrar, Two Lives; by his Brother John and by Dr. Jebb" (a friend and contemporary).

[7] *The Story Books of Little Gidding,* John Ferrar comments that their 'having but once had personal conference with each other', most of their friendship was conducted by letter, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

[8] *The Story Books of Little Gidding*, [from the 'Introductory Sketch'], p.ix. N.B. double speech marks indictate words from the biography by John Ferrar or Dr. Jebb, single speech marks from the Rev. Mayor.

[9] This recalled story of young Ferrar, whereby he resists temptation, promising to serve God for ever, is a seventeenth century 'type scene', which may or may not be entirely true. The

know how he must serve him. There are parallels in this account to those found in Herbert's poem 'The Collar.' Here, the frustrated poet physically strikes the 'board', in a similar way as Ferrar physically 'throws himself upon his face on the ground', and lies on the freezing 'grass-plat.' Both individuals show outward signs of extreme grief and mental turmoil; witness Herbert's explosive words in 'The Collar', 'But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde'(33). Then, his ire expunged, the final submission to God's will is complete; the poet calms himself, and in the last two lines states: 'Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Child:/* And I reply'd, *My Lord.'* At the end of Ferrar's experience, the reader is informed,

> After much bitter weeping he felt his heart much eased, and comforts began to come to it, and to have the assurance of God, and the doubt began to pass away, and his heart was much cheered [...] yet found he daily more and more confirmation in his soul, and so had all his lifetime after a more than ordinary fear of God in him, and his presence which continued in him to his dying day.[10]

These two parallel experiences convey the experience of a spiritual crisis, which is both physical, and closely involved with the control of the individual's human feelings. They show how it was possible for the person to overcome such doubts through faith, achieving a reconciliation through submission to Christ. They are both narratives of rebirth, a rebirth in Christ, that indicates the necessity of self-examination, and which can only be achieved through suffering and self-discipline. The rebirth motif is apparent in the poet's reference to himself as *'Child'* at the end of the 'The Collar.' This poem is one of Herbert's most familiar poems, and demonstrates, with its irregular lines and dislocated syntax, the speaker's corresponding thoughts.

I struck the board, and cry'd, No more

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protagonist faces a spiritual crisis in isolation, and emerges from it a stronger individual. Walton also recounts a similar story about Herbert. Other 'type scenes' record enlightening death-bed speeches (again recounted by both Walton and Ferrar).

[10]*The Story Books of Little Gidding*, p.ix.

I will abroad.
What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the rode,
Loose as the winde, as large as store.
Shall I be still in suit? (1-6)

But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word,
Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Child*:
And I repl'd, *My Lord* (33-36).

Herbert attempts to define his actions through physically attacking the 'board', a metonym for his God and all that he represents.The poem explores three key strands in an embedded narrative. The initial story focuses on Herbert, the speaker, who travels figuratively on the road to serving God as a priest; secondly the speaker discusses his life, his frustrated hopes and wasted life; and lastly there is a subliminal message on Christ's Passion, which is the summation of the speaker's life, as he parallels this latter with his own life. Jeffrey Hart in his discussion of 'The Collar' argues that

> part of the brilliance of the poem lies in the fact that it expresses rebellion and atonement in the same vocabulary, and by so doing epitomizes its central idea: that rebellion necessarily entails, because of God's justice and mercy, atonement.[11]

The narrative offered here by the speaker is economic, elliptic and matter of fact. Not expecting anyone to argue with him, the speaker then presents to himself the main tenets of his argument. At this stage there is little to suggest he is speaking to anyone other than himself, for the abstract concepts of his rhetorical questions are answerable only by his own conscience: 'What? shall I ever sigh and pine?' he asks, 'My lines and life are free; free as the rode.'The poetic devices of alliterative internal metre in the 'i' sounds ('sigh', 'pine', 'lines' and 'life') focus the reader's attention on

[11]Jeffrey Hart, 'Herbert's *The Collar* re-read,'in J.R. Roberts, ed. *Essential Articles for the study of George Herbert's Poetry* (Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1979), pp.ix-552 (p.454).

the internal struggle the poet is battling with. These, together with repetition 'free; free as the rode' also assist in drawing the eye and the mind of the reader to the constricting plight of the unhappy speaker. The pun on the word 'rode' reminds us of the rood screen which separated the priest from his congregation. This acts as a metaphor for Herbert as he is being divided from God.

The speaker contemplates travelling onwards, 'I will abroad' he states, yet never moves from the well-known, familiar surroundings he has constructed. Knowing the geography of the 'rode' or cross, is a different concept to knowing what one will find on the 'rode' [road]. The reader is aware of conflict present in the speaker's soul by the verb 'strike', and the statement 'I struck the board' is anger directed against Christ. In Herbert's poems, as in Reformed soteriology, the solution has been determined and is generally implicit from the beginning. Over and over again, the speaker in Herbert's poetry goes through his turmoil and rebellion, but discovers, through multilevel ironies, that he has never escaped God's providential, saving design.[12] Rosalie Colie argues that

> the poet certainly lacks no words to rave against God [...] all those words [are] useless [and] irrelevant to the truth, since one word from God - [...] was sufficient to demonstrate the uselessness and irrelevance of the poet's tirade.[13]

There is an echo which presents itself in the story of Moses in the Old Testament, who struck the rock and out gushed water:

> Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock at Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it (Exodus17.6).

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[12]Gene E. Veith Jr, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.108.
[13]Rosalie L. Colie, 'Logos in the Temple,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 25 (1963), 327-42 (p.334).

Each individual has a tactile encounter with a symbol of the cleansing, renewal and rebirth of faith, and is manifest in dramatic action; whilst for Moses the anger against him is very real and he is in palpable danger:

> And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin [...] and there was no water for the people to drink [...]. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink and the people murmured against Moses [...]. And Moses cried unto the Lord [...] What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me (Exodus 17.1-4).

In this encounter with the people, Moses 'cried' to God to tell him what to do, and there is a parallel in Herbert's speaker, who 'cry'd, No more.' The agonies that Moses has about the 'people murmur[ing] against him' are his own internalised doubts and anxieties. Herbert's third line appears to respond to the unanswered question 'What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?' The sixth line provides the answer by asking another question: 'Have I no harvest but a thorn?'(7). The 'thorn', 'bloud', and 'cordiall fruit', symbols of Christ's Passion, are placed in ritualistic order before the speaker on the same 'board' Herbert so angrily strikes.The intertextuality of the embedded narrative focuses on the speaker who identifies the literal images of the Passion, yet later in the poem, augments the narrative through *midrash*, by describing the Eucharist itself in the more obscure images of wine and corn: 'there was wine [...] there was corn' (10-11).[14]

The 'hidden' properties are obscure because these symbols are the key elements that can offer him redemption. In themselves the 'wine and corn' mean simply that, wine and corn; but on the 'board' they become precisely what Herbert wants them to become, notably the blood and body of Christ. Herbert at this stage

[14]Frank Kermode describes *Midrash* as 'the interpreter, either by rewriting the story or explaining it in a more acceptable sense, bridges the gap between an original and modern audience'. N.B. The word comes from *Darash* (to probe or examine). Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* 3rd edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.x.

does not feel able to accept them as such; for it needs God to restore order and harmony, creating a word of response.[15] Repetition, used for emphasis, helps fix these images in the correct scenario on the 'board' or Communion table in the reader's mind's eye. The self-reflexive statements made by the speaker recognise the areas where he needs reassurance and support. 'Lines and life' which are 'Loose and free' need an anchorage. It is in this sphere that the plot begins to develop, as the poem is a plea for help and guidance, and one with which the reader can empathise with the poet. The imagery of a 'blasted', 'wasted' life is an anti-pastoral nightmare. His misery of the past is eclipsed in the misery he contemplates for the future:

> Is the yeare onely lost to me?
> Have I no bayes to crown it?
> No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
> All wasted? (12-16).

The assonance of the last two words pulls the reader into a realisation of the summation of just what being bereft of 'bayes, flowers [and] garlands' means to the speaker, for he is 'All wasted.' Life is futile, and the reiteration of the barren words mirrors the desolation in his soul. His meditation on the past year has little to recommend it, and his question 'Is the yeare onely lost to me?' has a particular poignancy to it. Each of the images presented by the speaker, ('winde', 'thorn', 'bloud', 'fruit', 'wine' [and] 'corn') triggers off a portion of a particular event where the speaker has played a key role.

Wine, corn and thorns present a still-life image needing few words to describe it, yet Herbert extends the metaphors. Using his involuntary memory, the images provoke a trigger for his outburst and the response by the reader is to embellish the story to fit Herbert's life, not the reader's own life.[16] The 'it' Herbert so belatedly

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[15]Gene E. Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.220.
[16]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, p.92.

bemoans is the unidentified object of Herbert's devotion, namely the salvation and redemption he so craves. By calling his desire for soteriology 'it', he now acknowledges that 'it' cannot be acquired through meaningless ritual and dogma. There is a reliance on the reader's ingenuity to extrapolate what Herbert is referring to: 'Sure there was wine/Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn/Before my tears did drown it [...]./ Have I no bayes to crown it?' (10-14).

The inversion of the 'drie sighs' equating with the wet wine, and the wet 'tears' equating with the dry corn, together with the 'crown' referring to the 'thorn' mentioned earlier, pull the reader into Herbert's world. The first crown, a pagan secular symbol of victory, whilst the latter crown signifies Christ's victorious crown of life. Both assist in the narrative structure, and focus on the involuntary memory, impinging on the reader's consciousness to construct a holistic pattern of the Eucharistic scene, one which the frustrated Herbert is angrily challenging. Hardy argues that such involuntary memories are neither arbitrary nor irrational. Herbert's remembrance of wine and corn expands to the remembrance of Christ's Passion. After the destructive forces of his own desperate persona, which he asserts are 'blasted and wasted', a second character (devised by the speaker) puts it all into perspective. Herbert has been listened to all along, for in Line 17 he is told: 'Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,/And thou hast hands.'

The narrative within a narrative calms and reasons with Herbert, pointing out that he is able to 'Recover' (what he formally had, and has had all along), whilst his hands that were striking the 'board' now break the bread and bless the people. By responding to questions asked, the use of narrative assists in making the argument responsive to a human dilemma.The literal and the figurative meanings are intimately woven in this poem. The punning title (choler) is contrived to implant the same

doubts in the readers' mind as lurk in the speaker's mind; whilst the dislocated irregular syntax which looks untidy on the page serves to mirror the dysfunctional thoughts that bedevil the speaker.

The physical acts of violence interact with the violent language to demonstrate the human side of Herbert, the man. This separates him from the Christ he so desperately tries to emulate. The two speakers understand each other, what has been presented by the first speaker is now qualified by the second voice. The clipped brevity of: 'Away; take heed:/I will abroad' indicates the impatience shown by the speaker, whilst the 'take heed' implies a warning to this second voice, and serves only to inflame the speaker's anger. Such a conflagration of fury indicates that he knows the second voice is right all the time. Hart shows how at the end of the poem 'there is a kind of stillness, which has earlier been hinted at by the speaker as he states: 'shall I be still in suit?" (6). There is a type of pleading and bargaining by the speaker which is likened to the quelling of the tantrum that Herbert exhibits through the words: *'Child'* and '*My Lord'* are the final two words are spoken by Herbert, for it is he who needs to come to terms with his rebellious outburst.[17]

'Images and objects in his life often evoke in Herbert a situation that he can discover.'[18] For example wine and corn recall a response in the poet, which is sighing and weeping; the yearly feast days recall his 'wasted' youth and whole life perhaps. The paronomastic use of the word 'draw' focuses the reader's attention on the idea of pulling the speaker towards God, but paradoxically can suggest an evisceration, a drawing out or away from God. Both, we find, are proposed by the speaker: '[to] be thy law.' The 'bloud [and] cordiall fruit' have now turned into 'thy death's head' (29). Each is a symbol, the skull representing Christ's death at Golgotha, the place of the

[17]Jeffrey Hart, 'Herbert's *The Collar* re-read', p.455.
[18]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, p.93.

skull, whilst the former ambiguously represent eternal life, through Christ's body and blood. The intertextuality of the Biblical story of Jesus' death is closely intertwined with Herbert's spiritual agonising over his life in death. The 'wine [and] corn' of the Eucharist, with its promise of eternal life, now metamorphoses into the coarse statement: 'Call in thy deaths head there' (29).The speaker whips himself into a frenzy at his own damning words.

Herbert appears to be arguing that the sweeping away of supernumerary impedimenta of ordinary words is vital if the Word is to be heard, and he does just this in the final ten lines of the poem. Now the regularity of the metre and rhyme scheme, parallel the calm and constant pattern he desires. At the commencement of the poem there is an *altercatio* of separate questions thrown out randomly as they occur to the speaker. Now the answers are controlled. Herbert places himself as the narratorial commentator, devising the answers that he is sure God would make. There is a suggestion of a period of silence after the statement 'Whilst thou didst wink and wouldst not see.' The alliterative *'w'* sounds, together with the inversion of *'did wink'* and *'wouldest not'* assists in the reader's perception of blinking; this complements the metaphor of not seeing, either metaphorically nor literally.

The narrative voices that occur in 'The Collar' prefigure the subsequent spiritual awakening of Herbert, and one way this happens is through paradox. Through the theatrical movement of the opening lines vis-à-vis the stillness of the doubting fears, Herbert's poem forms a parable of the spiritual over the secular life. Such a parable, Kermode argues, 'is a paradox, that functions as a mnemonic, [as] it always recalls different things.'[19] Herbert presents the narrative as a dialogue between two people who will not or cannot resolve their differences, this makes the interlocution accessible. The 'board' we soon realise is the Communion Table, and

[19]Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, pp.44-45.

this is crucial in the parable story, for the whole poem is about communication with God and communing with the self.

The parallel mirroring of Jesus' 'fruit' and 'heart' with Herbert's 'cordiall fruit', together with the 'hands' which represent Christ's crucified hands, which echo Herbert's angry hand striking the Communion Table [board], serve as a *mis en scene* to show Herbert his foolish, futile self. Herbert has created *dramatis personae* to act out the Passion scene, placing himself as principal player to demonstrate his own sin. Herbert is reunited with God, and together with his congregation and understanding, so the poem comes full circle; the three concepts unify to become a personal Trinity with the echoing rhymes of 'board Lord', 'more thoughts', 'cry'd reply'd.'[20]

Harmony within Herbert has been restored, with the restoring of harmony in the poem. The form of 'The Collar' represents a circular drawing round to God by Herbert from the depths of despair, which is a type of sin. All through the poem the reader is being asked to judge and deliver the verdict on the two sets of arguments. Yet the disparate argument that the speaker evokes is lulled into silence by the brevity of the final two words - *'Child'* and *'Lord.'* The wildness and untamed persona of mankind without God is placated and civilised by the Word Herbert hears at the end of the poem by the 'one' that we know is God. It is a poem with a happy ending. The resolution is both what Herbert wants and we want also. The prolepsis of uncertainty is controlled through the economy of words, by a God who does not need to call the speaker by name, just '*Child.*' Now the poem has turned full circle; the inverted rhymes of 'board' and *'Lord'* with 'cryd' and '*Child'*, allow Herbert to inhabit the space at the tomb of the resurrected Christ, as John recalls it: 'Jesus saith unto

[20]Jeffrey Hart, 'Herbert's *The Collar* re-read,' p.460. N.B.McGrath explains that 'The basic feature of this doctrine is that there are three persons within the Godhead.'A. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p.23. Herbert mirrors the triple concept in the echoing rhymes suggested, and in his acknowledgment of the fallible, human and spiritual side to his nature.

her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say; Master' (John 20.16).

1.1.2 Is there a God? Doubts and Defiance

In the stories of the Ferrar family there is a similarity with Ferrar's youthful doubts as to the existence of God, and his desire for self-improvement, and Herbert's later experience as an adult at his church at Bemerton, where

> at his induction he was shut into Bemerton Church, being left there alone to toll the bell, - as the Law requires him, - he staid so much longer [that] [...] his friend Mr. Woodnot looked in at the Church-window, and saw him lie prostrate on the ground before the Altar; at which time and place - as he after told Mr. Woodnot - he set some rules to himself, for the future manage of his life; and then and there made a vow to labour to keep them.[21]

Here, Herbert is faced with a critical decision at the turning point in his life, when he was alone in the Church, and it was therefore necessary to face the spiritual crisis unsupported. The tolling of the bell must have reinforced the fragile mortality of his own life, and stressed the need to live by some 'rules.'The story has echoes of events in Jesus' life where he is alone and where he must take action, as for example when he appears to the disciples 'walking on the sea' (Matthew 14.25).

Both Ferrar and Herbert had to face their individual crises in solitude, this allowed Herbert to 'set some rules to himself, for the future manage of his life;' and Ferrar 'that he might know how to serve him.' Both these narratives demonstrate the 'type scene' as it was ideally perceived by each of the biographers. The necessity of Herbert, Ferrar and Jesus to be alone, appears to emphasise the importance of the individual to break away from the crowd, through an intimate self-awareness. This allows him time to reflect on what the next stage in his life should be. Jesus proves his humanity by being alone and needs time to reflect and contemplate as well as

[21]Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Dr. J Donne, Sir Henry Wooton, Mr. Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Dr. Robert Sanderson,* revised by A.H. Bullen (London: Bell & Sons, 1884), p.293. To be further referred to as *Lives.*

gaining strength. For both Ferrar and Herbert, one can argue that it is only through being alone that the voice of God might be heard, and the necessary self-discipline to achieve what God requires. This is what Jesus also needed and acquired prior to his crucifixion: 'And he was withdrawn from them [alone] about a stone's cast [...] there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him' (Luke 22. 41-43). What we see is a narrative of solitude whereby a clear and unequivocal direction to the individual is offered through self-examination.

From the biography contained in the 'Introductory Sketch' to the *Story Books of Little Gidding*, it becomes increasingly apparent that Ferrar himself had an unusually high commitment to the need for narrative. Indeed, John, his elder brother recalls,

> "he was a lovely child [...].The Bible was the book in the world, to him dear and precious The next book, *The Book of Martyrs*, he took great delight in, and the story of Bishop Ferrar he had perfect, as for his name's sake."[22]

The biographical accounts go on to tell of both the weekly and Sunday routines at the Little Gidding community. From these accounts, what we see is a man focused on the importance of narrative, both in his interest in the Bible (which is partly a book of narratives), and *The Book of Martyrs*, which recounts the sufferings and exemplary behaviour of its victims. Both Herbert and Ferrar were committed to the acts of self-scrutiny and mortification. Ralph Houlebrooke shows how 'The notion that dying was the most important part of a person's life performance had a long history. When death summoned him, the individual had to be willing to obey the call.'[23]

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[22]*The Story Books of Little Gidding, 1631,1632*, p.viii.
[23]Ralph Houlebrooke, 'The Puritan Death-bed', c.1560- c.1660, in *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700*, ed by Christopher Durston & Jacqueline Eales (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp.122-144 (pp.122 & 129).

1.1.3 Discussion and Narrative

In the next poem to be discussed, Herbert uses narrative to relate a story of suffering and conflict presented to the individual through an imaginary conversation. 'The Rose' is the tale of an individual who also suffers, and having been tested, is able to overcome the temptations of human frailty and stand firm. The first and last stanzas are quoted:

> Presse me not to take more pleasures
> In this world of sugred lies,
> And to use a larger measure
> Then my strict, yet welcome size.
>
> But I health, not physick choose:
> Onely though I you oppose,
> Say that fairly I refuse,
> For my answer is a rose (1-4 & 29-32).

Using a rose, a traditional symbol of desire, beauty and transience, Herbert presents the rose as an inspiration to the reader as a symbol of Christ's suffering; using a form of narrative as a quasi-dialogue between two people, one of whom is attempting to persuade the 'strict', temperate Herbert to a life that he has firmly rejected: 'Presse me not to take more pleasures' admonishes Herbert, and the opening lines suggest that the tempter is wasting his time, for the speaker has already made up his mind, by his use of 'more.' His 'strict, yet welcome size' suits him perfectly, and the use of this adjective is no accident, the OED defining the word 'strict' in 1578 as 'drawn together, tight, severe and rigid', originating from the Latin *strictus,* meaning 'tightened.' It is a word that the speaker embraces and welcomes. This tight, closeted lifestyle is in sharp contrast to the overblown sensuous beauty of the rose. Herbert attempts to draw a paradoxical comparison in order to emphasise his key argument. He has chosen to grasp the sharp thorns of life and reject the pleasurable sensation of viewing the rose, which come to represent all the secular

pleasures of this world. In embracing rejection and the agony the cruel thorns present, Herbert parallels himself with Jesus, who by offering himself to his captors in Gethsemene also paid the ultimate price, suffering humiliation and a crown of thorns.

The sensuousness of the rose triggers Herbert's involuntary memory regarding the secularity and sensuousness the world offers. Roman Jakobson argues that 'the supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous.'[24] In the poem, Herbert touches and looks at the rose, but more importantly he knows about its *other* properties. In his hands it becomes ambiguous, the symbol of Christ's suffering and death, as well as an image of sensual beauty. It is able to purge the body of poisons, and also ambiguously purges sins, whilst through grasping and enclosing it in the hand, its thorns produce the bloody stigmata of the Resurrection, transforming itself to everlasting life through the Word. 'The Rose', we find, moves from a noun to a verb (Rise), through one small letter, and moves from the past to present tense. Heather Asals points out that

> it was well known in the seventeenth century that the Psalmist does not use the present tense: 'In Hebrew there is no Present tense; In that language wherein God spake, it could not be said, *The upright in heart, are praised*; Many times they are not. But God speaks in the future.[25]

'The Rose' also offers 'Colour'd griefs [and] Blushing woes' (6) and certainly 'no pleasure here' (5). The narrative suggests that the image of the rose is evocative to Herbert, who in spite of himself, remembers 'griefs [and] blushing', recalling a time perhaps when secular pleasures were of great importance to him. Indeed, he states in *The Countrey Parson* in a chapter named 'The Parson's State of Life':

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[24]Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics,' in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. by David Lodge (London & New York: Longman, 1988), p.50.
[25]Heather A.R. Asals, 'The Voice of George Herbert's '*The Church*'', cited in *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*, pp.ix-552 (p.404). N.B. Asals takes her information from William Chomsky, *Hebrew: The Eternal Language* (Philadelphia, Pa, 1957), pp.164-165.

> *He keepeth his watch and ward, night and day against the proper and peculiar temptations of this state of Life, which are principally these two, Spirituall pride, and Impurity of heart: against these ghostly enemies he girdeth up is loynes [...] he is not afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darknesse, [carnall impurity] [...] nor of the sicknesse that destroyeth at noone day [Ghostly pride and self-conceite].*[26]

The words from this chapter are almost a summary of the sentiments expressed in 'The Rose.' Involuntary memory blurs together in a haze of pleasant or unpleasant experience and we can see that as Herbert views the rose, he involuntarily thinks of the temptations open to him.[27] Both would evoke unpleasant as well as pleasant experiences, and it is to this latter that he must direct his thoughts in order to expunge them.

The whole story that this poem tells is one of struggle by the speaker against the human will, and parallels the physical struggle of the martyrs. The more Herbert tries to reason with himself, the more voices are introduced by the poet into the poem. These *personae* offer an alternative point of view, and it is tempting to think that they actually exist in the poem in a dramatic form. In effect, it is Herbert himself who is in control, and although he talks to these *personae* as if they exist, they are what Robert Scholes might call 'Mime characters', they are simply 'types.'[28] The fact that they are anonymous and simply referred to as 'you' and a 'friend' as in 'The Holdfast' support this viewpoint. The phrase: 'But I will not much oppose/Unto what you now advise', (13-14) strengthens Scholes' idea, making the reader think that Herbert is holding a conversation with someone. It is a narrative device reified by Herbert to convince the reader that the indirect speech of 'you' is occurring in the

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[26]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.238. N.B. This passage is printed in italics in Hutchinson.
[27]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, p.87.
[28]Robert E. Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.230.

present, and Herbert is responding to it in the present by answering: 'Onely take this gentle rose,/And therein my answer lies' (15-16). This device is what Jakobson argues is 'the *modus obliquus* [indirect method] and Herbert's response 'Onely take' the *modus rectus* [direct method] shows the reader that these are nothing but linguistic forms.'[29]

As a rose is symbolic of love, beauty, and sexual desire, this poem coalesces the interaction between two people in a specific, measured and naturalistic way. It is therefore pertinent that Herbert's choice of title for this subtle narrative poem to demonstrate his use of narrative, is founded upon this typically English flower. It is a a metaphor for the transitory life of man; from its burgeoning bud right through to its falling petals. It is able to represent the different aspects of life as experienced by its observers. Adopted by the Tudors as their private symbol, it decorated all of the secular features of their domestic and regal life.

As the reader proceeds through this complex poem, Herbert presents the poem to the reader, making him an eavesdropper on an intimate conversation between two people, intruding into the narrative when not wanted. The opening few words demand to be read as a conversation between the poet and another unspecified individual: 'Presse me not to take more pleasure/ In this world of sugred lies' (1-2). The use of the word 'more' implies that the first speaker has been pressurising Herbert to take pleasures, which he has possibly tried.

Now Herbert argues against taking 'more', whilst the hyperbole of 'sugred lies' also implies that the first speaker is suggesting a mode of action or lifestyle which is an anathema to the religious Herbert. The use of enjambement from 'more pleasure/In this world of sugr'd lies' is a subtle ploy by Herbert to draw the reader's

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[29]Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', p.54.

eye into a corrupt world, where the '*s*' alliteration of 'sugred [and] pleasure' combines to offer a sickly duo guaranteed to bring the speaker both spiritual and physical ill health. The word 'In' heralds the new sentence, together with the person who is to be thrust into a world already full of 'lies', but also an individual who will introduce more 'pleasures' into the world. 'In' also pulls the reader into the poem, empathising with the poet. Such a combination of *paronomasia* is exploited by Herbert throughout the poem, as he delves into other aspects of the rose, not immediately obvious, such as its medicinal properties and its thorns.

Jakobson argues that 'in a sequence, where similarity is superimposed on contiguity, two similar phonemic sequences near to each other are prone to assume a *paronomastic* function.'[30] Words similar in sound are drawn together in meaning. This occurs in Herbert's emphasis on the emetic and purgative qualities of the rose in the second half of the poem, he states: 'yet it purgeth' (18). This rhymes with 'urgeth' and the corollary is obvious to understand. Here, the expurgation of sin corresponds to the expulsion of poisons from the physical body. Both correspond with the hidden life of man, and are necessary for the well-being of both the physical and spiritual body. The dialogue continues into the second stanza, with the speaker persisting that: 'First there is no pleasure here:/Colour'd griefs indeed there are.' By using the word 'First', it indicates a person who is counting the difficulties of the clerical or religious life on the fingers of his hand, as well as introducing an argument. We are expecting him to say secondly, but he refrains from this, and the suggestion of a legal argument between two people who are attempting to put their point across is feasible. Nevertheless, the suggestion of a conversation is more germane to this dialogue, and the use of metaphors sprinkled throughout supports the idea.

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[30]Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and poetics,' p.50.

Jakobson suggests that 'romanticism, [which the fatality of the rose heralds], is closely linked with metaphor, whereas realism is generally tied with metonymy.'[31] The rose (metaphor) is symbolic of beauty, yet the 'Colour'd griefs [...] [and] [...] Blushing woes' (6-7) denote that the speaker knows what he is talking about. Explaining the transience of the rose in terms of its fading beauty only appears pertinent to Herbert, who is able to deduce from such transient, transparent beauty the shame wrongdoing (metonymy) will bring him. Herbert simply responds to this enumeration of the salient points by stating: 'Onely take this gentle rose,/And therein my answer lies' (14-15). There is a suggestion that Herbert is not only under pressure, but under excessive stress, yet he remains calm.

In stanza three he makes what we now term a Freudian slip, due to this stress. Such a mistake would in ordinary circumstances be crossed out with a stroke of the pen. Herbert calmly and purposely leaves it in as a narrative device. In reality he is thinking about 'lies and deceits', rather than 'deceits there be,/Such delights I meant to say'(9-10); however politeness demands that he say 'delights', and Herbert hastily corrects himself.The use of 'Onely' is an appeal to the first voice, and is an intimate term designed to make a plea to a known person. This indicates that Herbert knows his interlocutor well, knows their vulnerabilities, as they know his. Nevertheless, the second word 'take' though having a sexual connotation, is used as an exemplar, such as the phrase 'take for example' might be employed. The first line in stanza four 'But I will not much oppose/Unto what you now advise' (12-13) hints at a recapitulating Herbert, but his use of 'much' suggests a tone of gracious giving in, and there is a suggestion of reciprocal action by both parties in the poem, whilst the you' totally excludes the reader from the narrative.

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[31]Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics,' p.60.

Now we are even more aware of there being just two individuals in this poem, and we, the reader, listening in to their conversation. The active use of 'you' together with the previous 'I' supports this idea and suggests that Herbert is responding to the suggestions in a thoughtful, contemplative, yet polite way. Herbert's final line in the first half of the poem (for the poem appears to be presented in two distinct halves), indicates his summation of several items. Initially he discusses the rose's seductive beauty, moving on to such seduction's transitoriness, his polite refusal to be seduced and finally the ability he has to hold such secularity in his hand.The final words 'And therein my answer lies' (16) are a recapitulation of the 'lies' he has spoken about earlier.There is a pun on the word 'lies', whereas in line two he refers to the untruths offered by the world, he now offers his secular life to his first speaker as the world 'lies' resting in his hand.

The agency of an unseen power is present throughout the poem, and corresponds to the concept of Christ's unseen power at work in the world. 'The Rose' comes to represent, as Patrides points out, 'the rose of Sharon, the Church'; however, it is also a reminder of Christ's ascension.[32] Herbert only implies this in the second four stanzas of the poem, as indicative of Christ's ministry some forty days post-resurrection, whereby the lines, 'Sweetly there indeed it lies' (23) are also a metaphor for Christ as he lies in the tomb. Using the ordinary mechanisms of speech, the *faux pas* Herbert leaves unaltered ('deceits [...] delights' line 9) focuses our mind on the truth of the narrative, and echoes the words of Peter:

> But there were false prophets also among the people [...]. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Peter 2.1-2).

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[32]*The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. by C.A. Patrides, p.182.

The narrow, singular minded life style of the *Countrey Parson* appears to parallel the tight rosebud that has not opened up to reveal its true beauty and perfume. It is this factor that the active 'you' in line fourteen now 'advise[s]', moves into: 'Unto what you now advise.' By using a third person, other than the passive reader, Herbert is able to utilise the narrative to make his own life that of all mankind. Correcting himself in the line 'I meant to say' (10), is human foible, and draws in the reader as an eavesdropper on this intimate poem concerning a rose. Herbert's use of the word 'sugred' is apt in the second line. The word 'sugred' is defined in the OED as coming from Middle English and means 'sweetened with sugar', and implies a childish preoccupation with the non-substantial trivia of the world. Yet these banal sugary words are used in counterpoint by Herbert as he bites back with 'lies' which, coupled with 'deceits', evaluates the argument for what Herbert believes to be the true way.

The final four stanzas also present another side of the argument, and also the other side of 'The Rose.' Initially the opening words appeal to the reader: 'What is fairer then a rose?' inquiries Herbert. No-one is expected to disagree with him, yet in the same breath he challenges, I will show you something else about it: 'What is sweeter?Yet it purgeth' (17-18). Nevertheless, there is a strength in the sweetness and Herbert gains strength from this knowledge:

> And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness (Judges14.14).

The language now becomes violent, and medical: 'purgeth', 'purgings', 'contracted', 'biteth', 'scourge', 'health', and 'physick', and the rose is rendered into a medicinal purge. Images of disease and purgation suffuse this half of the poem. Its hidden value is in the violent, explosive expurgation of both physical and psychological

poisons: 'yet it purgeth/Purgings enmitie disclose,/Enmitie forbearance urgeth' (18-20). What use is its beauty now if it is to be crushed and distilled to produce this toxic mixture, which is necessary if life is to be saved?

The true power of the rose now becomes clear, the endurance that the phrase quoted implies, has been rewarded. Tired of defending himself against attack, the speaker now presents his case in defiant and deliberate terms. Being able to crush a rose is easy enough, the problem is the thorns: 'Sweetly there indeed it lies,/But it biteth in the close' (23-4). Using almost the same words as he used earlier, Herbert acknowledges the rose's subtle power: 'If then all that worldings prize/Be contracted to a rose', (21) we almost want him to say 'what next?' What he does use is the conditional 'If', which indicates a summation of all that life has to offer, although the reader knows that is not what Herbert really believes.

The proleptic opening has suggested to the reader Herbert's true point of view. Kinney suggests that the reader is encouraged to think of each stanza, in a poem, as a unique autonomous structure in itself - related to the whole - but not yet revealed how exactly this will occur.[33] 'The Rose' appears to be a good example of this. The reader is made aware of Herbert's feelings about the secular world, and his rejection of it at the beginning of the poem. As the poem proceeds, Herbert unfolds the poem as if it were a rose, petal by petal, to explain his argument.This methodical development of the argument in 'The Rose' is indicated the word 'First, there is no pleasure here' (5). The presentation of the rose to Herbert will only cause him pain.

The power of conversation and the Word draws the reader along with the narrative. The words used are everyday ones, accessible, simple language used to convey complex meaning. The enclosure of the rose in the hand transfers power

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[33]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, p.12.

from the rose into the hands of the speaker, cupping the hands in a circular action, as the poem is cyclical in its form. The act of crushing suggests a symbolic act of physical rejection on the part of the receiver of the rose. By offering back the rose to the speaker Herbert considers the fragility of the rose, which when crushed and decimated of its petals, comes to act as the metonym of those 'sugred lies' of secular vanity he so wishes to repel.

Herbert's way of deliverance is to deliberately put his hand out to receive the rose, closing over it, thorns and petals alike: 'Sweetly there indeed it lies,/But it biteth in the close' (23-4). The thorns that pierce Herbert's hands replicate Christ's bloody hands at the crucifixion; the 'scourge', (26) comes to define the whipping Christ receives prior to his death: 'Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him' (John 19.1). The pun on the word 'scourge' signifies the destruction of the spirit as well as a disease of the physical body. The only way Herbert is able to fight off the temptations the sweetness the rose offers is by adopting the bloody stigmata of Christ's wounds. He demonstrates this by showing the other person the cruel wounds the rose inflicts, and just as Jesus shows his wounds to Thomas, so Herbert also teaches his audience by simple proof. The reader is a spy on the two interlocutors, who are discussing perhaps more than a flower. Here, the rose now takes on the role of arbiter and delivers the verdict on Herbert, for we find that 'The Rose' has now taken on spiritual properties, knowing the poet better than he knows himself. We are in a scenario of Eden and Gethsemene simultaneously, observing the tempted in the act of temptation.

The use of repetition in the phrase: 'They all produce repentance/ And repentance is a purge' (27-8), emphasises the call of both John the Baptist and Christ: 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand' (Matthew 4.17), and assists

to inculcate into the mind of the other person the importance this quality of repentance is to mankind in a type of chant or mantra. The repetitive words 'sentence', 'repentence', 'scourge', 'purge' produce a metrical rising rhythm, indicative of 'The Rose' as a metaphor for Christ's resurrection. The rose has its fair and exquisite qualities displayed and rejected. Herbert mirrors the second four stanzas against the first four, and in doing so, mirrors the vacillation he frequently experiences in life.

1.1.4 The 'Little Academy' explored

The dialogue of bleeding hands, pain and suffering, is paralleled within the Ferrar storybooks. The biographical accounts recall that:

> On a Sunday at 5pm (winter) 6pm (summer), the bell rang, the family assembled in the great parlour, and sang while the meal was being set on the table. At supper one of them read aloud a chapter:"And then another that had supped went to the desk and read a story out of *The Book of Martyrs* [...]. Others, as young or old and such as were too young to go to school yet, sat there, and in great silence, either at their book or otherwise; and others, some to their needle works, others to learn what they were to say the next day."[34]

Such 'Religious Exercises', which consisted of 'the compilation of divine interludes, dialogues, and discourses in the Platonic way', were a practical way of showing the family their own weaknesses and Christian backsliding.[35] Indeed, in a later exercise, we read of *The Little Academy* discussing human foibles as if they are a physical disease (in commemoration of St. Luke's Day, 1632, the patron saint of physicians), The GUARDIAN says,

> The disease, questionlesse, is right and fully discovered; Idleness, Inobedience, and Indiscretion are those bitter fountaines, whence that distemper and Infection flows, whereby our heads are so dazled in the contrivement, our hearts so unriveted in the persecution, and our hands so maimed in the performance of those many good and vertuous exercizes which

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[34]*The Story Books of Little Gidding*, pp.xxx-xxxii. N.B. The names of the 'performers' are given in capital letters in the *Story Books*.
[35]*The Story Books of Little Gidding*, p.xli.

> wee have on foot And the Cure is evident (sayd the CHEIFE by the Admission of Industrie, Humilitie, and Wisdome).[36]

Here, the disease is diagnosed, and the cure found only in

> the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift [...]. But yet must wee not neglect to sett our shoulders to the wheel, and to prick forward theTeemer if wee desire indeed to gett out of the slough wherein wee are fallen.[37]

Ferrar and Herbert remained close friends, albeit through correspondence, for it is known from the Ferrar papers that Susanna Collet Mapletoft (Ferrar's niece) lent Herbert her copy of the *Story Books of Little Gidding*, hence Herbert had direct access to the stories contained within.[38] Ferrar remained a strong influence on Herbert through the community Ferrar founded at Little Gidding, which sowed the seeds of storytelling as a didactic art form. It was this model that Herbert adopted and adapted in many of the poems, either as a direct or a subconscious influence of this narrative culture of the seventeenth century.

1.1.5 Herbert's observation of Time

A second contemporary who contributed to the development of Herbert's reputation was Barnabas Oley. Oley, who entered Clare College in 1617, was a key influencing factor in raising the posthumous public awareness of Herbert.[39] As Amy Charles notes,

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[36]*The Story Books of Little Gidding*, p.158. N.B. The roles played out by the Ferrar family were given capital letters in *The Story-Books*, possibly to emphasise their importance. Ferrar always played 'THE CHEIFE.'

[37]*The Story Books*, p.159. 'Teemer' OED, 'Teem' Old English 'give birth to' or become pregnant' OE; be prolific, abound with, XV1, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, p.484. N.B. Ferrar means to 'give birth' to evil thoughts or not doing God's will.

[38]*The Williams Manuscript of George Herbert's Poems: A Facsimile Reproduction with an introduction by Amy M. Charles* (Delamar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), p.xv.

[39]Amy M. Charles, *A Life*, p.68.

> if had it not been for the constancy and determination of Nicholas Ferrar and Barnabas Oley in seeing Herbert's English works through the press, his reputation as a poet would have never developed.[40]

Oley writes in a Preface to the 1671 edition of *The Temple*,

> His singular Dexterity in sweetening his Art, thou maist see in the garb and Phrase of his writing. Like a wise Master-builder, he has fetch't about a form of Speech, transferred it in a Figure, as if he was all the while learning from another man's mouth or pen, and not teaching any.[41]

In this remark regarding a 'Master-builder', Oley links Herbert's desire to build his poems to the way in which he built his life, learning from others. Oley continues, noting Herbert's practice of mortifying the flesh and his consciousness of Time, saying,

> It would swell this Præface too much, to set down the several excellences of our Author: His conscious experience of Time, which he even measured by the pulse, that native watch God hath set in every one of us. His eminent Temperance, and Frugality (the two best Purveyors for his Liberality and Benificence) his private Fastings, his mortification of the body.[42]

Again, behind the exemplary life we gain the strong sense of personal detail. This observation on Herbert's interest in time implicitly underscores his commitment to narrative, the genre which recalls the past, present, and future, and to which he frequently refers in the poems through the manipulation of the tenses. What is also apparent is the implicit truth of the statement by Oley, Herbert's measurement of his pulse is something that only Herbert would know he did, and something that he would only divulge to a sympathetic friend.

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[40]Amy M. Charles, *A Life*, p.199.
[41]Barnabas Oley, *George Herbert, the poet, A Priest to The Temple: Or the countrey parson, his character and rule of life* - the second edition - London:Printed by T. Roycroft for Benj Tooke, 1671.
[42]Barnabas Oley, *George Herbert, the poet* ... 1671. 'Pulse' OED - origin Latin *pulsus* 'beating', from *pellere* 'to drive, beat'

The account does not appear in Walton's 'Lives', because it is not a 'type scene.' It is the action of an individual who is acutely self-aware, and conscious of time slipping by inexorably. It shows Herbert as a vulnerable human being, despite the hagiography later written about him, and it possibly reveals what he really does do when faced with both solitude and spiritual crisis. The use of the human pulse to record life passing by indicates that Herbert was fully aware of his own fragile and brief time on earth.This is noted in the use that Herbert makes of the movement towards death within a poem such as 'Mortification', which is a poem indicative of his awareness of time passing.

Oley's observation of Herbert's 'experience of Time' allows the reader an insight into the human face of Herbert, and is also apparent in a letter written 'To his Mother, in her sickness' (1622), in which he states,

> As the Earth is but a point in respect of the heavens, so are earthly Troubles compar'd to heavenly Joyes; therefore, if either Age or Sickness lead you to those Joyes? Consider what advantage you have over *Youth* and *Health*, who are now so near those true Comforts [...]. For my self, *dear Mother*, I alwaies fear'd sickness more than death, because sickness hath made me unable to perform those Offices for which I came into the world, and must yet be kept in it.[43]

The above letter shows how as a young man (Herbert was twenty-nine), he was also conscious of his mission 'to perform those Offices for which I came into this world, and must yet be kept in it.' It also shows how important he felt that his mission should not be wasted here on earth, and the importance of trying to keep well to execute them. Nevertheless, the mortification of the spirit was also important, for he states at the end of the letter,

> Lastly, for the Afflictions of the Soul, consider that God intends that to be as a sacred Temple for himself to dwell in, and will not allow any room there for such an in-mate as Grief; or, allow that any sadness shall be his Competitor.[44]

[43]F.E. Hutchinson *Works*, pp. 372-373.
[44]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.374.

In a letter like this, it is possible to see Herbert trying to make sense of time as he reiterates his mother's sickness, and attempts to reconcile this to the fact that as an older person she is 'near those true Comforts' [in heaven], and has some advantage over '*Youth* and *Health.*' He then moves into the narrative of his own purpose in life, pointing out how sickness would make him 'unable to perform those Offices,' confessing that 'I alwaies fear'd sickness.' Finally, he elucidates his philosophy of life in the pronouncement on the mortification of the soul, which he considers is essential to understand God's will, and his desire that man also respects God's use of man as a repository for good, 'that God intends that to be as a *sacred Temple* for himself to dwell in' [casting out grief and sadness].

The letter is a good example of not only Herbert's 'conscious experience of Time', but also his conscious experience of narrative. For what is seen is Herbert narrating his mother's sickness as a general philosophy by which he is able to live. His final line in the letter summates this, 'What can be said more comfortably? Trouble not your selves, God is at hand to deliver us from all, or in all.' It also gives everyone a part to play, and an important part as well. His mother's sickness is not in vain, as neither is his fear, for it permits him to focus his life 'to perform those Offices.'Herbert shows how God uses man as a *'sacred Temple'*, and 'will deliver us from all, or in all.' The final phrase becomes the purpose of this life narrative. God, argues Herbert, has the power to make us well or allow us to die, we have little choice, but we can be aware of God's power, understanding His motives and purposes, which confirms Oley's remark on Herbert's 'conscious experience of Time.'

1.1.6 The Fashion of Hagiography

William Dowling, writing in the preface to Walton's *Lives,* notes that in 1670 Izaak Walton: 'Gave his life of George Herbert to the world' (the book was published

in the same year). Walton is the biographer most associated with Herbert, his work is unashamedly hagiographic, telling of a life of sacrifice and self-denial. Herbert's life becomes exemplary by the way that he deals with the spiritual challenges he faces, and how he is able to overcome them. Modern criticism of the work has suggested that Walton often 'invented' conversations and emotive incidents.[45] Walton, however, was writing a narrative of an ideal life through selection and invention, drawing together the ideas that such early writers as Ferrar and Oley had begun.

Walton's purpose was to develop a narrative of Herbert's life as a model of triumph over conflict and despair. Through his skill as a storyteller, he is able to interlink much of the poetry and Herbert's own comments in *The Countrey Parson*. Walton finds that in the most seemingly poignant circumstances, Herbert was able to draw up a plan of fortitude, overcoming his difficulties by turning them into a salvationary narrative. For instance, Walton recalls how

> his wife observed him to read in pain, and told him so, and that it wasted his spirits, and weakened him; and he confessed that it did, but said, his "life could not be better spent, than in the service of his Master Jesus, who had done and suffered so much for him. But,"said he, "I will not be wilful; for though my spirit be willing, yet I find my flesh is weak; and therefore Mr. Bostock shall be appointed to read prayers for me tomorrow; and I will now be only a hearer of them, till this mortal shall put on immortality."[46]

Here, Walton shows Herbert turning physical pain to hope, a narrative that moves from conflict in the frustrated need to read, to resolution in submitting himself to hearing Mr. Bostock read. Again, this is a narrative of self-subsuming. It also shows how Herbert was prepared to sacrifice himself, becoming only 'a hearer' of prayers rather than delivering them, until 'this mortal shall put on immortality' (1 Corinthians

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[45]Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert, His Religion and Art,* 2nd edn. (Binghampton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), p.13.
[46]Izaak Walton, *Lives*, p.310.

15.54). Herbert hagiography developed as early as 1638, when Robert Codrington demonstrated that he had no doubts about Herbert's worthiness of a saintly title:

> View a true Poet, whose bare lines
> Include more goodnesse than some shrines
> Wee'le canonize him, and what er
> Befalls, style him heavens Chorister[47]

Another admirer distinguished Herbert as '*Prophet*, and *Apostle*,'[48] and a more colourful Englishman in 1640 claimed that '[Herbert's] pious Life and Death have converted me to a full beleefe that there is a *St. George*.'[49]

1.1.7 Confrontational Narrative

In Herbert's next poem of conflict, 'The Holdfast', he presents to the reader a gradual unfolding of a narrative that is both confrontational and submissive, showing the reader a man who is ready to capitulate to God, but not without having his say first.

> I threatned to observe the strict decree
> Of my deare God with all my power & might.
> But I was told by one, it could not be;
> Yet I might trust in God to be my light (1-4).
>
> 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 thing were more ours by being his.
> What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
> Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall (9-14).

In this poem the use of the past tense in the opening two words of the first line:' I threatned to observe the strict decree' offers both a psychological and

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[47]Helen Wilcox, 'Herbert's *Temple* and Seventeeth-century Devotion' in *Images of Belief*, p.156. Robert Codrington, poetic fragment in Bodleian MS Eng. poet. f 27, p.296.
[48]Anonymous commendatory poem, The Temple (10th edition, London,1674), p.274. In H. Wilcox, 'Herbert's *Temple* [...]'in *Images of Belief*, p.156.
[49]Philo-Dicaeus, *The Standard of Equalitie* (London, 1647), dedicatory epistle. A3v. in H.Wilcox, 'Herbert's *Temple* [...]'in *Images of Belief*, p.156.

emotional demand to his readers.[50] The word 'decree' is ambiguous, and it almost appears if the speaker is either challenging God's Word, or the idea of predestination itself. The reader is listening in to a conversation the speaker is having regarding his path to salvation. The use of the word 'threatened' is in itself challenging.The OED defines the word as having its origins in Old English meaning 'oppression' and also 'to make or express a threat to 'someone.' Herbert has chosen the word as a symbol to shock and challenge, making the reader alert and focused, and therefore reluctant to continue with a dialogue. Jurij Lotman suggests that 'in a work of art the course of events comes to a halt when the narrative is broken off.'[51]

By beginning the dialogue with such an emotive statement, Herbert sets the scene for an open contestation about what he believes to be God's requirements for salvation. 'Decree' appears to sum up both sides of the equation. On the one hand a belief in predestination in 'something decided' (by God), but on the other hand a desire to obey God's Word as set down in the monarchical episcopacy. As the narrative gradually unfolds, the presentation of a second person in the form of 'one' infiltrates the scene, Herbert relating what this person has said through indirect speech: 'But I was told by one, it could not be.' And whilst the 'I' is challenging and confrontational in the first line, the past tense of 'I was told by one, it could not be' (3) places doubt and discomfiture in the speaker's mind. Patrick Collinson argues that

> in a climate congenial to 'further reformation', monarchy and episcopacy were regarded not only as the guarantors of order and stability but as instruments of energetic reform.[52]

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[50]OED - decree, Latin *decretum* 'something decided'.
[51]Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. from the Russian by Ronald Vroon (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1977.), p.216.
[52]Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* 4th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.2.

Herbert is questioning the whole Reformation question in this poem. His numerous arguments are flouted at every turn by the mysterious 'one.' Yet at no time does the speaker ask - why? He simply tries to conform to what he thinks God wants.

The polarity of indirect and direct speech throughout the poem offers a credibility to the reader not apparent in a reflective poem. The lack of name of the 'one' is deliberate, we are left uncertain as to the status of this person, yet we know it is someone who is knowledgeable about God, a person who is prepared to share with Herbert such knowledge, and who fuels the imagination of the reader. The effect of using direct speech 'I threatened' allows an air of realism to the poem. The reader is encouraged to supply the missing persona as he reconstructs the dialogue between the 'one' who informs and Herbert who assimilates it all, whilst the suggestibility of: 'Yet I might trust in God to be my light,' (4) makes for a credible conversation by someone anxious to help.

Beginning the second stanza in the present tense suggests to the reader a process by Herbert to actively listen to and mould himself to the second speaker's wishes: 'Then will I trust, said I, in him alone/Nay, ev'n to trust in him, was also his.' Such active movement within the poem proposes a feasible dialogue, between addressee and the addressed. Herbert has deliberately adopted this technique to concentrate on the concept of a personal interaction with God, rather than a formal dogma of religious moralising. The language is intimate and challenging, intimating that he has a personal knowledge of what God requires of him. This, as will be seen, as the poem unfolds, is not the case.

Stanley Fish argues that 'the speaker will agree to anything so long as some sheer responsibility remains with him.'[53] As the dialogue progresses, we find that it

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[53]Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artefacts: the experience of seventeenth-century literature*, p.174.

becomes more abstruse and abstract, and it becomes apparent that this conversation is not between two ordinary individuals. The anxiety to conform is a very human quality, and as Herbert tries each time to 'observe, trust, and confesse', the other 'one' confounds him at each turn. This unequal partnership makes the narratives plausible, yet at the same time it is realised that the 'one' is not human, but rather the spiritual other in Herbert's psyche. Such inequality between the divine and the human parallels Christ's teachings to the disciples, but presented in such a way as to make them credible and believable. Herbert's questions to his addressee are similar to those asked of Jesus:

> When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?' But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19.25-6).

The narrative offers to the reader a picture of a process of conflict as it is happening, which makes the dénouement, when it comes, all the more powerful in its resolution. In 'The Holdfast' the reader is conscious of a suppression of knowledge, indeed, a holding back of the obvious, which the punning title might suggest. As the holdfast holds onto Herbert, so also does Herbert holdfast onto God, whilst the 'one' hold[s]fast onto his homiletic knowledge. The revelation of this wisdom is not told to the speaker who must discover it for himself. Herbert's use of narrative permits a tension in the verse with one person trying to discover what the other is about to say, demonstrated through the offering of a 'strict decree', as well as the 'trouble[d] and amaze[ment]' he experiences on hearing his ideas opposed.

Herbert has his original concept of righteousness thwarted, and his rhetorical echoing in: 'I might trust in God [...] Then will I trust [...] We must confesse [...] Then I confesse' plays on his uncertainty of just exactly what God does require from him. The mood and pace of 'The Holdfast' reflects its confrontational form. The

stichomythia of direct versus indirect speech, without a pause for breath, suggests an electrifying duel of words. There is nothing more frustrating than one person attempting to demystify what the other is trying to say. This dramatic altercation between Herbert and the other speaker in the poem assists in building up the tension to a powerful climax. Interpretative processes are continually at work as the reader attempts to refashion the story into a plot, the poet guiding the reader's intellectual and emotional responses along the way.[54] If we fail to comprehend what the plot is, the process or story is in vain.

1.1.8 The Challenge to God

Part of Herbert's methodology in utilising the narrative as a technique, assists in the foregrounding of this plot. The initial lines which refer to his 'deare God', with the bellicose stance of 'observe the strict decree/Of my deare God with all my power & might' (1-2), suggest the religious conflict and indecision simmering in his heart. The plot or *szujet* is confirmed through these opening lines. The reader knows that the subsequent *altercatio,* with its legalistic cross-questioning, will ultimately arrive at the correct solution. Undecided what line of attack to adopt (although his conscience tells him the 'strict decree' is the right one), Herbert's introduction of the 'one' takes the pressure off the self, allowing time for reflection. Herbert's repeated use of 'I' in the first two stanzas focuses on the importance of the self in the final decisions he makes in this poem. The energy that is evoked in these presentations of the self to God, 'I threatened', 'I was told', 'Yet I might', 'will I trust', 'I confesse', is indicated by the anxiety the poet feels at his inadequacies.

Desirous to establish and confirm his suitability for salvation, he asserts his argument with more and more averment, and the repetitive 'I' persona confirms this. Herbert's narrative with the second person helps him differentiate realism from

[54]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, p.5.

fantasy. The second person, the 'one', acts as a focus for his discussion, which in effect is in reality with himself. By projecting this other person into the dramatic frame, the illusion of reality is established.

Barbara Hardy argues that: 'Humankind cannot bear very much abstraction or discursive reasoning.' She goes on to explain how we 'make and remake the stories of our days all through our life, which we never complete.'[55] It can be argued that Herbert reasserts his position over and over again, only coming to the final conclusion when the 'friend' expresse[s] the resolution to him: 'Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse' (12). This reestablishing of the Christian truth has only come about after the doubting and 'Much troubled' Herbert has it explained and demystified. The narrative works by showing Herbert as an insecure and ineffectual doubter by permitting two other persons in the poem who challenge and guide him onto the right path. This acts as an effective hermeneutic device working to strengthen the poetic argument. And the indirect speech offered in 'The Holdfast' - 'I was told by one' (3) - 'We must confesse' (7) - 'That all things were more ours', (12) serves to strengthen the truths the poet wants to hear. Herbert allows these truths to be said by someone else in order to understand them better.

A story works simply because it can be transferred to the template of our own lives.Telling and listening create a permanent change in the relationship between two people.[56] We interpolate ourselves into that selfsame scenario and imagine what we would do in the same case. Herbert is no exception, hearing that: 'But to have nought is ours, not to confesse/That we have nought, I stood amaz'd at this' (10-11). The 'troubled' feelings he has are a recognition that he has not understood the Protestant

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[55]Barbara Hardy,*Tellers and Listeners: The Narrative Imagination*, p.4.
[56]Barbara Hardy, *Teller and Listeners*, p.153.

concept of grace, a concept that argues for either Grace alone - *sola gratia*; Faith alone - *sola fide*; Christ alone - *solõ Christo*; and Scripture alone - *sola scriptura*.[57] Spurr shows how

> Puritan theology is based upon the divine promise of forgiveness and salvation. Salvation is the free gift of God who arbitrarily chooses some sinners to participate in eternal life [...]. The justified Christian has the righteousness of Christ imputed to them or put down against their account to cancel out their sin.[58]

Yet the recognition of his ability to be one of the elect and to have his burdens and sins borne and expunged by Christ's death has passed the speaker by. The 'one' tells him that: 'We must confesse, that nothing is our own.' (7) Despite his accurate repetition of the key words 'trust and confesse', Herbert fails to repeat the crucial 'nothing', stating that: 'Then I confesse that he my succour is' (8), a small point, yet one that is vital in the overall theological message of the poem. It is this final 'nothing' that is the linchpin of Herbert's understanding; for to have 'nought' gains Herbert both understanding and everlasting life: 'What Adam had, and forfeited for all' (13). The sestet of this poem (which is written in Petrarchan sonnet form), encapsulates the key spiritual truths, which have eluded the poet up until now. He stands 'amaz'd', the divine journey he has undertaken has been productive through the 'nought' of his understanding.

As the narrative moves from past to present tense it takes with it the concept of a continual process of revivification and renewal. The 'friend', we find, does not 'tell' Herbert, but 'expresse[s]' his exegesis to him.[59] Thus the line: 'till I heard a friend expresse' (11) becomes crystal clear to the 'threaten[ing]' Herbert, who finally understands the apparent paradox of having all by owning nothing. St. Paul says: 'all

[57]Gene E. Veith, Jr, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.24.
[58]John Spurr, *English Puritanism*, pp.154-155.
[59]OED - 'Express' - to convey a thought or feeling in words or by gestures and conduct. p.385.

are yours [...] And ye are Christ's; and Christ *is* God's' (1 Corinthians 3.22-23). The effectiveness of a two-way dialogue is demonstrated in the two line dialogue both by gesture and also by expression, and shows the effectiveness of narrative in lyric verse. Herbert, although troubled by the 'one' and his demands, has his fears placated by the 'friend', for both it seems, have his welfare at heart. The final summation of Christian theology is revealed through parable and paradox. Herbert uses narrative in the *personae* of two other fictive characters in the 'one' and the 'friend.' Thus by giving them indirect speech, they become involved in a personal and authoritative way in the whole dramatic tableau. Narrative, we can argue, permits space for the reader to fill in the interstices such *dramatis personae* elicit, this is surely Herbert's idea. Noting how the active mind is one that is beneficial to mankind he states in *The Countrey Parson*:

> God hath placed two great Instruments, Reason in the soul, and a hand in the Body, as ingagements of working: So that even in Paradise man had a calling.[60]

Although Herbert is discussing practical issues vis-a-vis idleness, it is plain to see where his concepts do arise. Making his poetry prophetic and interactive through following the characters depicted, mythical or parabolic, permits Herbert to examine the issue he is contesting from every angle. It allows him to alter viewpoints, interpolating both himself and others into the scene, as he does in 'Christmas' and 'Redemption.'

As 'The Holdfast' moves to its concluding lines, we can see the literal and the figurative moving concurrently within the poem. The change of attitude from the belligerent defiant Herbert, moves to the calm accepting servant of Christ. Now he understands the *sola Scriptura* the actual Word of God through a working out of his

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[60]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.274.

own words. The realisation of what God gave to Adam and Eve, namely the freedom to eat of whatever fruit except one, and to look after Eden, 'to dress it and keep it' (Genesis 2.15-16), finally impinges upon the speaker's understanding of the creation story. Yet both Adam and Eve were fallible through disobedience and the speaker acknowledges this.

Through a shared narrative whereby the poet introduces a 'character' in the form of 'one', he is able to define himself as one who: 'Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall' (14). The change of heart is mirrored in the change of speech rhythms. The harsh sounding syntax of the opening phrases now alters to the alliterative - 'forfeited', 'fail' and 'fall', and 'Christ keepeth', together with the internal rhymes of 'Adam had.' The change of poetic style effects the speaker's change from Adam to Christ, present in one man both the speaker, and in Everyman. Words are used to express the speaker's mind ('threatened', 'strict', 'trust', 'confesse', 'amaz'd' and 'troubled'), and are complemented through the narrative of the other two speakers - the 'one' and the 'friend', who take up these very human expressions and expand on them to Herbert. Both react to Herbert in a nonjudgmental way, reinforcing the underpinning Christianity that Herbert wishes to follow.

It is essential that the correct path is followed if the plot is to come to its satisfactory conclusion. Herbert presents an anti-narrative which permits the voices to assert that the speaker's course of action is a futile exercise, and one which would be unacceptable. Herbert does not allow such action to happen, and functionally the dialogues allow him to be in complete control. The final four words 'cannot fail or fall', support and strengthen the intertextuality of the plot, which has focused as a reminder of mankind's vulnerability and his dependence on God in Christian teaching.

1.1.9 The Narrative Poem as a Drama

'The Holdfast' works by creating a drama, whereby Herbert is the pivotal character. Initially introducing different *personae*, the three central individuals - Herbert, the 'one' and the 'friend', all act as a metaphor for the Trinity; and it is interesting to note that Psalm 73.27, which the poem paraphrases: 'But it is good for me to hold me fast by God, and to put my trust in the Lord God' is sung on Trinity Sunday, day 14 in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Thus on a figurative level, the poem acts out the Trinity in dramatic palimpsest, whereby the original three persons in one God erased, and in its place the three persons Herbert constructs who all speak with one voice. These voices define the requirements of God to a vacillating Herbert, who on realising that Christ's death absolves him from all sin, 'stood amaz'd.' The juxtaposing of the past tense 'What Adam had' with the present tense 'Christ keepeth now' acts as a synecdoche for the Christ who is both present now and has been from all time.

'The Holdfast' is a poem about confidence, as its title suggests, the *Logos* used as text becomes the script that cements the fabric of truth the speaker is searching for. The reader becomes a bystander as he watches the different acts of a play unfold before his eyes, and the conversational dialogue assists him connect other relationships within the narrative.[61] These leave the reader in suspense, for example at line nine: 'not to confesse/That we have nought' whilst emphasising 'confesse' by repetition of the word moves the reader onwards to the realisation of what 'nought' here actually stands for on a figurative level. Not material wealth, but a loss of spiritual integrity, the proper response to the dilemma the poem poses is discovered to be not action, mental or physical, but humility and self-abnegation. Herbert saves the poem from being a tragedy by the intervention of these inclusive

[61]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, p.11.

persons, for he listens to them, and acts accordingly.'[62] The *hubris* the speaker initially feels, when he feels himself invincible, becomes his *nemesis* as he recognises 'to have is ours, not to confesse/That we have nought' (9). It can be argued that through playing out the salvation he so desires, in dramatic fashion, Herbert's acceptance of himself as being nothing without Christ is a 'forfeit' he must pay. Narrative is used as closure, the 'voices' have spoken, now there is time to reflect and finalise the contract between speaker, voice and reader, as all have been involved on an intimate journey of the soul.

1.1.10 Ideal Types

There is little doubt that Herbert exhibited personal conflicts as disclosed in the poems. The observations, written by Izaak Walton some forty years after Herbert's death on his holiness, demands a large suspension of disbelief. Herbert's brother Edward had a more practical view, and recalls George as 'not exempt from passion and choler, being infirmities to which all our race is subject.'[63] Walton's subtext might be read in the light that Herbert's precocious 'piety' and 'virtue' were expressions of a form of melancholia. Yet Herbert's love of music and virtue complement his love of God, and if he was melancholic, he is simply echoing Marsilio Ficino's philosophy which embraced melancholy, seeing it as a desirable state. Ficino says:

> As long as we are representatives of God on earth, we are continually troubled by nostalgia for the celestial fatherland [...] no earthly pleasures can comfort the human mind, since it is eager for better things.[64]

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[62]A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 22nd edn.(London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), p.4.Bradley describes tragedy as a total reversal of fortune coming unawares upon a man who stood in high degree; happy and apparently secure.
[63] *Life*, pp.12-13. cited in Amy Charles *A Life of George Herbert*, p.39. Charles notes that: At the time Edward Herbert wrote his *Life* in the 1640's he was in his sixties, p.25.
[64]*The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, ed. by P.O. Kristeller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p.211.

Indeed, Herbert's opening lines in the chapter from *The Countrey Parson*, called 'The Parson in mirth,' state:

> The Countrey Parson is generally sad, because hee knows nothing but the Crosse of Christ, his minde being defixed on it with those nailes wherewith his Master was.[65]

This shows that Herbert was conscious of his image as a man of God, but more importantly manifests a decision to control his emotions, particularly his conflicts.

It can be argued that Walton wrote Herbert's life as an ideal or an archetype. Michael Mascuch suggests that

> any intelligible description of individualist self-identity [...] will of necessity be an ideal type to which specific instances may fail to conform precisely [...]. In its particularity each personal script, like each personal performance, depends heavily upon actual and imagined audience response, and so will be a unique product of the public situation of its bearer.[66]

While the situations Herbert found himself in, and the ways he dealt with them, were possibly products of Walton's imagination, they are designed to fit the self-image that Herbert developed in his poems, of a man who experienced conflict and spiritual anguish. Most of all, what the poems share with the biographer, is the impulse towards a narrative. His life was imagined through set pieces, such as a perfect childhood, academic success, physical suffering, and profound deathbed speeches. It was a life modeled and narrated on Christ's. The three poems discussed reflect the imagined and actual response of Herbert's reading audience; these echo the poet's own personal conflicts and self-doubts.

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[65]'Sad' in this case comes from an obsolete rendering meaning - steadfast, firm; grave, serious, sorrowful X1V; deplorably disappointing or bad XV11, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed, by T.F. Hoad 3rd edn (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.413. *The Countrey Parson*, p.267. in *'Works.'*

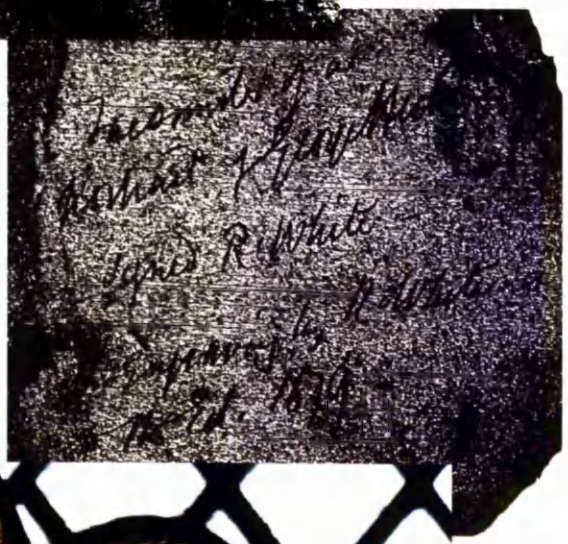
[66]Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Bodmin: Polity Press, 1997), pp.18-20.

Images of George Herbert from 1679 to 2004

1. A pen and ink drawing done in 1679, now in the possession of the Bishop of Salisbury, taken from an engraving of Herbert from the original by R. White.
2. A sculpture in chickgrove stone of Herbert by Jason Battle for Salisbury Cathedral, completed in September 2003.
3. A coloured postcard on sale at Bemerton Church
4. A photograph of the seven foot high statue *in situ* on the Western portal of Salisbury Cathedral taken by the author of the thesis.

Images of George Herbert from 1679 to 2004

1



NEW STATUE OF GEORGE HERBERT

2

The new statue of George Herbert, donated by the Friends of Salisbury Cathedral, was installed on the West Front on 19 September. The statue, carved by sculptor Jason Battle (pictured above), was dedicated at the Friends' Day on 20 September. Created from Chicksgrove stone and weighing approximately a tonne, the statue is seven feet high.

George Herbert was the vicar of St. Andrew's Church in Bemerton, near Salisbury, from 1630 until his death from consumption in 1633. During his time at Bemerton, George Herbert preached and wrote poetry. He frequently walked across the water meadows to attend the Cathedral.

3

4

Chapter Two

'Oh Book! infinite Sweetnesse!'

The Bible as a Model; The Linear Narrative explored

The poems discussed are 'The Pilgrimage', 'The Bag', 'Redemption' and 'Christmas'

2.2.1 A Journey Through Life. The Gospels and Parables

In this chapter, the poems to be discussed are linear and indicate Herbert's movement through the journey of life. Although beset with conflicts, Herbert's poetry is replete with movement as he strives for a resolution to many of these doubts. In the first poem, the initial precipitous opening of 'The Pilgrimage' uncannily echoes the opening line of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, as the speaker states: ' I travell'd on, seeing the hill, where lay/My expectation'(1-2), and shows how Herbert is narrating a story which he breaks off for the reader's benefit. Ralph Pite makes a similar observation in his introduction to the *The Divine Comedy*, saying that

> for such a deliberately structured work, [...] *The Divine Comedy* begins with extraordinary abruptness [...] without the ceremony of an introduction [...]. 'In the midway of this our mortal life.'[1]

As each poem is examined in this chapter, the journey from doubt and conflict to certitude and contentment, though long and often tortuous, is ultimately achieved.

The previous chapter showed how Herbert was drawn to narrative through the way he challenges God and his emphasis on time. Through his friendship with Nicholas Ferrar and the community at Little Gidding, it is possible to see a parallel between the narrative art of Herbert and their activities. Although Herbert had in his

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[1] *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Henry Cary, ed. by Ralph Pite, (London: Everyman, 1994), p.xix

possession a copy of *The Story Books of Little Gidding,* it is not possible to know if he ever actually participated in the performances of the 'Little Academy.'

2.2.2 The Bible as a Model

The Bible was the primary source for Herbert's creative output. This section explores the influence of the gospels, psalms and miracles, together with the whole format of the Anglican experience in Christian worship, upon Herbert's poems. As Alister McGrath suggests,

> The tag *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which could be translated roughly as 'the way you pray determines what you believe', expresses the fact that theology and worship interact with each other.[2]

Herbert's poems express his love of order and ceremony within the liturgy; these aspects of worship, together with the physical features of the church (the church floor, the windows, the church lock and key) impinge upon the narrative as it unfolds within the poems. For, as it will be shown, worship, prayer, together with the sermon, form a crucial message within each narrative poem. As referred to earlier, Oley, in his preface to *The Temple*, remarks that Herbert held in 'high esteem the Word of Life'; and Ferrar also tells us that, 'Next God, he loved that which God hath magnified above all things, that is, his Word.'[3]

The principal areas of narrative in the Bible which provide models for Herbert's narrative are the New Testament, together with the Proverbs and Psalms found in the Old Testament. Shimon Bar-Efrat points out that one third of the Hebrew Bible consists of narratives. It is generally recognised that these are of the highest artistic quality, ranking among the foremost literary treasures of the world.[4] In the New

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[2] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an introduction*, p.188.
[3] *The English Poems, of George Herbert* ed. by C.A. Patrides, p.31.
[4] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 3rd edn. trans. by D. Shefer-Vanson (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), p.9.

Testament, the key areas of narrative that Herbert uses as a template are the parables and miracles of Jesus contained within the gospels. Often the stories within the poems are couched in everyday situations, as in the poems 'Love-joy', 'Redemption', or 'Christmas.' Herbert uses each to tell the story taken from the Bible, and of the individual's response to the given situation. Other poems such as 'Humilitie', 'Sinne (11)' and 'The Quip' explore a supernatural and surreal aspect of the Christian message:

> I saw the Vertues sitting hand in hand
> In sev'rall ranks upon an azure throne ('Humilitie',1-2).

or

> O that I could a sinne once see
> We paint the devil foul, yet he
> Hath some good in him, all agree ('Sinne (11),'1-3).

There is also an impulse for Herbert to create linear poems. Such poems describe a deliberate movement, in poems like 'The Pilgrimage', in which the movement of the believer (the pilgrim) parallels the travelling of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. What is noted is a desire by Herbert to model himself on Jesus as he completes his spiritual journey, and a wish to move from despair towards salvation.

> I travell'd on, seeing the hill, where lay
> My expectation.
> A long and weary way.
> The gloomy cave of Desperation
> I left on th'one, and on the other side
> The rock of Pride.
>
> My hill was further: so I flung away,
> Yet heard a crie
> Just as I went, *None goes that way*
> *And lives*: If that be all, said I,
> After so foul a journey death is fair
> And but a chair (1-6, 31-36).

'The Pilgrimage' is one of a number of narrative poems that take as their *leitmotif* the theme of travel and journeying. As Schell argues, the figure of life as a journey is not peculiar to Christianity. It is one of that stock of universal images, born out of the facts of the human condition that are common to many religions. The poem to be discussed follows this theme, and examines the two parallel strands that delineate Herbert's narrative poetry: the literal strand, what the story is about, and secondly the figurative or subliminal strand. The reader must tease out from these strands the 'message' or abstruse meaning, if there is one, hidden in the poem.

The idea of the journey is at the heart of Biblical narrative, and a number of stories focus on travel and journeys both in the Old and New Testaments. These include the wanderings of the children of Israel across the desert, as noted in Exodus: 'But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea' (Exodus 13.18). The stories of the specific journey of the Magi who travel to visit Jesus at his birth; and the flight into Egypt by the holy family to escape Herod. This latter story is narrated by Matthew who says: 'When he arose, he [Joseph] took the young child and his mother by night, and departed unto Egypt' (Matthew 2.14). In the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus consistently travels from Galilee to Jerusalem performing miracles and teaching, finally entering the city on a colt. Matthew, echoing Zechariah, records the scene thus: 'Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass' (Matthew 21.5); (Zechariah 9.9).

George Herbert as a Christian pilgrim, and his spiritual journey, are the pivotal focus that engages the reader in this particular poem. By exploring the narrative strands that run parallel within Herbert's poem, and the interweaving of these strands or story lines into each other, Herbert presents a simple narrative. Conversely, he

presents a profoundly complex *fabula* (material) comprehended only by 'insiders', that is, individuals who can penetrate the allegory, parable and conceits used to embellish such a story.[5] Herbert, though, is intending his reader to journey with him towards his destination, enduring the trials that he, himself, will have to face. Taking as his template the words of Jesus as recorded in the gospel, 'I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me' (John 14.6), Herbert presents his story with corresponding parallels. For Jesus, we observe, did not say, 'I am the easy way', and Herbert eventually comes to realise this, stating that: 'A long it was and weary way' (3). The poet gradually moves his reader towards a Passion, redolent of Christ's suffering prior to Calvary, and the story, we can now recognise, is Herbert's own personal passion, who, like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemene, suffers the agony of his own impending death:

> And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22.44).

As Jesus 'went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him' (Mark 14.35); so we find that Herbert states, 'I fell, and cry'd Alas my King;/Can both the way and end be tears?' The embracing of death in the final line, 'After so foul a journey death is fair,/And but a chair' mirrors Jesus' reasoning, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt' (Mark 14.36).

The poem Herbert presents to the reader is a parallel of Jesus in the garden, in which he mirrors his own suffering with Jesus. Herbert presents his garden as 'Phansies medow'; whilst the 'good Angell, which a friend had ti'd/Close to my side' (18) emulates the angel who appears to Jesus to comfort him: 'And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him' (Luke 22.43). The implicit

[5] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.2.

narrative thus proffers the suggestion of Herbert, who is aware of his encroaching death and subsequent judgement, and has a vision of this in his mind's eye, as defined by the actual words and syntax: 'A long and weary way./The gloomy cave of desperation' (3-4).[6] Joel warns of God's final judgement with similar words, saying

> for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; [...] A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness (Joel 2.1-2).

The poem's story tells us of a man who is ascending first one hill hoping to find fulfilment in his Jerusalem, 'My expectation', only to realise there is yet another hill to ascend. Luke's gospel parallels this by describing Jesus' final approach to Jerusalem:

> And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! But know they are hid from thine eyes (Luke 19.41).

Throughout the poem, the reader is aware that Herbert is climbing slowly towards Calvary and his death; the impedimenta of 'Desperation, Pride, Phansies, Cares and Passion' are thrown by the wayside, for he has little use of them now. He needs to ascend to God just as he is, with no earthly possessions: 'Here I was robb'd of all my gold' he states, except the intrinsic 'good Angell, which a friend had ti'd/Close to my side' (16-18) who is worth more than all material possessions.

The poem suggests to the reader the element of choice, for whilst death will come to all men, Herbert argues, the way to death can be filled with remorse or hope. By narrating his life as a journey, and a long tortuous one, there is plenty of time for reflection. The visual imagery of hills, meadows, copse and wold, together with brackish waters and stinging bees, proffers a nightmarish pastoral scene. Herbert appears to be deliberately subverting the idyllic scenario for one of crude reality.

[6] 'Gloomy' - dark, obscure xvi; sullen , depressed. *The Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, p.196.

Having found the new Jerusalem of the heavenly city, Herbert now tells us he 'was deceiv'd:/ My hill was further: so I flung away' (29-31). Just when he thinks he is there, the real hill is out of reach. So he is forced to travel through the 'Phansies medow' of the will, where he is tempted to give up all the hardships of the vocational life of the cleric for a more lucrative career.

In the next stanza he finds the 'easy' secular life does not bring everlasting life. 'I was quicken'd', he says, to get through to more 'Cares cops' (10-11):

> And you, being dead in your sins [...] hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all your trespasses (Colossians 2.13).

Now he is 'robb'd of all my gold', yet even that cannot deter him. It is necessary for the speaker to be dead so that he may become alive again in Christ. The life-giving motivation in Christ propels him through 'Cares cops', which he manages to surmount, with the friend who supports him with the 'Angell'.

> But I was quicken'd by my houre.
> So to Cares cops I came, and there got through
> With much ado (10-12).

The literal meaning of the poem is intimately entwined with the allegorical message, and in the unpicking of one from the other the reader is often left with many loose ends. Herbert's technique in writing the narrative poem combines story-telling with lyric devices to assist the reader's unpicking of these ends. For example, in the alliterative lines 'wilde of Passion, which/Some call the wold;/A wasted place' the change of a single letter from 'wilde to wold', can be recognised as a metaphor for the change in Herbert's psyche, as he disciplines his mind towards his ultimate goal, notably physical death, and everlasting life in Christ; the predominate 'w' sounds have a distinctive lyrical onomatopœic sound, reminiscent of soughing or wailing across a bleak landscape.

As the reader moves painstakingly with Herbert along towards his hill, the story unfolds itself as one of thwarted hopes and desires, a promising career cut short in its prime. As Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemene to 'take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt' (Mark 14.36), so Herbert asks God the same question: 'Can both the way and end be tears?' (28). Just as Jesus recognises his vulnerability and humanity, so Herbert gains strength in the fact that simply seeing with his own blinkered vision has not shown him the final words of Jesus - the Life. The cry he hears, '*None goes that way/And lives*', (33-34), reminds him of Jesus' final cry on the cross: 'And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying [...] My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark15.34). Herbert responds with his own final cry: 'If that be all, said I,/After so foul a journey death is fair,/And but a chair' (34-5). The ending to such a powerful and emotive poem is almost throw-away, yet the simplicity of the all-embracing belief in Christ has eluded Herbert right from the start, and we realise that 'a chair' is a metaphor for Christ as the only true 'way' to receive eternal life. In 'The Pilgrimage' Herbert narrates his own personal journey towards death. By travelling through the 'gloomy cave of Desperation', having been 'robb'd of all my gold', and 'struck with many a sting/Of swarming fears', falling and tearful, his victory is echoed in the words of St. Paul who stated:

> Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ [...] And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2.5-6).

2.2.3 Parables and Secrets

The narrative models itself on the story of Jesus' Passion in Gethsemene prior to his death on the cross. It is also a parable, and like the parables of Jesus has a hidden meaning. Many of such parables were often not understood by the disciples,

Jesus having to explain them in simplified terms and in precise detail. When challenged by the disciples as to why he, Jesus, spoke in parables, Jesus answers:

> I speak to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matthew 13.13).

It can be argued that the advantage to parable is in its interpretation, once understood, the story is permanently fixed in the memory. Its main disadvantage is that it may be incorrectly interpreted, or not understood at all. Kermode points out that parables are stories - not to be taken at face value, for some have a measure of darkness, while some are transparent.[7] From these observations it is clear that although Herbert utilised the parabolic model from which to work, his poems, like the parables, are full of 'dark sayings' and 'hard sentences' in equal measure. Kermode also points out that

> the world divides between those who seek to restore something authentic but lost and those who conclude that the nature of parable, and perhaps of narrative in general, is to be "open" - open, that is, to penetration by interpretation.[8]

Herbert's poem is a parable to be used figuratively to demonstrate the difficult journey through life that both he and all mankind have to endure. Herbert cannot proffer an explanation as to how to stop difficulties from arising in life. What he is able to do is to circumvent them. This is the 'Truth' that Jesus originally spoke about, and by travelling through the 'Way', Herbert explains that he is able to acquire the 'Life.' No-one, argues Herbert, has an easy life, yet there is comfort in the most unexpected places. A chair, we can safely assume, is the last thing one would expect to find either halfway up or on the top of a hill. Yet Herbert suggests this metonymy for the ease which Jesus proffers to his believers in their encounter with death. We

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[7] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, pp.15,23,24.

[8] Frank Kermode, 'Secrets and Narrative Sequence' in *On Narrative*, ed. by W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp.79-97, (p.82).

could not survive without rest; our physical makeup suggests we need to sit down frequently. It is this context that suggests the ease of transition from physical death to life eternal that is present in Herbert's poem. Christ says:

> To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne (Revelation 2.21).

As well as parable, the poem represents a micro-narrative which is important in Biblical narrative. This is a small story which embraces a wider picture. The narrative describes a readily tactile and visual scenario that the reader can easily identify with. It relates a believer moving towards God, having overcome many of life's obstacles - 'pride', 'phansie', and 'passion.' J.M.C. Scott suggests, for example, that the story of Jesus walking on the sea (Matthew 14.25) occupies a critical place in the development of the macro-narrative.[9] In these stories, the faith of the witnesses is tested to the utmost limits, and can be recognised as embracing the wider circle of humankind, Jesus explaining: 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' (Matthew 14.31). Herbert narrates his own doubting faith by entering into the Biblical story itself. He is in Gethsemene in 'The Pilgrimage', and he is present in 'Christmas', 'Redemption' and 'The Bag.' Other poems that explore Herbert's doubting faith include 'Sighs and Grones' and 'Deniall.' The narrating self that Herbert introduces in each of these poems assists in reinforcing the fact that Jesus is his *personal* Saviour.

2.2.4 The Eucharistic Narrative

Another poem that subtly defines the disciples' (and Herbert's) faltering faith is 'The Bag'; an explicitly linear narrative poem with an implicit narrative. In line 8 the speaker deliberately informs us that a narrative is about to begin:

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[9] J.M.C. Scott, 'Jesus Walking on the Sea', in *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts,* ed. by G.J. Brooke and J-D. Kaestli (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), p.93.

Hast thou not heard, that my Lord Jesus di'd?
Then let me tell thee a strange storie (7-8).

The poem is a narrative about the power of Christ to move man directly, and redeem him through His death and resurrection as celebrated through the Eucharist. The use of Herbert's bracketed asides convince us that an individual is communicating to someone within listening distance, and demonstrates Herbert's impulse towards dramatic structure. The first five stanzas relate the narrative through a teller-character, whilst in stanza six we hear Christ himself saying:

If ye have anything to send or write,
(I have no bag, but here is room)
Unto my fathers hands and sight
(Beleeve me) it shall safely come (31-34).

The speaker continues:

Or if hearafter any of my friends
Will use me in this kinde, the doore
Shall still be open; what he sends
I will present, and somewhat more,
Not to his hurt. Sighs will convey
Any thing to me. Heark despair, away (40-43).

The final words of Jesus echo the initial despairing words of the speaker ('Away despair'). These words overturn the despair through the Eucharistic promise of forgiveness in the final two lines: 'Sighs will convey/Any thing to me. Heark despair away.'[10] The poem commences as a narrative from lines 7-30, but from lines 31-42 the words of Jesus are used. The narrative, we find, changes from a report on what has happened, to a dramatic reconstruction in the present of the crucifixion scene, with Jesus as a pivotal character supplying a monologue: 'If ye have anything to send or write,/(I have no bag, but here is room)' (31). The echoing of the two words 'despair' and 'away' are crucial for the melding together of the doubting believer and Christ who saves him.

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[10]'Hark' give ear to X11; listen X111. *The Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, p.210.

Herbert presents a Eucharistic narrative which tells of Jesus who 'gave up his life to pay our score' (24), effectively describing the participation of the believer in Jesus' body with the words, 'Look, you may put it very neare my heart' (36). Herbert uses the metaphor of the sinking boat, also about to overturn, that he has earlier introduced with the words:

> Though windes and waves assault my keel
> He doth preserve it: he doth steer
> Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel.
> Storms are the triumph of his art:
> Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart (2-6).

The poem is a focus on the Eucharistic promise of Jesus through his wound, made by the spear at the crucifixion: 'But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water' (John 19.34). Herbert has subtly conflated Jesus' narrative, his birth, death and resurrection, with the miracle of the calming of the storm: 'And there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy' (Luke 8.23). The small enclosure of the boat gives way, as it threatens to sink, to the large wound in Jesus' side that promises security. The poem has also an implicit narrative message in the safety of that wound in Christ's side': ('I have no bag, but here is room) [...] Look, you may put it very near my heart' (32 -36 incl.).

St. Augustine, actually using the word 'despair', states that

> we have two incredible things, the resurrection of our body to eternity, and the world's credence at this incredibility [...]. One of the two incredibilities we already observe to have happened; the world credits what has been incredible. Why should we despair of the one remaining?[11]

In 'The Bag', Herbert transposes the figurative to become the literal, rather than the converse. The metaphor of the water that gushed from Jesus' side, indicating his

[11]St. Augustine, *City of God* , trans. by Henry Bettenson, 3rd edn (London: Penguin, 1984), p.1027. Book XX11, Chapter 5.

death, is now a symbol of his power to calm and control, as he did that day when his disciples declared: 'What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him' (Luke 8.25). The eyes that were shut do not signify death, as neither did the actual crucifixion ('Well may he close his eyes'(6). Jesus said: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death' (John 8.51). Herbert uses binary opposites insofar as the water from Christ's side cleanses and saves, whilst the water in the boat threatens to destroy everything. Now the actual body of Christ becomes the physical protection, as Christ says: 'Look you may put it very near my heart'(36). McGrath points out how, in Luther's view,

> There is no change of both bread and the body of Christ at one and the same time [...] The substance of both bread and the body of Christ are present together.[12]

This viewpoint of consubstantiation appears to uphold Herbert's understanding of the Eucharistic mystery as shown in the poem. (Transubstantiation, on the other hand, argued that while the substance of bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, the actual outward appearance of bread and wine remained unchanged). The poem describes in dramatic narrative the movement towards Christ through a Eucharistic parable. The story also conflates both parable and miracle.

2.2.5 Miracles within the Self

In the next poem to be discussed, 'Redemption', the miracle occurs, as a parable, within the speaker. In this poem, he searches for both explicit justice, whilst gaining implicit redemption at the same time. It demonstrates a linear narrative towards salvation:

Having been a tenant to a rich Lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit to him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancell th'old.

[12]Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, ppp.524 & 527.

I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks and courts:
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth

Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, & died (1-4, 9-14).

One of the most discussed poems in the collection of *The Temple,* Herbert's choice of title is propitious, in that it encapsulates in one short noun the summation of the whole of the Christian life. The ultimate price paid in theological terms is the death of Christ, who died to redeem mankind of all their sins. In Mark's gospel, it is recorded: 'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10.45). St. Augustine states that

> he was dead in the spirit, of his own will; but doomed, against his will, to die in body; forsaking eternal life, he was condemned also to eternal death, unless he should be set free by grace.[13]

Herbert, in this poem, is 'condemned also to eternal death', nevertheless, he does acquire grace by finally acknowledging his 'Lord' is about to die for him as he says 'Your suit is granted', (that is, your sins are forgiven). Jesus confirms this by saying, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men' (Matthew 12.31).

Within the narrative is a weak, 'not thriving', Herbert who remains so until the final scene when he witnesses his Lord's death, and so is redeemed. The whole of the narrative focuses on the litigious terms exacted by the 'Lord' to his anonymous tenant. This 'Lord', we must surmise, is quite obviously an intimidating person, for the speaker informs us that as he is 'Not thriving, I resolved to be bold'. (2). The tone of the poem resonates to the importance of the 'Lord' and the insignificance of the lowly speaker. Both work in a symbiotic relationship, each avoiding the other until the

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[13]St. Augustine, *City of God*, p.575. Book X1V, Chapter 15.

dénouement of the last two lines, for the 'Lord', we note, cannot be located, despite the speaker's intimate knowledge of his whereabouts. Virginia Mollenkot argues that: 'Herbert's narrator views God as a rich Lord only because in the terms of allegory He is exactly that.'[14]Joseph Summers points out that the poem gives Herbert's allegorical account of the granting of the Covenant of Grace, arguing that the traditional mode and the traditional form make for an untraditional poem. Summer's observations rest on what he terms 'the structural firmness' of the narrative voice, which is held until the final two lines, which proffer a 'metaphorical expansion' which adds drama to the final bare line.[15] Yet in *The City of God*, Augustine points out how:

> The Grace of God could not be commended in a way more likely to evoke a grateful response [...] the only Son of God [...] clothed himself in humanity [...] so that by this love men might come to him.[16]

Herbert has not yet realised how his 'Lord' can be located in the most humiliating circumstances possible, that is, on his way to execution. He wastes his time and energy seeking him in all the secular places where he will never find him notably, 'great resorts', 'cities' and so on. Only through his 'humanity', that is his demise, will the speaker locate him. St Paul states that

> they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us (Acts 17.27).

The first four lines of the sonnet describe, in quite literal terms, an individual who wishes to contact his 'Lord' in order to make a fresh contract for a new lease, smaller than the first, thus cancelling the old one. At this stage of the narrative there is little suggestion of a theological poem; the causative use of 'have', in 'having

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[14]Virginia R. Mollenkot, 'George Herbert's 'Redemption',' cited in *Essentials Articles for the study of George Herbert's Poetry*, pp.ix-552 (p.505).
[15]Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, pp.181-2.
[16]St. Augustine, *City of God*, p.415. Book X, Chapter 19.

been', implies a continuous searching for the elusive 'Lord.' Because of the legalistic tone, the reader must surmise that there will be two points of view, and a dialogue of argument will follow. He is not disappointed, and the material versus the spiritual are placed one against the other in a discourse which takes place in an allegory of timelessness. This concept of 'otherworldliness' does not fit into the normal concept of time, but dwells in what Kermode terms *kairos* - a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end. (This differs from ordinary *chronos* which simply means 'passing time').[17]

The speaker initially intends making an appointment with this 'Lord', but as soon as the following line is read a suspension of disbelief becomes activated, for the poet states: 'In heaven at his manour I him sought:/They told me there, that he was lately gone' (5-6). Herbert, of course, is seeking a spiritual mentor with whom to have his dealings. Word order is transposed, which gives the poem an incantatory mysticism. 'They' are related to 'others' gone before, individuals who know about the 'Lord' and his location. This is where the plot begins to intrude into the narrative, the link between the old and the new; and what is described is a speaker who is attempting to synthesise the two narrative voices.[18] This plunges the reader into the realms of allegory, and the time, or *kairos*, now becomes limitless; eternity and the present collapse into the single line on the page. The search for his 'Lord' that prompts and motivates Herbert is that same search of any individual seeking Christianity. The particular now becomes the general.

The eternity of limitless time that the seeker has at his disposal is severely curtailed by his simple humanity. God, on the other hand, in there for all eternity. Herbert must try to convey such a polarisation of binary opposites through narratives.

[17]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 47.
[18]Frank Kermode, *An Appetite for Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.220.

The first of the intrusive 'voice[s]' come into the frame at a specific juncture, conveniently telling Herbert: 'That he was lately gone' (6): and not only is he 'gone', but they actually know where he has gone and also why. Kermode argues that 'poetic fiction needs to reconcile such opposites, and must make sense of discords, ethical, political, legal and so forth.'[19]

In the Bible, we find that the disciples continually ask Jesus why and how he performs miracles: 'Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could we not cast him [a devil] out?' Jesus' answer is less than satisfactory, and not what they want to hear, as he states: 'Because of your unbelief' (Matthew 17.19-20). So Herbert asks where his Lord may be found, and we find that Herbert only asks once, the rest of the time he must seek his Lord himself. Jesus urged: 'seek, and ye shall find [...] and he that seeketh findeth' (Luke 11.9-10). Herbert's new information, to seek out his Lord in heaven, moves into allegory, and is the first step towards the poet's attempt to find a satisfactory ending to his search. Both the literal and figurative meld into the surreal, and Herbert literally seeks his Lord in a place where Christ may be found, in church. But Jesus argues that the people are his 'church' saying that: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18.20).

At this stage, we are reconciled to the concept that the seeker is on a spiritual quest that cannot be found in a formal place of worship. The searching for Christ must take place in all the venues which the poet frequents, and a synopsis of his (the poet's) life is offered to the reader, cities, theatres, gardens, parks and courts, in an attempt to win the reader's sympathy. It is a literary device whereby the reader *in medias res* becomes part of the poetic narrative.

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[19]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p.75.

This 'lease' Herbert wishes to cancel is no literal monetary transaction, indeed it cannot be cancelled through ordinary channels; the narrative suggests a reconciling of the discords Herbert finds in his search. The binary opposites of the 'new small-rented lease' (4) which Herbert offers pale into insignificance when placed alongside the Lord's 'land which he had dearly bought', (7) implying as it does the ultimate price his Lord has paid, notably with his life. The materialistic versus the spiritual runs parallel throughout this poem, as in 'Christmas', where man's sublime position against that of an ordinary beast presents a counter-argument to the principal message contained in the poem. The message, of a theistic pursuit, in metaphorical terms, is easy to recognise; what is more complex is the interweaving of several narrative voices, and the disentangling of the same.

As Herbert's original title for this poem was 'The Passion,' we can assume that Christ's resurrection was in his mind, as the key focus in Christian theology is the resurrection of Jesus. Confused and panicky in his search for the man who can resolve his problems, he searches for him in all the wrong places. The metaphors of greatness, power, richness and expense are keynotes in the poem. The literal sense of 'dearly' implies a monetary costliness, yet the word 'deare' is used twice in 'Love (III)', as both a term of endearment and as the price Love paid for man, and it has the same use here. When Jesus purchases items, they are individuals' lives, purchased by his death on the cross at Calvary. This fact has not occurred as yet to the speaker, who on wandering around places of wealth and secular activity, simply by chance hears the 'ragged noise and mirth' (12).

As referred to earlier, Herbert's nouns in the poem describe his own personal life, for we know he lived in London and Cambridge, where the court, parks and gardens would be an attraction and a temptation. His stumbling on the crucifixion

scene reminds the reader of the Nativity poem where the poet puts up at the same inn as Jesus. The subliminal message of finding salvation in the most unexpected places cannot be avoided, as well as the implicit meaning of 'finding' Christ in himself. The difficulty of 'knower' and 'sayer' is also highlighted in a poem such as 'Redemption.' This is not realised until the final lines of the poem, where the sayer has failed in his lack of assistance at the end of his Lord's life. There is an emotional gap that is left void in 'Redemption', for although the debt is paid, the suit is granted, the speaker is left with the unresolved feeling of guilt as the Lord utters his dying words '*Your suit is granted*, said, & died.' This is reminiscent of Peter's denial of Jesus: 'And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man' (Matthew 26.72). The speaker knows, and assumes his Lord knows, that he should have been there at the end. The conflict vacillates between duty: ('In heaven at his manour I him sought' (5)) and desire: ('and knowing his great birth,/Sought him accordingly in great resorts') (11). The speaker *wants* to find his Lord in all the great and important places. What he does find is self-humiliation in the understanding of his own foibles, and of course the solipsistic knowledge of his own selfishness as he finds him at the mercy of 'theeves and murderers.'

'Redemption' is designed to conclude as a resolved ending. As soon as the speaker finds his Lord, there should be a happy and satisfied finality to the searching and eventual finding. Because of the irrevocability of death, the suit can only be granted with the demise of the Lord, and it is this that makes the ending uncomfortable, even though it is paradoxically resolved through death. Herbert employs narrative to create his own parable; he thus creates two deaths, one literal and one allegorical. The two stories in 'Redemption' run parallel to each other: the 'rich Lord' who dies at the hands 'Of theeves and murderers,' and is finished; the

other story is of Christ who also dies at the hands of thieves and murderers, yet is resurrected. The death of the Lord is final, yet it opens up a life of immortality, as most readers can, by now, recognise the parallels drawn with Christ, together with the crucifixion scene in the third verse: 'At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth/Of theeves and murderers':

> Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left (Matthew 27.38).

Through retelling the story of the crucifixion, Herbert melds both an accessible story, the tale of the elusive 'rich Lord,' with an equally accessible story of Christian redemption. The story cannot be read as autobiographical in the same way as 'Affliction (1)', or 'The Pearl', for example, for we know that Herbert did not hold any tenancy to any rich Lord in his own lifetime. Thus it is for this reason that Herbert in order to control the narrative, must create his own parable, with himself as the central character. It is known that Herbert wrestled with his conscience, both in his decision to become a priest, and in his personal life, describing his poetry as 'a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my Soul.'[20]

The narrative has a tight economic structure. The single-syllable words move the poem onwards like a crowd moving in a surge towards its destination, 'sought, told, there, gone, some, land'; whilst the lyrical poetic alliteration of 'lately, land, long and length' moves like a sound wave to assist the narrative move into the realms of abstraction and metaphor. For the 'land' that both the reader and Herbert are plunged into is no earthly land, just as the 'Lord' is no earthly Lord. The crossing of the boundary between heaven and earth makes demands upon the reader. He has to believe that he has a choice, what Kermode describes as a 'time when the soul

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[20]Izaak Walton, *Lives*, p.315.

distends itself to include past and future.'[21] If the reader is unable to accommodate this conflation of past, present and future in one line of the poem, the narrative falls apart. The meaning and sense of the whole poem become futile; not sufficient to recognise its surreality, it must somehow transmit its message.

The realisation of the speaker that he cannot 'make a suit unto him /and cancell th'old', is only recognised by him in the final two lines. The binary opposite of 'ragged' to 'rich Lord' is further compounded by the intrusion of the thief on the cross who believed in Christ, and who begs forgiveness, and the murderer Barabbas who is released into the crowd, and of whom no further comment is made:

> And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom [...]. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison (Luke 23. 42 & 25).

The 'theeves and murderers', that comprise the company that Jesus keeps, and where the speaker eventually finds his Lord, is a *peripeteia,* that is not totally unexpected.[22] Now the speaker finds his change of 'good' fortune in the death of his Lord, for Christ died to save sinners. This is a factor not completely understood at first by the speaker in the poem, for he complains he is 'Not thriving', (2) that is, not getting rich or moving up the social scale. At the end of the poem, there is his Lord in the lowest echelons of society.

The spiritual journey that this narrative poem offers is a personal one enacted by Herbert. By examining intimate strands of his life - his love of secular pleasures, cities, and all that goes with the city, including the political life of court, Herbert examines these in the light of Jesus' career and life. The poverty of such materialism is scrutinised through the *catachresis* of 'ragged noise and mirth.' The humiliation of

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[21]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, pp.84-5.
[22]Peripeteia - Gk sudden change, In drama, usually the sudden change of fortune from prosperity to ruin; but it can be the other way about. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p.500.

a public execution vis-a-vis its entertaining value, is where Herbert finally finds his Lord. The curt, crisp, seven words of the final line: '*Your suit is granted*, said, & died', are redolent of Christ's last words on the cross: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27.46), and provide a fitting conclusion to Herbert's restless, endless seeking.

2.2.6 'Insiders' and 'Outsiders'

We need to make sense of endings whether in life or on the page, and we do this by humanising time, Kermode argues: the simple ticking of a clock must have the humanised ending of 'tock' for it to make sense to us.[23] This, of course, may seem somewhat irreverent but the poet must include a satisfactory ending. Herbert does this here by making the final lines include the eye rhymes of 'espied' and 'died.' The ending of 'Redemption' is final, yet the Christian message is only just beginning. The proleptic commencement to the poem prefigures what the reader expects, and Herbert does not disappoint. He provides the 'tock', where just a continuous 'tick' would simply be heard. Four key narratives run through the poem conterminiously: the first three include the speaker, the 'they' who inform the speaker, the voice of the executed man and the subliminal narrative. At no time does Herbert tell the reader that it is Jesus who is both the 'Lord' and the executed man. The signifier of 'great[ness]' and insignificance is arbitrary, and left for the readers to judge for themselves. The two words become metaphors for the choice in life between material wealth and spiritual growth. Of the former, *The Countrey Parson*, musing on material values, comments that

> the Countrey Parson is very circumspect in avoiding all coveteousnesse, neither being greedy to get, nor niggardly to keep, nor troubled to lose any worldly wealth; [...] even to a wondering, that the world should so much value wealth, which in the day of wrath hath not one dramme of comfort for us.[24]

[23]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p.45.
[24]F.E. Hutchinson, '*Works*', p.227.

. Kermode also suggests that there are individuals that he terms 'insiders' and 'outsiders. Insiders, argues Kermode, have immediate access to the complex mystical texts of the Bible; outsiders are randomly scattered across space and time, and excluded from the elect who doubt and distrust their unauthorised divinations.[25] He also argues that

> one cannot make sense of the part unless it is placed in relation to the whole. *But* we must also understand the *whole* before we can make sense of a part. All narratives are capable of darkness; the oracular is always there or thereabouts.[26]

It is the 'oracular' or implicit narrative that Herbert explores in his poetry. The explicit conflates with the implicit to reveal a Christian story that is idiomatic, yet recognisable to the reader only when he has understood the Biblical narrative.

In the next poem, 'Christmas', the 'insiders', of whom Herbert is one, acknowledge that Christ can be found anywhere. The drama unfolds as Herbert retells the Christmas story, but places himself at the hub of the action, exactly where mankind is supposed to be. It is a poem that links in the spiritual and literal journey that Herbert proposes; twelve key lines are quoted:

All after pleasures as I rid one day,
My horse and I, both tir'd, bodie and minde,
With full crie of affections, quite astray;
I took up at the next inne I could finde.
There when I came, whom found I but my deare,
My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief
Of pleasures brought me to him, readie there
To be all passengers most sweet relief?

Furnish & deck my soul, that thou mayest have
A better lodging then a rack, or grave

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be? (1-8, 13-14,15)

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[25]Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, pp.ix. x. xi. 2-3.
[26]Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, pp. 14-15.

The poem's opening jocular tone presents an individual aglow after a hard day's riding, one of his 'pleasures', sufficient to tire out both his horse and himself. This equating of the animal with man, at the beginning of the poem, is crucial, as the differentiation of the two is at the end. The closeness of Herbert to his horse is an emotional bond, which is shown in the poet's speaking to his animal, suggesting they both put up at the next available hostelry: 'With full cry of affections, quite astray;/I took up at the next inne I could finde' (3-4). The parallel connections with the Incarnation are not difficult to observe, and the co-existence of God, mankind and animals is conterminous in the Biblical account of Jesus' birth, as well as in Herbert's poem, the use of a humble stable, and the metonymy of the manger, a feeding trough in which to lay Christ, are conceits which are acceptable at face value, yet extend to encompass the broader picture as Herbert's poem unfolds. At the Eucharist, Jesus will also offer himself to be consumed, saying 'Take, eat: this is my body [...] this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many' (Mark14.22&24). Herbert himself states in *The Countrey Parson*:

> therefore doe thou fulfill what thou didst appoint; for thou art not only the feast, but the way to it.[27]

The first stanza is written in Shakespearean sonnet form, which for a narrative poem is in itself a departure from the norm. Therefore, Herbert is instructing the reader to expect something extraordinary in this poem, and as the birth of Jesus heralded a new chapter in mankind's history, so the poem signifies a change in the poet's life. In the first two quatrains, Herbert re-tells the story of Jesus' birth from first hand experience, for by sheer good fortune he has put up at the same inn where Jesus has just been born. At this point the narrative transforms into allegory, and a

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[27]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, Chap.XX11 'The Parson in Sacraments', pp.257-8.

pensive Herbert is conscience struck by his wretched unworthiness to share the same stable with Christ:

> There when I came, whom found I but my deare,
> My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief
> Of pleasures brought me to him (5-7).

Thus we are presented with a man whose contact with the carnal, animal pleasures of the world do not differentiate him from his horse; yet here at this inn, he is brought face to face with Jesus. In such an unexpected setting, Herbert has been made to confront his own frailty and the importance of his soul to Christ. The vulnerability of his own human weakness is mirrored in the weakness of the new birth, and the new beginning for Herbert commences at this powerful recognition. His old life can be discarded, and the new illumination allowed to enter into his mind: 'O Thou, whose glorious, yet contracted light,/Wrapt in nights mantle, stole into a manger' (9-10) he proclaims; 'contracted', because such overwhelming light of necessity must be compressed into the smallness of Herbert's human soul.

The efficacy of the Nativity story is in its simple polarisation - human beings and animals; poverty and riches; purity and taintedness; ululation and singing. All encompass a fragile creation, both of man and animals, a creation that needs a solid foundation. Herbert interpolates himself into the Nativity scene, acknowledging 'my dark soul' which he describes as 'brutish.' In the same breath he addresses the infant Jesus in adult language saying: 'To man of all beasts be thou not a stranger' (11-12). By humbling and associating himself with such basic nature, Herbert conflates simplicity and complexity and projects his own idiomatic signature into the scene: 'so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ'

(II Corinthians11.3). In the Biblical accounts, although shepherds and wise men praise and worship Jesus, none asks for acceptance or forgiveness; this is Herbert's own personal response to the scene. Matthew's account states that:

> there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem [...] And when they were come into the house, [they] fell down and worshipped him (Matthew 2.1-11)

whilst Luke adds: 'And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God' (Luke 2.13). Herbert seizes this opportunity to speak to Christ in a personal way. The poem is an attempt by Herbert to differentiate his soul from that of his beast, pleading with Jesus to accept him: 'Furnish & deck my soul' (13), he states, whilst at the same time offering his soul to Christ to have: 'A better lodging, then a rack, or grave' (14). The final couplet distinguishes Herbert's death from that of his beast, which simply eats from his rack and is thrown into a grave when dead.

The poem is a solipsistic examination of his soul and his fortuitous meeting with Christ; the story is reminiscent of St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus:

> And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me? [...] And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened he saw no man (Acts 9.3-8).

The Biblical story continues with Saul receiving back his sight as he is told of the work Jesus has for him to complete, his name henceforth being changed to Paul.

2.2.7 Eventual Understanding

Thus for Herbert, the true recognition of the work Christ has for him to fulfil is adumbrated in the chance meeting he has with the Christ child in the stable. Like Paul, who has the scales lifted from his eyes when he 'sees' Jesus at last, so Herbert is offered a vision of a more encompassing life in Christ than he has previously been

aware. There is a change in the man and in his poetical style, for whilst in the first quatrain, he is totally wrapped up in the secular pleasures of the world that are indicated by the mostly single-syllable words. The commencement of the poem with the word 'All' implies the self-centred approach to life both he and his beast have. By the third quatrain, the transformation is complete. Herbert becomes overtly poetical, further separating him from his animal; beginning the stanza with 'O Thou' to his Lord, the use of 'O' indicates Herbert's idyllic world of Christ's love, and draws him into the realms of poesy, and a wish to praise God, that is mankind's sole prerogative. The change in Herbert parallels the change in Christ after his resurrection, whereby even his close friends did not recognise him. John recounts how Mary Magdalene

> turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus [...] She, supposing him to be the gardener saith unto him [...] tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away (John 20.14-5).

The metaphorical journey that a changed Herbert will now take, begins with the pæan of praise at line15. His song, that he sings with the shepherds, his soul, pasture and sunne (Son), all contribute to thaw the hard coldness of an ungodly, unchristian world:

> A willing shiner, that shine as gladly
> As frost-nipt sunnes look sadly [...]
> His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine,
> Till ev'n his beams sing, and my musick shine
> (29-30 & 33-34).

The final two lines make reference to Herbert's musical talents, a gift from God, and take on the metaphor of Jesus' death on the beams of the cross, that stretch out to become sun-beams. Nothing will silence Herbert now, both the literal and the figurative '[en]twine' with each other, he is suffused with the [Son] sun. Just as Jesus'

'beams' on the cross support him in his death, so those same beams support Herbert, by illuminating and embracing him in the hour of his death, for Herbert's narrative poems are truly an intimate encounter with God.

In a chapter called 'New Ways with Bible Stories', Kermode argues that:

> There were comparable changes in attitudes towards the Christian Bible. The Gospel narratives were restored to attention *as* narratives [...] Hans Frei showed how in the eighteenth century interest in the factuality of the narratives came to supplant consideration of them as stories; facts, not writing, were the object of scholarly consideration [...] new interest in the way narratives work [...] in the mystery of narrative [...] there were secrets in the text, and that they could be brought to light only by devoted research.[28]

Examined in this context, Herbert's narrative poems also contain hidden meanings. Many contain significant 'gaps', and as Kermode observes, 'all stories have gaps, total explanation would be intolerable; and it is not a new discovery that they can be subtly used.'[29] As Herbert says in 'Sinne (1)':

> Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in,
> Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,
>
> Yet all these fences and their whole aray
> One cunning bosome-sinne blows quite away (7-8 &13-14).

In each poem discussed, Herbert works through his conflicts to arrive at a resolution he can justify. This permits him to say that the narrative poems do contain 'millions of surprises'; for the miracles which occur, as each poem unfolds, are truly within his own self.

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[28]Frank Kermode, *Poetry, Narrative, History*, pp.30-31.
[29]Frank Kermode, *Poetry, Narrative, History*, p.34.

1. Bemerton Chapel and The Bishop's House in 2004

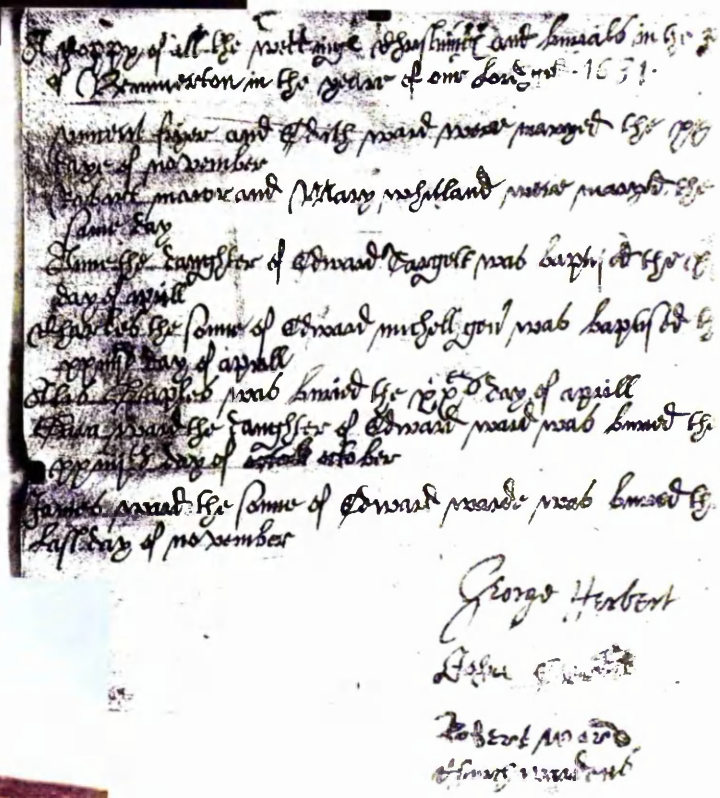
now occupied by the Bishop of Salisbury. It was here that Herbert played his viol in a consort with fellow musicians as related by Walton.

2. The Transcripts of Bemerton Chapel, Herbert's distinctive signature is clearly seen

Bemerton Chapel,
1629 - 1637

Bishop's Transcripts

Bishop's House



A copy of all the christenings weddings burials and burials in the
of Bemmerton in the year of our Lord 1631.

Samuel Fisher and Edith ward were married the
[illegible] day of november
Robert Mayor and Mary Highland were married the
same day
Anne the daughter of Edward Taylor was baptised the
day of aprill
Elizabeth the sonne of Edward mitchell gent was baptised the
[illegible] day of aprill
Elizabeth [illegible] was buried the [illegible] day of aprill
Edith Ward the daughter of Edward ward was buried the
[illegible] day of [illegible] october
James ward the sonne of Edward ward was buried the
last day of november

George Herbert
[illegible]
Robert [illegible]
[illegible]

Chapter Three

'Pulpits and Sundayes, sorrow dogging sin.'

Linear Movement around the World

The poems discussed are 'The Church Militant', 'The Windows', 'In Pacem Britannicum', and 'In Solarium.'

3.3.1 The Christian Narrative through the Psalms and Sermon

In the previous chapter I discussed Herbert's linear journey through life, and how he resolved his conflicts by undertaking such a challenging psychological journey. Now, in this chapter, I explore his views on expansion towards a global perspective in 'The Church Militant.' Two of Herbert's early Latin poems are examined, as they also emphasise his commitment to an holistic concept of Christian unity. The sermon is the focus of the poem 'The Windows', whilst the Psalms also herald a pattern for Herbert's poetry with their strong narrativising principle. Mrs. Herbert was a deeply religious woman who took her large family to church each Sunday where they would hear the psalms sung.

3.3.2 Linear Movement around the World

An important area of Biblical narrative that Herbert explores is the Old Testament, which includes the psalms and wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes). In the poem 'The Church Militant', Herbert explores the Old Testament and traces the history of the Jewish people as they embrace the coming of Jesus as Messiah: 'Where th'Ark did rest, there Abraham began/To bring the other Ark from Canaan' (19-20). The poem moves gradually from East to West, where: 'Sinne did set out of Eastern Babylon,' (103) until finally we see that: 'Onely the West and Rome

do keep them free/From this contagious infidelitie' (157). Individual poems that explore the Old Testament include 'Joseph's coat' and 'Aaron.'

'The Church Militant' has interesting connections with the three previous poems from 'The Church' which have been discussed in the previous chapter, in which time and eternity become fused in the endless consciousness of God. Yet the poem, as well as proposing the development of the Christian Church in a linear as well as a cyclical form, also suggests a history of the future in the penultimate lines: 'To time and place, where judgement shall appeare.' This represents the unknown and untested period of God's judgement, a period where belief in the second coming is necessary, Jesus saying to Thomas: 'blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed' (John 20.29). F.E. Hutchinson argues that the theme in 'The Church Militant' is logically developed, and his description is simple and straightforward:

> The Christian Church followed the course of the sun westward. Beginning in the East, it travelled to Egypt, Greece, Rome, Germany [and] Britain. But Sin followed in its wake [...] the Church and Sin shall at last circle the globe and arrive where they started, and there shall be judged.[1]

Nevertheless, the poem is more subtle than this account of it proposes. Lee Ann Johnson points out how 'The Church Militant' 'reflects a divergence in style and treatment from preceding poems', and she argues that 'the poem depicts the Church dogged by 'Sinne', struggling against internal corruption as well as warring against heathenism.' She goes on,

> Nowhere [...] does the church reflect a confident spirit aiding *others* to attain perfection; rather 'The Church Militant' concludes with the fate of the Christian life in doubt.[2]

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[1] F.E. Hutchinson, *Works,* p.543.

[2] Lee Ann Johnson, 'The Relationship of 'The Church Militant' to *The Temple*', *Studies in Philology*, 68 (1971), 200-206 (p.202).

Yet the strength of the poem lies in its cyclical form, a continuum that allows for some glimmer of light from that same sun or Son. The discreet change of one letter from 'Sinne' to 'Sonne' is the catalyst that gives 'The Church Militant' a link with such Christian hope. Although the poem paints a gloomy picture of Religion as it travels through the centuries, the church holds a fatal attraction for 'Sinne' as it draws both to their final apocalypse, for it is only then that both can be judged: 'The Church shall come, & Sinne the Church shall smother: [...] Judgment may meet them both & search them round' (266-9 incl.). The poem is fiercely patriotic, placing England as the hub of Christian understanding: 'But England in the higher victorie:/Giving the Church a crown to keep her state,/And not go less than she had done of late' (90-92).

3.3.3 Patriotism and Englishness

Such nationalistic pride has parallels with one of Herbert's Latin poems, 'In Pacem Britannicum.'[3] The whole poem is quoted.

Anglia cur solum fuso sine sanguine sicca est,
Cum natet in tantis cetera terra malis?
Sit licet in pelago semper, sine fluctabus illa est,
Cum qui plus terrae, plus habuere maris.

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[3] 'On the British Peace'

Why is England dry
(Not having poured her blood out),
While all the earth wades
Through tides of evil?
Though she is always in the sea,
She has no waves; at the same time,
They who have more land more sea possess.
The sea is the cause of shipwreck to them;
To England, a source of strength -
And water, which wrecks wall, is itself a wall.
For sure Religion flowers here, the Queen of Peace,
And you, Christ, move upon our waters.

Mark McCloskey & Paul R. Murphy, *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert: A Bilingual Edition* (Athens; Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1965), p.87.

Naufragij causa est alijs mare, roboris Anglo,
Et quae corrumpit moenia, murus aqua est.
Nempe hic Religio floret, regina quietis,
Tuque super nostras, Christe, moueris aquas.

As Richard Whalen points out 'as well as being narratives, the poems also become visual symbols for the abstract concepts that Herbert presents to the reader.'[4] The recognition that England is pivotal to the coalescence of the Christian religion is of paramount importance in 'The Church Militant.' So it is surprising to find that the poem has in effect two parallel narratives, and recognises that:

Much about one and the same time and place,
Both where and when the Church began her race,
Sinne did set out of Eastern *Babylon* (101-103).

The isolationism that the Latin poem applauds: ('The sea is a cause of shipwreck to them;/To England a source of strength [...] For sure Religion flowers here') cannot be acknowledged in the 'The Church Militant', the doggedness of 'Sinne' simply will not permit it however hard the speaker tries. Discussing patriotism in the seventeenth-century, Stephen Prickett argues that

> our concept of "foreigness", of the presence of other societies very different from our own, is as much an essential part of cultural identity as it was for Homer. In the case of England - and [...] the rest of the English-speaking world - we can say that [...] from the early sixteenth century to the early twentieth centuries [...]. England's social self-consciousness was in relation to a dominant Other.[5]

The movement of the Church as an active living process parallels Jesus' teaching to his followers: 'And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church' (Matthew 16.18). Jesus' call to Peter to become a stable rock, as indeed the name Peter implies. The rock becomes a living process of vitality,

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[4] Richard Whalen, 'George Herbert's Sacramental Puritanism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 1273-1307 (pp. 1274-5).
[5] Stephen Prickett, *Origins of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.72.

essential to life, just as 'The Church Militant' alters from being an immobile temple erected to God, a place which draws people on pilgrimage to, now travels to the people: 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' states Jesus (Matthew 18.20). This concept of mobility and flexibility is recorded by the speaker as the movement of the new church, moving from East to West. There is a parallel in John Donne's poem 'Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward', in which the paradox of the endless (or eternity) setting of the Sunne (Son) eclipses the finality of death which:

> Sinne had eternally benighted all.
> Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
> That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
> Who sees God's face, that is selfe life, must dye;
> What a death were it then to see God dye? (14-18).[6]

Yet this crisis of conscience, which had to reconcile two inconsistent world views, one secular, the other sacred was ever present. Basil Willey shows that there were

> two principal orders [...] one, represented by Christianity, which men could not but reverence, and the other, represented by science, which they could not but accept.[7]

Earlier the church was presented as an altar, a porch, a stained glass window, a floor, monuments, music, locks and keys, and it has to be acknowledged that all these impedimenta means little without the people. The church has been shown as a series of static images, a collage of bricks and mortar. It now becomes the people, active, questioning, full of life and events. Nevertheless, it is only when people become active in the scenario of 'The Church Militant' that problems are thrown up. The allegorical figures of Religion, the pilgrim 'Knocking at all doores' together with 'Sinne' who trails after the Church, appear as symbols of a need and desire that

[6] *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. by C.A. Patrides, p.454.
[7] Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background,* 3rd edn. (London: Boston: Ark, 1986), p.105.

remain unsatisfied even by spiritual standards. These three figures parody the Trinity as a grotesque shadow, echoing the cry that the church must remain perpetually dissatisfied as it ever constantly moves to a new culture where it is unknown. The realisation that this will always be the case makes the poem disturbing and challenging.

The poem is a study in realism. Herbert's main thrust is that this is how it really is. There is a church, ready and willing to take God's message to a godless world, yet we cannot prevent sin from following on automatically, it is a corollary of the Fall. Stanley Stewart argues that

> 'The Church Militant' is a poem concerned, not with the struggle of the soul in time, but with the movement of the Church throughout all time [it] follows 'The Church' in time, though not in space [...] thus it differs from the earlier transition in kind. [8]

Stewart goes on to examine the connection made by Herbert between time and change, and suggests

> the knowledge of this connection [...] underlying man's anxiety gives rise to despair. [...] The sense of duration haunted man [...] duration was only another word for change [...] a synonym for death.[9]

Yet although the poem is damning in its context, foretelling as it does the final judgement, the finis is omitted, and the final couplet is a supplication to God. These are the only two lines of support offered in the poem, a compact and eulogistic interpellation to God, a direct contrast to the hyperbole gone before. It is all the speaker needs to relate: '*How deare to me, O God, thy counsels are!/Who may with thee compare?*' (99-100). This echoes St. Paul who says: 'For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?' (Romans 11.34).

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[8] Stanley Stewart, 'Time and *The Temple*', *Studies in English Literature*, 6 (1966) 97-110 (p.98).
[9] Stanley Stewart, 'Time and *The Temple*', p.99.

3.3.4 Teller/Reflector-Characters, Etic and Emic Openings

The speaker has no illusions about the Church, and uses a 'reflector-character' or *etic* opening to relate events as they occur.[10] The events as they occur are referred by him in a reflective way, as for example, the commencement which resembles a prayer: 'Almightie Lord, who from thy glorious throne/Seest and rulest all things ev'n as one.' By beginning in this way, the poet gently eases the reader into the story. The reader, as yet, does not acknowledge that so many events will be related by the speaker. Stanzel suggests that:

> In these cases, the reader is obliged to forgo all preliminaries and to place himself in the position of the reflector-character, experiencing the narrated event *in actu*.[11]

Of course Stanzel is discussing the novel or short story, but it is a useful comparison to examine Herbert's technique, as in 'Love (III)', for example, where Herbert uses the 'teller-character' of the personal pronoun 'I' some eight times as an agent of transmission. This offers the reader an unequivocal and direct viewpoint on the speaker's intimate relationship with love, notably the love of God. In 'The Church Militant', the sequences of historical events unfold before the reader's eyes in a moment, and this is Herbert's focused theme, as throughout the poem the progress of the minutes, hours, years and ages is disclosed. At every moment, and throughout all time, the world is ordered by God's love. Rather than seeing time as a linear phenomenon, the speaker is able to see the holistic picture, and only when time ceases in the next world, will spiritual unrest and the pain of human life also cease to exist.[12]

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[10]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.169. Stanzel describes an *Etic* opening as being reflective, they appear indirect and have an abrupt or clipped opening. *Emic* openings have an explicit introduction by a teller-character - it can be grasped as a whole.
[11]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.160.
[12]Stanley Strewart, 'Time and *The Temple*,' pp. 108-109.

The narrative the speaker relates in this poem is reflective and implicit. Herbert teases the reader into a suggestion of what to expect in a traditional story, then dramatically introduces the three allegorical figures of Religion, The Church and Sinne. By using these 'characters' through indirect action, the authority that they hold blurs the impression and distance us from the character, the poet writing: 'Sinne did set out [...] /And travell'd westward' (103-4).[13] This latter quote of direct speech suggests the closest possible nexus between character and reader, but the omniscient narrator implies indirect speech for all three characters.[14] This allows for a degree of scepticism to enter into the reader's mind. Herbert is allowing for a choice to be made on the credibility of his narrative. He challenges the reader's belief and forces him to choose the power of the Church to overcome sin. Ann Banfield calls this style the 'dual voice theory,' a merging of two voices , one the narrator's the other the character's. For example, the interpolating and repetitive line 'How deare to me, O God' is clearly the narrator's and has no connection directly with the story-line, whilst the movement of 'Sinne', 'Religion' and 'the Church' is crucial to the argument of the story, and plays a direct role in the events as they occur later. Banfield explains that 'there is a clearly defined notion of linguistic material which cannot represent a character's consciousness and which must present a narrator's objective point of view.'[15] She also points out that

> when we examine the sentence of narrative [...] these include sentences of represented thought, but also other sentences which represent mental states such as sense perceptions.[16]

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[13]Helmut Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes,* p.52.
[14]Helmut Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes*, p.52.
[15]Ann Banfield, 'Reflective and Non-Reflective Consciousness in The Language of Fiction', *Poetics Today*, 2.2 (1981), 61-76 (p.61). The term 'dual voice' comes from the title of Pascal's book on represented speech and thought (1977).
[16]Ann Banfield, *Poetics Today*, p.65.

The three characters of 'Religion', 'The Church' and 'Sinne' are problematical for the reader as he cannot decide with whom to identify, for the three take on an independent life as they travel the world, moving with resolution to their final destination. Thus the 'adventures' of the three personae ('Religion', 'Church' and 'Sinne') operate on a realistic plane that the reader can understand and with whom the reader can empathise. Each of the characters appears to develop a three-dimensional inner life as each moves purposefully from east to west.The characters do not go north to south, and this is no accident; it is essential that the Church with Sinne following, travels across the world, for it mirrors the sun's route, which ties in conveniently with the Son of God, a favourite Herbertian pun.

Herbert introduces the three figures to give the plot credibility, for as Peter Brooks notes 'plots are not simply organising structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-orientated and forward-moving.'[17] The characters move within the framework of the plot with ideas and concepts of their own. Indeed, each of the characters represents a conceit for the wider picture; as Brooks points out: 'plot could be thought of as the interpretative activity elicited by the distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet,* the *way* we use the one against the other.'[18] So, for example, we have 'Religion' seen as the truth, whilst 'the Church' represents the people, and 'Sinne' arguably recognised as death.

The frustration of 'still' (272) with its *double entendre* as an adjective, meaning lack of movement, and as an adverb relating to time, is counterbalanced with the more positive word 'skill' that the Church and Sunne possess. As all three advance 'To time and place, where judgement shall appeare', (277) the reader anticipates a closure, and a satisfactory outcome for the Church; so it is not without some

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[17]Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press Ltd. 1984), p.12.
[18]Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot,* p.13.

disappointment that the repeated lines of the prayer are simply recounted by the speaker. The reader must recognise that eternity is cyclical: 'for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 22.5); 'These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive' (Rev. 2.8); 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last' (Rev.22.13). Thus the length of the poem comes to represent the length of eternity as it moves with the dogged determination to see the Church triumph:

> To time and place, where judgement shall appeare.
> *How deare to me, O God thy counsels are!*
> *Who may with thee compare?* (277-279).

In 'The Church Militant', which can truly anchor itself in the tradition of an epic narrative, the speaker recalls the history of the church in its East to West development, and implicitly back again to the East. This poem responds to the reader's expectation of a traditional story, and the first point about a traditional story is that it is a story already known in outline to others than the author.[19]

3.3.5 The Significance of the Psalms

As well as the narratives of the Old Testament, Herbert also explores the Psalms. These bring with them a strong narrativising principle, recounting and exploring the feelings and emotions of David, while their lyricism provides a model for Herbert's love of music. Herbert himself, it will be noted, imitated only one psalm, the celebrated twenty-third. Yet so profoundly was Herbert engaged with the Psalter that its echoes reverberate across his poetry, to an extent unmatched by any other poet in English Literature.[20] And we can confidently assert that Herbert, as a musician, would have held a special regard for the Psalms. Indeed, Amy Charles records how

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[19]Derek Brewer 'Traditional Stories', *Studies in English Literature,* (1988) 3-14 (p.4).
[20] *The English Poems,* of George Herbert, ed. by C.A. Patrides, p.9.

'several famous musicians visited the Herbert house - John Bull for suppers in April and May [...] William Byrd for three meals [in] June1601.'[21] Both men were prominent in the techniques of contrapuntal music, and Herbert 'sought to "push thought into the foreground" by the intellectual music of contrapuntal poetry.'[22] Byrd had his *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs* printed in 1588, and so began the printing of music in England on an unparalleled scale.[23] Iain Fenlon points out that: 'William Byrd, who was a crypto-Catholic, seems to be the first composer to accept the challenge of providing large-scale five-part and six-part anthems in any quantity.'[24] Fenlon continues saying

> at that time [1575] amateurs capable of singing anything more complex than metrical psalms were comparatively rare [...]. Musically unpretentious metrical psalm collections promised greater profits [in 1596-7] than the more 'artificial' and musically interesting music books of madrigals, part-songs, lute songs or motets.[25]

Herbert was, no doubt, aware of these musical innovations as he grew older, as he was a composer and player himself. Joseph Summers recounts that

> the Psalms of David, begun by Sidney and completed by the Countess of Pembroke, is almost a handbook of poetic experimentation. Among the various poems in classical and traditional metres, there are fourteen 'contrapuntal' or 'approximately contrapuntal.'Their poetic rhythms often resemble Herbert's.[26]

In the matter of the liturgy, Diarmaid MacColloch describes how Elizabeth

> retained a lifelong detestation of married clergy and a liking for beautiful church music, much of it composed for Chapel Royal by Catholics [Byrd and Bull] who stubbornly refused to conform to her religious settlement.[27]

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[21]Amy M. Charles, *A Life of George Herbert*, p.43

[22]Albert McHarg Hayes, 'Counterpoint in Herbert', *Studies in Philology*, 35 (1938), 43-60 (p.48).

[23]*Man & Music: The Renaissance*, ed. by Iain Fenlon (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p.335.

[24]*Man & Music* ed. by Iain Fenlon, p.312.

[25]*Man & Music*, ed. by Iain Fenlon, p.335.

[26]Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, p.148.

[27]Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England 1547-1603* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p.28.

He continues,

> The liturgy, already more elaborate and more reminiscent of older liturgical forms than any other Protestant service-book, took no account of developments of Protestant thinking after the early 1550's.[28]

MacCulloch also describes how there was also a strong desire by John Whitgift, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583, to tilt the balance of the Church towards strict conformity and not embrace any popish ways; Whitgift further argued that the 1550 Prayer Book and the Ordinal should 'containeth nothing [...] contrary to the word of God.'[29]

The Book of Psalms was regarded as divinely-inspired poetry which was combined with necessary comfort for the Christian reader, whilst the long custom of singing Psalms had served to emphasise their inherent qualities.[30] The stories and moral precepts contained within them must have played an important role in the shaping of Herbert's childhood and formed the core foundation for his interest in religious narrative. The Psalms were thought to contain not only good matter, but also eloquent expressions of that matter, and were the fundamental form for religious poets. They were also regarded as providing models for self-examination. The long tradition of singing the Psalms had served to emphasise their inherent lyrical tradition.[31] Hence it is probable that Herbert would be no stranger to the metrical singing supplied in the Psalter, although we have no record from which one he sang. Likewise, as a viol player, the playing of contrapuntal music in part of a consort group would be natural and familiar to him.

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[28]Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation*, p.32.
[29]Diarmaid MacCullloch, *The Later Reformation*, p.49.
[30]Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535 - 1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1987), p.41.
[31]Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms*, pp.28-29.

As well as his love of the Psalms, Herbert's poems also reflect his interest in the elliptical and economical brevity found in *The Proverbs*, which afforded him the opportunity to indulge in that highly compressed, economic phrasing.[32] Amy Charles suggests that

> Herbert had a natural affinity for the proverb. In his own writing he valued succinctness, especially when it combined with wit on a sudden flash of truth.[33]

Herbert collected and wrote out 1032 proverbs of foreign origin, a collection that was published in 1640 as *Outlandish Proverbs selected by Mr. G.H.* In 1651 these were then augmented to 1190 proverbs and called *Jacula Prudentum*.[34] His use of pithy sayings to illustrate a profound message is found in 'Repentance', where the final line informs us: 'Fractures well cur'd make us more strong', and in 'Artillerie,' it reads: 'from small fires comes oft no small mishap.' In the poem 'Businesse', we note: 'He that loseth gold, though drosse,/Tells to all he meets, his crosse', but: 'He that finds a silver vein,/Thinks on it, and thinks again.' The condensed thought that encompasses the holistic view of life in these phrases parallels the thousand or more proverbs that he collected, proverbs like 'He that lends, gives'(787), ' or 'Hee is rich enough that wants nothing' (403), or 'God comes to see without a Bell' (384).[35] Herbert also used allegory to illustrate his main point, as in 'The Pearl', in which the pearl of great price (Matthew 13.46) is allegorised into a story about his own searching and decisive rejection of the secular world:

> I know all these, and have them in my hand
> Therefore not sealed, but with open eyes
> I flie to thee ('The Pearl', 31-33).

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[32]*The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. by C.A. Patrides, p.9.
[33]Amy Charles, *A Life*, p.196.
[34]F.E. Hutchinson in *Works* points out that: 'The complicated bibliography of *Outlandish Proverbs* must be fully set out because of its bearing on the disputed question of Herbert's part in the collection, pp.568-573.
[35]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, pp.334.335.347.

3.3.6 The Agency of The Sermon

As well as Biblical stories, the actual form of service interested Herbert, and he uses the Sermon as an excellent homiletic to show how a concrete story could be delivered to demonstrate the abstract. Sermons were not simply the occasion for the collective mind to celebrate its most cherished beliefs, but an attempt to tell sectors of an unruly populace what to think in order to keep them in their place.[36] Two narrative poems that explore the agency of the Sermon through which to demonstrate a spiritual message, are 'The Church-floore' and 'The Windows.' Indeed Herbert himself urges God in *The Countrey Parson* to

> Blesse this portion here assembled together, with thy unworthy Servant speaking unto them: Lord Jesu! Teach thou me, that I may teach them: Sanctifie, and inable all my powers, that in their full strength they may deliver thy message reverently, readily, faithfully & fruitfully [...] O make thy word a swift word, passing from ear to the heart to the life and conversation.[37]

This statement closely parallels the opening lines in 'The Windows' that poses the question: 'Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?/He is a brittle crazie glasse.' Nevertheless, the resolving of the issues that bedevil Herbert as to his suitability to preach are encapsulated in these final three lines.

> but speech alone
> Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
> And in the eare, not conscience ring (14-15).

Using a combination of symbolic imagery and metonymy (man as 'crazie glasse', and preachers as 'light and glorie'), Herbert works through the poem, delivered as a sermon. He explains, through poetic imagery, what an onerous task of delivering God's word is placed upon the preacher.

> Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?

[36]*Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore & Alan Sinfield, 3rd edn (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.5.
[37]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, 'The Authour's Prayer before Sermon' p.289.

He is a brittle crazie glasse:
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window, through thy grace ('The Windows', 1-6).

As the nineth poem in the thesis, although not strictly a narrative, the poem presents a self-reflexive narration in an implicit rather than an explicit narrative, whereby the speaker meditates on his suitability and his personal commendations to present the word of God to all mankind. It is the story of a man who does not feel adequate to preach: ('He is a brittle crazie glasse' (2)), yet finds his inspiration and support through meditating on the stained glass windows in his church. The commencement of the poem with a question is a narrative device offered by the speaker, who knows that for the next fifteen lines there will be a dialectic on the *quid pro quo* of preaching. The speaker utilises the concept of time as a medium, through which he arrives at the concluding answer to the question he poses to himself: 'Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?' For it seems that only through a temporal sequence as a generating principle can a personal discourse also develop. The speaker needs time to act as a spur, and the reader needs time to witness the poem unfolding. The preacher becomes simply the conduit for the true narrator, God. For as the poem develops, it is God who transfers his artistic skill 'anneal[ing]' not only the windows, but the courage the preacher needs to proclaim his message.

In their introduction to *The English Sermon revised,* L.A. Ferrell and P. McCullough argue that the sermon properly considered is a literary art inextricably engaged in the public sphere, and as such it stands poised to take a wholly new place in the canon of literature and social history. In considering the place of sermons in early modern English society, we must remember that they were not simply words on a page, or speeches to an audience, but instruments of policy, documents of

religious change, and expressions of public life: they were, in short, both historical texts and historical context.[38] In a court sermon of March 1634, for example, Robert Skinner, a royal chaplain, reviewed the recent history of the predestinarian dispute in England and Europe, noted that the king, Charles I, had

> stretched forth his "sacred and blessed hand" and interposed peace and silence by his royal and most religious declaration [...] and so, God be thanked, [...] all in effect was hushed on a sudden.[39]

As 'The Windows' progresses, so does the speaker's solipsism and his reliance on visual stimuli to preach effectively. And what is seen is a preacher who having asked himself 'how can man preach thy eternal word?' acknowledges that his inspiration must come from an external source, working within him. The windows, however, provide the answer, acting as an *aide memoire* to the faltering preacher, as they are man-made and accessible. These stained glass windows relate a narrative as explicitly as any verbal outpouring can do, windows that act as a biblical tale for the illiterate, and windows that are able to act as signifier for the homiletic with which the preacher engages. For whilst this poem is written as a 'narrative lyric', Barbara Herrnstein-Smith notes on how a poem passes into the narrative poem proper, and the two may be kept separate if we think of the former as essentially related to the personal anecdote (the preacher's anxieties about his abilities to preach) and the latter to the tale; (how the sun-emblazoned stained glass assists him in recognising the power and glory of God in a dull church).[40]

Thomas Leitch proposes that the rule of "tellability" establishes a minimal criterion for stories, but each of its three subsidiary rules 'display', 'economy', and

[38]*The English Sermon revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600-1750*, ed. L.A. Ferrell and P. McCullough (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.2. &11.
[39]'Joseph Hall, Robert Skinner and the rhetoric of moderation at the early Stuart court,' P. Lake, in *The English Sermon revised*, pp.167-8.
[40]Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p.123.

'suspense' is more narrowly conceived than the last, and each successive rule excludes more narratives than the last. This theory can effectively be applied to Herbert's poem - 'display' ('brittle crazie glasse'), 'economy' (a narrative just 15 lines long), and finally 'suspense' (the key question - how can man preach thy eternal word?). Leitch also points out how stories should come to an end in order that they may be grasped as intelligible wholes; and we can acknowledge this also in the final lines of 'The Windows' where the anxieties of preaching simply through speech must be complemented by the power of God working within the preacher.[41]

John Holloway shows how inversion in Herbert's poetry seems to be related to a need to throw a structure into relief.[42] For example, the final line 'And in the eare, not conscience ring' (15) inverts both 'eare' and 'conscience' appositely, thus allowing the reader to acknowledge the significance of the two senses to the importance of preaching. In 'The Windows' the transforming operation occurs in the preacher, the congregation and also the church itself, which moves from a literal darkness to a metaphorical enlightenment, by the action of the sun (Son) shining both through the windows and the preacher simultaneously. The act of closure in the poem is completed by the act of understanding by the preacher, whilst the illumination of his own mind, the showing up of the niches of doubt, is paralleled in the illumination of the window:

> Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford?
> This glorious and transcendent place,
> To be a window, through thy grace.
>
> Which else show watrish, bleak, & thin (3-5,10).

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[41]Thomas Leitch, *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), p. 117.
[42]John Holloway, *Narrative and Structure: Exploratory essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.125.

It is essential that the sun shine through the window, as the Son shines through the preacher, and we find that Herbert's language defies the arithmetic and says, 'that one things equals two', for 'A Sonne is [both] light and fruit.'[43]

There are subtle resonances of meditative practice in 'The Windows', that shows through visual and tactile imagery. There is evidence from a letter written by Arthur Woodnoth to Ferrar that Herbert was conversant with the writings of Savonarola. In the letter Woodnoth, referring to Herbert, states:

> Sauonorola in Latine he hath of the Simplicity of Chr: Religion and is of great esteeme wth him. He sayth he doth Vunderstand Italian a lyttle.[44]

Olga Pugliese remarks that 'during the Renaissance as a whole [...] English interest in the Italian humanists was a non-academic one;'[45] whilst Elizabeth Clarke also notes that 'Herbert was not the only reader of the Dominican Monk in Protestant England.[46] Regarding the importance of the senses in understanding, Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98) suggests that

> therefore we know by experience that when spiritual things are represented through corporeal similitudes, they are better understood by men, and are held more firmly in the memory [...]. Therefore let us begin with corporeal things, in order to understand more easily spiritual things.[47]

Herbert, by using the 'corporeal similitudes' of the preacher as a piece of 'crazie glasse' enables the reader to understand the spiritual dimension of

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[43]Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication*, p.xi.
[44]*The Ferrar Papers*, ed. by B. Blackstone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p.268.
[45]Olga Zorzi Pugliese, 'English Translations from the Italian Humanists: An Interpretative Survey and Bibliography', *Italica*, 50 (1973), 408-434 (pp.415-416).
[46]Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry: 'Divinitie, and Poesie Met'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.27.
[47]Girolamo Savonarola, 1452-98, *De Simplicitate Christianae Vitae* (Strassburg: 1615), Liber 1, Conclusio 1, in Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p.282.

illuminating man's dark mind with God's 'colours and light.' It is explored by Herbert on the art of Preaching. In *The Countrey Parson*, Herbert exhorts that

> When he preacheth, he procures attention by all possible art, both by earnestnesse of speech [...] and by a diligent, and busy cast of his eye on his auditors, with letting them know, that he observes who marks, and who not; and with particularizing of his speech now to the younger sort, then to the elder, now to the poor, and now to the rich.[48]

In this short extract, Herbert suggests the importance of knowledge on his audience and the effective delivery of the word of God. Yet it is apparent that Herbert's answer to his question asked at the commencement to his poem, finds its response in the simplicity of fullness. Martz states that 'it is able to utilize exterior things in accord with their proper ends; *simple* in the full Latin sense of *simplex:* open, frank, direct, sincere, pure and whole.'[49] Debra Shuger argues that 'Herbert's principal end of preaching is an ardent and vehement psychogogia, achieved primarily through the preacher's own expressivity.'[50]

The windows become the synecdoche for an illumination of the inner man, offering a openness to all who care to look; and the windows also throw a clarification on both the words he speaks and the Word itself. God enters both in him and through him, via the illuminating principle of light. A prior knowledge of the story in question is needed if the message is to be acquired correctly. This is where the preacher must attune himself to the needs of his parishioners, and why Herbert suggests that: 'The Countrey Parson preacheth constantly, the pulpit is his joy and his throne.'[51]

The conceit of man as a window, placed in the temple of the Lord, whereby he can become a transparent (transcendent) pane, through which light can shine

[48] F.E. Hutchinson *Works*, Chap. V11 'The Parson Preaching', p.232.
[49]Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, p.283,
[50]Debra Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.94-95.
[51]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, pp.232-3.

'through thy grace', is ingenious, for windows come in many guises, designs, patterns and sizes, as does mankind. The poet argues around the polarity of man as 'a brittle crazie glasse' versus 'this glorious and transcendent place', and acknowledges the simple man's desire to have 'anneal[ed] in glasse thy storie' in order to strengthen his faith. Both 'light and glorie' are contrasted with the 'watrish, bleak & thin' light reflected, and although we know we are discussing windows, the reader is excited by the fact that in reality it is mankind we are really discussing. Steven Cohen and Linda Shires argue that

> a narrative text does not simply represent subjectivity *to* readers [...] it also signifies their subjectivity *for* them. This identifies what, specifically, makes them equal; such a gap invites the reader to interpret the metaphor.[52]

The holistic concept of man being both a reflective palette of God's love and grace, and yet being a transparency through which love and charity can shine, is pivotal to the understanding and internalisation of the poem. Gene Veith states that

> Calvin stressed the initiative of God in all divine-human relationships. For Calvin, God is active, intervening with mysterious generosity in lives [...] overmastering their sinful wills with His grace and power.[53]

Herbert understands that he is but an agent of God, and can do nothing without God's initiative. The preacher in 'The Windows' has his doubts and misgivings on his preaching skills, but as Calvin points out, 'God is active, intervening with mysterious generosity in lives.' It is this faith that enables Herbert to acquire comfort from the symbolism of the windows in his church. 'The Windows' suggests a powerful metaphor for permitting that grace of God's to enter a darkened and vacillating will acquired at the Fall. Humanity, Augustine explains, is universally affected by sin as a

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[52]Steven Cohen, & Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A theoretical analysis of narrative fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 28 &149.
[53]Gene E.Veith, Jr. *Reformation Spirituality*, p.33.

consequence of the Fall, that is, the sin of Eve in response to her temptation, as recorded in Genesis:

> And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [...]. She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Genesis 3:6).

McGrath shows how in

> Christian theology, this subsequent disobedience of both Adam and Eve caused the human mind to become darkened by sin. Augustine argues that sin makes it impossible for the sinner to think clearly, and to understand higher spiritual truths and ideas.'[54]

McGrath develops this argument further saying that

> humankind cannot save itself from sin. It is through the grace of God that our sin is 'cured.' In Augustine's view, man is totally dependent upon God for salvation, from the beginning to the end of our lives Augustine understood grace as 'the real and redeeming presence of God in Christ within us, transforming us; something that was internal and active.[55]

This is confirmed by Jesus as he says: 'for without me ye can do nothing' (John 15.5). In Herbert's poetry the transformation occurs in the speaker as he acknowledges the presence of God in all the humble events of his life. For example, in poems such as 'JESU', where after reconstructing his heart, he is able to gain comfort from the message 'I ease you.' Similarly, in 'The Windows', he recognises God working through the light of understanding bringing a 'strong regard and aw.'

McGrath also points out how in Augustine's view

> God does not leave us where we are naturally, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but gives us grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven, and restored.[56]

The poem appears to mirror this concept that man cannot do anything without God, and certainly not preach His Word, thus 'speech alone' will of its very essence be a

[54]Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p.445.
[55]Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, pp. 446-7.
[56]Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p.446.

'vanish[ing] [...] flaring thing', having little of the substance of man's will. The preacher is purely the vessel or window through which God can project his grace offering redemption to believers; in this context God has chosen this particular man to be such an instrument of his grace. Calvin also argues that

> when a Christian looks into himself he finds cause to be afraid or even despair; [...] he will win a sure hope of eternal perseverance when he considers that he belongs to Him who cannot fall or fail.[57]

'Fall and Fail' are words echoed in 'The Holdfast.' Thus far from being an unhappy end to the poem, the conclusion arrived at by the preacher is one of satisfying unity with God.

Herbert also makes his Christian position clear through his reply to No.10 of *Valdesso's Considerations*, which poses the problem:

> When a person equally gives credit to all things that are said unto him, he is without the spirit of God, he believes by relation [...] and not by revelation nor inspiration.

Herbert's reply and understanding of this consideration are that

> he meaneth only the effectuall operation or illumination of the holy spirit, testifying, and applying the generall promises to everyone in particular [...] that it makes him godly, righteous, and sober all his life long; this I call beleeving by Revelation, and not by Relation.[58]

The speaker clarifies his position insofar as he supports the concept of the infusion of the Holy Spirit to enable the individual live a Christian life, and not simply pay lip-service to it. The metaphor of glass in a window that can shatter into a hundred pieces, is one that is echoed in 'JESU', and we see the desperate speaker attempting to find the fragments, his patience rewarded as he discovers a comforting sentence that he had not previously recognised. Similarly the speaker in 'The

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[57]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.14.20, quoted by Neisal, in *Theology of Calvin* p.179, in G. Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.94.
[58]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.309.

Windows' looking at the glass sees the reflection of himself both literally and figuratively. St. Paul points out that

> we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (II Corinthians 3.18).

Herbert is also changed. From a doubting preacher who queries his very ability to deliver God's word, he changes into the very window he gazes upon. At the end of the poem he understands God's purpose through the combining of the words 'Doctrine' and 'colours' and 'life' and light.'

3.3.7 Contemplation and Mystery

Arnold Stein shows that

> Herbert's most important subject is the mystery of God's art with man [...] that God's art with man reveals God's nature he takes for granted, and he assumes that the mysteries which God has concealed in man encourage the study of things human as an authorised reflection of things divine.[59]

Herbert understands how God uses the power of light and colour within his universe. The mystery of speech not only penetrates the 'eare' but the 'conscience.'

St. Paul says:

> For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known (1 Corinthians 13.12).

The key phrase in this latter statement is, 'as also I am known.' 'The Windows' is a contemplation on the self-knowledge God imparts to the individual. Herbert uses the window as a tool, through which and by which the 'brittle' frailty of man is made to acknowledge with 'A strong regard and aw' his co-dependence upon God. Although 'The Windows' cannot be called a narrative poem, in that there is a specific individual

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[59]Arnold Stein, 'George Herbert: The Art of Plainness,' in J.R. Roberts, ed. *Essential Articles for the study of George Herbert's Poetry,* pp.ix-552 (p.166).

who enters the poem, like the 'One' and the 'man' in 'Love-joy', the addressee is the addresser himself.

In his study on the *Self-Begetting Novel* (and we might argue the self-begetting narrative poem also), Steven Kellman argues that

> the self-begetting novel begins again where it ends, like the infinite recession of Chinese boxes [...] this device of a narrative which is in effect a record of its own genesis is a happy fusion of form and content. We are at once confronted with both process and product, quest and goal, parent and child.[60]

Taking Marcel Proust as his touchstone, Kellman points out how the nascent fiction gives life to the ageing Marcel (in this case), who in turn is about to create it. Something similar is happening to the speaker in the 'The Windows,' who is so familiar with preaching, that it of necessity needs to be defamiliarised and reborn. 'The Windows' need to be broken, like the heart in 'JESU', so that they can be recreated to present a new light on the words and the Word itself. Yet in the wake is the palingenesis of a new inspired individual, who has heard not simply with his 'eare', but in his 'conscience.' This allows him to be renewed and reborn. St. Paul supporting this argument states:

> And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12.2).

The narrator must recreate his experiences by putting them into words. The status of the self-begetting novel as both process and product introduces an important dual perspective on each reading, a disparity between *temps passé* and *temps retrouvé*. A dialectic between the naive, questing hero (the preacher in 'The Windows') and his narrator alter ego recollecting prior emotion in current tranquility, as he asks, 'Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?' Such a narration is a

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[60]Steven G. Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel* (Trowbridge & Esher: Redwood Burn Ltd,1980), p.3.

self-portrait, not in the sense of a portrait of the self, but a portrait of the portrait itself.[61] What the preacher is preaching is that there is a mystic union with God, who through simple windows, is able to exhibit his power, without which man's understanding grows 'watrish, bleak & thin' (10). The poem is thus a conflation of the baseness of man, flawed and unsound, with the transcendence of God. The stained glass of the windows is both object of the gaze, and in its turn looks critically at mankind.

'A novel', says Stendhal, 'is a mirror [...] sometimes it reflects the blue of the sky [...] sometimes the mud on the Road.'[62] In 'The Windows', the speaker holds up a glass to the reader offering him a choice, he can look through it showing life 'watrish, bleak and thin' (10), or it can reflect back on himself offering 'Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one'(11). Herbert's poem reflects what the reader wants to see. Nick Davis argues that

> many of the staple terms employed in modern discussion of written narrative (viewpoint, characterisation, 'showing' as distinguished from 'telling', etc.) likewise refer to aspects or dimensions of a world which opens up for the reader *behind* the visible process of narration.[63]

The dimensions of a world do open up for the reader in many of Herbert's poems, and this is clearly self-evident in 'The Windows.' The poet has self-consciously chosen both context and content in order to suggest variable methods of interpretation for the reader, opening up an exegetical space over and above the first 'simple' reading. Since all acts of narration are more or less linear, all acts of reading must to some extent set memory and recollection to work on the linearity.[64] We can acknowledge that in 'The Windows.' The speaker arranges his 'sermon' along

[61]Steve Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel,* pp.3.4.&7.
[62]Robert Liddell, *Some Principles of Fiction*, p.108.
[63]Nick Davis, 'Narrative Composition and the Spatial Memory,' in *Narrative: From Malory to Motion Pictures,* ed. by J. Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1985), p.27.
[64]Nick Davis, *Narrative: From Malory to Motion Pictures,* p.29.

performed lines, initially personalising his question to God with the use of the indefinite article, 'He is a brittle crazie glasse'. By using 'a' he implies reparation is possible, which could not occur if Herbert had written: 'He is brittle crazie glasse.' He then moves on to discuss how God has made things easy for man to believe, by 'anneal[ing]' his story in stained glass, strengthening man with His spirit, St. Paul arguing that

> he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 4.16).

Another of Herbert's Latin poems, 'In Solarium' [65] is also a contemplative attempt to conflate the mystery of the universe with the God-given acquisition of science:

Coniugium Caeli Terraeque haec machina praestat;
Debetur Caelo lumen, & vmbra solo:
Sic Hominus moles animaque & corpore constat,
Cuius ab oppositis fluxit origo locis.
Contemplare, miser, quantam terroris haberet
Vel sine luce solum, vel sine mente caro.

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'On the Sundial'

This machine shows
Earth and Heaven linked.
It owes its light to heaven,
Its shadow to the ground.
Thus man's weight and import
Hangs between a body
And a spirit: the source of man
From opposite directions flowed.
Wretch, meditate on this:
How frightened the ground
Would be without the light,
Or the flesh without the mind.

Mark M. McCloskey & Paul R. Murphy, *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert*, p.109.

The poem has clear resonances of 'The Windows' insofar as the conflation of light, power and mankind is all interdependent upon God. The futility of the sundial on a sunless day is comparable to the 'flesh without the mind' (12), for neither can function in the manner to which they have been created. In the lines: 'And a spirit: the source of man/From opposite directions flowed' (7-8), the poet suggests that both good and evil derive from the same common cause. Yet the mind, wretched though it is, is still able to meditate and contemplate on the truth, as the viewer is able to wonder at the stained glass whilst absorbing its meaning with his 'conscience', and not solely listening with his 'eare.' 'On the Sundial' is piece of juvenilia from Herbert that acts like a prolepsis to 'The Windows.' In both poems the speaker collapses the power of God into the framework of a window, or a sundial, whilst the anxiety of the preacher has his tranquility restored by his meditation on the sun-lightened windows, empowered by God.

'The Windows' is a pæan on the beauty of church furniture. The light, we find, has taken on a mystical life of its own, independent of the preacher. Just as a mirror is ineffectual without a reflection in it, so the ineffectuality of the preacher has his initial question answered through the light of the Word piercing the windows. Although the speaker does not criticise the Word ('Jest not at preacher's language, or expression' (439) he urges in 'The Church Porch'), he has harsh words for rhetoric that he terms 'speech alone' (13).

In 'The Windows' the reader becomes a member of the congregation, looking into his own soul as well as looking at the windows allowing the truth to 'ring' into his 'conscience', whilst listening with his ear. As the reader progresses through the three stanzas of five lines of equal measure in the rhyme scheme of abacc, he is aware that the whole poem is a carefully constructed dialectic on the subject of sermonising,

its hazards and its sureties, as well as its gestures and situations. It is a poem where the narrator is God himself, speaking through the preacher, whose abilities lie in his sermons. Indeed, Herbert himself states that after

> dipping and seasoning all our words and sentences in our hearts, before they come into our mouths [...] every word is Hart-deep. [66]

Finally, the summation of the argument draws on the power of God to open up man's understanding of the Word. The poem urges the listener to internalise the message so that it will have a permanent effect on his own life, as the permanent stained glass windows have an effect on the beauty of the church. Debra Shuger states that

> all Christian subjects are of incalculable importance. Only the effect, therefore, whether to move, encourage, or teach determines the appropriate style.[67]

As with 'Love-joy'and 'JESU' (discussed in the next chapter), the poet has 'created a spectator-created unity, a *diegesis*, which is a concept whereby the spectator's (reader/listener's) predisposition to supply the narrative continuity is central to an understanding of the whole.'[68] Hence in all three poems, 'Love-joy,' 'JESU' and 'The Windows' a focus is made on a diegetic reading by the reader, who brings to each poem his own narrative and discourse, and drawing on his own personal, moral and cultural *milieu* to provide the didactic meaning he is satisfied with.[69]

Robert Liddell argues that 'The art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown,* to be so exhibited that it will tell itself.'[70]

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[66]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works,* 'The Parson Preaching,' Chap.V11, p.232
[67]Debra Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric,* p.51.
[68]Nick Davis, *Narrative: From Malory to Motion Pictures,* p.26.
[69]*Diegesis* is originally taken from the Greek rhetoric term for narrative: or in speech. In Davis' book it is a concept identified by French film theorists, whose idea was that spectators' would supply narrative continuity essential for the functioning of conventional cinema. They styled this spectator-created unity the *diegesis.* p.26.
[70]Percy Lubbock, 'The Craft of Fiction', p.62, in Robert Liddell, *Some Principles of Fiction,* 2nd edn. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), p.63.

This is evident in 'The Windows' where the preacher 'shows' his story to his congregation through the stained glass. The poem moves on a purely metaphysical plane. It is interesting to note that Herbert does not use the conceit of a flame or 'cloven tongues like as of fire' (Acts 2.3). The 'flaring thing' is just that, like a cheap firework, that lasts a few seconds and is gone in a puff of smoke; what Vendler calls a 'false flame of hypocrisy [...] leaving the temple in total darkness.'[71] The patterns of correspondence and cross-reference have jumped barriers of reality as both speaker and reader reads and identifies with the illuminating metaphor. This allows the poem to 'vanish like a flaring thing', but not its intrinsic message.

[71]Helen H. Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert*, p. 83.

Chapter Four

'Alas poore mortall, void of storie'

The use of Dialogue, Plot and Lyric in Narrative

The poems discussed are 'Love-joy', 'Dialogue' and 'JESU'

4.4.1 Herbert's use of the Lyric in Narrative

In the previous three chapters I have explored Herbert's personal response to life's challenges, and how he works through his vacillating doubt in his ability to preach effectively. As Herbert is primarily a lyric poet, in this chapter I want to explore the use of the lyric in his poetry. I also want to discuss how the lyric initially developed, and how Herbert conflates narrative with lyric.

Music, as I have pointed out earlier, was an important feature in Herbert's every-day life. Indeed, a number of poems focus deliberately on this feature, poems such as 'Antiphon (I)' or 'Easter' wherein he asks: 'Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part' ('Awake, thou lute, and harp' (Psalm 108.1)). Louise Schleiner observes how 'Herbert was a master of the song-text periodicity [which] he learnt from the songs he sang to his lute or viol.'[1] Nevertheless, as well as lyricism, there is a further exceptional feature in the narrative poetry, that of plot, characterisation and conversation. It is these features that are also studied in this chapter through the poems 'Love-joy', 'Dialogue' and 'JESU.' There is also an exploration in the poems of Herbert's pride and self-discovery, through a peeling back of the insecure persona that initially frustrates him.

Describing the lyric qualities of Herbert's verse, Alicia Ostriker observes that

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[1] Louise Schleiner, 'Jacobean Song and Herbert's Metrics', *Studies in English Language*, 19 (1979), 109-126 (p.123).

> the singing qualities in Herbert continue the music-oriented tradition of late Elizabethan lyric, which turned from 'drab' to 'golden' toward the close of the sixteenth century largely because of the prosodic influence of musical forms imported from France and Italy [...]. Some obvious results of this interest in song were his use of refrains.[2]

George Herbert Palmer writing on Herbert's lyric form, suggests that

> his is a poetry of struggle [...] he originated a new species of sacred verse, the religious lyric, a species for which the English world was waiting, which it welcomed with enthusiasm [...] the religious lyric is a cry of the individual heart to God [...]. He searches his own soul, and utters the love, the timidity, the joy, the vacillations, the remorse, the anxieties, he finds there.[3]

Palmer's point that Herbert's poems are 'a cry of the individual heart to God' emphasises their reflective and contemplative elements, an emphasis which would seem to be reinforced through the connection between lyric and music.

4.4.2 The Development of Lyric

Cecil Day Lewis suggests that 'The lyric [...] began as a courtly amusement. It ramified in the great 1560-1620 period of the lutenists and the madrigal.'[4] This would fit in with Herbert's great love of music, referred to earlier, as recorded by Walton, who reports that

> his chiefest recreation was Music, in which heavenly art he was a most excellent master, and did himself compose many Divine Hymns and Anthems, which he set to his lute or viol.[5]

Paul Allen Miller points out that the lyric, as most moderns think of it, does not begin with the archaic Greek lyricists such as Sappho, Alcaeus, and Pindar, nor with the Hellenistic poets, but rather in the Roman period, more particularly the first century BCE. (Miller cites Catulus (54-84 BCE) as the true exponent of lyric).[6] He points out

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[2] Alicia Ostriker, 'Song and Speech on the Metrics of George Herbert', p.62.
[3] George Herbert Palmer, *The English Works,* pp.93-4. 140. &154.
[4] Cecil Day Lewis, *The Lyric Impulse* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1965), p.8.
[5] Izaak Walton, *Lives*, p.306.
[6] Paul Allen Miller, *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness* (London & New York: Routledge,

that this involved a shift from the oral tradition of Greek poetry, enjoyed by listeners who heard not only entertaining poetry, but also learned the

> paradigm of personal behaviour, the forms of deviance and the norm, of excellence [...] to integrate into the collectivity [...] the object of the archaic Greek poet was not to represent to [the] audience a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion [...] not the projection of an 'individual' voice [...] but rather to show people their status in the community.[7]

The lyric seemed an appropriate medium for oral poetry with its 'rhythmical chanting' and 'recitation', the reading and the re-reading that came with the advent of a wider literacy in the Roman era called for a lyric which is

> dependent upon the existence of certain social and technical conditions [...] literacy, printing, education and personal awareness [...]. And hence is not the primal language of men [...] but a complex grid of writing and reflexive referentiality [...] [and a] deeply intereriorised consciousness.[8]

It is through the 'deeply interiorised consciousness' element of the lyric that it is possible to see Herbert's desire towards narrative. Herbert frequently puts himself into a narrative situation in lyric poems, even such brief ones as 'Love-joy':

> As on a window late I cast mine eye,
> I saw a vine drop grapes with *J* and *C*
> Anneal'd on every bunch. One standing by
> As'k what it meant. I (who am never loth
> To spend my judgement) said, It seem'd to me
> To be the bodie and the letters both
> Of *Joy and Charitie*. Sir, you have not miss'd,
> The man reply'd; It figures *JESUS CHRIST* (1-10).

Here, the form of the poem with its even regular lines, and its rhyme scheme of aba, cbc, dd, suggests to the reader that the problem posed is at first glance, quite straightforward - (what do J and C mean?). The assonance of 'as' 'cast' 'saw' and 'ask'd', move the musical lyricism of the poem (and the speaker/reader) towards the

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1994), p.3-4. and p.120.

[7] Paul Allen Miller, *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness*, p.6.

[8] Paul Allen Miller, *Lyric Texts*, pp.5.6.7.

crucial *J* and *C*. Later we are to understand why this is, but Herbert is not ready to reveal the answer just yet. The title of the poem offers no clue to the genre of the poem, and the reader is not certain if this is a religious poem or not. Yet the symbolism of the 'vine' together with the verb 'Anneal'd' which means 'to heat (metal or glass) [...] so as to toughen it' (OED) suggests a symbol of psychological strength, soon to be tested.

The poet is able to keep the reader in suspense up until the final revelation, and the doubt that the reader feels is *not* felt by the speaker as yet, who we are told is 'never loth/To spend my judgement' (4-5). Here, the confidence of the speaker is contrasted with the uncertainty of the reader and Herbert makes a self-conscious distinction between the two, setting each at odds with the other. The poem has a fragility that is human. The message offered is that to see is not to understand. For anyone can make an error, this is part of the learning process.

The enjambement on almost every line implies a continuous thought pattern; yet the image of the 'bodie' is tantalisingly uncertain and is the first clue that the speaker might just be right in his 'judgement.' He has seen with his eyes what *J* and *C* mean both literally, that is *JESUS CHRIST*, now he must 'see' the letters spiritually which, with help, he does, notably meaning *'Joy and Charitie.'* 'Love-joy' like the poem 'JESU' presents the reader with a tightly compressed narrative. The lines: 'One standing by/Ask'd what it meant' (4) immediately pulls in the reader, making him alert to a story of secrecy and mystery, which the narrator implies in the use of the word 'late', in the opening line: 'As on a window late I cast mine eye.' The window has always been there, but the speaker decides it is worthy of some scrutiny. We, the readers, never really know if the speaker is fooling us, and is perhaps testing us, as he himself is later tested. As Kermode points out,

> we easily assume that narrative ha[s] a natural drive towards plainness and clarity, yet what becomes apparent is that there are secrets in the Biblical texts[9]

and these are the very texts that act as a template for Herbert's outpourings in *The Temple.* Herbert's poem 'Love-joy' moves in on this didactic device, offering the reader choices of interpretation, as well as thwarting their most basic assumptions.

The poem tells the story of a speaker who, on seeing the letters *J* and *C* annealed on a stained glass window, for some unknown reason interprets them incorrectly. The poet builds up the reader's expectation of the obvious, only to have it thrown back into his face with the hidden meaning of what the *J* and *C* really mean, not only literally, but as a paradigm for the Christian life. The inclusion of one small word 'late' implies a time lapse that suspends the speaker's reasoned judgment. Although we assume initially that he fails to guess what *J* and *C* stand for, as we travel through the time it takes to read the poem, we finally realise he has 'not miss'd.'

In 'Love-joy', the metaphor of vine and grapes equates with Jesus Christ, which the secular viewer cannot see. Herbert extends the conceit to encompass a multiplicity of codes to include 'judgment and bodie.' The 'One standing by' has a parallel in the gospels where the true God is not recognised by the disciples, they mistaking John the Baptist for the Messiah:

> John answered them, saying, I baptise with water but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not (John 1.26).

There is a transformation of the speaker who reassesses what the 'One' wants to hear, namely 'Joy and Charitie' rather than the obvious Jesus Christ. This is what Kermode terms 'insiders' as opposed to 'outsiders', the *mashal* or dark sayings

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[9] Frank Kermode, 'New Ways with Bible Stories in *Poetry, Narrative, History*, pp.30-31.

hidden in the text of the Bible - 'obvious, yet not to everyone.'[10] Cohen and Shires argue that 'unlike speech, writing foregrounds the constitution of discourse as a chain of references, not from sign to meaning, but from sign to sign.'[11] This concept can be related within 'Love-joy', as it presents as a model a template for living one's life in Joy and Charitie, within the simplicity of the two letters and the multiplicity of meaning the two letters evoke. Cohen and Shires continue with the concept that this theory

> calls for rigorous attention to narrative as a set of signs. It requires a method of textual analysis responsive to both the structuring operation of a sign system, and the instability of signs in discourse.[12]

This latter point is recognised in the uncertainty the poet creates with the ambiguous letters, and the ineptness of the speaker to conflate the meanings, namely Jesus Christ with Joy and Charitie.

4.4.3 Emblems, Allegory, Plot and Characters

The poem's almost casual opening lulls the reader into a false sense of security, that this is going to be a relatively simple account of question and answer - what do *J* and *C* mean? Of course the reader knows that they stand for Jesus Christ, especially as they are carved in a Church window (the poem is part of the 'The Church') together with the references in the poem to 'vine', 'bunch', 'one', 'judgement', 'bodie' and 'man.' What the reader has 'miss'd' together with the speaker, is that 'Joy and Charite' are the signified referents that the name Jesus Christ stands for. The poem is a deliberate self-conscious attempt by Herbert to conflate the syntagmatic with the paradigmatic. The *J* and *C* mean Jesus Christ to the reader and the 'man', but Joy and Charitie to the speaker and the 'One.' Yet all four are correct. As Cohen and Shires point out,

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[10]Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, pp.23-24.
[11]Steven Cohen, and Linda Shires, *Telling Stories,* p.20.
[12]Steven Cohen & Linda Shires, *Telling Stories*, p. 20.

> It is the marking of a text (dividing it into its component parts such a similarity, placement and difference) [which] inscribe the text with various stresses making it appear 'stress-full.[13]

The tension that the reader feels and his uncertainty as to what he should perhaps think, and what the speaker should say, help to build up such stresses as the speaker declares: 'It *seem'd* to me [...], the 'man' replying: 'Sir you *have not* miss'd' (5&8). The reader is left in doubt, and is slightly irritated when he hears the obvious answer given mistakenly, yet assured when he realises that the 'man' is of course correct - Joy and Charitie do equate with Jesus Christ. What both the speaker and the reader have not yet realised is that the 'man' has seen the holistic picture.

After the opening statement, the narrative begins in earnest with the: 'One standing by/Ask'd what it meant' (3-4). The reader knows that a story is about to begin, and knows this from the time indicator 'late.' The word 'late' is significant. Are we dealing with a man who at last saw what *J* and *C* mean, late in his life, so to speak? Or is this someone who saw the letters (lately - not long ago - OED). This preoccupation with time is again a move of Herbert's towards narrative, and is referred to frequently in this thesis. The introduction of the 'One' who stands by is crucial to the development of the plot. It is essential that such a question is asked by him, and whilst it conveniently begins the sentence, it also denotes Christ as the 'Holy One' (Acts 3.14) as well as the beginning of the speaker's understanding of the meaning of the Christian life. These contrived devices by Herbert are focused on the reader's subsequent understanding of both the poem, and the Christian teaching that lies behind the doctrine.

Fish has described this as 'a strategy to change the pupil/reader's mind, rather than the poet changing his mind.'[14] Herbert naturally knows the outcome of the poem,

[13]Steven Cohen & Linda Shires, *Telling Stories*, p. 21.
[14]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p.27.

together with its implicit meaning. Nevertheless, it is essential that the dénouement of the plot is understood by the reader. Herbert, therefore, must describe a narrative that it is accessible, together with a problem that is easily solved. This supports Kinney's argument that 'the poet adopts an attempt to shape the reader's intellectual and emotional responses as they read the text.'[15]

Adopting Loyola's meditative spiritual exercises, Herbert introduces the reader into his intimate world with the repetition of the 'I', 'I cast' , 'I saw', 'I who am never loth to spend my judgement,' 'It seem'd to me', and allows the reader to be part of this intimate game of 'guess what these letters mean.'[16] The corollary to this suggests that the reader will get it wrong because Herbert already knows the true answer. We are not aware at this juncture that the omniscient 'One' who asks, and the 'man' who affirms, are indeed part of he same equation. The poet builds in a measure of guess work through this *altercatio*, that is, question and answer, to keep the reader on his toes. The secure opening of the poem is brought into question by the challenge that the 'One' poses to the speaker. It can be assumed that if he had not appeared the speaker would go on his way comfortably assuring himself that he had solved the mystery. It is through quizzing the speaker that the 'One' is able to reassure him that *J* and *C* do mean both Jesus Christ and Joy and Charite, through revealing himself as a 'Man of God', and urging the speaker to see beyond the obvious:

> But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] meekness (I Timothy 6.II).

Through opening the poem in this binary way, the poet presents a number of choices to the reader and a number of interpretations. When the 'One' asks the

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[15]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative,* p.5.
[16]Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, translated by W.H. Longridge (London: Scott, 1922), p.2. In the exercises, Loyola asks the individual to imagine themselves in the same situation as the sufferer. As, for example, Jesus in the garden of Gethsemene prior to his crucifixion.

speaker 'what it meant?' does he mean what do *J* and *C* stand for? or possibly what do they mean in your life? The second speaker is thus questioning the first speaker's faith paralleling Jesus as he asks the disciples:

> Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, some say that thou art John the Baptist, Some say, Elias; and others Jerimias, or one of the prophets. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16.13-16).

Jesus, affirming that he was correct in recognising the truth, replies:

> Blessed art thou Simon Barjona for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 16.17).

Thus the phrase, 'what it meant' is loaded with ambiguity, and the reader is never really sure if the speaker knows that the *J* and *C* means Jesus Christ or not, until the 'man repl[ies]', 'Sir, you have not miss'd' (7).

As Rosalie Colie argues,

> The idea of God, God - the - Word is the ultimately self-sufficient idea, the idea of ideas which, if understood, satisfies, suffices, fills [and] makes content.[17]

Yet the speaker has failed to give the images their full significance, and the poem thus 'becomes a presentation of and commentary upon the imperfection of one man's understanding of Christian truth.'[18] This latter point fails to take note of the subtle implication made by the first speaker, namely the aside 'I (who am never loth/To spend my judgment) said, It seem'd to me'(4-5). In other words 'I really know that it means Jesus Christ, but to this stranger I will state what he would like to hear - 'Joy and Charite.' How very human does the poet make this intimate revelation of the heart. Jonathan Culler notes how 'these conventions of metaphorical coherence

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[17]Rosalie Colie, 'Logos in the Temple,' in *JWCI*, 26 (1963), 327-342 (p.328).
[18]Robert L. Montgomery, Jr. 'The Province of Allegory in George Herbert's Verse,'in *Essential Articles for the study of George Herbert*, pp.ix-552 (p.119).

produce coherence on the levels of both signifier and signified, and provides the work with a unifying formal structure.'[19]

As Kinney suggests, 'the formal framing becomes a plot in itself, whilst the reader gets so overwhelmed by poetic devices, that the plot itself is subsumed in a sea of brilliant subtle and didactic devices.'[20] Fish, referring to 'Love-joy', argues that

> the reply to the poem's riddle is surprising to the reader, who hears what he feels to be the wrong answer.[21]

Yet the answer to the poem's riddle is simply Jesus Christ who embodies Joy and Charitie. The reader is effectively brought to a self-discovery which is the goal of catechising; like the parishioner, the reader has been brought by means 'of what he knows' - that *J* and *C* stand for Jesus Christ, - to 'that which he knows not' - that truly to know Jesus Christ is to know Joy and Charitie.[22] The reader does not know what the speaker who views the *J* and *C* on the bunch of grapes first thinks, and Herbert does not indicate this either. The poet builds up the suspense subliminally in the reader's mind, and as Eric Rabkin points out, as he refers to subliminal knowledge in narrative generally, 'we are unaware of this suspense until comparisons of perceived bits with the context in which they occur.'[23] Thus the 'vine', 'grapes', 'bodie' and 'judgement', which are relevant in 'Love-joy', are relevant in the context of the philosophy for the Christian life, lived through Jesus Christ.

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[19]Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (Icatha, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p.115, in S. Cohen & L. Shires *Telling Stories*, p. 22.
[20] Clare Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, p.10.
[21]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p. 28.
[22]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p. 29.
[23]Eric Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense* (Michigan, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), p.18.

As the plot in 'Love-joy' develops in line 3, the narrator draws in the reader who is also standing by waiting to know what it means. John Donne, in a sermon dated 26 April 1625, states that

> the hand of God, hath not set up, but laid down another Glasse, wherein though may see thyself; a glass that reflects thyself [...] a Crystall glasse will not show a man his face, except it be steeled, except it be darkened on the backside Christ as he was pure Crystall glasse, as he was God, had not been a glasse for us [...] except he had been steeled, darkened with our human nature.[24]

Although Donne refers to a mirror, both works imply an intimate involvement between God and man, and a personal commitment whereby the purity of the window is 'steeled' by the *J* and the *C*, and similarly reveals the innermost nature of the first speaker, darkened by hubris: 'I (who am never loth/To spend my judgement' (4), he proclaims.

'A plot', as Peter Brooks argues, 'is conceived to be the outline or armature of the story, that which supports and organises the rest.'[25] Herbert's plot in this poem, hinges on the uncertainty and ambiguity of just two letters. There is a suggestion of a contrived casualness in the introduction of the 'One', who appears to be waiting for the speaker to interpret for him specifically. The reader suspects that this individual already knows the secret of the puzzle, and the powerlessness of the speaker who is drawn to look at the window, is confirmed by the all-knowing presence of the 'man [who] repl'd; It figures Jesus Christ' (8). Was he the man who annealed the *J* and *C* on the grapes? It is usual for an artist to sign his work, whether on a painting or on glass; sometimes the signature is coded so that only experts can tell whose work they are viewing. Yet although there can be little doubt in the speaker's mind regarding the *J* and *C* Herbert deliberately puts doubt in the reader's mind. The important realisation is not in deciphering the initials, but in decoding the message

[24]*John Donne Selected Prose*, ed. by Neil Rhodes (London: Penguin, 1987), p.225.
[25]Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.11.

they stand for; the message that the speaker is congratulated on acknowledging, even though he does it unknowingly.

In 'Love-joy', the basic ingredients are the window, the vine, the letters and the bunches of grapes. To one who is familiar with Christian doctrine they immediately describe the basis of the Eucharist. For Christ said:

> I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman [...] I am the vine, ye are the branches (John 15.1-5).

The conceits of the Eucharist, as Rosemund Tuve has pointed out,

> are Herbert's characteristic way of 'sounding' the depths of these mysteries, revealing their nature in images rather than to discuss it [26] [...] His genius is in his capacity to see resemblances in such 'tiny' new little movements of the mind.[27]

What makes the poem an interesting narrative, together with its dramatic content and 'characters', is the fact that its compression belies the expansion of the story it attempts to reveal. The speaker opens up an interpretative space through the devices of ambiguity and ellipsis by asking several key questions. Where was the window? - who is the I ? - who is this One?, is he the same person as the man? And how does he (the One and the man) already have the answer, knowing as he does that Joy and Charitie are Jesus Christ? Why does he ask the question in the first place?

Such questions propel the reader into delving deeper into this simple poem, creating didactic meaning through the bare facts presented by the poet. The text, together with the conversational asides , 'One standing by' and the solipsistic 'I (who am never loth/To spend my judgment)', together with 'The man repl'd', is a very real

[26]Rosemund Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert*, p.127.
[27] Rosemund Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert*, p.63.

dialogue between addresser and addressee. The mystery is revealed by the omniscience of the 'man' who knows the 'I' also knows. This takes the story into the realms of Herbert's imagination. The asides are seen as a texture or weaving of codes which, as Barthes suggests

> the reader organises and sorts out but only in provisional ways, since he can never master them completely; the already read (and already written), in the writer's and the reader's experience of other literature, in a whole set of inter textual interlockings.[28]

'Love-joy' is a poem of intellectual discovery, the speaker soliloquising with a reflective, 'It seem'd to me' whilst the essential unintellectual discovery in 'Love-joy' is that moral virtue is only a mask, hiding divine grace, and that 'Jesus Christ is the figure behind every exercise of joy and charity.'[29] This device of eyewitness narrative can be called into question as the 'unreliable eyewitness, laying on the reader a special burden of enjoyable ratiocination.'[30]

4.4.4 Questions and Answers

Scholes argues that 'the development of interior monologue begins when the narrative artist chooses to focus on a mind tormented by a dilemma.'[31] The tentative 'It seem'd to me'(5) holds the reader in a kind of limbo. So rather than the speaker catechising the required answer, learnt by rote, we see an individual thinking for himself. As Luther argues 'He is assured that any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.'[32]

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[28]Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), in Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.19.
[29]Helen H. Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert*, p.69.
[30]Robert Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative*, p. 263.
[31]Robert Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative*, p.182.
[32]Martin Luther, 1483-1546, *95 Theses*, trans. by P.J. Schroder, ed. K. Aland (London: Concordia Publishing Hse.,1967), p.37.

The scenario in 'Love-joy' is presented as a visual *mise-en-scene,* the drama played out by the speaker, with an entry of the 'One' to question him, as God might do on Judgment Day, as stated in the poem 'Judgement.'

> Almightie Judge, how shall poore wretches brook
> Thy dreadful look
> Able a heart of iron to appall
> When thou shalt call
> For ev'ry mans peculiar book?
> But I resolve, when thou shalt call for mine,
> That to decline
> And thrust a Testament into thy hand
> Let that be scann'd.
> There thou shalt finde my faults are thine (1-5, 12-15).

Herbert places responsibility for 'all his actions on God on the last day.'[33] If salvation is based not on human choice, but on God's, then it is impossible to fall from grace, to lose one's salvation; such a belief of predestination is crucial in offering a doctrine of 'unspeakable comfort' *(BCP* Article 17). In 'Love-joy' the speaker acknowledges that he has been given the chance to interpret what he is shown in the window. The speaker is offered choice, a rejection of God or an opportunity to allow him to shine through his own soul, illuminating all around him. And while the poem focuses on a perfect final alignment of natural, aesthetic, moral and divine, there is a sense of arbitrary causality that allows the speaker to be gazing at a window, whilst at the same time being asked one of the most important questions of his whole life.[34] It is like being asked by a total stranger - are you a good person? or why are you here on this earth?

The narrative hinges on the casual questions put by the 'One', who just happens to be 'standing by.' If he had asked the speaker 'who engraved these windows?' the reply would not have been, 'Joy and Charitie.' So it is vital for the right

[33]Gene E. Veith, Jr. *Reformation Spirituality*, p.84.
[34]Helen H. Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert,* p.71.

questions to be asked, and we note he is asked, 'what it meant?' The whole Christian moral life is framed by the window and the economical eight lines of the poem. The chance happening of Christ entering the speaker's life, not contrived or searched for but simply occurring, and the way the speaker responds to it, is compressed into the question and answer of narrative dialogue. Herbert's poem indicates how the individual can be trapped by his own self-absorbed introspection. Realising that the speaker has been right all the time allows a reassuring conclusion to the poem.

Barbara Herrnstein-Smith points out that

> in music, the return to the tonic prefigures closure or end of piece, [and] equates the same satisfaction in the listener, he expects a particular sound [...] rhyme strengthens closure [...] familiarity of groups of sounds makes the poem more effective.[35]

In 'Love-joy' the very title is dislocating to the reader. Bloch suggests that

> The proper translation of the Greek word *agape* was a matter of some controversy in the Reformation. Tyndale tendentiously translated 'love' instead of 'charity', just as he translated 'congregation' instead of 'church.'[36]

Nevertheless, the title appears to simply be a concatenation of the Love, Joy, Charitie and Jesus Christ that the whole poem infers. The two words of two syllables, Love-joy, sit more comfortably on the ear than say the four syllable Love-charitie, whilst the familiarity of groups of sounds (the 'o' assonance in Love-joy), make the poem more effective, and easier to remember, permitting a relaxation of tension in the formal structure. The Word becomes two words 'Love-joy' which discusses and acts out the implications of the letter as sign, set against the backdrop of the glass (or window). St. Paul says:

> For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face [...] And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Corinthians 13.12-13).

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[35]Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 212.
[36]Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word*, p.211.

Herbert has used narrative to conflate both the 'love' and 'charite' which the speaker 'sees' with his understanding; by doing so, he therefore penetrates through the darkness of misinterpretation. The poem's closure opens with the concept of perceiving Christ's name in the window and ends with its final confirmation - *JESUS CHRIST*. What the reader has witnessed is the uncertainty and misappropriation of what is normally taken for granted, the misprision of simple interpretation. How fortunate that the 'man' was there to confirm what the *J* and *C* really meant. 'Closure here is the complex product of the interaction between logical sequence and figurative language.'[37] The name, *JESUS CHRIST* equates with the Joy and Charitie, and this is the lesson that is truly learned.

4.4.5 Conversation in the Narrative Lyric

In Herbert's long narrative poem 'Love unknown', the speaker offers his heart to the unseen 'other' saying: 'To him I brought a dish of fruit one day.' There is a clear demarcated line of dialogue between the speaker and his critical Lord. Here, the conflict that occurs is one of endless frustration as the speaker tries to present his heart to his Lord, yet each time it is found wanting in every respect. The dialogue is told in the third person, and in the past tense, by the unseen character that the speaker presents to the reader. 'Deare Friend, sit down, the tale is long and sad' is the opening line which permits an extended tragic tale. For whilst the speaker tells his tale in both the past, present and future tenses ('A Lord I had,/ And have, of whom some grounds which may improve' (3-4)) the mysterious 'servant, who did know his eye/Better than you know me' (9-10), holds the poem together presenting the speaker with some uncomfortable choices. The poem describes what Paul Ricoeur terms as

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[37]Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p.135.

> an endless spiral that would carry the mediation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes [...] we may be tempted to say that narrative puts consonance where there was only dissonance. In this way, narrative gives form to what is unformed.[38]

The cyclical nature of conflict, and the therapeutic setting of it through dialogue, is essential to the resolving the dilemma in 'Love unknown.' The dialogue between the 'characters' leaves a narrative space for resolution which finally occurs in the last line as the speaker is told, *'Who fain would have you be, new, tender, quick'* (70).

In the poem 'Dialogue', as in 'Love unknown', the confused speaker cannot acknowledge his worthiness to be in Christ's presence. The first and last stanzas are quoted:

Sweetest Saviour, if my soul (speaker)
Were but worth the having,
Quickly should I then controll
Any thought of waving
But when all my care and pains
Cannot give the name of gains
To thy wretch so full of stains;
What delight or hope remains?
(1-8).

That is all, if that I could (God)
Get without repining;
And my clay my creature would
Follow my resigning.
That as I did freely part
With my glorie and desert,
Left all joyes to feel the smart ----
Ah! No more thou break'st my heart (speaker) (25-32).

The implicit dialogue in the poem focuses on the *aporia* that the speaker has before God. For it is what is not said that holds the key to an implied narrative.[39] God, for example, does not reject the unworthy speaker out of hand, but rather the

[38]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols., (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 11, p.72.
[39]Aporia, or 'apory' in English, is the cognitive perplexity posed by a group of individually plausible but collectively inconsistent propositions. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.41.

conversation that follows allows both to put forward their arguments. The speaker cuts off the dialogue by permitting himself the last word in the final line. This has the effect of silencing God once and for all. Even God has no further argument to present to the speaker. Yet the ending is resolved through implication. By giving God seven lines instead of eight, and cutting him off in mid-sentence, the reader is aware of Herbert's final capitulation to God's will:

> *Left all joyes to feel all smart--*
> Ah! No more thou break'st my heart.

Stanzel suggests that 'it is often difficult to draw the line of demarcation between the 'knower' and the 'sayer' in a narrative dominated by external perspective.'[40] We can acknowledge this in 'Dialogue', whereby the implied narrative is carried through the two well-defined sections of conversation, one of them God's, the other the poet's. It is necessary for there to be an onlooker to understand who is the 'knower' in 'Dialogue.' If it were simply possible just to hear such a conversation, we would never 'hear' God for example. In 'Dialogue', there is an animated conversation between the speaker and God; the speaker is heard first:

> Sweetest Saviour, if my soul
> Were but worth the having (1-2).

God replies:

> *What (childe) is the balance thine,*
> *Thine the poise and measure? (9-10).*

The dialogue continues, two verses to the speaker, two to God, yet there is a surprise, for the speaker interjects God's final words with a realisation of his own: 'Ah! No more thou break'st my heart.' This permits the speaker to have the final word on the matter (31-32).

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[40]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.113.

In 'Dialogue' the story is an imagined meeting with God. As in much of Herbert's verse, time is also dissolved into the suspended time of narration, the *aevum*, a period suspended between the past and the present. Herbert's technique of dialogue, conflict, and resolution is often suspended in a timelessness:

> As I one ev'ning sat before my cell,
> Me thoughts a starre did shoot into my lap ('Artillerie', 1-2).

Or

> The merrie world did on a day
> With his train-bands and mates agree ('The Quip', 1-2).

Herbert explores the potential of the lyric form to narrate both the life and various episodes in others' lives in order to penetrate the interiorised consciousness of his 'characters', much as the Ferrar family did in their 'Little Academy.' For example, he discovers and dramatises the volatile situation presented in the 'consciousness' of the two characters presented in 'The Rose.' Here, the speaker converses with another yet anonymous speaker who tempts the first speaker who rejoins with the words: 'Presse me not to take more pleasure/In this world of sugred lies.' This also has subtle sexual connotations in its tempting and ambiguous language.

4.4.6 Dramatic Monologue

Douglas Gray suggests that

> the English religious lyric was by no means an isolated or insular phenomenon [...] it was deeply indebted to the common Western European Christian tradition of which it was a part [...] the Bible, the Psalter, the liturgy, and from innumerable Latin hymns, [and] poems.[41]

Bearing all these factors in mind it is clear that Herbert's choice of lyric form for his poetry was most apt. Gray also states that poets were 'actively choosing 'simple ejaculatory prayers [...] reflective poems [...]. Some have a simple narrative, others

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[41] *A Selection of Religious Lyrics,* ed. by Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp.vii/viii/x.

are dramatic scenes, or sustained dramatic monologues.'[42] These descriptions of religious lyric poetry fits in with many of Herbert's sensational narrative poems, such as 'The Collar', 'Artillerie', 'The Church-floore' or 'JESU', whereby dramatic monologues become the narrative form Herbert adopts. This technique is explored in the next poem 'JESU.'

> JESU is in my heart, his sacred name
> Is deeply carved there but th'other week
> A great affliction broke this little frame,
> Ev'n all to pieces which I went to seek
> And first I found the corner, where was *J*,
> After, where *ES*, and next where *U* was graved.
> When I had got these parcels, instantly
> I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
> That to my broken heart he was *I ease you*,
> And to my whole is *JESU* (1-10).

In this poem, Herbert deliberately designs the name of his Saviour, Jesus, to fit in to the iconography he wishes to explore. The poem is a self-conscious attempt by Herbert to extrapolate individual meaning from the *Logos* or Word itself. The Word then becomes flesh as it is carved into the speaker's heart: 'Jesu is in my heart, his sacred name/Is deeply carved there.' For Herbert, Jesu the person, as well as Jesu the icon, must be chiseled into his heart, as he later states when looking for the pieces declaring 'and next where *U* was graved'(6). The *Oxford Dictionary of Art* states that 'line engravings (the most universally known), have a quality of metallic hardness and austere precision.'[43] So in the speaker's mind the key advantage of this procedure implies that Jesu can be transferred onto any other receptacle, making it permanently fixed for all time. But the reader immediately senses the irony between the confidence of the speaker and the suddenness of the 'great affliction'.

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[42]Douglas Gray, *A Selection of Religious Lyrics*, p.viii.
[43]*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. by I. Chivers & H. Osborne (Oxford:, & New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.291.

4.4.7 Irony in the Narrative Situation

Scholes points out that the narrative situation is ineluctably ironical, and argues that

> the quality of irony is built into the narrative form, as it is into no other form of literature. What the dramatist can achieve only with considerable effort, and what is utterly alien to the lyricist, is the natural basis of narrative art. Irony is always the disparity of understanding[44]

and nowhere is this more obvious than in the carved letters of JESU into the heart of the speaker. The ironic thing about this story is that the heart has to have an endurable hardness about it to take the carving. Herbert might have simply said JESU is *written* on my heart, but his emphasis on the inflexible, solid and unyielding heart points up to the ironic situation occurring to the unfortunate speaker. The reader enjoys this type of irony, because it suggests a simulacrum of life which enables him to participate in events without being involved in the consequences. Scholes points out that 'the reader is also able to enjoy a certain superiority over the characters who are involved in the action.'[45] The irony in 'JESU' is that Christ knows the speaker's most intimate thoughts, better than the speaker himself.

Herbert uses narrative to relate two strands of a story. On the one hand it is a narrative of a man who has lost faith in God. On the other, it is a story of an individual who fails to see what the Christian faith really means. Interwoven within these strands is the intimate, personal and literal description of the actual breaking of a heart, and its ultimate reconstruction, a symbolic action that focuses on the heart's fragility and its brittle construction. Only after the heart has been broken can the speaker finally discern the truth about Jesu, and his own personal interaction with his Lord. It is Herbert's use of visual imagery that conflates with the emblem of the heart, the engraver's skill, and the spoken word. Not content to relate how Jesu is in his

[44]Robert Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative*, p. 240.
[45]Robert Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative*, p.241.

heart figuratively already, Herbert goes one step further and has the letters etched into his heart physically. He uses narrative to define the image of Jesu as a symbol by making it the carver's sole duty to ensure that it is fixed permanently.

The brittle hardness of a heart that shatters after 'a great affliction'(3) is picked up by Herbert's great follower Henry Vaughan in his volume of sacred poems *Silex Scintillans* or *The Fiery Flint* published in 1650. This refers to the stony hardness of the heart, and whose frontispiece graphically depicts the emblem of a heart, whose numerous accretions and flames weep tears of blood in its attempt to resist the fist threatening it. The act of physical assault on the body which the carving delineates in 'JESU', parallels the assault on Christ as he is put to death. Herbert equates his puny efforts to imitate Jesus, through suggesting his own heart is mutilated. This connection of the speaker with Christ, who also suffered, produces a tension within the reader. As we are aware of Christ's outcome, we subconsciously wonder if the speaker will be able to sort out his problem.

Kermode proposes 'concerns on the effect of a doubling and the repetition in speech and action on our reading of a narrative.'[46] The doubling and excessive narrative Herbert uses to relate this tale about a broken heart is through the emphasis on the importance of his own heart, and in the repetition of Jesu, defined in two phonetic sounds 'JESU is in my heart' (line 1), which increases to three sounds in line (9), 'to my broken heart he was *I ease you.*' The ultimate reconstruction places anxieties in our minds as he focuses on the tenses of the narrative, which vacillate between the present and past in a confusing circularity. Rabkin argues that for the reader 'any temporal structure at any level of meaning can create the subliminal suspense that pulls [him] through the narrative.'[47]

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[46]Frank Kermode, *Poetry, Narrative, History*, p. 32.
[47]Eric S. Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense*, p.20.

The conflation of time lapses: 'is in my heart', th'other week', 'I found', 'he was', 'Is JESU' suggest a contrived narrative. Herbert has designed his own heart to be broken up, yet at the same time subtly construing it with idiomatic meaning when it is realigned in the phrase - '*I ease you.*' The suspense that Herbert creates is in the speaker's childlike simplicity that attempts to piece together a heart as casually as he would a broken toy. The reader knows that such a feat is impossible, yet the poet persists in his asseveration, stating that: 'When I had got these parcels, instantly/I sat me down to spell them.' Rabkin continues, arguing that

> legitimate allusion is clearly a potent force for creating the reality of the fiction [...] if the allusion supports a complete parody [...]. The allusion will work subliminally for an audience familiar with the referred style.[48]

In 'JESU' the reader is aware of the allusion to Christ healing a broken heart, which the poet deliberately put together again.

A similar proposal is proffered in the biblical story of Jesus walking on the water, the reader's apprehension is tested by the deliberate separation of Jesus from the others in the boat, and a reminder of how disaster struck when this last happened; a storm blew up which Jesus calmed.[49] In 'JESU' the reader is offered a separation of the speaker from reality, and we can see therefore that the dreamlike unreality of Herbert's experience is made tangible and focused by the realisation that 'allusion is being used.'[50] The speaker naively believes that if he searches for the letters it will solve all his problems, like a child who collects all his puzzle pieces only to find one is missing, therefore finding that the picture cannot be made. Barbara Hardy argues that

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[48]Eric Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense*, p. 47.
[49]J. M. C. Scott, 'Jesus Walking on the Sea', in *Narrativity in Biblical Texts*, p. 94.
[50]Eric Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense*, p.49.

> not only does each image tell its singular story but that story invokes another [...]. The distortion of time coexists with a reverie that is composed of narrative revision and rehearsals of past and future.[51]

Realism and fantasy are co-existent in our judgments of literary narratives, and it is this suspension of disbelief that allows Herbert the confidence to merge the present 'JESU is in my heart' with the past 'but th'other week.' For the reader now knows he is reading a story and not a factual account.

The poem begins with a confident assertion that as long as 'JESU is in my heart [...] his sacred name/Is deeply carved there' all will be well. The enjambement of 'sacred name/Is deeply carved there' allows the eye to be drawn to the 'carved there' through the alliterative 'c' sounds which come to characterise the hardness of the engraving as well as the heart itself. It also allows the reader to be lulled into a false sense of security with the adverb 'deeply', which indicates the measures the speaker will go to in order to follow Jesus, as well as the depth of the instrument. Nothing can be lost if the owner's name is 'deeply carved there.' It is a secure way to claim ownership, irrefutable evidence that A belongs to A and not to B. Aware of this syllogism, Herbert challenges the reader with the argument, and asks what if all the letters are scattered and hidden? A totally different proposition then presents itself.

Chana Bloch argues that 'Herbert does not present God's doctrine in all its absoluteness; he presents a human being speaking God's Word, bringing it to life by living it.'[52] The reader, as well as the speaker, experiences a poem of discovery and a celebration of the holistic concept of Jesu as each travels through the words. Reconstruction of the letters as well as the speaker's faith is essential if the poem is to work. Not sufficient to be able to spell the name, he must be able to read its subliminal message too. The poem tells us to look for the hidden properties in the

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[51]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, pp.4-5.
[52]Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word*, p.44.

individual, not immediately obvious at first encounter. The poem would not work if Herbert had used the name 'Jesus.' The poem is a contrived effort on the poet's part, and a measure of his skill as a rhetorician to visualise the final sentence whilst still reading a name; it is therefore essential that the name be Jesu in order for the poem to work. The poem begins with the name in capitals to denote its importance to the poet and to its substance. A cursive Jesu would not be so effective, for formality and ritual were important to Herbert; and we acknowledge that *The Temple* shows a Herbert who 'believed in the significance and beauty of ritual.'[53] The carved name of his Jesu must needs be read by all. Herbert conflates the metaphorical with the literal, blurring the boundaries.

4.4.8 Calvinism and Reformation Accountability

For an Anglican such as Herbert, Salvation is the function of God's will and as such it is secure; therefore the breaking of the heart is simply the precursor that strengthens the speaker's faith. Indeed, in 'Repentance', Herbert's poetic closing line states that 'Fractures well cur'd make us more strong', such 'Fractures' which can also occur in a fractured heart. This assertion that Herbert is in tune with God proffers a confidence that suggests they enjoy a symbiotic relationship. Despair was a widely recognised and widespread phenomenon in England in the late sixteenth century.[54] It was attributable to both Calvinism and Puritanism and Herbert offers a tangible means of expression in narrative terms by the re-aligning of his broken heart to a message of comfort. Herbert's rationalisation of the despair felt at his 'affliction' which was so severe it broke his heart, had to be reconstituted through a method that might have to serve him again and again. With childlike simplicity, he produces a foolproof tactic that allows him to find the letters and read a message also. Now, if

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[53]J.H. Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, p.58.
[54]John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p. 27.

he forgets the name he just needs to remember the sentence, or vice-versa. It is a mnemonic device that will stand him in good stead when 'the many spiritual Conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my Soul, before I could subject the will of Jesus my Master' challenge and bedevil him.[55] Hardy calls this 'mnemonic resurrection', and states that

> the final gathering of mnemonic release, the desperate increase in the efforts of soliciting memory, the plaintive summoning of resources and reinforcements, appear at first to elicit a recognition that the past was not only remembered piecemeal but wholly remembered.[56]

Religiously, 'Calvin stressed the initiative of God in all divine-human relationships.'[57] It is therefore feasible to recognise the intervention of God in the speaker's recognition of the phrase thus revealed in the name Jesu. Herbert acknowledges this aspect of Calvinistic theology, demonstrating in a practical way how 'God seeks out the sinner and reveals himself, rather than the reverse occurring.'[58] Waswo suggests that

> at the level of theory, most forms of Protestantism - especially the English varieties of Calvinism - potently reinforced the magical referentially of words that Luther had refused.[59]

Developing this point, Clare Kinney argues that 'one person's *fabula* may be another person's *szujet*.'[60] The former is that concatenation of events which constitutes the raw material of narrative; the latter involves the manipulation and deployment of that material to create an artistically satisfying whole. Therefore Herbert's plot *(szujet)*

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[55] Izaak Walton, *Lives,* p.318.
[56]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners,* p.92. Hardy is discussing the long narrative of memory and memories in 'Time Regained' from Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*; however the imaginative use of time past and present is one that is continually explored in Herbert's poems, and particularly in 'JESU', both literally and figuratively.
[57]Gene E.Veith, Jr, *Reformation Spirituality*, pp.27-33.
[58]Gene E. Veith Jr. *Reformation Spirituality*, p.25.
[59]Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, p.259.
[60]Clare Regan Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative,* p.5.

reveals itself as we proceed through the poem, and the story becomes subsumed in the allegorical and figurative meanings encountered. He cannot just leave his heart broken in pieces, but must construct a plot into which a satisfactory closure becomes essential. Indeed, it is difficult to read the story without trying to find some alternative or *midrash* to it; something that the reader can contribute to the narrative, embellishing and augmenting it as he thinks fit.

Fully aware of the futility of the act of carving a name into his heart, the poem moves rapidly from this literal meaning into the figurative. Such a decisive move enables the reader to understand the friability and fragility the speaker's faith has become. Herbert does not vacillate. After the carving comes the breaking, and then the searching, with exact precision. The poem moves along in a singular, determined pace. Absent are the 'friend' and the 'one' with whom he has discussed his difficulties in other narrative poems. Herbert here stands alone. Self-knowledge is important, and it this factor that Herbert, after seeking the pieces of his heart, must reconstruct and rediscover. Calvin writes:

> It was not without reason that the ancient proverb so strongly recommended to man the knowledge of himself [...] more disgraceful is self-ignorance [...] we deceive ourselves in matters of the highest moment, and so walk Blindfold. [61]

The catastrophic occurrence is at odds with the casualness of the statement: 'but th'other week/A great affliction broke this little frame,/Ev'n all to pieces' (2-4). Such nonchalant writing belies the significance it seeks to convey, and the phrase 'th'other week' is almost like a piece of modern journalism, moving from the past tense to present tense in two lines. The message it transfers is that it happened without warning and at random, but more importantly could do so again, and probably will. Herbert could have stated the definitive 'Last night a great affliction' but the

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[61]Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 2 vols., p.210.

deliberate yet measured brevity of these words focuses on the brevity of the fine line the poet walks between faith and disbelief, life and death, affliction and benefit. The ellipsis of the pronoun 'which' between the words 'affliction and broke' is crucial not only to the metre, but the omission indicates that the 'great affliction' was the agency that 'broke the little frame', indicating that the speaker is that agency breaking his own heart. Herbert's use of *parataxis* coveys the terseness and brutality the poem tries to convey, and the desperation the speaker experiences in attempting to find the portions of his heart.[62] The implosion of the heart equals the sudden apostasy the poet experiences, whilst the ellipses in the syntax parallel this fact. The reader can now reconstruct the poem, filling in the interstices, that Herbert has deliberately left out; which can be read as a metaphor for the Jesu left out of Herbert's life unless 'carved there.' The heart, we can now recognise, has broken *because* it was so hard.

The importance of the truth of the Bible is one that Herbert argues: 'For all Truth being consonant to it self, and [are] all penn'd by one and the selfsame spirit' he states in *The Countrey Parson*.[63] Veith shows that 'the Bible, for Herbert, is not only a source of knowledge, but the means by which God speaks directly to human beings.'[64] The polarity of 'great affliction' and 'little frame' focuses the reader's attention on the feebleness of the speaker without God; whilst the 'all to pieces' projects the fragmentation of the spirit, as well as the dissolution of the body in the grave 'where U was graved' (6). Demonstrating the vacillating nature of words and how slippery phrases can become, the line 'Ev'n all to pieces' (4) becomes ammunition to Herbert's pen. The word 'Ev'n' as well as being read as an adverb, implying that these pieces were broken not only into several portions, but can be

[62]*Parataxsis* - (Gk 'beside arrangement) Coordination of clauses without conjunctions [...] Common in Latin and not unusual in English. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. by J.A. Cuddon 4th edn (London: Penguin, 1979), p.481.
[63]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.229.
[64]Gene E. Veith Jr., *Reformation Spirituality*, p.183.

read as an adjective meaning - 'evenly.' The latter point is important for the construction of the regular words (*'I ease you '*) that is pivotal to the poem. It is a deliberate intimate construction of syntax by the poet, there being no complementary phrase in the Bible to simulate it except perhaps Christ's words: 'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11.30). This makes the words (*'I ease you'*) a fitting conclusive argument.

Paronomasia presents the reader with the expectation of finding other examples with which Herbert has challenged the reader, and as we progress through the poem the reader joins in with Herbert seeking inferences, as the poet seeks for his missing letters. Such inclusion of the reader in the process of the narrative allows for it to become intensely flexible. The 'piece[s]' become peace, whilst 'grav[ed]' migrates to the grave, and 'ev'n' calls for the regularity of thought rather than the scattering it first denotes. Indeed, the whole poem on the one word JESU metamorphoses into a synecdoche for the personal interaction between the Christian and Christ. The Word, in this case JESU, becomes the vital catalyst in order to move the poem onwards towards its final holistic concept (a name which metamorphoses into words). Herbert himself allows God to take control in 'JESU', as he does in 'Jordan (11),' arguing in the final line of the latter poem that shows 'There is a love ready penn'd/Copie out that, and save expense.'

It is a concept adopted by Sir Philip Sidney who states in *Astrophil and Stella v.1:* 'Fool', said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'[65] All these arguments focus on poetry being something God-given, and intuitive, something from within the soul of the individual. Herbert appears to argue in 'JESU' that the individual is certainly the only person able to look into his own heart, find the pieces, assemble

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[65]*Silver Poets of the Sixteenth Century*, ed.by Gerald Bullett, 3rd edn (London: Dent, 1985), p.173.

them and read what is there. This focuses on Herbert adopting the Calvinistic concept of the individual responding to God who has initiated the challenge, rather than the obverse happening.

The separate letters of the crude carved JESU at the commencement of the poem metamorphose into the sacred *Logos* of succour at the end of the poem, a metaphor for the end of life, but it takes the individual to find this. Anyone can carve letters into anything, argues the poet, it requires insight and the ability to 'spell them' (8) and to comprehend their significance, reading what God has planned for them. Herbert uses narrative as a demonstrative tool to show how the reader is also able to deduce inference from the letter. The final sentence *must* be one of comfort, if the poem is to work, as we remember that the speaker has had his heart broken by 'A great affliction', the narrative would be futile if it read '*I see you*' for example.

Fish has pointed out that the reader is being asked to 'misspell the words in lines 5 and 6 of 'JESU."[66] Playing with the letters until they make sense, the 'J' and the 'I' become exactly what Herbert wants them to become. Elsewhere in the poem the speaker uses the prosaic statement:

> When I had got these parcels, instantly
> I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
> That to my broken heart he was *I ease you*,
> And to my whole is *JESU* (7-10).

The continual enjambement implies that the second line is counterpoint to the preceding one, each complementing the other. The insertion of the comma after 'parcels' as in 'When I had got these parcels, instantly/I sat me down' has a different connotation to 'When I had got these parcels instantly,/I sat me down.' The comma break in the first example allows for a pause for reflection by the speaker before he instantly attempts to spell the letters. Without such a pause, there is an implication

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[66]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p.33.

that there is a selfish grasping of something the speaker has searched for, for his own gain, rather like a child getting a Christmas gift. The OED states that the seventeeth-century meaning of 'parcel' indicates the word as a part, a portion or division of anything. Herbert, of course, knows what his parcels contain. What he does not know, are the words the actual letters make, only when he has found the letters one by one, can the true sense of the whole be acknowledged by him.

The poem's proleptic opening prefigures its dénouement, and the opening of the poem mirrors the finding and opening of the 'parcels' by the speaker. The carved letters remain the same carved letters throughout the poem, the fact that the speaker can only see them as a name JESU initially is a human feature of his own vulnerability. It takes an 'affliction' to scatter the letters, and a triumph of the human spirit to reconstruct them again, and be able to benefit from the event. The narrative works by presenting a cyclical prefiguring of the poem. The poem opens with the word JESU, and closes with the word JESU. What has happened in some ten lines, is the scattering of: 'a broken and contrite heart, [...] shalt thou not despise' (Psalm 51.17).

Nevertheless, this 'broken heart' has entered a learning curve, realising the wholeness Jesu means to his broken spirit, the speaker actively searches out the pieces, which become the metonym for the whole, which is what the actual word (metonym) means as a rhetorical device. The 'whole', we realise, becomes the hole that has been left by the 'affliction', the same vacuous hole that the final punning line indicates, which is completely filled with Christ, as well as the sentence: 'And to my whole is JESU.' Salvation in which man has even the smallest hand is thereby invested with a degree of doubt. But 'salvation which from the beginning to end is entirely the work of God is invested with complete assurance God's work, it cannot

fail or be frustrated.'[67] The poem is a triumph of the written and spelled word over the spoken one. For whilst the speaker knows he has Jesu in his heart, he can only prove it to himself and others, through the dismemberment of parts of the Word. Such disjointing of the 'pieces' parallels the casting of dice for Christ's robe:

> The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part [...]. They said [...] Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be (John 19.23-24).

The poem, like many Biblical narratives, only makes sense when seen holistically, such as the parable of the feeding of the crowd with five loaves and two fishes. Kermode points out that

> this parable is interpreted by Augustine as being the five wounds of Christ; whilst the two fishes become the Virgin Mary and the penitent thief; the twelve baskets the twelve apostles.[68]

The allegorical heart is central to the poem, but only when reconstructed. Herbert's opening definitive statement: 'JESU is in my heart' is only made meaningful when the speaker's change of viewpoint mirrors his attitude, through the change in letters. Such a change of attitude is paralleled in the change of language; the hard sounds of 'sacred and carved' (1-2), which trick us into thinking they are anagrams, are transposed to the sibilant sounds of 'perceived' and 'ease' (8-9). Fish has argued that in Herbert's poetry there is always a dialectic of choice between 'a structure that is firm, secure and complete, and one that is precarious, shifting and unfinished.'[69] The reader is constantly asked to interpret not only the meaning, but the words also.

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[67]Philip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), p.56. in Gene E.Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, p.93.
[68]Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.37. N.B. Kermode argues that 'Every hermeneutic encounter with a text is an encounter with Being disclosed within. The very fact we are *outside* allows us to do just this.' *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.39. N.B. In this interpretation, Kermode is quoting from G.R. Owst, *Literature & Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933 ed of 1961), p.62.
[69]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p.11.

Such flexibility allows for interpretative truth to flow through. Many individuals, however, cannot always understand truth and Herbert understands this saying:

> wicked men, however learned, do not know the Scriptures, because they feel them not, and because they are not understood but with the same Spirit that writ them.[70]

The self-reflexive nature of the poem hinges upon the individual knowing what is in his own heart, for it is then that he is able to reiterate what is truly there. Throughout the poem the reader is kept ahead of the plot. It is essential that Herbert wins the confidence of the reader. The reader needs to know that affliction will be eased, and that the 'little frame' is indeed his own being, thus the climax when it arrives is not too surprising. The poem, as a perfect circle, responds to the central name JESU. This is important for the revivification to the spirit. The speaker wants JESU in his heart at his birth and at his death. Catechising the reader with the hypnotic rhythm of JESU at the beginning of the poem and finishing with his name is 'not to eliminate rote, but to perfect it.'[71] In narrative any recurring symbol, whether it is an object, a gesture or a character, becomes defined and limited by its contexts. Scholes argues that

> Narrative requires an irreducible minimum of rationality which eventually limits its meaning [...]. A great part of the pleasure of allegory is the ingenuity and creativeness of the artist, who is able to sustain both a fiction and a complex idea at one and the same time.[72]

The narrative relationship between the name JESU and the words 'discovered' by the speaker attempts to convince the implied reader of the centrality of the Christian's role in responding to God.

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[70]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works,* p.228.
[71]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p.17.
[72] Robert Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative*, pp.107 &142.

The narrator aims to convince the reader of the message the name JESU is able to evoke in the receptive heart. This micro-narrative of some ten lines, responds in the smallness of just four letters (JESU) to the macro-narrative of an all-encompassing God, which the destruction of the proud heart has revealed to the speaker. Rather than 'mediating between contradictions or resolving paradoxes, Christ literally embodies them.'[73] As an example of a contrived and subtle narrative the poem works on all the subliminal, personal and literal levels; deceptively simple, yet profoundly complex. In conclusion, it can be argued that the dialogue that Herbert presents to both himself and the reader in these poems attests to his deliberate construction of narrative within the lyric genre, thus creating an idiomatic Christian message to himself.

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[73]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p. 44.

Chapter Five

' But not of speech in starres'

The Unfamiliar and the Unexplained.

The poems discussed are 'Artillerie', 'Our Life is hid with Christ in God', 'The Crosse', 'The Church-floore' and 'Confession.'

5.5.1 An Exploration of Defamiliarisation in the Narrative Poems

Herbert is frequently unable to explain why God appears to act in ways that defy explanation. Many of his poems grasp this concept by viewing objects in a unique and unfamiliar way, such as a cross, a church floor or even a log fire. In previous chapters it was shown how Herbert worked through his conflicts eventually acquiring a resolved ending. In this chapter, by defamiliarising the familiar, he comes to understand God's point of view, and is therefore able to more confidently assert that 'I am but finite, yet thine infinitely.' It is this important concept that Herbert explores in many of his poems of defamiliarisation.

In Viktor Shklovsky's book *Theory of Prose* (1990), he argues that

> poetry is a special mode of thinking - to be precise, a mode of thinking in images [...]. A poetic image is one of the means by which the poet delivers his greatest impact.[1]

Shklovsky explains that the reason for this hypersensitivity is 'intensifying the sensation of things' such as sounds of the literary work itself. 'The forms of art are explained by the artistic laws that govern them and not by comparison with actual life.'[2] Many of Herbert's poems, as well as telling a story, move into this realm of fantasy: poems such as 'Artillerie' where a spark from the fire becomes a message

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[1] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, pp.1&3.
[2] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p.170.

from God; or 'JESU' in which the speaker literally reconstructs his broken heart. In the following poem to be discussed 'Artillerie', which is both circular and cyclical as well as fantastic, the trajectory of the speaker's life is articulated through the ironical submission to God's will. The first two stanzas are quoted:

> As I one ev'ning sat before my cell,
> Me thoughts a starre did shoot into my lap.
> I rose, and shook my clothes, as knowing well,
> That from small fires comes oft no small mishap.
> When suddenly I heard one say,
> *Do as thou usest, disobey,*
> *Expell good motions from thy breast,*
> *Which have the face of fire, but end in rest.*
>
> I, who had heard of musick in the spheres,
> But not of speech in starres, began to muse:
> But turning to my God, whose ministers are; if I refuse,
> Dread Lord, said I, so oft my good;
> Then I refuse not ev'n with bloud
> To wash away my stubborn thought:
> For I will do, or suffer what I ought (1-16).

Using the conceit of a sudden ignition from what he does not know, the hapless speaker is admonished by 'one' for doing what any normal-minded person might attempt, namely extinguishing the conflagration about to start: 'Me thoughts a starre did shoot into my lap./I rose, and shook my clothes' (2-3). Nevertheless, this is the wrong thing to do, as the reader, together with the speaker, is about to discover. For the fire about to ignite is not on the speaker's person but in his mind. This is no normal fire and the speaker misinterprets the signs, both in wanting to put out the fire and misjudging God. The sense of isolation and aloneness, so essential for this particular narrative to work, is compounded through the imagery of the solitary hermit, sitting before his cell (and it can be assumed that there is no-one else to share the experience with). Thus the figure of contemplation is presented to the reader and allows the narrator to adopt an air of anticipatory tension by the use of the word 'before.' The *emic* opening by the 'teller-character' shows an explicit

introduction and exposition oriented towards the reader, drawing him in, as both (speaker and reader) are urged to expect some portent to happen, and it does, the words: 'As I one ev'ning sat before my cell,/Me thoughts a starre did shoot into my lap' (1-2) are the concentrated opening remarks of this reclusive individual.[3] The narrative focuses on the sensible actions of the speaker as he attempts to put out the fire on his clothing.

The narrative in this poem moves unselfconsciously between the figurative and the literal, and between fantasy and reality. For whilst the reader can identify with the actions of the speaker in trying to douse the flames on his person, what he is not ready for is the speaker hearing 'one say.' Herbert sets the scene, as it were, of quiet contemplation, yet confounds the reader with his conflation of the bizarre and the strange, with the homely and domestic. It is a situation designed to jolt the reader out of his apathy as the speaker is challenged before God. The narrative articulates between the literal and the figurative in a symbolic way. The shaking of the clothes reflects the shaking off of God's will, that the speaker would like to do. The fire, a symbol of purgation, recalls the disobedience of the speaker.

God shoots his arrows into the speaker's conscience, the speaker ignores them, only when a physical act impinges itself onto the speaker will he take note of God. Just as the crucifixion symbolised the destruction of the physical to make way for the eternal, so too must the domestic scene refer to the homiletic and subsequent salvation of the speaker. The 'cell' is the speaker's mind, which, together with the involvement of the reader, permits a collusion which both will explore together. It is a compressed and focused life narrative that allegorises the compactness of the cell or mind into an expansion of a mystical understanding, which as yet is not revealed.

[3] Roland Harweg, *Textgrammatik*, ed. by Schecker and Wunderli (Tubingen:1975) pp.166-85. in F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.169. NB. Harweg describes an *Emic* opening thus: 'The teller is master of the story - it can be grasped as a whole, it is orderly and makes sense'.

Joseph Summers suggests that 'the relations between factual statement and allegorical significance could be varied from dramatic contrast to almost complete identity. Allegory does not have to be dull.'[4] What it does have to be, however, is interpreted accurately. The use of fire to expunge sins from the self is hardly surprising, yet the speaker ironically misreads the signs and the symbolism. Using logic and homespun philosophy learnt from his mother's knee he reasons: 'That from small fires comes oft no small mishap' (4); but such reasoning plays no part in the concept of God. The sudden realisation that this is no spark from his log fire is hastily dispelled when he: 'heard one say,*/Do as thou usest, disobey* ' (5-6), for this is the last thing the speaker wishes to hear. The conceit of fire that attacks the speaker of its own accord, together with the voice, is arguably a thing to pay attention to and act upon:

> I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division (Luke12. 49 &51).

The speaker must be ready to act upon God's will at a moment's notice. Yet the *mashal* or dark saying of Jesus offers little in the way of viewing the whole picture; and Herbert's poem suggests a similar concept, for both propose what Frank Kermode terms a *Klêdôn,* or a pronouncement, which makes sense at the time (the speaker needs to shake his smouldering clothes, and listen to the voice as it tells him of his disobedience).[5] Ralph Flores argues that

> if humans are free yet fallen, they may misunderstand (in their subtlety) the very language that might lead them toward God. This means that even - or especially - divine language might fail, and indeed God [...] speaks through signs.[6]

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[4] Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art,* p.171.
[5] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p.106.
[6] Ralph Flores, *The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority* (Icatha & London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.44.

In 'Artillerie' it is important for the speaker to be able to recognise the 'one', and to understand the 'message' given. This is essential for the interpretative process to work, as he reasons: 'I, who had heard of musick in the spheres [...] whose ministers/The starres and all things are' (9 &11-12). The conflation of stars, spheres and heavens, with the humble fire the speaker is sitting before, helps to identify the enormousness of the universe and the minute smallness of man by a reconciliation of opposites. It is an image Herbert explores in depth in a poem discussed previously 'The Church Militant':

> Almightie Lord, who from thy glorious throne
> Seest and rulest all things ev'n as one:
> The smallest ant and atome knows thy power (1-3).

5.5.2 A Cloak of Obfuscation

The speaker, who has the hairs of his head numbered, must therefore view his life in relation to the whole universe, an awesome prospect: 'But the very hairs of your head are numbered' states Jesus in Matthew 10.30. A cloak of obfuscation entraps the reader in 'Artillerie.' Unsure how to interpret the sign of a burning coal, the speaker cannot question God, but must simply obey what God intimates. John Olson argues that

> even good men lash out at the God they serve. They resist not because they are vicious people but because they feel abandoned by their God and isolated from their fellowmen.[7]

Just as the speaker in 'Love-joy' misreads *J* and *C* on a window as Joy and Charitie, so he repeats the process in 'Artillerie.' Only a working through of the sign that a spitting fire evokes can the resolution be arrived at:

> Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand[...]. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isaiah 6.6).

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[7] John Olson, 'Herbert's Dialogues,' *The George Herbert Journal*, 12, (1988), 17-27 (p.20).

Thus it can be argued that the self-narrative Herbert supports is one of self-abnegation and repentance, weighing up, as he does, what he has to offer God in return for everlasting life that the final two lines intimate: 'I am but finite, yet thine infinitely.'

There is little indication of what the speaker is thinking as he '[sits] before [his] cell'; unlike the poem 'Man' whereby the speaker confronts God with the exclamation: 'My God, I heard this day'; or in 'Affliction (V)' :'My God, I read this day'; two statements that demand an immediate response. No, he is in a thoughtful, contemplative mood, a mood ripe for the voice of God as was Elijah:

> And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice (1Kings 19.12).

The speaker is not slow to react appropriately to the voice of the 'one' that he interprets as his 'Dread Lord' (13). Being able to hear God's voice is therefore a prerequisite to act speedily and accurately. How dreadful if, for example, the speaker had merely shrugged his shoulders and walked away from such a situation, simply relieved that he had dealt with the emergency in a competent way, and avoided a minor disaster. But the 'one' sees it differently, and herein lies the problem in the *midrash* of vague parabolic conceits that confront both speaker and reader alike; both must arrive at the same conclusions if some didactic meaning is to be achieved. Thomas F. Merrill, in discussing what he terms 'God Talk' argues that

> God-talk has always been difficult because it is a deliberate misuse of language. It is ordinary language 'stretched' beyond its functional limits to address supernatural 'facts'[...] for in reading God-talk our interest is not what the words mean but what they do.[8]

Hence the meaning of a flying spark landing at random on a person is no act of carelessness, rather it is a sign from God that can be ignored or acted upon.

[8] Thomas F. Merrill, 'Herbert's Significant Stuttering', *The George Herbert Journal*, 11, (1988), 1-18 (pp.1&5).

In writing the principal character as himself, the speaker is thus able to control all the outcomes possible that this brief scenario presents. Self-knowledge is vital, and knowing one's weaknesses is as important as having faith in one's strengths:

> If I refuse,
> Dread Lord, said I, so oft my good,
> Then I refuse not ev'n with bloud
> To wash away my stubborn thought:
> For I will do, or suffer what I ought (12-16).

Hence there is a clash between the religious narrative and the life narrative, yet it is one that the speaker is acutely aware of, and does not seek to excuse. The tension that arises cannot be easily diffused. An attempt by the speaker to reason with God, and even offer a challenge, points to a man who has achieved a settled confidence in his own secure ideas, however wrong these ideas turn out to be. The repetition of: 'If I refuse' (12) (what will you do?); to: 'Then I refuse' (14) (you still cannot touch me); culminating in: 'yet thou dost refuse' (20) (see, we are both the same you and me) has the gibes of a tormenting child, but also an echo of a court of law, whereby the defendant challenges the legality of his accusers. Nevertheless, the aside: ('I must say still') (21) suggests a reliable speaker, and one who is clearly conversing with another person. Waswo shows how 'theologians who wanted words to stand for unalterable spiritual realties now had to argue that they could so function.'[9] Leitch suggests that

> narratives do not so much teach truth as unteach falsehood [...] [they] can be an area of experience rather than an object of knowledge[10]

and Culler develops this concept further by stating that

> rhetorical writing depends heavily on readers' ability to naturalize it and to recognize the common world which serves as a point of reference.[11]

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[9] Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, p.249.
[10]Thomas M. Leitch, *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*, p.77.
[11]Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, p.135.

This is particularly apt in 'Artillerie', where we see the development of a singular conceit (a starre), which grows into warfare between the self of man and the will of God. The poem opens up more questions than it attempts to answer. Why, for example, does the 'starre' provoke the thought of fire? Why does it not simply be seen as a sign that the person who has noticed it perceives it as a blessing? Yet warfare is implied in the title of the poem, and warfare it is.

God, of course, knows how to target his victim, so to speak, through his conscience. The speaker has no such strategy. He knows he wants to serve God, but God makes it difficult for him. Engaging the reader in his humorous, yet ingenuous way, the speaker relates that: 'I, who have heard of musick in the spheres,/But not of speech in starres' (9-10). This little observation excludes God in a most deliberate way, for it appears to say - I know that you, God, have heard the music of the spheres, but no-one else has. This widens the gap between the real and the unreal. The speaker tries to make sense of God's will, for this is what defines his Christianity; whilst in the third stanza, he implies that: 'I have also starres and shooters too' (17) (even though God has given them to him, namely his tears and prayers).

As the speaker attempts to make a bargain with God, or at least reason with him, he tries to rationalise the workings of God through external actions, actions that can only be explained in subjective terms. Yet God does not act in ways that man might call rational, and this is what the speaker has not yet acknowledged. It is in the final stanza that the resolution and reconciling of God and man are finally achieved. The speaker must come to understand the enmeshing of God and man, and he acquires this through the interweaving of the words: 'I am thine' (29); 'If I am mine' (30); 'I am but finite, yet thine infinitely' (32). The adverb 'infinitely' implying a

continuum with God. This central rhetorical topos is echoed in the 'Clasping of hands' and shows the interweaving of supplicant and benefactor, whereby the 'thine and mine' repeat themselves like a catechism that must be learnt before it can take effect. William V. Nestrick points out how in this latter poem,

> 'Mine and Thine' is a harmony [...]. By coupling 'mine' and 'thine' as rhymes, Herbert discovers the separation that is the basis for the Christian's sense of God, and the attempt to overcome these words, to bring them into a union, is a poetic and religious desideratum.[12]

In 'Artillerie' the initial words of God: *'Do as thou usest, disobey'* are not referred to again, but the sign that God has sent is enough for the speaker to take heed. The literal and the figurative are used by God to work in a symbiosis with each other. The 'starre and speech' are signifiers for God's power and man's feebleness. The inept: 'But I also have starres and shooters too' (17) are not seen by anyone but God. The humble petition of the speaker is almost heartbreaking, for all he has to offer are his tears and prayers, but in a flash of inspiration he realises: 'Then we are shooters both, and thou dost deigne/ To enter combate with us' (25-26). The speaker uses words as armaments to attack and challenge God. Indeed they are man's only weapon: 'But I would parley fain/Shunne not my arrows' (27-28), he pleads. The definite article of the (thee) is used as a homonym in the last two lines: 'There is no articling with thee', for as Nestrick points out,

> articles related to pronouns in Greek usage are finite (the) and infinite a/an; hence by linguistic play, the wish of the last two lines becomes a reality.[13]

The narrative focuses on the enfeebled attempt by the speaker to rationalise all he has just experienced. Nestrick shows how

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[12]William V. Nestrick 'Mine and Thine in *The Temple*', in Joseph Summers, *Too rich to clothe the Sunne: Essays on George Herbert,* ed. by Claude J, Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), p.115.
[13]William V. Nestrick, 'Mine and Thine in *The Temple,*' pp. 125-6.

> without the special revealing voice, the spark could not be known to have a 'face of fire' but ending in 'rest.' We discover obedience to run counter to 'natural' behavior and to be inconvenient and painful even to the point of consuming us.[14]

What is noted, however, is that the voice does not startle or shock the speaker, indeed he states: 'I [...] began to muse' (10). This is hardly the action of an amazed individual, but rather one who has been expecting a revelation. Yet he fails to ask God what he means, for he knows that the answer lies within his own heart. Stanzel explains that

> realistic presentation of consciousness seems to require the illusion of immediacy, that is, the apparent suspension of mediacy, more than does the presentation of external events [...]. Interior monologue, free indirect style and figural narrative situation, that is, the forms of the reflector-mode and of internal perspective, suggest immediacy, that is the illusion of direct insight into the character's thoughts.[15]

Herbert's interior monologue: 'Me thoughts', and his internal perspective: 'as knowing well,/That from small fires comes oft no small mishap'; whilst the 'figural narrative situation' that shows the speaker knows he is addressing God demonstrate Stanzel's point well.

Defamiliarisation occurs in 'Artillerie' whereby a simple fire becomes the vehicle for the all-knowing voice of God. The speaker 'needs' a voice to put him on the right track, as it were. And just as in 'Love-joy' the reader, together with the speaker, 'hears' the one saying ironically that 'you have not miss'd' [because I have assisted you] [...] 'It figures JESUS CHRIST.' In 'Artillerie' the focus is on the *mashal*, the hidden meaning, that needs to be unravelled by a third party. Jesus explains to the disciples that: 'Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables' (Luke 8.10).

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[14]William Nestrick, 'Mine and Thine in *The Temple*,'p.122.
[15]F. K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p 127.

There is a realisation that language is empty unless God accepts it, and in 'Artillerie', language involves accepting and facing the very threat the speaker has tried to avoid at the start of the poem. Helmut Bonheim argues that

> a character may also substitute for the reader, for whom he may seem to listen (audition by proxy) or provide whatever sense organs may be required to take in the fictional world [...]. If the author speaks [...]. The reader cannot hear him: only the written words register.[16]

Although such reported speech as: 'I heard one say' (5) tends to distance us from the speaker; in this case, the cosy intimacy that the speaker has set up, warm fire, mulling over life, homespun philosophy, aligns the reader to the inner thoughts the speaker intimates, and we do not feel dissociated from him at all.[17]

In a quantitative study of readers' varying interpretations of theme in short fiction, Victoria Kurtz and Michael F. Schober show how individual readers arrive at a fictional story's theme. The results of the study strongly suggest that themes do not reside in texts in any obvious way but are constructed by readers. Kurtz and Schober also suggest that 'thematic inferences are not computed [understood] automatically, as part of comprehension, but rather later as acts of interpretation.'[18] This is evident in the self-characterisation in 'Artillerie.' The speaker opens up his heart on the page, as it were, and the reader can empathise with him in his dilemma. Heather Asals argues that Stanley Fish's reading of *The Temple* tends

> to dismiss Herbert's ontology and, with it, Herbert's own attachment to the principles of the *via media* which argues the necessity for outward form and assumed the validity of a ceremonious ontology.[19]

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[16]Helmut Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes,* p. 51.
[17]H. Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes*, p.52.
[18]Victoria Kurtz and Michael F. Schober, 'Readers' varying interpretations of themes in short fiction,' *Poetics* 29 (2001) 139-166 (p.139).
[19]Heather A. R. Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God* , pp.5.

Asals points out that as she read 'Artillerie', 'she was also personally 'struck' by one of Herbert's 'starres', as the reality of what the Church of England and all its ceremonies meant to a man like Herbert.'[20]

The acceptance that man will always get it wrong without God's help is essential to Herbert's Christian thought: *'Do as thou usest*, [as you usually do] *disobey'*, states the 'one'. Nevertheless, you will come round to my way of thinking eventually, for this is essential for contentment, is the covert message underpinning the flash of enlightenment. The 'rest' (8) suggested is not the peaceful ending to a fulfilled life, but rather the restless anxiety of not achieving one's full life potential, through the egotistical motivation of self-righteousness. 'When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,/I thought the service brave', he states in the first two lines of 'Affliction (1)', which later he would berate: 'I was entangled in the world of strife,/Before I had the power to change my life' (41-42). Not *a* world of strife, we note, but *the* world of strife (the pronoun 'a' equating with infinite in Greek, and the finite with 'the').[21] Hence the recognition by the speaker that the world, a synecdoche for materialism, is transient and finite. It is this continual tension between what he should do, and what he does in reality, that evokes the empathy in the reader. Submitting to God's will both allows God to control, and the speaker to permit that control, for at the final summation he states: 'I am but finite, yet thine infinitely.' Self knowledge is crucial to the speaker as he argues for an understanding of his stubbornness, and even a plea to allow him to take his punishment: 'For I will do, or suffer what I ought' (16).

In a chapter entitled 'The Problem of Love', Terry Sherwood points out how

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[20]Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication*, p.4.
[21]William Nestrick 'Mine and Thine' in *The Temple*, pp.125-6.

> the love in *The Temple* is not just God's love for man, but also man's answering love for God.[22]

Yet allowing a person to love an individual, gives that person complete control over the individual, and it is by this submission to God's will, however it is revealed, that Herbert, in his narrative, demonstrates God's love for him. The rationale of reasoned judgement becomes inadequate when contemplating God. The speaker's feeble attempt to make sense of the 'starre' in his lap, together with its significance, is as puzzling as attempting to 'hear' the music in the spheres. Someone has heard them, the speaker reasons, but mankind, including the speaker, must take such knowledge on faith.

5.5.3 The Hidden Face of God

In another of Herbert's poems which explores a life narrative, 'Coloss. 3.3. *Our Life is hid with Christ in God'*, taken from Colossians 3:3 the speaker attempts to explore the *Deus Absconditis,* the 'hidden face' of God, only revealed through Christ; and with it the demonstrable love of God the believer accepts, which winds its way through his life like the hidden key words in the poem. The poem is quoted in full below.[23] In 'Coloss. 3.3, *Our Life is hid with Christ in God'* we find that God's motive for man's redemption is hidden in mankind's life, as the words are concealed in the poem. The continual searching the speaker experiences in 'Artillerie', 'Love-joy',

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[22] Terry G. Sherwood, 'The Problem of Love' in *Herbert's Prayerful Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p.33.

[23]
My words & thoughts do both expresse this notion,
That **Life** hath with the sun a double motion.
The first **Is** straight, and our diurnall friend,
The other **Hid** and doth obliquely bend.
Our life is wrapt **In** flesh, and tends to earth.
The other winds towards **Him,** whose hapie birth
Taught me to live here so, **That** still one eye
Should aim and shoot at that which **Is** on high:
Quitting with daily labour all **My** pleasure,
To gain a harvest as eternall **Treasure** (1-10).

'JESU' and in 'Coloss. 3.3' together with many other poems, is often only revealed in the most unexpected way. When the speaker is least expecting it, an individual 'turns up' as it were, one that the speaker immediately relates to, and more importantly, believes in.

Gene E. Veith, in discussing 'Coloss 3.3' notes that

> Herbert's most ingenious explicit treatment of [...] conflict between the old man of sin and the new man of the Holy Spirit is 'Coloss 3.3' [...] although the spiritual life is hidden, it is in infallibly present [...]. Theologically, the conflict of sin and grace is resolved in Christ.[24]

In this poem, the speaker's God resides within, ready to be disclosed to the speaker when he is amenable, as the acrostic is solved to those who are sensitive to puzzles. The same *modus operandi* occurs in 'Artillerie', the simple spark becomes the: 'cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them' (Acts 2.3). We might safely argue that unless the individual is responsive to God's message it will pass him by, and Herbert is attuned to this truism. Wallace Martin suggests that

> whenever in metafiction the fictional narrative/reality relation becomes an explicit topic of discussion, and readers are removed from the framework normally used in interpretation, they become outsiders, and move into the realm of fantasy.[25]

This is noted in 'Time' where a jocular Herbert meets Time itself, and provokingly states: 'Thy sithe is dull; whet it for shame' (2). Many of Herbert's opening lines gently ease the reader into the narrative, but sometimes he employs shock tactics to jolt and startle, as in the opening line to 'The Crosse', where the 'uncouth thing' becomes the signifier for Christ's suffering. This allows the reader to acknowledge the cross as if for the first time.

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[24]Gene E. Veith Jr. *Reformation Spirituality,* pp.142-3.
[25]Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Icatha: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.179.

5.5.4 To Shock and Startle

How real are Herbert's poems? As a master of defamiliarisation and the unexplained, Herbert's hearts can be literally broken, his floors are self-cleansing, his tombs laugh at the living, and he makes his readers understand what a cross (crucifix) really represents. The theory of defamiliarisation is taken from Victor Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, or making strange. Shklovsky states that

> a poetic image is one of the means by which a poet delivers his greatest impact [...] in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition.[26]

It startles us into a new way of seeing and a new way of saying, and enables us to clarify the unknown by means of the known. A poem that demonstrates this technique of shock and disquiet is 'The Crosse.' In this poem Herbert examines the familiar and often comforting image of the Christian's cross, and makes it the object of horror it really is. The first and last stanzas are quoted:

> What is this strange and uncouth thing?
> To make me sigh, and seek, and faint, and die,
> Untill I had some place, where I might sing,
> And serve thee; and not onely I,
> But all my wealth, and familie might combine
> To set thy honour up, as our designe.
>
> Ah my deare Father, ease my smart!
> These contrarieties crush me: these crosse actions
> Doe winde a rope about, and cut my heart:
> And yet since these thy contradictions
> Are properly a crosse felt by thy sonne,
> With but foure words, my words, *Thy will be done* (1-6, 31-36).

In much of Herbert's narrative poetry, the use of such a device as 'making strange' can be frequently observed. In 'The Crosse' the speaker's opening line immediately draws the reader's attention to an object, a 'thing' that is 'strange' and

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[26]Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, pp.3 &6..

'uncouth.' Such an observation forces the reader to admit that as well as the speaker, he has only seen the cross as a piece of Church furniture, in the same context as the chalice or candles for example.[27] Yet the cross, even without the body of a crucified Christ, is the most abiding image of the Christian faith. Here, the poet is looking at a cross as if for the first time, viewing it as it really is, a grotesque method of execution. The 'thing' that he observes opens up the whole narrative of the crucifixion story, as the concrete conflates with the abstract. Thus from becoming the piece of wood criminals were executed on in Roman times, it becomes the icon of redemption to the Christian. The proleptic opening of man taking up his cross, prefigures in the speaker's initial looking at the cross with a palpable sense of unease, Jesus saying:

> If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9.23).

This is what the speaker does from the second line onwards, as he instantly realises the true function of the cross, and his intimate relationship to it.

The use of a question to open the poem, and the following line of intimate personal emotions: 'sigh', 'seek', 'faint', and 'die' intimates that the speaker is not addressing another person, but is rather musing to himself; contemplating the physical horror the executed victim is experiencing, as well as relating how it makes him feel also. Herbert supports this concept by the continuing lines, as he travels through his own human foibles and weaknesses, known only to himself: 'One ague dwelleth in my bones,/Another in my soul' (13-14).

R.H.Stacy shows how

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[27]"Uncouth"-*unknown; *unfamiliar; (dial) unusual OE; *unfrequented XV1; uncomely, awkward, [* - obsolete]. *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, 2nd. edn. ed by T.F. Hoad, p.514. N.B. Herbert has used exactly the right word here in 'unfamiliar.'

> Shklovsky [...] distinguishes between two familiar aspects or functions of imagery: as a practical means of thinking or abstraction and as a means of reinforcing an impression.[28]

The cross, we learn, has the power to transform the speaker's own inner concept of himself, allowing him to place himself figuratively on that same instrument of torture. It is a narrative of inner conflict, the cross becoming the signifier for torment the speaker puts himself through: 'when my will doth studie thy renown' (19-20). As he wrestles with the death of the self, and his own weakness, the human narrative turns itself onto Christ who is the person really on the cross, the speaker being simply an observer; yet he notes: 'Thou turnest th'edge of all things on me still,/Taking me up to throw me down' (21-22). It is at this point that the narrative becomes Christ's narrative: 'bleeding on the ground' (12). The story transfers itself from the speaker's agony to that of Christ's, which is the true message of the Christian faith, as Christ takes on mankind's sins through his death. As the poem is viewed holistically, the message the cross initiates is a narrative of the speaker's agony, which is, in a paradoxical way, transferred from Christ's agony. This becomes the intertextualised message the crucifixion and subsequent redemption scene promotes, and why Herbert, echoing Jesus' taught prayer, concludes his story with '*Thy will be done.*'

As we read the first line of 'The Crosse': 'What is this strange and uncouth thing?' the reader is taken into the familiar essential Christian narrative, yet is, at the same time, immediately defamiliarised with the object of his faith. For this is not the cross the believer is used to viewing. Or is Herbert describing a different cross to that which the Christian views as an object of comfort and relief? The first line pushes the reader into an examination, not only of the cross, but of his own faith and his relation to it. The narrative forces the reader to familiarise himself with the narrative message

[28]R. H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature* (Syracuse & New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977), pp.40-41.

of the cross, and then paradoxically see it through the viewing eyes of the crowd at Christ's death:

> no pulpit
> Of his ever held their eyes so still,
> Never, as now his agony, his wit.
> ('The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar', 10-12).[29]

The instrument of bloody execution has become so familiar as to be innocuous and inoffensive, permitting it to take the burden of sin from the sinner:

> For he is our peace, who hath made both one [...]. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Ephesians 2.14-16).

Herbert takes this concept of comfort and makes it a concept of discomfiture: 'Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort.' (Article 11, *Book of Common Prayer*). By subverting the key concept of Christianity, he encourages the reader to see both the cross and the poem in a new and different light. Defamiliarising the images in the poem opens the readers' eyes to the cross's cruelty and perversion. The cross, in this sense, becomes the metaphor for the sins of mankind. Now being tied to the cross is hardly comforting, but becomes a burden, and one that cannot be lightly expunged.

Thus in order to accept the burden of the cross, Herbert adopts the idea first mooted by Jesus, that man must be born again before he can enter the kingdom of God:

> Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3.5).

Yet as Jesus explains, this is purely a metaphor for reassigning one's life to being encompassed within Christ, not a literal birth: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh:

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[29]Ted Hughes, *New Selected Poems 1957-1994* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p.19.

and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3.6). So similarly does Herbert argue that seeing the cross as one of the crowd, or if for the first time, or perhaps as Jesus himself might see it, allows the individual space to explore his true emotions towards the object. Herbert has effectively defamiliarised it (it has become flesh not spirit, rather than the spiritual icon Christians are used to), whilst he has surreptitiously become one of the multitude witnessing Jesus' death. It is an idea that he explores in 'Redemption' as he explains: 'At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth/Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied' (11-12). And Jesus espies him too: 'Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, & died' (13-14). The subtle interchange of the implied narrative in 'The Crosse' refamiliarises the reader with the central tenet of the Gospel message. The reader is 'born again' to an understanding of the 'thing' he is looking at when he views the cross and asks: 'this uncouth thing?'

Many of the titles of Herbert's poems are either abstract or concrete. 'The Crosse' is both, for whilst initially it is a tangible and tactile object, it gradually becomes the symbol of all the frustrations the speaker encounters in his life:

> My power to serve thee; to unbend
> All my abilities, my designes confound,
> And all my threatenings bleeding on the ground.
>
> Thou turnest th'edge of all things on me still,
> Taking me up to throw me down:
> So that, ev'n when my hopes seem to be sped,
> I am to grief alive, to them as dead (10-12, 21-24).

The sheer discouragement the cross offers as it 'crosse actions' the hopes of the devotee, is one that the speaker in the final lines of the poem eventually understands: 'And yet since these thy contradictions/Are properly a crosse felt by thy sonne' (34-5). The acute realisation that pulls him back to the brink of familiarity is uttered in the prayer '*Thy will be done*.' The essential narrative has desymbolised the

cross, now it can never be seen as the glorified icon of placid and ineffectual Christianity. Herbert has taken it and placed it alongside the gallows and stake of bloody martyrdom. To see it otherwise appears almost sacrilegious, as Herbert points out: 'These contrarieties crush me' and: 'since these thy contradictions/Are properly a crosse' (32.34.35). The speaker is at pains to demonstrate how he wants to obey God, yet: 'I am in all a weak disabled thing' (17). Only by acknowledging that the cross stands for suffering and death of the self, can the speaker move on to find peace in God. The iconoclastic tearing down of the cross, by defamiliarising it, has permitted a new understanding of the words '*Thy will be done*' with a heavy emphasis on the '*Thy will.*'

Asals argues that

> crucial to the distinction between guilty ceremony and efficacious sacrament is the poet's intention and purpose in the act of writing the poem [...]. Christ undoes the Adamic art of the poet's handwriting and lays his 'threatenings bleeding on the ground.' The legal 'threatenings' of artistic merit, of the poet's own chirograph, are brought low and made to 'bleed' in the handwriting of his Lord nailed to the Cross, where merit is not his own.[30]

Yet it can be argued that the bleeding is not the literal blood spilt, as neither was the 'born again' a literal birth, but rather the exsanguination of sin poured out from the speaker, who is revivified by the blood Christ sheds for him. It is necessary that the speaker views the cross as a life-enhancing icon in order that this may take place; blood cannot be spilled from a jewelled or gold cross, only the literal object.

What is found is that 'The Crosse' ties both the speaker and reader into a scenario of agony, rather than of comfort: 'One ague dwelleth in my bones'; 'Taking me up to throw me down'; 'To make my hopes my torture' and so on. All these are images of intense suffering, extracted to parallel the physical torture Christ suffered on the cross.

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[30]Heather A.R. Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God*, p.24.

Kevin Hart suggests that

> on earth, however, the consequences of the Fall are still felt: man is no longer the master of signs but is frequently mastered by them [...]. Without the presence of God, in Paradise or on earth, there can be no hope of understanding oneself, others, or texts. One would be lost in a maze of signs, with no possibility of distinguishing true from false.[31]

The cross that is recognised by Herbert acts as a reminder of his 'sinfulness.' For it is through his conscience, as well as his subconscious, that the cross transmits its subliminal message. Herbert's narrative attempts to explain how crucial it is for man to understand his place in the world by contemplating on the cross. The cross must be seen as a symbol of redemption rather than of execution. Jesus said: 'And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10.38). The words are unequivocal and direct, implying that there *must* be a cross to bear if salvation is to be acquired. Taking up this theme on the importance of words in the role of narrative, Paul Nelson proposes that for some individuals

> narrative is the universal inner form of human experience. Personal identity is said to require an understanding of one's experience as a coherent story [...] religious texts or traditions are seen as providing the means by which people can find meaning in their personal stories and orient themselves in relation to the larger world.[32]

Nelson goes on to explain how 'our moral notions are said to arise from the stories that determine who we are.'[33] Herbert, by deliberately subverting the familiar image of the Christian's cross, weakens the believer's faith. This is an emotion felt by the speaker as he laments his failings: 'To have my aim, and yet to be/Farther from it then when I bent my bow' (25-6). I know what I want to believe, argues Herbert, but you, God, make it so difficult for me. Words are no substitute for the signified

[31]Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.3-4.
[32]Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry* (University Park & London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p.4.
[33]Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality*, p.5.

presence of God as represented in the cross, and it is this factor that Herbert has nullified by taking the cross as the true referent it really represents. Because of this, the choice between blind belief and reasoned argument offers the reader a narrative of decision. Hart suggests that

> the Fall introduced a gap between man and God, words and objects, thereby making signs the indispensable and imperfect vehicle for knowledge, religious or otherwise, the economy of salvation was also worked out according to signs, especially verbal signs [...]. Before the Age of Reason, God was generally accorded both an ontological and an epistemological function, as the *fons et origo* of all that is and as the guarantor of determinate meaning. Thereafter, God's epistemological function passed to man, initially by means of Cartesian *cogito*. [34]

In other words, man became uncertain of the sublime power of God, utilising his own reasoning intelligence to decide for himself the how and why of creation and human faculties. This offers a wide impetus to Herbert's retelling of the Christians' belief in the cross, which Herbert has considered when thinking of his fellow men: 'Sometimes he tells them stories, and sayings of others; [...] for them also men heed, and remember better than exhortations.'[35] By adopting this tool of defamiliarisation, Herbert induces the reader and listener to consider the subjects and objects of his poetry in a different light. Looking at them in a totally individualistic way, allows the reader to actually think about such iconography in a more personal, yet objective way.

Stacy points out that the idea of 'making strange' was far from new, Aristotle writing that:

> The virtue of style is to be clear without being mean [*tapeinos*] [...]. That diction on the other hand, is lofty and raised above the commonplace which employs strange [*xenikos*] words. I mean strange, metaphorical, and lengthened words - anything that differs from the normal idiom.[36]

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[34]Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the* Sign, pp.7. & 29.
[35]F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, Chapter V11 'The Parson Preaching', p.233.
[36]R.H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language* and Literature, pp.33-34.

Shklovsky's term may also be applied to such matters as the creative manipulation, radical upsetting, and distortion of familiar traditions. Stacy shows how, by tearing the object (the cross in this instance), out of its habitual context (we normally view the cross on an altar, or as a piece of jewellery); by bringing together disparate notions, the poet gives a *coup de grace* to the verbal cliché, and to the stock responses attendant upon it and forces us into a heightened awareness of things and their sensory texture. More is understood about the cross's original function.[37] The idea of defamiliarising objects had also been discussed by S.T. Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria,* whereby he suggests that

> incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions [...] supposing them to be real. [38]

Herbert uses the cross to recall the intimate details of his own life. For just as the cross exposes the victim to open ridicule and indignity, as recounted in the crucifixion scene of Christ: 'And they stripped him, and put on a scarlet robe.' (Matthew 27.28); so does the defamiliarsing of the situation that the speaker finds himself in, namely gazing at a method of execution. It also allow him to look at both himself and God in a similarly unfamiliar way. Defamiliarisation has permitted the speaker to step outside himself and see himself as God sees him. Just as the crowd viewed Christ on the cross, now Herbert views the cross itself, and in effect becomes one of the crowd: 'this deare end,/So much desir'd, is giv'n, to take away' (8-9). As the narrative unravels, the sanitised meaning of the polished and jewelled cross of

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[37]R.H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature*, p.33.
[38]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Litereria*, 2 vols. ed. by J. Shawcross (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1907), 11, p.5. N.B. Hutchinson writes 'When Herbert's poetic credit stood lowest, the first notable critic to rediscover his quality was Coleridge. There are references to his poetry in *The Friend* (1809-10) and a considerable discussion of it in *Biographia Literaria* (1817).' *Works*, pp.xlviii-xlix.

the Church becomes the 'strange' and 'uncouth' instrument of disfiguration and death. It is as though by not consciously recognising the cross, the speaker in a paradoxical way, somehow makes himself believe it is innocuous and insignificant. Stacy reiterates this point as he suggests,

> Does not the poet, by somehow making us feel the anguish of love [...] more accurately *familiarize* us with these sensations? [...] the artist, familiarizes by defamiliarizing, in the sense that, if successful, he brings to our recognition a new or different or more striking vision; he renews our familiarity, or even refamiliarizes us, with some [...] facet of reality, image, literary tradition, or resource of the language.[39]

The poem is written in the present tense to 'emphasise the act of creative deformation which counteracts the inexorable pull of routine, and dislodges the automatism of ordinary perception.'[40] Herbert adopts this tactic to give weight to the idea that he is looking at the cross in a new way. The present tense continues up until the final stanza, when the speaker adopts the implied future tense, he says, 'Ah my deare Father, [will you] ease my smart!' (31) This interpolation of a future tense alters the narrative to one of hope, and a reliance on a power higher than himself. Now the speaker is able to accept the 'crush[ing]'; the 'crosse actions' and the 'rope [that winde] about'; all contradictions that now make complete sense, a paradox to the 'uncouth' cross. The speaker is not finally crossed out by God, like a line or word on a page, but is given the final words: '*Thy will be done.*' As Stacy's viewpoint is examined on the concept of paradox and contradictions, he insists that

> the oxymora we find in the religious mystics and the metaphysicals [...] may be associated both with what is known as apophatic or 'negative' theology [...] and baroque poetics [...]. Quite close to the oxymoron in effect are the so-called [...] 'string [ing] together of impossibilities.[41]

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[39]R. H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language,* pp. 48-49.
[40]Victor Erlich, 'Russian Formalism', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 34 4 (1973), 627-638 (p.629).
[41]R.H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature,* pp.65-66.

This can be recognised in 'The Crosse' whereby the initial opening of the narrative does not really resemble the final humbling submission to 'ease my smart!' (31). Yet Herbert has familiarised the reader with the true Christian message of the cross through defamiliarising it; together with the consequential sequelæ of that message, notably Christ's necessary death on the cross, and the subsequent redemption of man. The moral narrative that presents itself in the poem, argues for an examination of oneself with the objectified vision of one seeing the self as if for the first time.

As Erlich points out:

> This meant that the 'inward form' of the word - the semantic nexus inherent in it - was no less essential to the aesthetic effect than the sheer sound. The 'actualization' of the verbal sign achieved by poetry was recognized as a complex transaction involving the semantic and morphological as well as the phonetic levels of language.[42]

The inherent meaning of the word, over time, becomes obfuscated in the religious symbolism of the Christian narrative. Herbert takes the cross as a word, to examine both its inference, that is as a method of death, but also building on that eschatological meaning to pull himself to God. Thus the cross takes on a multiplicity of meanings, its 'aesthetic effect' implying a cross[ing] out by God; a cross [irritated, frustrated] speaker; and a contradiction to the will of the individual. Erlich goes on to explain that

> verse is not merely a matter of external embellishment such as metre, rhyme, [and] alliteration, superimposed upon ordinary speech, it is an integrated type of discourse, qualitatively different from prose, with a hierarchy of elements and internal laws of its own [...]. What is also noted is not the reader's attitude towards reality but the poet's attitude towards language.[43]

This is self-evident in Herbert's work, whereby the manipulation of the narrative text opens up choices to the reader. Herbert suggests a shared narrative with the reader,

[42]Victor Erlich, 'Russian Formalism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, p.631. (Erlich, it must be remembered, is not discussing Herbert).
[43]Victor Erlich, 'Russian Formalism', pp.630-631.

offering him a chance to participate in the levels of narrative proffered. For example, in 'The Crosse', the opening line hints at a speaker who is questioning his whole faith, almost as if to say 'why do I believe in this symbol?' The next poem explores the reason for faith, indicating as it does the sole working out that the believer must achieve through faith: 'And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong' (Acts 3.16).

5.5.5 Personification in Narrative

In the next narrative poem to be discussed 'The Church-floore', the speaker personifies the staid and immobile object of an inlaid floor into vital human emotions: 'Patience', 'Humilitie', 'Confidence', 'Love' and 'Charitie.' The poem is quoted in full:

Mark you the floore? That square & speckled stone,
Which looks so firm and strong,
Is *Patience:*

And th'other black and grave, wherewith each one
Is checker'd all along,
Humilitie:
The gentle rising, which on either hand
Leads to the Quire above,
Is *Confidence:*

But the sweet cement, which in one sure band
Ties the whole frame, is *Love*
And *Charitie.*
Hither sometimes Sinne steals, and stains
The marbles neat and curious veins:
But all is cleansed when the marble weeps.
Sometimes Death, puffing at the doore,
Blows all the dust about the floore:
But while he thinks to spoil the room, he sweeps.
Blest be the *Architect*, whose art
Could build so strong in a weak heart (1-20).

Initially, Herbert appears to be discussing the floor with another person, rather than relating a story about the floor. The narrative is implicit, we are aware that a story is about to commence, but not just yet, and the allegorical personæ of 'Patience', 'Humilitie', 'Confidence' and 'Charitie' herald an anticipation that the

imaginative process must be forthcoming. The first half of the poem (as it is clear the poem is in two distinct halves) suggests a meditation on the virtues suggested; Herbert is thus preparing his reader for the narrative proper which indeed commences in the following eight lines: 'Hither sometimes Sinne steals, and stains' (13). The poem articulates between the practical and physical aspect of cleaning a floor; together with the idea that the floor is able to cleanse itself, and the metaphorical self-cleansing of the soul.

'The Church-floore' is a form of defamiliarisation that Frederic Jameson describes as

> restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct [...] and allowing us to be reborn to a world in its existential freshness and horror [...] the element and techniques or devices *(priyomy)* of the work are now all ordered toward this end.[44]

The poem is written in the form of a sermon (a mechanical habit of conduct), and it targets a congregation who have their heads bent in prayer. Herbert defamiliarises the obvious, making his congregation not only examine the crevices of their own hearts and consciences, but the intricacies of the floor; perhaps not written to reflect his tiny church at Bemerton, but probably inspired by nearby Salisbury Cathedral. Herbert deconstructs the magnificence of the building into the manageable pieces of the floor that he is able to deal with namely 'Patience', 'Humilitie,' 'Confidence', and so on. The holistic overview of the poem parallels the progress of the liturgical service as the speaker perceives it, just as 'Mortification' gives us the process of a funeral. In the final eight lines of the poem Herbert delivers a homily on the unseen dangers that can attack the unwary Christian. At the same time the practical application of this same danger of destroying forces on the floor is dealt with also.

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[44]Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language,* 2nd. edn. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 51-52.

Herbert presents a visual iconography of 'square & speckled stone'(1) which is 'black and grave' (4), and 'Is checker'd' (5) with 'the Quire above' (8), finally binding it all with the 'sweet cement' (10); whilst a 'Sinne [that] steals' and a Death [that comes] puffing at the doore'(13 &16) allows the reader to see the church in a new and startling way. The reader immediately identifies with the emotions and sensations, even if he is unable to recognise either the church or its service. This is what Jameson means when he states that the individual needs to break through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct and to allow him to be reborn to a world in all its existential freshness and horror. Herbert allows the poem to sweep along like the many pilgrims who come to the church to take in bite-size nuggets of information, when he suddenly breaks off and make his portentous statement: 'Hither sometimes Sinne steals, and stains/The marbles neat and curious veins' (13-14). It is at this stage that the poem becomes a narrative.

Now Herbert discusses how the floor, so pristine at first, becomes to look sullied. The word 'But' alters the concept that all is futile, for just as 'Sinne steals, and stains' the regenerative power of the marble 'weeps' and so cleanses itself: 'But all is cleansed when the marble weeps' (15).[45] In the same way, we see: 'Death, puffing at the doore, Blows all the dust about the floore' (16-17). Again it is a barren exercise: 'But while he thinks to spoil the room, he sweeps' (18). Herbert deliberately causes

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[45]This unusual metaphor may be related to the idea that marble is subject to efflorescence and staining. Efflorescence is a deposit, usually white in colour that appears on exterior surfaces of masonry walls. The water soluble salts causing efflorescence come from other materials in the wall. The salts exist in small amounts and are leached to the surface by water percolating through the walls [like weeping] if left alone, the stain is removed naturally by the action of the elements, usually in the course of a few months. (*www//http://Copyright 2002 GTR Marble, Inc. All rights reserved*) *Marble*: A housewife's term for making a pattern on the hearthstone by dabbing it with a cloth soaked in whitening and water. Francis E. Taylor, *The folk-speech of Sth. Lancashire* (Manchester: Heywood, 1901) N.B. Herbert does refer to 'a good huswife' in 'Artillerie'ie 'from small fires comes oft no small mishap.' This might indicate he was familiar with some 'old wives tales.' Mrs Herbert came from Shropshire, which is not too far from south Lancashire, so may have used the expression.

the destructive forces of sin and death to become ineffectual by demonstrating their conquerable qualities. In the same way the heart that God as 'Architect' has built is self-cleansed, by both weeping and sweeping, the Psalmist, aware of his vulnerability sings:

> Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping (Psalm 6.8).

The abruptness of the speaker who knows that this is more than just a floor we are looking at, is the defamiliarising agent that makes the reader see the floor quite differently. Here, Herbert answers his own question, namely, how is everything kept in pristine condition?, by both weeping and sweeping. The lyrical utilisation of rhythmical assonance in weeping and sweeping pulls both the eye and ear of the reader into the practical solution that not only cleans the floor, but eliminates sin and death. The figurative meaning, however, instructs the reader on how to keep the soul in the same spotless condition as he states in the final lines, God is the '*Architect,* whose art/Could build so strong in a weak heart.' God, Herbert argues, is the only cause who can motivate man, and has so built man's heart to replicate such self-cleansing in the same way as the dust is blown away, and the marble staining 'is removed naturally.' Herbert uses the binary opposites of 'strong' versus 'weak' in the final line, and in the assonantal use of 'weak' and 'heart' he offers a lyrical narrative rhythm. These poetic devices parallel the earlier movement of: 'Death [which comes] puffing at the doore' (16). The human actions of 'stains', 'weeps' and 'sweeps' all contribute to making the church a living monument, and the people to become the living body of the church, as St. Paul states:

> For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building (1 Corinthians 3.9).

The poem is written in the present tense, which implies that the observations made are ongoing, there will always be a soiled floor and sin in man's heart. The opening statements are irrefutable, and serve to set the scene as a backcloth onto which Herbert is able to project his figurative meanings. Jameson suggests that

> *Ostranenie* can apply either to the process of perception itself, or to the artistic mode of presentation of that perception.[46]

This is noted in 'The Church-floore' whereby the process of perception is delivered as a treatise on the upkeep of an expensive marble floor. Herbert deliberately focuses on the beauty and workmanship to draw attention to the disaster that might occur should such a floor become spoiled. Having drawn the reader's attention thus, the analogy to the soul of man that similarly becomes clouded by the staining of 'Sinne', and dusty when 'Death' appears, is an allegory that only the individual can rectify. In his chapter 'Art as technique' Lev Semenovich Vygotsky argues:

> We must seek the explanation of the psychology of characters and *dramatis personae* and their actions, not in the rules and laws of psychology, but in the aesthetic conditions set by the author's intentions.[47]

If this idea is contextualised into Herbert's poem, the unseen observers of the floor, the actors so to speak (congregation, clergy, pilgrims and so on) must accept that the floor comes to represent their own souls. The narrative challenges the conventional observation of a floor, and replaces it with the metonym of mankind's sin and subsequent punishment - death. Each narrative stanza (1-4) becomes an artistic construction leading ultimately to the revelation that the narrator has presented to his reader (14-20). A further point made by Jameson, as he discusses de Saussure's distinction between synchronic and diachronic, is that

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[46]Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, p.75.
[47]Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, 'Art as Technique' *in The Psychology of Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), pp. v-295 (p.54).

> the dominant opposition is that between the *langue*, which is to say the ensemble of linguistic possibilities or potentialities at any given moment, and the *parole,* or the individual act of speech.[48]

The narrative of 'The Church-floore' articulates between the *langue* of the factual ('sweet cement') and the *parole* of the abstract ('*Love* and *Charitie*'). Here, the poet uses a synchrony of metaphoric possibilities to help focus the text on the physical aspects of the Church floor, and the human qualities that go to make up that church. For just as both can be destroyed by their individual fragility, so God as the '*Architect*' has the ability to build 'so strong in a weak heart' (20). The oxymoron of strong, vis-a-vis weak 'cement[s]' the whole message to show how a strong faith is present in a failing will.

5.5.6 Defamiliarising the Self

Another aspect of the unfamiliar is examined in the poem 'Confession'; although not strictly a narrative poem in the sense that it has a plot, characters or conversation as earlier poems have had; but rather the poet defamiliarises *himself*, and regards himself as the sole object (not subject) of the story. The first and last stanzas are quoted:

> O what a cunning guest
> Is this same grief! within my heart I made
> Closets; and in them many a chest;
> And like a master in my trade,
> In those chests, boxes; in each box, a till:
> Yet grief knows all, and enters when he will.
>
> Wherefore my faultes and sinnes,
> Lord, I acknowledge; take thy plague away:
> For since confession pardon winnes,
> I challenge here the brightest day,
> The clearest diamond: let them do their best,
> They shall be thick and cloudie to my breast. (1-6, 25-30).

[48]Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, p.22.

The narrative describes an individual who has constructed his personality so as to be completely hidden from everyone, except God. He has done this by the practical application of woodcarving a set of boxes, where he is able to hide his true personality. By doing so, he thus permits himself to become one of those boxes: 'Yet grief knows all, and enters when he will' (6). This concept of viewing oneself in an objective way, yet emerging as an autonomous individual at the end of the poem, is handled with consummate skill by Herbert; as the poem becomes both the story of an individual who is powerless to hide from God, to one who understands not only his own true self, but God's will also. There is also an intertextual message of Jesus as the carpenter, whom the speaker emulates: 'like a master in my trade' which runs through the entire poem. This makes the crowd in the synagogue ask themselves: 'Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?' (Matthew 13.55).

The theme of hidden-ness and discovery presents itself as the core narrative of this poem. The speaker defamiliarises himself as one of the boxes, and attempts to hide his 'grief' that he describes as a 'cunning guest.' Nevertheless, there are no hiding places from God, man can only hide in God through Christ which Herbert has already explored the hidden life of man in the poem 'Coloss. 3.3':

> One life is wrapt *In flesh*, and tends to earth.
> The other winds towards *Him*, whose happie birth
> Taught me to live here so (5-7).

The Psalmist also sings:

> Thou art my hiding place: thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt encompass me about with songs of deliverance (Psalm 32.7).

The speaker presents the reader with a paradox, for because he has constructed and customised the boxes, he must naturally know what is in them. This, in effect, makes him Godlike, yet he also knows that the key to unlocking each box is

solely with God, making the secret contrived and thus no secret at all. It thus puts the power of discovery in the hands of the speaker, who must eventually *want* to be discovered. The effect of such a narrative of hiding and finding has its parallel both in the burial service, where the finding is implied at the Resurrection, as the priest utters the words: 'Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts' from *The Book of Common Prayer*, and also in the epistle of St. Paul:

> In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel (Romans 2.16).

Paul Nelson proposes that 'personal identity is said to require an understanding of one's experience as a coherent story.'[49] Herbert, in 'Confession', subverts the true concept of a confession by hiding his innermost feelings, and his subsequent understanding, even from himself. He finds that his experience of God at odds with his need to love God, as he explains: 'Yet grief knows all, and enters when he will' (6). He does understand, however, that: 'Onely an open breast/Doth shut them [his true feelings] out.' The narrative is one of hide and seek, Christ stating that: 'seek and ye shall find' (Matthew 7.7). In Herbert's poem it is the pilgrim who is sought. Herbert, we find, has placed God as the seeker, defying him to worm his way into a heart that is shut tight: 'No scrue, no piercer/Into a piece of timber work and winde' (7-8). The challenge of the narrative is to provoke the antagonist, God, to penetrate into a heart that He has made both unworthy and unwelcoming: 'When he [God] a torture hath design'd' (10). The poem is a poem of power politics, and the way the speaker can be in control once more. In the final stanza, the speaker eventually capitulates to God's overwhelming presence saying:

> Wherefore my faults and sinnes,
> Lord, I acknowledge; take thy plagues away:
> For since confession pardon winnes,

[49]Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry*, pp. 4 &.79.

I challenge here the brightest day (25-28).

In his *Confessions,* Augustine states:

> Therefore when I willed or did not will something, I was utterly certain that none other than myself was willing or not willing. There lay the cause of my sin I was now coming to recognize. I saw that when I acted against my wishes, I was passive rather than active; and in this condition I judged to be not guilt but a punishment.[50]

There is a similar impetus in Herbert's argument, and the confidence he suggests in his final lines to the poem is an active, yet paradoxical defamiliarisation of his whole being: 'let them do their best,/They shall be thick and cloudie to my breast.' He now becomes even more transparent than the 'clearest diamond' shrugging off the need for God to probe into real self. Augustine, stating that 'the day had now come when I stood naked to myself.'[51] Like Augustine, Herbert has presented himself in an unfamiliar form, notably as a collection of emotions, doubts and 'grief[s]' rather than tangible flesh and blood. The true individual is closeted in a series of boxes, hidden like the final 'talent' Jesus describes in the parable: 'But he that hath received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money' (Matthew 25.18).

The narrative in 'Confession' is thus so constructed as to mirror those man-made artefacts, allowing the agony of: 'Gods afflictions[...] [To] fall, like rheumes, upon the tendrest parts' (9-11). It is a narrative where even here, the speaker argues, one cannot keep God out; where the 'chests' and 'boxes' with the intimate grief and inner emotions he experiences at the hand of God. At this stage, the speaker ceases to be himself, and through *prosopopœia*, defines his feelings that permit God to be able: 'Into a piece of timber work and winde' (8). Herbert suggests that such emotions are themselves autonomous, and devised by God: 'When he a

[50]St. Augustine, *Confessions*,V11 (5) trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.114.
[51]St. Augustine, *Confessions*,V111 (18) p, 145.

torture hath designed' (10). Each stanza permits the reader a glimpse into the intricacies of the speaker's life, and where he attempts to contain the relentless movement of his confession through hiding away his grief in 'Closets', 'chests', 'boxes' and 'a till.'[52] Although confession offers a way to release the burden of sin, Herbert understands how deep seated true agonies of guilt present themselves: 'Like moles within us, heave and cast about' (14).

Stacy argues that

> Shklovsky [...] distinguishes between two familiar aspects or functions of imagery: as a practical means of thinking or abstraction and as a means of reinforcing an impression [...] [he] contends that the purpose of the image [...] is not 'to clarify the unknown by means of the known' but rather to defamiliarize the known.[53]

This is apparent in 'Confession' as each stanza comes to represent a single box waiting to be opened by God. Taking out the concept of guilt and grief as if from a chest is a familiar image to the reader, yet it is defamiliarised by Herbert in the first two stanzas:

> O what a cunning guest
> Is this same grief! Within my heart I made
> Closets; and in them many a chest; (1-3)
>
> No Scrue, no piercer can
> Into a piece of timber work and winde (7-8)

Herbert presents the reader with a challenge to the narrative as he locates himself in different guises, and he uses the first three stanzas to polarise the reader's understanding of God's wrath against the speaker's inability to provide a counterattack. It is in stanza four that Herbert, initially employing his favourite word 'Onely', provides the paradoxical clue to the resolution to the problem as he states:

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[52]'Till' small box etc. Contained within a larger one XV; box or drawer for holding cash in a shop XV11. of unknown origin.*The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed by T.F. Hoad, p.494.
[53]R. H. Stacy, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature*, pp.40-41.

'Onely an open breast/Doth shut them out, so that they cannot enter' (19-20). The use of the future tense heralds a hope that: 'if they enter, cannot rest' (21); whilst the regular iambic metre of the final two lines:

> The clearest diamond: let them do their best,
> They shall be thick and cloudie to my breast (29-30)[54]

jars uncomfortably with the previous lines, and mirrors the dislocated thought pattern the dehumanised individual experiences. But there is a deliberate narrative trick here that Herbert employs to indicate to his reader that this story has credence, for he states: 'so that they cannot enter;/Or, if they enter, cannot rest' (19-20). It is as though the matter is out of Herbert's hands, he is simply the mouthpiece, so to speak, telling it as it is. It is a device he deploys in 'The Rose' when he makes his supposedly *faux pas*: 'Or if such deceits there be,/Such delights I meant to say' (8-9).

The final two lines of each stanza reflect the thoughts of a God that illuminates a way out of the mælstrom of a doubting speaker. The narrative is one of containment as the speaker confesses he is defeated by God's apparent callousness towards him:

> No scrue, no piercer can
> Into a piece of timber work and winde,
> As God's afflictions into man,
> When he a torture hath design'd (7-10).

The whole narrative examines what it feels like to be in despair, yet be powerless to do much about it. The confession Herbert is narrating is double-edged, insofar as well as confessing his sins and failings, he is also confessing that he has little power over God's plan for him. It is something he considers in 'Affliction V' as he says 'We are the trees, whom shaking fastens more' (20).

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[54]*The English Dictionary of Etymology*, p.80. describes 'cloud' as an obsolete meaning of hill, rock OE. Herbert has used the word 'cloudie' as a metaphor for the hill he needs to climb to spiritual enlightenment.

Jurij Lotman argues,

> It is revealing that in those instances where the final episode becomes the initial episode of a new narrative for a Christian the end of life is the beginning of life beyond the grave [...] it is clearly recognised as a new story.[55]

In Herbert's narrative poems, he frequently ends his poem with the resolved suggestion that belief in God will make the angst of life meaningful thus creating a new beginning. Supporting this viewpoint, Augustine suggests that,

> When I am evil making confession to you is simply to be displeased with myself. When I am good, making confession to you is simply to make no claim on my behalf [...]. Therefore, my God, my confession before you is made both in silence and not in silence.[56]

Augustine qualifies his statement on silence and non-silence by explaining that: 'It is silent in that it has no audible sound; but in love it cries aloud.'[57] Herbert has also confessed an affinity with God both in silence and not in silence. The 'locks' and 'keyes' that contrive to keep God out, yet still allows in 'grief', are the silence that Augustine refers to; whilst the 'open breast' of love 'cries aloud.' In 'Confession' it is noted that God does not speak directly to Herbert as in 'Artillerie' for example:' When suddenly I heard one say' (5), or in 'Dialogue': *'What (childe) is the balance thine,/Thine the poise and measure?'* (9). Rather, the interlocutor is conversing with himself as in a true confession, unburdening himself in layers of narrative: 'O what a cunning guest/Is this same grief!' or 'No scrue, no piercer can/Into a piece of timber work and winde.' There is a development of the image that only reveals itself when the box is completed, or the speaker chooses to disclose his true self.

Gérard Genette suggests

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[55]Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans.from the Russian by Ronald Vroon (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1977), p.216.
[56]St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X ii (2) p.179.
[57]St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X ii (2) p.179.

> that repeating prolepses, like analepses of the same type and for reasons equally obvious, scarcely occur except as brief illusions: they refer in advance to an event that will be told in full in its place.[58]

This is observed in 'Confession' where it is essential that the narrator keep in control of the situation, expecting God's forgiveness and grace: 'For since confession pardon winnes' (27). There is more than hint of manipulation here on the speaker's part, as he attempts to bargain with God, a ploy he attempts in 'The Collar': 'I will abroad' or in 'Dialogue': 'I disclaim the whole designe' or as in 'Artillerie': 'Then I refuse not ev'n with bloud.' When an equilibrium is achieved between the commentaries of the narrating self and the actions of the experiencing self, the presentation of the relationship of the two selves approaches the ideal type of the first-person narrative.[59] This is apparent in 'Confession', whereby a chastened Herbert admits: 'my faultes and sinnes,/Lord, I acknowledge.'

In concluding this chapter on defamiliarisation we return to Stacy who argues that the Renaissance itself - or at least some facets of it - may be viewed as defamiliarisation. Stacy goes on to cite examples of

> the resurgence of rhetoric through the study of Cicero's Latin, Pico della Mirandola's preoccupation with Arabic and Hebrew language and thought, as well as Cusa's method of speculation, which was heavily influenced by Augustine's writings.[60]

Herbert attempts to conflate God with mankind through language and metaphor. He achieves this in 'Confession' through the defamiliarising of himself and making 'grief' a character able to penetrate into the innermost psyche.

Nevertheless, the final word on defamiliarisation must go to Shklovsky who argues that

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[58]Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.73.
[59]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.216.
[60]R.H. Stacy, Defamiliarisation in Language and Literature, pp.166-7.

> people are guided in their life not by deeds but by words [...]. The purpose of parallelism is the same as that of imagery in general, that is, the transfer of an object from its customary sphere of perception to a new one.[61]

Herbert does this by jolting the reader out of his apathy, making him 'see' and experience familiar objects with a new intensity and consternation.

[61]Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, pp.7&12.

Chapter Six

'O that I could a sinne once see.'

Formal Shapes of Narratives

The poems discussed are 'Hope','The World' and 'Life.'

6.6.1 Implicit and Explicit Narrative

Within the individual poems of *The Temple*, as well as formal shapes, it is possible to recognise the implicit as well as explicit narrative. In this short chapter, the way Herbert utilises the narrative in both an implicit as well as an explicit way is explored. Herbert, it can be argued, speaks for his characters and acts as an omniscient narrator as the poem 'The World' demonstrates ('she was heard to say'). Focusing on this idea, Barbara Harman proposes that 'speech installs itself in place of thought's barrenness.'[1] This is apparent in the way Herbert gives the vacancy of the explicit meaning shape through his implicit suggestions, as the following three poems demonstrate.

Helmut Bonheim, writing on implicit vis-à-vis explicit narrative, argues that

> *direct speech* suggests the closest possible nexus between character and reader, as the term *direct* suggests. *Indirect* and *reported* speech, by contrast blur the impression and distance us from the character [...]. Comment [...] can be subdivided into *pure* and *integral.*[2]

The direct speech that Herbert employs in poems such as 'Dialogue' equates the reader with the dilemma the speaker is confronted with as he reasons:

> But when all my care and pains
> Cannot give the name of gains (5-6).

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[1] Barbara L. Harman 'Herbert, Coleridge and the Vexed Work of Narration', *Modern Language Notes*, 93 (1978), 888-911 (p.889).
[2] Helmut Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes*, pp.39.41.52.

We are able to identify with him, but it is more difficult in 'Miserie':

> Man is a foolish thing, a foolish thing,
> Folly and Sinne Play all his game
> His house still burns, and yet he still doth sing,
> *Man is but grasse,*
> *He knows it, fill the glasse* (2-6).

It is only at the end that Herbert reveals in direct speech the truism: 'My God, I mean myself.'

Wayne Booth suggests that

> one of the most obvious artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart [...]. In life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs, and most of us achieve an all too partial view even of ourselves.[3]

To understand explicit and implicit narrative in Herbert, an example can be described, whereby the direct speech of the writer is a pure integral comment on what he expects from hope, demanding our sympathy from the very first line. The poem 'Hope' is an illustration in emblems of both explicit and implicit narrative and is quoted in full:

> 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 (1-8).

The poem is written in a reportage style and explicitly tells a story of a man's thwarted hopes as he presents Hope with all the requirements of the Christian life, giving him what he thinks he expects. It tells of how a faithful believer offers Hope his time, his prayers, as faithfully recorded in *The Book of Common Prayer*, and his tears

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[3] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.3.

of contrition. The implicit narrative within the poem (which is of essential importance) recounts how, in reality, Hope offers strength, support, and forgiveness to the speaker. St. Paul urging his followers that 'our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall* ye be also of the consolation' (II Corinthians 1.7). The 'few green eares' translate into the story that Jesus tells as he suggests his believers become ears of corn that grow into fruition:

> For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear (Mark 4.28).

The whole poem becomes a narrative on the inadequacies of the Christian to follow Christ without His assistance, and yet still acquire forgiveness. Yet the final line hints that the speaker did have the correct expectations as he states: 'I did expect a ring', symbolising a unification with Christ that the circular ring symbolises, Jesus saying at the conclusion in the parable of the prodigal son:

> But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet (Luke 15.22).

For we know it is God who is the father in the parable, and the protagonist is Herbert, the prodigal son.

Although the poem is only very short at eight lines long, Herbert manages to develop an argument within the narrative, interpolating the implicit Christian message of forgiveness through the 'character' of Hope. The lyric qualities of the poem are shown in those self-revelatory statements the speaker declaims, as he states with dogged certainty, each one ending in a colon: 'I gave to Hope a watch of mine:' Hope's replies, however, end in a final full stop: 'but he/An anchor gave to me.' The significance of these two speech patterns come to identify the hesitancy of the speaker in contrast with the final certainty of Hope. The rhythmical ' but' and 'and'

assist the reader in understanding the *stichomythia* between the story he is relating to the fictitious 'character' of Hope. The poem is a blend of both explicit, easy to follow narrative, and complex, subtle, philosophical argument, which challenges the reader's abilities to follow the narrative as Herbert presents it. As Bonheim suggests, 'An opinion attributed to a fictional character [Hope] can arouse a reaction, start a discussion, help to characterize the speaker, or motivate an action.'[4] This poem demonstrates how Herbert presents parable, emblem, and implicit narrative within the style of explicit storytelling.

6.6.2 Tenses in Narrative

> Verb tenses are also an important narrative technique. Stanzel suggests that
>
> the temporal division between the main story and the preliminary phase depicting prior events often necessitates such a combination of a summary in the present tense and a paraphrase in the past tense.[5]

This is seen in another of Herbert's poem 'Life' which explores both implicit and explicit narrative, and demonstrates Stanzel's point well. The first line, in the past tense, implies that a narrative is about to commence, the speaker stating that: 'I made a posie, while the day ran by.' He then moves to the present tense in the second line: 'Here will I smell my remnants out', whilst the final summation in the last lines: 'And wither'd in my hand' (6) 'If it be as short as yours' (18) is a past tense paraphrase. The poem is quoted in full:

> I made a posie while the day ran by:
> Here will I smell my remnants out, and tie
> My life within this band.
> But time did beckon to the flowers, and they
> By noon most cunningly did steal away,
> And wither'd in my hand.
>
> My hand was next to them, and then my heart:
> I took, without thinking, in good part

[4] Helmut Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes,* p.41.
[5] F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.26.

Times gentle admonition:
Who did so sweetly deaths sad taste convey,
Making my minde to smell my fatall day;
Yet sugring the suspicion (1-12).

Farewell deare flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,
Fit while ye liv'd, for smell or ornament,
And after death for cures.
I follow straight without complaints or grief,
Since if my sent be good, I care not, if
It be as short as yours (13-18).

The lines from 1-12 are explicitly narrative, the poet recalling the story of gathering flowers, an everyday occurrence. The concluding two lines, however, summate the implicit narrative whereby the speaker muses on the purpose, not only of flowers, but more importantly, life itself. Man who is 'sent' by God to be his ambassador here on earth, yet who can be cut down as quickly by death. The philosophy dwells on this final thought and leaves it in the mind of the reader also. After the initial two stanzas, the final third stanza changes to one of reflection and contemplation, as the poet recalls ' Farewell dear flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,/Fit while ye liv'd, for smell or ornament' (13-14). The flowers now become the signifier for man's life spent upon this earth, brief and discarded like the flowers: 'Since if my sent [sent by God] and [scent] be good, I care not, if/It be as short as yours' (17-18).[6] What makes the poem a narrative primarily, are the verb tenses, the past tense in 'Life' - 'made', 'ran', 'wither'd', 'took,' which together with the autobiographical element 'I made,' 'My hand,' 'I follow' gives this poem a tight narrative form. The poem, we note, has a beginning, middle and end, much as a story in a book might have.

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[6] 'Scent,' (O)F *sentir* feel, perceive, smell:- L. *Sentire* feel, perceive. *The Concise Dictionary of English Entymology*, p.421.

In 'The World' Herbert offers us an explicit narrative whose musical regular metre suggests the ideal, harmonious world that he would like to create. The first and last stanzas only are quoted:

> Love built a stately house; where *Fortune* came,
> And spinning phansies, she was heard to say,
> That her fine cobwebs did support the frame,
> Whereas they were supported by the same:
> But *Wisdome* quickly swept them all away.
>
> Then *Sinne* combin'd with *Death* in a firm band
> To rase the building to the very floore:
> Which they affected, none could them withstand.
> But *Love* and *Grace* took *Glorie* by the hand,
> And built a braver Palace then before (1-5 &16-20).

In this poem the narrative is both implicit and explicit throughout. The story purports to tell how the character of 'Love' built a house, yet 'Pleasure', 'Sinne' and 'Death' contrive to destroy it. The poem is a narrative on the creation of the spiritual individual using the metaphor of the 'stately house' which parallels *The Temple*. A simple to follow story; Herbert creates the 'bad' characters of sin and death and forces them to confront the 'good' characters of love and grace, who, by taking glory 'by the hand', build a 'braver Palace then before.' Yet there is an implicit narrative running through the tale which the words 'stately', 'phansies', 'swept', 'pleasure', 'weakened' and 'menaces' suggest:

> Then enter'd *Sinne,* and with that Sycamore,
> Whose leaves first sheltred man from drought & dew,
> Working and winding slily evermore,
> The inward walls and Sommers cleft and tore:
> But *Grace* shor'd these, and cut that as it grew (11-15).

The sly tree whose roots 'cleft and tore' suggests that the speaker has acknowledged that his 'inward walls' (innermost thoughts) are being challenged. The resolution offered by 'Love', 'Grace' and 'Glorie' to ' buil[d] a braver Palace' makes the

destruction of the old way of life essential.[7] Herbert uses the 'Sycomore' tree to echo the Psalmist's words: 'He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycomore trees with frost' (Psalm 78. 47). The poem is a battle between good and evil, with the destruction of the soul (the stately house) by the forces of a secular godless life. The implicit message tells us that only through 'Love' and 'Grace' can these forces be overcome and a new life become established and rebuilt.

In the poems discussed in this thesis, Herbert explores everyday situations, much as Jesus' parables do, whereby Herbert invites the individual to look up at a window, or down on the floor, or examine a tomb, or even a spark from a fire that may hold a message. Soul-searching questions emanate from such encounters; with characters, conversations and dramatic situations that might occur in life. Often the situations can only be recognised when seen holistically, such as 'Mortification', whereby the individual stanzas mirror the person's life, which then viewed as a whole, goes to make up his own funeral. To be sure, whilst you have been reading this poem, you have moved closer to your own death, is Herbert's implicit message in 'Mortification'. This is the implicit message that he attempts to convey. Herbert thus taps into the *affektenlehre* or doctrine of the affections, that obscure emotion that makes us want to laugh or cry when we read moving literature, or hear inspiring music. As Fish so succinctly puts it,

> The knowledge to which catechizing brings the pupil is a knowledge of what he does not and cannot, unaided know; the discovery that awaits him after a succession of 'well-ordered' questions.[8]

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[7] 'Braver' might appear an unusual word, why not use 'stronger' or 'more powerful'? *The Oxford Dictionary of Etymology* describes 'braver', - XV - F. *brave* - It. *bravo* bold, accomplished, or Sp. *bravo* courageous, fine, p.49. Again Herbert uses the right word for the right occasion, equating it with man's spiritual psyche.

[8] Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p.44.

It is these questions that Herbert creates in an implicit message through an explicit narrative.

Chapter Seven

'Lord thou art mine, and I am thine.'

Circular and Cyclical Narratives

The poems discussed are 'A Wreath', 'Clasping of hands', 'Sinnes round', 'In Alapas' and 'In Mundi Sympathiam cum Christo.'

7.7.1 Circles and Cycles

As well as implicit and explicit narrative, Herbert also utilises cyclical and circular forms in the poems. The former show form and development by being progressive, whilst the latter simply reiterate the problem over and over again in a circular spiral of degenerative misery. After examining his own psyche and its resulting conflicts, Herbert now moves round to God by means of frequent tortuous and convoluted methods. Through the working out of the often tedious syntax, the speaker can finally say, 'Sorrie I am.'

Commenting on Herbert's form, Joseph Summers suggests that 'this disorder must be controlled before presenting oneself before God', and this is what Herbert does in these poems.[1] The first of the poems, 'A Wreath', confirms this circular form by its continual pleading of iteration. Herbert's skilful use of tense format, together with his use of temporality, makes this poem subtle and profound at the same time. It is quoted in full:

A wreathed garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
I give to thee, who knowest all my wayes,
My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
Wherein I die, not live: for life is straight,
Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee,
To thee, who art more farre above deceit,
Then deceit seems above simplicitie,

[1] Joseph Summers, 'Herbert's Form', *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, 66 (1951), 1055-1072 (p.1056).

> Give me simplicitie, that I may live,
> So live and like, that I may know thy wayes,
> Know them and practise them: then shall I give
> For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise (1-12).

In 'A Wreath' Herbert uses narrative as a temporal exploration of life, analysing the concept of time as both a linear measure of existence, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the immeasurable distance of eternity. As Webber points out 'time for him [Herbert] is an aspect of eternity.'[2] The wreath itself becomes the signifier for timeless continuance delineated in the circle it portrays. Kermode has described this distinction between time and eternity in Christian thought as the *nunc movens* with its beginning and end, and *nunc stans,* the perfect possession of endless life.[3] And we can argue it is this latter concept that Herbert examines in 'A Wreath'; changing the tenses from the present, 'I give - I live', to the final two lines when the future tense of 'then shall I give' presents an indication of the proportionate promise both the speaker and 'thee' offer to each other. Although not a narrative poem in the demonstrable sense, whereby characters enter and exit speaking their piece, the speaker does relate a story about the making and offering of a wreath to an unknown beneficent. The title of the poem suggests that the ominous portent of presenting a wreath to a living person might be read as a precursor to his expected demise.

Throughout the poem, Herbert self-consciously and deliberately manipulates the syntax, using the rhetorical devices of *epanalepsis* (the repetition of words after other words have become between them) and *chiasmus* to weave in and out of each line to present a characteristic slow falling rhythm. The use of dactyls prevents the poem from being read in any way other than ponderously, which was surely Herbert's

[2] Joan Webber, *The Eloquent 'I'*, p.7. N.B. Webber is not discussing Herbert, but the Anglican perspective generally.
[3] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending,* p.71.

intent. Dwelling on each final word, a metaphor for death, the words repeat themselves backwards in each line, for example, 'deserved praise,/Of praised deserved'; such forwards/backwards movement corresponds to the attempt by the speaker to move towards God, yet all the time his profane and materialistic ways pull him back.

The linear and circular structure of the poem corresponds to the eternity of Jesus. Here, the poet acknowledges Christ as the Alpha and the Omega: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last' (Revelation 1.11). The poem then moves from the present moment in time (the speaker's life, and his 'crooked winding wayes', what Kermode terms *kairos* or 'moment of crisis', to his hope for life eternal or *chronos* (which occurs in the final six lines of the poem) as he states 'so that I may live,/So live and like.'[4] This is a specifically altered state of time which is metaphorically represented in the circular wreath. There is a contrapuntal structure present in the poem demonstrated in its *chiasmic* pattern, whereby the ab ab cd in the first three lines are a perfect reflection of the final three lines. The 'praise', 'give' and 'wayes' of the penitent speaker in stanza one, are reflected by the 'wayes', 'give' and 'praise' in the last three lines, and by such an action the circle is made whole, and what is more, made whole by God.

As a musician, Herbert would have certainly played and no doubt written contrapuntal music. 'A Wreath' describes a Canon by Inversion. This is defined, in music, as an upward interval in the Dux (the leader) which becomes a downward interval in the Comes (companion).[5] An analogy is thus made with the poem in which

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[4] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p.47.

[5] *The Oxford Dictionary of Music,* 2nd edn. ed. by Michael Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.147 & 198. N.B. Canon - 1 Strictest form of contrapuntal imitation. The word means 'rule' and musically, it is applied to counterpoint in which one melodic strand gives the rule to another. Contrapuntal, adj. of counterpoint - point against point.

the speaker attempts to replicate his life to Christ's, and which is described in the laborious syntax the poet forces his reader to experience, two words forward, one back. W.S. Pratt states that

> the seventeenth century signalises the ultimate emergence of harmonic or monophonic music into dominance over contrapuntal. But in English church music under James1, the heavy harmonic style was replaced for a time by a return to the old counterpoint.[6]

Diane McColley supports this view, and adds that

> The Reformers' principle that one should sing from the heart, and the ways composers expressed the heart's and the mind's experience, reoriented sacred music to include human response within the music itself.[7]

Herbert would have been aware of this, relishing as he did the music and singing at Salisbury Cathedral, as recorded by Walton in *Lives*. The poem, then, parallels the perpetual or infinite canon, whereby the voices finally end then begin again. Margaret Carpenter argues that in 'A Wreath' the

> separation between the speaker and poet is so subtle that it might easily be missed [...] its presence is explicit [...] in the ironic contradiction of the speaker's requesting simplicity of God so that he might imitate the very God whom he describes as being above both deceit and Simplicity. [8]

For it can be noted that the expanse of time is both literal (the speaker is now, God was then). The speaker not only realises that God is 'farre above deceit', but that also God is far above the speaker's accessibility and comprehension. He resides in the realms of eternity which cannot be understood or 'know[n]' here on earth. Such a separation is brought together in the circularity of the wreath which the speaker weaves, that is at least under his control. The reader is aware that only the speaker

[6] W.S. Pratt, 'The History of Music', (New York, 1907) p.212. in Albert McHarg-Hayes, 'Counterpoint in Herbert', *Studies in Philology* 35 (1938), 43-60 (pp.57-58).
[7] Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Music in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.64.
[8] Margaret Carpenter, 'From Herbert to Marvel: Poetics in *A Wreath* and *The Coronet*', in *Journal of Englsh and German Philology*, 69 (1970), 50-62 (p.52).

can weave the wreath, for it is only he (and God) who 'knowest all my wayes,/My crooked winding wayes'(3).

7.7.2 Time and Death

Michael de Montaigne, quoting Raymond Sebond on temporality, argues that, 'there is no permanent existence either in our being or in that of objects.'[9] Hence the wreath will wither as will the speaker, its only hope of survival is in its transformation to a 'crown of praise.' The material, flowered wreath, becomes the abstract pæan of Christ's glorification. Sebond continues,

> we men stupidly fear one species of death, when we have already passed through so many other deaths [...] not only is the death of fire the birth of air [...]. But [...] this day will die unto tomorrow. Nothing lasts, nothing remains forever one.[10]

The poem becomes an exploration on the transience of life: 'He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down' (Job 14.2). But it is paradoxically also the speaker's attempt to discover the truth and meaning of Jesus' statement: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14.6). Examining his own life which '[should be] straight,/Straight as a line, and [should] ever tend[s] to thee'(5), the speaker acknowledges the pitfalls and temptations which cause him to deviate from the true way that Jesus delineates. The deviations from his self-regulatory life are shown in the curvature that the wreath demands, a curve which must be flexible as it will break, but strong enough to take the rough handling of life.

The circularity of the wreath is a conceit for the alpha and omega of life, yet a life which as the speaker argues is the precursor to eternity - the *nunc stans* - as he interprets Jesus' 'last' as the beginning of life eternal. For a life that is 'straight,/Straight as a line' might end in spiritual death. Yet the Christian life is linear

[9] Michael de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. by M. Screech, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.680.
[10] Michael de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, p.681.

and metaphorically depicted as a journey; as Jesus travels literally from Galilee to Jerusalem, so man travels from his spiritual darkness to the light of Heaven. Sometimes the path is twisted with tribulations that must be overcome [the curve in the wreath], but ultimately leads straight to God. Paul himself states: 'the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 6.23). Thus the emblem of the wreath, funereal and sepulchral, moves the speaker towards his eventual demise, yet he continually pulls back from it.

The relation of straight and circular has the property of what Kermode calls 'an image of endlessness consistent with a temporal end.'[11] We know the wreath has an end, we just do not know where it is. The speaker, we acknowledge, must die, yet the perpetuity of life will of necessity continue, both must coexist alongside the other. Nicholas of Cusa, born c. 1300, states that the

> infinite line coincides with the triangle and the sphere, thus opposites are reconciled in the absolute unity of God [...] all motion is relative [...] [with] no fixed centre, time and space are products of the mind [...] therefore inferior to the higher principles.[12]

Several centuries later Steven Kellman offers a secular yet similar concept, and argues that 'in the *Self-begetting Novel* (or poem), we are able to get an account of the development of a character (the speaker in 'A Wreath') to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel (poem) we have just finished reading.'[13] As Paul Valéry suggests,

> the poem does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its own ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been.[14]

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[11]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p.74.
[12]Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, ed. by Dr.W.Stark (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), pp. viii. x. 49.
[13]Steven G. Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel*, p.3.
[14]Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, translated by Denise Folliot (New York: Clarke & Way Inc, 1958), p.72.

In 'A Wreath', the speaker weaves the story of his whole life which is past into the poem which is in the here and now; what Kellman describes as a dual perspective on each reading, a disparity between *temps passé* and *temps retrouvé*. The poet controls the movement of the poem, as God controls his life. Just as the pagan wreath can be viewed as a funeral presentation, so can the same wreath be seen as a kingly crown offered to the speaker by 'thee.' It is a complementary attitude, for it is the speaker who wishes to exchange: 'this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise.' A poet may, in narrative verse, use the passage of time as a structural principle as the wreath is woven by the poet, each branch/flower coming to symbolise a facet of his life. Herrnstein-Smith proposes that

> the passage of time, however, is continuous; and although temporal sequence provides the poet with an excellent principle of generation, it does not provide him with a termination point, his poem must, at some point stop, but the conclusion, with respect to time alone, will always be an arbitrary one.[15]

What is found in 'A Wreath', is the continuous pulling back of the syntax which seems to delay the final conclusive moment. This has the effect of the speaker envisaging his own demise, and who is anxiously delaying the event. The reader, on the other hand, is moved along to the inevitable finality that the circle projects. The ending of the poem that awaits the reader is somewhat disappointing, for the final line does not mirror the first line. Nevertheless, the dénouement is complete, for there is nowhere to turn to now the speaker has given his life (his 'poore wreath') to thee. The closure of the poem must end here. The speaker *must* believe that the first line of the poem, 'A wreathed garland of deserved praise', will be bestowed upon 'thee' in the next life by the speaker, or the poem cannot be cyclical or eternal. Herrnstein-Smith points out how 'in literature, as in life, we do not respond directly to

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[15]Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p.117.

time as such; [...] what determines the integrity of a unit of time [...] is the integrity of some attendant circumstance.'[16]

Thus the inevitability of death, in order for it to make sense, must correspond to life in some way. In the poem 'Time' for example, the speaker's jocularity is in sharp contrast to the sombre meditation that is shown in 'A Wreath.' The passage of time, in this latter poem, has allowed the speaker to meditate on the poverty of his life without God, and the inevitability of death, which is depicted as a straight line 'for life is straight/Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee.' In 'Time', the speaker muses: 'And this is that makes life so long,/While it detains us from our God [...] Of what strange length must needs be,/Which ev'n eternitie excludes' (19-20 & 25-26). The speaker in 'A Wreath', suspends time through the signifier of a circle which transfers itself to eternity, and collapses both the present and future time into one. By contrast, in 'Time', the speaker acknowledges that his life (which is 'wrong'): 'Ev'n pleasures here increase the wrong/And length of dayes lengthen the rod' (21-22) is the feature that does delay him from God's presence, not in eternity, but here on earth.

The placing of 'A Wreath' at the beginning of a selection of poems on eschatology, initiates the reader to the portent of poems on related themes - 'Death', 'Dooms-day' and 'Judgement.' And although it is no surprise to know we are born to die, it is therefore fitting that the poet reassures his reader immediately of the permanence and eternity a perfect circle can symbolise. Eric Rabkin notes that 'any temporal structure at any level of meaning can create the subliminal suspense that pulls us through a narrative'[17]; whilst Cohen and Shires suggest 'the events of a story *count* as significant points in time [...]. Reading a narrative always requires some degree of comparative attention to the *order* of story in narrational times.'[18]

[16]Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p.121.
[17]Eric S. Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense*, p.20.
[18]Steven Cohen and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories*, p.84.

The speaker in 'A Wreath' focuses on himself in the first six lines, declaring that he offers 'deserved praise.' The repetitive 'Of praise deserved' echoes the speaker in the poem 'JESU' who declares that 'JESU is in my heart, his sacred name/Is deeply carved there' (1-2). The ironic misunderstanding of the speaker in each poem is shown through these statements he makes about his relationship with God. The speaker ironically does not see that he can only offer 'praise deserved' when he has received the 'simplicitie' bestowed by God. As Scholes suggests,

> irony is always the result of a disparity of understanding. In any situation in which one person knows or perceives more - or less - than another, irony must be actually or potentially present [...] our pleasure in narrative literature itself, then, can be seen as a function of disparity of viewpoint, or irony.[19]

The ironic feature of 'A Wreath' is in its simplistic form, which transforms itself into a crown through the complexity of man-made rhetoric.

7.7.3 Repetition and the Catechism

The childlike repetition of words in 'A Wreath' seems to have its parallel in the teaching of reading; this is again seen in 'JESU', where the childlike speaker gathers up the pieces of his heart to spell out 'I ease you'; whilst elsewhere in 'The Flower' the speaker's imploring plea is: 'Thy word is all, if we could spell' (21). The repetitive lines, which occur with laborious frequency in 'A Wreath': 'deserved praise,/Of praise deserved' - 'my wayes,/My crooked winding wayes' - 'above deceit,/Then deceit', and so on, are reminiscent of catechising which Herbert thought of as

> an admirable way of teaching, wherein the Catechized will at length finde delight, and by which the Catechizer, if he once should get the skill of it, will draw out of ignorant and silly souls, even the dark and deep points of Religion.[20]

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[19]Robert E. Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative*, pp.240-241.
[20]George Herbert, *The Countrey Parson*, Chapter XX1 'The Parson Catechizing,' in F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.256.

Cranmer himself states at the commencement to the Catechism in *The Book of Common Prayer:* 'An Instruction to be learned of every person before he be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop.' The effect of the continuous repetition, both in the poem and the Catechism, is hypnotic like a mother lulling her child to sleep, the sleep of death, to which Christ eventually draws all mankind. Indeed the childish 'simplicitie' that the speaker desires is not the simplicity of abnegation as Louis Martz shows,

> it is like that of St. François de Sales, a simplicity of fullness, able to utilize exterior things in accord with their proper ends.[21]

Such a goal enables the speaker to rise above deceit, drawing him closer to Jesus who he knows is the truth, and therefore 'farre above deceit' (7). The distance between deceit and simplicity is occluded, whereas the truth that Jesus represents cannot be achieved alone; therefore the speaker desires that which is achievable in this life stating: 'Give me simplicitie, that I may live,/So live and like' [that is be like you]. The speaker seeks life through truth having practised his 'wayes' through the poem. The finality of the poem is suggested through the intertwining of the 'I give and give thee', in lines eleven and twelve; whilst the assonant phrases of 'wreathed', 'deserved', 'wherein', 'winding', 'live' and 'like' suggest a musical hymn of praise that complements the final line: 'For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise.'

Narrative logic requires that 'the development of a situation be implicit in the situation, for example, a man becomes a thief because he is poor.'[22] In 'A Wreath', the temporal sequence of the speaker's life (some twelve lines long) is implicit in the funeral wreath he weaves. Using the strands and flowers of experience, the wreath becomes the synecdoche of everything he has to offer to God on the last day. The final outcome to be presented at death is not the pagan wreath of godlessness, but

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[21]Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation,* p.283.
[22]Thomas M. Leitch, *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*, p.116.

becomes the kingly 'crown of praise' transformed through the influence of Christ on the speaker's life. Where a poem narrates the successive stages of a search or a pilgrimage, the end will coincide with the poet's discovery of his object or arrival. Herrnstein-Smith notes that

> the conclusion of such poems are thus implied not only by their own thematic structures, but by the structure of that spiritual realm to which they refer. Such a closure may be secured through the speaker's concluding turn or framing comment.[23]

Thus the exchange by the speaker of 'this poore wreath' to a 'crown of praise' seems the final victory over solipsism by the speaker whereby he acknowledges his poverty of spirit before God. (The word 'poor' attested in the OED implying poverty, and to have changed little since the thirteenth century to modern day). The poem must end here, as life must end. The interweaving of the syntax comes to represent the interweaving of God in the speaker's life as he finally recognises Christ as life through truth. At this juncture there is no more to be said; the straight line of a lifetime becomes the ever-continuing cycle of eternity.

7.7.4 Cycles of Eternity

In the next poem 'Clasping of hands' which differs in form because it is cyclical, exploration of tenses propels the reader into this interwoven poem. As we read, we find there is a subtle move from 'mine to thine' some ten times, which is quite confusing! 'And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them' (John 17.10). The first stanza is quoted:

> Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine,
> If mine I am: and thine much more,
> Then I or ought, or can be mine.
> Yet to be thine, doth me restore;
> So that again I now am mine,
> And with advantage mine the more.
> Since this being mine, brings with it thine,

[23]Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure*, pp. 125-126.

And thou with me dost thee restore.
If I without thee would be mine,
I neither should be mine nor thine (1-10).

In the first line of the poem, the speaker begins in the usual confident manner so redolent of the speaker in 'JESU', and 'A Wreath' who carves his Lord in his heart, and promises to give him the praise deserved. The opening statement: 'Thou art mine, and I am thine' is effusive and almost on a par as an exchange between lovers, so intense and steadfast is the declaration; however, the doubtful 'If' conditions the next line, and an immediate, yet subtle insecurity is presented to the reader. This is qualified through the suggestion by the speaker that: 'If mine I am: and thine much more,/Then I or ought, or can be mine'(2-3). The movement into the future tense heralds a longing and desire by the speaker to move into that eternal world that Christ promises, in the Christian way of life; this is the cyclical world where time has no beginning nor end as written in the first epistle of St. John: 'And this is the promise that he [Jesus] hath promised us, even eternal life' (1 John 2.25).

7.7.5 Hands as an Icon

The very title of 'Clasping of hands' prefigures the hands clasped in prayer (and calls to mind the painting by Dürer of his mother's hands, old and gnarled). Hands were also an important feature on the stone breasts of deceased worthies on medieval and Tudor tombs, and were always depicted pointing heavenwards. The title also holds an ambiguous connotation, implicating as it does the support and strength offered to the outstretched hand clasped in times of danger, as a child is grasped by its parent. Indeed in one of Herbert's Latin poems, the hand is given special status, yet not only Christ's hands, but those of his tormentors.

The poem called 'In Alapas'[24] from *Passio Discerpta* reads:

Ah! Quam caederis hinc & inde palmis!
Sic vnguenta solent manu fricari:
Sic toti medicaris ipse mundo

The hands here have an ambiguous role, as they do in 'Clasping of Hands'; hands wrung in anguish, can also be clasped in prayer. Hands can thus be used for cruelty as well as help, and the speaker realises in both poems that Christ's hands are the healing balm for the ills of mankind, as well as receiving the soldiers' strokes at his crucifixion.

In 'Clasping of hands' the interlocking of 'thine' and 'mine' becomes almost incantatory, what Helen Vendler terms 'Antiphonal chanting' (although Vendler here is discussing 'The Call').[25] Although there do not appear to be two obvious voices *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* describes two voices in this way - 'antiphonal singing, when 2 parts of a choir (Decani and Cantori) sing alternatively, one answering the other'; and there is a definite response to the unasked question that the speaker implies in the octosyllabic verses, with their repetitive emphasis. The enjambement of the first and second lines 'and I am thine,/If mine I am' draws the eye to the evocative words 'I am' and provokes a question in the reader's mind, echoing as it does Jesus' statement: 'I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8.58). Here, Jesus

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[24]'On the Slaps'

Ah, how with hands
You are on each side slapped!
It's thus that ointments are
Wont to be rubbed in the hand:
It's thus you yourself
Make well all the world.

Mark. M. McCloskey & Paul R. Murphy, *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert: A Bilingual Edition*, pp.67-8.
[25]Helen H. Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert*, p.211.

deliberately places past and present tenses together in order to emphasise the continuity of his kingdom in Heaven.

The discontinuity of tenses in this Biblical passage, rather than placing anxiety in the reader's mind, is a self-concious narrative ploy by Jesus which acts as a surety of his life in the past in Abraham's time, and the reassurance of his presence in the present period of the age in which he speaks. This is what Stephen Jay-Gould argues as 'time's cycle', he says

> events[...] have no meaning as distinct episodes with causal impact upon a contingent history. Fundamental states [...] are immanent in time, always present and never changing.[26]

Such events differ from the 'once only' event in history and are not repeated (and Jesus might have said: 'Before Abraham [...] I was also'), therefore implying both he and Abraham happened but once, Stephen Jay-Gould calls this 'time's arrow.'[27] The speaker in 'Clasping of hands' attempts to convey the same effect, indicating 'If mine (many aeons ago) I am' then I can be yours also. This appears to be what he is saying, moving as he does from the present to the past, and embracing the future with the line 'Then I or ought, or can be mine'.(3)

Nevertheless, doubt about the future prompted Calvin's followers to ask him 'Why did the power of God slumber so long in idleness?' (when told that little more than five thousand years have elapsed since the creation of the world before Christ came), Calvin answers, saying that,

> When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present [...]. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures.[28]

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[26]Stephen Jay-Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.10.
[27]Stephen Jay-Gould, *Times Arrow, Time's Cycle,* p.11.
[28]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 4 vols, Bk.111 Chap.XX1, pp. 205-6.

Such a viewpoint demands that the speaker in 'Clasping of hands' have faith in the future praying that: 'Yet to be thine, doth me restore' (that is infuse me with Jesus' presence) [...]. :'If I without thee would be mine,/I neither should be mine nor thine' (9-10); whilst the clasped hands are a signifier for the connection and continuity of mankind and God; for a speaker who feels bereft of God is little use to himself or mankind.

The use of 'with' and 'without' dominates the whole poem; whilst the second stanza is a subtle inversion of the first line and calls attention to the different direction in the relationship: 'Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine' (1) ' Lord, I am thine, and thou art mine' (11). P.G. Stanwood observes that 'the closing couplets of each stanza point finally to that higher ambition in which differences are obliterated.'[29] Now the speaker gives himself wholly to his Lord, and accepts that 'thou art mine'(11). This inversion of 'I am' and 'thou art' indicates the interlocking of the fingers of the two hands, so firmly joined that they cannot be prised apart, so much so that the speaker acquires more confidence: 'I may presume thee mine, then thine' (13) he argues; in other words you are more important to me than to yourself.

The beginning of the line: 'Yet then as mine' moves into the present tense again 'restor[ing]' the present, and heralds the wonder that the speaker feels knowing Christ's sacrifice for him. The final interlacing of the two lines is the closing prayer that melds both 'Thine and Mine' together with the 'still! still', implying 'also' as well as 'calm'; whilst the joining of the two words refers to an active Christ and a passive speaker, complementing the joining of the speaker's soul with Christ.

The poem is also an exercise in defamiliarisation in which hands are used as a conceit for both provision and denial. It is a story of a man seeking out and finding

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[29]P.G. Stanwood, 'Time and Liturgy in Herbert's Poetry,' *George Herbert Journal*, 1&2 5 Fall (1981)/Spring (1982), 19-30 (p.23).

Christ through the Word; and whereby the narrative is explored through the interweaving of the tenses. The speaker initially acknowledges that: 'Lord, thou art mine' which moves from a confident present tense, to a tentative future: 'or can be mine', and finally a reassured past: 'Since thou in death wast none of thine.' Such a focus on the present, future and past allows the narrative to move forwards in a cyclical continuum, echoing Paul's words: 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever' (Hebrews 13.8). Thus the words on the page move from what Jay-Gould describes as 'time's arrow' to 'time's cycle', and provide a parallel exercise in the Bible's reassurance.

The paradoxical reassurance of the finality of death celebrates the speaker's confidence in conjoining himself to Christ; the exclamation marks at the final statement 'Thine and Mine!' imply a confidence in the only two words that are all the speaker needs to repeat -'Mine and Thine.' An examination of the speaker's life is suggested in the varying tenses -past, present and future, but not in that order, which allows for flexibility in the narrative. Hardy argues that 'the novel uses and analyses [...] forms of narrative which are crucial and essential aspects of our self-experience.'[30] It can be argued that this poem might also be considered in the same way. The speaker in 'Clasping of hands' uses the signifier of clasped hands in prayer, and relates a story whereby Christ enters his life through prayer literally by taking him in hand as well as by the hand. The hands thus become a conceit and a metonymy for a holistic view of eternal life. For as well as clasped in prayer, they become the visual icon of the bloody, crucified hands of Christ, and a semiotic denoted in the wringing of the hands in despair.

Hands play a crucial role in *Paradise Lost*. At the temptation, the reader learns that 'her rash hand in evil hour/Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat'

[30]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, p.5.

(780-1); (and again at the final expulsion) in their final disgrace: 'They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,/Through Eden took their solitary way.'[31] In essence, then, hands are readily identifiable and are emotively connected to both childhood and love, as well as temptation.

By delineating his life through the echoing chime of 'Thine and Mine', the speaker is able to concentrate on the key elements that go into fulfilling his life, making it resound both musically and metaphorically through emphasis and onomatopoeic sound (thine and mine can only mean belonging). There is no tangible plot to the narrative, yet the tenses, plus the key words of 'yet', 'advantage', 'neither', 'presume', 'suffer', 'death', 'restore' and 'still' propel a narrative along rigid and preordained lines. In the poem, Herbert desires and creates the simplicity that a life in Christ demands; the sincere and unaffected design of the poem, its economy, its assonance and parataxis of co-ordinated clauses parallel the compression in the speaker's life. The *chiastic* pattern of the first line is balanced through the interlacing of the words in the final line: 'Or rather make no Thine and Mine!' and correspond to the interlacing of the fingers of the hands. One is the speaker's, the other is God's.

7.7.6 Tedious Monotony

In this next poem, 'Sinnes round', the narrator tells his story with repetitive circular monotony, and the prayerful pleading of the penitent speaker dominates the whole poem. It is interesting to note the childlike persistence that pervades the whole poem. The first and last stanzas only are quoted:

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

[31] *The Poems of John Milton,* ed. by Thomas Keithtley, 2 vols (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859), 11, pp.88 & 218.

> 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 (1-6,13-18).

Here, the speaker's avowal of his contrition hammers into the reader's mind like the numerous sins committed. The repeated final line which begins the next stanza indicates itself as a signifier for the inescapable turmoil that sin becomes, the speaker realising that there is no escape from sin in this claustrophobic world of self-created misery. One sin perpetuates numerous others, like a lie, whereby ten need to be told to cover one. The excess of personal pronouns makes these sins intimate and particularly shameful to the speaker. Through repeating words, lines and phrases, Herbert constructs a narrative of suspense to relate the effect persistent sin has upon the speaker. For we are not told what the sins are, and this has the consequence of uncertainty, and as Eric Rabkin argues, 'parables are subject to everlasting exegesis by virtue of their spare content. A good parable has countless meanings.'[32]

The proleptic opening of 'Sinnes round' reiterates the effect of sin, without actually naming it, opening up a space for individual interpretation 'My thoughts are working like a busie flame' (3) states the speaker; the pathetic fallacy of 'a busie flame' encapsulates the frenzy and destructive nature of sin. And although the image of fire generally dominates the poem as it pulls in the reader into the visual experience of a medieval hellfire; it also suggests the reader's mind is working to decode the sins identified. It is a story of a contrite individual aware of his sin, which is so personal that he omits to mention it, yet it is hinted at: 'My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts' (6) or: 'where are lewd intentions:/My hands do joyn to finish

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[32]Eric Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense,* p.23.

the inventions'(11). Conscious of his status as a man of religion, Herbert, in *The Countrey Parson,* states his views on the unmarried Parson:

> If he be unmarried, and keepe house, he hath not a woman in his house, but findes opportunities of having his meat dress'd and other services done by men servants. [...] If he be unmarryed, and sojourne, he never talks with any woman alone, but in the audience of others, and that seldom, and then also in a serious manner, never jestingly or sportfully.[33]

The above passage indicates how seriously the poet took his public face, and consequently how he would view any deviation from the rigid life he set himself. The rigid life is mirrored in the rigid pattern of the verse, in which each last line becomes the first line of the next stanza. This implies that the speaker, after acknowledging his misdeeds, regurgitates them to explore them in more detail: 'for they supplie/New thoughts of sinning' (16-17).

The poem has echoes of 'Clasping of hands' insofar as its circularity parallels the frequent and consistent sinning that the speaker experiences. The futility found in this finite life is longed for in the timelessness that eternity brings, and is found in the mirroring that the final line has with the first line. The poem goes on and on, only Christ, the Alpha and Omega of eternity can step in to save the speaker. But the appeal to God is just an iteration 'sorrie, I am', which can go on indefinitely if the poem is read and reread over and over. Fish, in describing such circular poetry, argues that

> it is clear that we are dealing here not with a single linear pattern, but with a *rhythm,* and it is a rhythm whose fluctuations are bounded by the two poles between which self-examination moves, repentance and faith.[34]

Fish continues, and quoting two seventeenth-century theologians, Fields and Nowell on the pitfalls of self-examination, suggests that

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[33]F. E. Hutchinson, *Works,* Chapter 1X 'The Parson's State of Life,' p.237.
[34]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple,* p.120.

> attached to these poles are two corollary dangers: on one hand, the obligation of 'every man in his own heart and *estimation* to set himself *low,* and become *vile* in his own eyes.'[35]

As Fish notes, this can lead to despair and a sense of hopelessness. Fish argues that this danger is courted in a poem like 'Sinnes round', whilst the other pole argues for 'a sure hope of God's mercies.'[36] It is thus apparent that

> a heart broken is a heart prepared. Self-examination has apparently done its work, moving [...] from conviction of sin to repentance, and from repentance to a thankful remembrance of mercy.[37]

This is apparent in 'JESU' where the reconstruction does not offer the same heart to Christ, but one that has a personal message of comfort to its owner - 'I ease you.' Herbert uses narrative to demonstrate to himself the practical and intensely personal issues that occur when deviating from the linear way to Christ, repeating the Psalmist's hymn: 'For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin' (Psalm 38.18).

In another Latin poem from the *Passio Discerpta* ' In Mundi Sympathiam cum Christo'[38] the rhythm of self-examination, conscience and sinning, and the

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[35]Theophilus Field, 'A Christian's preparation to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper', 1622 STC 10860, pp. 168/9, in *The Living Temple,* p.120.
[36]Alexander Nowell, 'A Catechisme', 1614 STC 18735 Sig. M3. in *The Living Temple,* p.120.
[37]Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple*, p.122.

[38] 'On the Harmony of the World with Christ'

You do not die alone:
The World, at the same
Time, dies in you,
And the whole mechanism
Is with your cross in tune.
Plato, in this man find
The Spirit of the World;
Or, less your inquiry
Distress the world too much,
Look for Him in me.

reassurance of Christ's forgiveness are prefigured in his death and resurrection. The poem is quoted in full:

> Non moreris solus: Mundus simul interit in te,
> Agnoscitque tuam Machina tota Crucem.
> Hunc ponas animam mundi, Plato: vel tua mundum
> Ne minium vexet quaestio, pone meam.

Here, the urge of the speaker is to seek out the philosophy of time through the soul's immortality (Plato's soul in 'me'). Plato argues that

> we cannot admit that either the soul or anything else can be destroyed by the presence in another thing of that thing's specific evil in the absence of its own [...] no one will ever prove that death makes the soul worse morally.[39]

Thus the presence of evil (death) cannot destroy a body (the thing) imbued with Christ (absence of evil). St. Augustine, discussing Plato among other philosophers, says,

> These philosophers [...] recognised that no material object can be God [...] they raised their eyes above all material objects in their search for God. They realised that nothing changeable can be the supreme God.[40]

Thus time, in its endless circularity, as defined by the speaker in 'On the harmony of the World with Christ' who searches for God with a restless energy finds that whilst 'Time, dies in you [...] your cross is in tune.' This means, in effect, that time has no meaning, the cross symbolises eternity. For St. Paul states that

> to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross (Ephesians 2.15-6).

Mark M. McCloskey & Paul R, Murphy, *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert,* p.79.
[39]Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by H.D.P. Lee, 12th edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.389.
[40]St. Augustine, *City of God,* trans. by Henry Bettenson, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1984), p.307.

The use of three tenses - present 'I go', conditional 'if I go' and the future 'I will come again', focuses the reader's mind on the supernatural agency that Heaven suggests. Cohen and Shires describe such 'anachronies' as

> specific points of disparity between temporal order of a story sequence and that of the narration [...] [and] can amount to a phrase which effects some momentary disjunction between story and narrational times.[41]

The predominance of present participles in 'Sinnes round' focuses on the active presence of sin in the heart: 'My thoughts are working [...] 'And by their breathing' [...] 'New thoughts of sinning.'

Arnold Stein, in describing 'Sinnes round', describes the poem's form as 'emblematic and circular' and says

> the purpose of 'Sinnes round' precludes transformation, but the circular form does more than confirm the beginning; it establishes the compulsive order of sin and draws into its emblematic form, as an ambiguous adornment suitable to both beginning and end, the mere expression of regret.[42]

The speaker is trapped by his own admission of his sins, conscious that all he can offer is regret, he exploits this in an iteration of the three words - 'Sorrie I am.' The continuous present tense allows the poem to gain power from both its form, and the inventive and dramatic conceits presented, 'cockatrice', 'Sicilian hill', 'Babel', are all images associated with death and violent destruction. The poem does not offer hope; and the 'hands [which] [...] 'Joyn' (12) are not those clasped hands in prayer, but the hands put to some ignoble work. Each sentence, as the image of the cockatrice suggests, hatches another fiendish idea which breeds in on itself as the repetition of the lines connotes.

The poem is luxuriously self-indulgent, the speaker sensing that to unburden himself of all the most heinous sins, shameful as they are, by unceasing repetition, expunges himself completely. The self-discipline that the penitent lacks, presents

[41]Steven Cohen, & Linda M. Shires, p.84.
[42]Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p.145.

itself in the round of timeless sinning. And the more the sinner thinks of his sins, the more new ideas of sinning come to him: 'Yet ill deeds loyter not: for they supplie/New thoughts of sinning' (16-17). The sheer human side of the speaker offers itself in this revelatory line, and the simplicity of the prayer proffered to God is simple and frank - 'Sorrie I am'.

As Judith Dundas argues,

> the tension between wit and faith, if it is a one, can be the very source of power in a poem by polarising these opposites then voluntarily sacrificing the cleverness of wit to the divine simplicity.[43]

Such an argument for simplicity suggests that God wants nothing more, it being sufficient to acknowledge one's sins and be sorry for them. The Psalmist saying: 'The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me' (Psalm 116.6). Both poems seek a harmony with God, 'Sinne's round' by its incantatory pleading, a dialogue of a simple line 'sorrie, I am', that asks no interface with God, just forgiveness which must be taken on trust; whereby 'On the harmony of the World with Christ', by its very title, argues for a symbiotic relationship with God.

Jonathan Culler argues that 'the meaning of a sentence is the series of developments to which it gives rise, as determined by past and future relations between words and the conventions of semiotic systems.'[44] God, we find in this poem, superintends both time and space. 'Sinnes round' tells a story within a prescribed framework, and as Jay-Gould points out,

> Time cannot simply move forward toward ever more different and progressive states. God, and nature's order, forbids a mere aimless wandering through time's multifarious corridors. Our modern earth separates two grand cycles of repetition - our past and our future. Destruction (deluge) followed perfection (paradise) in our past. Our future shall cycle through these same stages in reverse order.[45]

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[43]Judith Dundas, 'Levity and Grace: The Poetry of Sacred Wit', *The Year Book of English Studies*, 11 (1972), 93-102 (p.96).
[44]Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.132.
[45]Stephen Jay-Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, p.46.

The repetitive nature of 'Sinnes round' attempts to develop the redemptive nature of God's forgiveness through the cyclical form in words and signs. The destructive power of sin by its very immolation must seek perfection in the next life. Jay-Gould notes that 'cycles also embody an aesthetic necessity, for the world would be impoverished and ill-informed without a concept of renewal for those parts of nature, or concepts, that wear out.'[46]

The inversion from normal word order of the three words 'sorrie, I am', from what one might expect in ordinary speech ('I am sorrie') creates a tension and doubt that the speaker feels in his vulnerable situation. This assists the reader to focus on the prayerful importuning of the penitent sinner to a God that he would like to feel he knows intimately. This point is picked up by Stein, who argues that in 'Sinnes round' 'the allegorical meaning, then, is philosophical and spiritual, the saving life, the soul of truth in words.'[47] Nevertheless, it is those same words that are the only thing that the speaker can offer to God, repeating them often in the hope that they are heard and acted upon.

The two poems ('Clasping of hands' and 'Sinnes round') are contrary poems, the first demonstrates a confident speaker who is firmly entwined with his God: 'make no Thine and Mine!' he quips. The second poem offers the reader a speaker who is full of insecurities and conscious of his sin:

> And he spake this parable [...] Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican/The Pharisee stood and prayed [...] God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are [...] or even as this publican [...] And the publican [...] Would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18.9-13).

The two poems parallel this story and reflect Herbert's paradoxical doubts and assurances. Herbert utilises narrative in retelling this latter parable using everyday

[46]Stephen Jay-Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*. p.47.
[47]Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics*, p.xxiii.

images and artefacts. He relates to his reader audience in the same way as did Jesus' telling of His parables.

Chapter Eight

'Death, thou wast once an uncouth hideous thing.'

Endings and Closure in Narrative

The poems discussed are 'Love (III),' ' Mortification' and 'Vertue.'

8.8.1 Endings and Last Things

In this chapter, the journey through life finally comes to an end, as Herbert's poems on death and endings are examined. As the reader is taken through the process of death he also experiences the process of a funeral (as in 'Mortification' for example). Nevertheless, the story does not conclude there, for in the poem 'Vertue' the narrative continues into immortality through a manipulation of the tenses ('Then chiefly lives'). Or in 'Love (III)' '(So I did sit and eat').

Michael Edwards suggests that

> an end is equally a form of salvation, substituting, for mere addition, finality and climax, and concentrating time into a shape.[1]

It is interesting that Herbert's endings do pull his exegetical message into a coherent whole, as seen in 'The Holdfast':

> What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
> Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall (13-14)

or in 'The Windows' where the implicit narrative relates on the preacher's feeling of his inadequacy to preach, forces him to admit:

> But speech alone
> Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
> And in the eare, not conscience ring (13-15).

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[1] Michael Edwards, 'Story: Towards a Christian Theory of Narrative', in *Images of Belief*, p.181.

Donald Mackenzie points out how 'in metaphysical poetry the emblem became a form important for the metaphysical poets.'[2] In Herbert's poetry the emblem of the vine (the literal), becomes the signifier (the abstract) in such poems as 'Love-joy', 'The Collar', 'The Bag', and most significantly and obviously in 'Love (III).' Herbert presents each emblem as the Eucharistic promise of Christ's redemption, showing how individually they come to symbolise the summation of the whole in *The Temple*: 'Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Revelation19.9).

8.8.2 The Sense of Closure

The Temple as a whole has a fully resolved Eucharistic ending, as shown in the poem 'Love (III)'.The first and last stanzas are quoted:

> Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
> Guiltie of dust and sinne.
> But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
> From my first entrance in,
> Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
> If I lack'd any thing.
>
> Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
> Go where it doth deserve.
> And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
> My deare, then I will serve.
> You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
> So I did sit and eat (1-6,13-18).

The penultimate poem in the whole book, 'Love (III)' appears to hold the key to the comfort and ultimate resolution to the speaker's anxieties about his acceptance in God's sight. The last two lines encapsulate the summation of Herbert's life narratives as they are presented in *The Temple*: 'You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:/So I did sit and eat.' The simple, single syllable words, précis the words of Jesus as he states:

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[2] *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed by Donald Mackenzie (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p.59.

> Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come and serve them (Luke12.37).

Herbert suggests that he is one of those servants as he places himself humbly before 'Love.' The reluctance of the speaker to feel at ease before his Lord opens up a narrative dialogue between the two. The conversation that ensues, with its inquits of 'I answer'd', 'Love said', 'sayes Love', offers a connection between the two speakers that is intimate and personal. The narration pivots between the teller-character, that is, the speaker who is invited to dinner, hesitant and guilt-ridden ('A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here' (7)), and the reflector-character, who analyses the situation he finds himself in:

> Ah my deare,
> I cannot look on thee (9-10)
>
> Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
> Go where it doth deserve (13-14).

In this latter situation, the reflector-character presents to the reader both personalisation and impersonalisation of the narration process, in what Stanzel terms the 'opposition mode.' For as much as Love tries to make the encounter personal and loving, the other character counterbalances it with an impersonal and self-deprecating reply: 'sweetly questioning,/If I lack'd any thing' (Love); 'A guest, I answere'd, worthy to here' (speaker). In 'Love (III)' the two differentiated basic forms must first of all be understood as different conceptions of the mediacy of all narration. Stanzel suggest that 'impersonalisation attempts to awake in the reader the impression of the immediacy of the narrative presentation of an event, and with it the illusion that that which is narrated is to be perceived, so to speak, *in actu*.'[3]

[3] F. K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.143. N.B. The situation *in actu*, is brought about by the conflation of direct speech and indirect speech that occurs between the two characters in the poem, that is, between 'Love' and the speaker.

It is possible to relate this concept of impersonalisation to this poem. For here it is noted, that the speaker relates an ordinary event (he is invited to dinner) in extraordinary circumstances, for his host is Love (God) himself. The personalistion of the event is demonstrated by Herbert through the use of intimate expressions. Love 'bade me welcome', he is 'quick-eyed' (observant) and questioned 'sweetly.' The taking of the speaker's hand and the smiling at him by Love (10) are all demonstrable effects by the poet to move the reader and listener, enabling him to experience the same discomfiture, that the 'unkinde, ungratefull' guest feels. After this emotion both the reader and speaker are on the same footing, as it were, and this allows the speaker to move into the realms of impersonalisation. Now we see that Love addresses all mankind through his words:

> And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
> My deare, then I will serve.
> You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
> So I did sit and eat (15-18).

Christ saying:

> Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20.28).

The final welcoming lines are the same as at the beginning (he is Love's guest), yet the guest is unable to be accepted as an equal at the commencement of the poem as he says: 'Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back'. At the end he agrees to permit himself to be served by Love alone. The personal challenge to the speaker to accept Love initially has to be tempered by the impersonalistion of a Love that 'bore the blame' (15). For only when the guest is comfortable is he able to accept the personal assurance that he is accepted, suggested by the word 'So' ('So I did sit and eat').

The situation *in actu*, is brought about by the conflation of direct speech and indirect speech that occurs between the two 'characters' in the poem. The speaker answers Love with the words: 'I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,/I cannot look on thee (9-0).' The frankness of the direct speech, whereby the speaker has no illusion about his flawed character, pulls the reader and listener into the actual situation as Herbert presents it. Love does not, for example, suggest that they are both equally flawed individuals. The situation is unequal in its subtlety, yet it is an inequality that the speaker is prepared and willing to accept. This gives the scenario a representation of unreality and reality at one and the same time. It is a situation that Joseph Summers, in describing the poem, says,

> However we read it the poem is moving, but it gains immensely in richness when we recognise the relationships it establishes between this world and the next, between abstracted and incarnate Love.[4]

This opening to anagogical interpretation is characteristic of Herbert's poetry. For nowhere in the poem does the speaker or Love hint at this world or the next. It is purely through the interaction of the two narratives, one human, the other sublime, that suggests to the reader or listener a third order of time, the *aevum*, that Kermode refers to, moving between the *nunc movens* and the *nunc stans*. This is the *aevum* that exists in the imagination of the reader, and which is the time-order of novels (and poems). Herbert presents an arc of narrative that allows for a discussion of the proposal before he does finally accept the invitation to 'sit and eat.' Both parties present their case, the guest, who feels unworthy, and the host who knows from the first line of 'welcome' that his guest will capitulate. As Waswo points out,

> To open the divine text to the newly historical modes of interrogation was to perceive a temporal semantic fluidity that offered ample scope for competing attempts at determination [...]. These arguments [between the literal or figurative presence of Christ in the bread and wine] [...] were not only about

[4] Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, p.89.

> how to interpret a given scriptural text (a *parole*), [they] also called into question both the entire semantic operation of the medium (the *langue*) and the very special status attributed to it proceeding, however indirectly, from God. [5]

Thus the semantics of the Eucharist that Herbert and his host 'Love' explore is skilfully presented by Herbert by his taking on both roles, that of guest and host. This is done through the clipped economic dialogue; and is also noted in other 'God-speaking' poems such as 'Artillerie.'

8.8.3 Death as the final Drama

When the endings of a poem are considered, it is usually the end of life that is being contemplated. Last words were an important source of spiritual comfort for the speaker and the hearer. They permitted the individual to accept suffering, and in some cases, martyrdom, as an act of faith, and became a model to which all men might aspire. As Philippe Ariès observes:

> The acts performed by the dying man, once he has been warned that his end is near, have a ceremonial, ritual quality [...] the confession of sins, the pardon of the survivors, the pious dispositions on their behalf, the commendation of one's soul to God [...] the written will seems merely to have formalized and rendered obligatory the instructions and prayers that the epic poets showed as spontaneous impulses on the part of the dying.[6]

In the deathbed scene, that Walton recalls, Herbert's reported words were, according to Walton: 'I have practised mortification, and endeavoured to die daily, that I might live eternally.'[7] These words echo sentiments expressed in Herbert's poem of the same name, 'Mortification' as he prays: 'Lord, instruct us so to die/That all these dyings may be life in death' (36), and supports Ariès' statement.

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[5] Richard Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, pp.208-9.
[6] Phillipe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, trans. from the French by Helen Weaver (London: Penguin, 1981) p.18.
[7] Izaak Walton, *Lives* p.320.

In a poem like 'Mortification' the narrative operates on a number of different levels. These become apparent and reveal themselves as the poem unfolds. This resembles the unwrapping of the 'winding sheets' that bind both the individual and the persona in the poem, only to trap him again, as the poem restates itself. The first and last stanzas are quoted:

How soon doth man decay!
When clothes are taken from a chest of sweets
To swaddle infants, whose young breath
Scarce knows the way;
Those clouts are little winding sheets
Which do consigne and send them unto death.

Man, ere he is aware,
Hath put together a solemnitie,
And drest his herse, while he has breath
As yet to spare:
Yet Lord, instruct us so to die,
That all these dyings may be life in death (1-6, 31-36).

The first level of narrative that 'Mortification' explores is that of the development of the individual from birth to death, taking the reader through the different stages of life. The speaker tells the story of infancy and childhood, not as a joyful experience, but rather as a pre-emptive for death, and he does this through the use of present and future tenses. For example: 'clothes are taken,'To swaddle', [and] 'are little winding sheets', whilst the commencement of each stanza with the future tense 'When' implies such a future awaits every man. It is a future that is the precursor of death. The second level of narrative explores the adult phase of man's life. Utilising allegory as a tool for mankind's unconscious actions; so as man develops friendships:'calls for musick', acquires a home, and lives his life to the full, in reality he is but preparing for death. The allegorical message is in the subconscious action he takes, for it matters little how 'staid and wise' he gets, the narrative of death must be told, and man cannot escape it. The third level examines

the poem as a whole, looking at it as a sermon of how man should live his life, that is, with the conscious knowledge of death. Although it does not tell man what he should do, but rather explores the ordinary events of life, allowing the reader to have an omniscient view of life as a whole, being careful to point out that even our 'clouts','beds', 'musick', 'home', and 'chair' are in reality the impedimenta of death. At this stage, the reader becomes aware of an omniscient narrator. It is he who controls the narrative, allowing the reader an overview of the individual's life as a whole. As the title implies, the reader is conscious of death very early in the poem, and cannot escape it in the poem, as neither can he escape it in life.

The fourth level of narrative follows on from this latter concept by shielding man from the crude and cruel realities of death. By constructing a purpose to life, when in reality there is no purpose at all, man deliberately avoids the reality of life and death. Through the use of the inclusive 'us' in the final stanza, a metaphor for the end of life, together with the past tense of: 'Hath put together a solemnitie,/And drest his herse' (32-33), the reader is able to incorporate the reader into the allegory. It is indeed a narrative about everyone. A fifth level of narrative appraises the whole poem, as man's life is scrutinised after death. What is now found, is that the poem is cyclical, taking the reader round to the commencement of life through the conceits of encirclement: 'Swaddle', 'Bindes', 'Circle', and 'rounds of musick.' Now the reader recognises that the old 'age [that] grows low and weak' is in reality the infant, ready to be taken from the womb to 'swaddle' and 'consigne' to death again. The whole poem is a palimpsest for man's own funeral. He has been arranging it from infancy, through his boyhood to his old age, yet he has been oblivious to it for: 'Man, ere he is aware,/Hath put together a solemnitie'(31-32). The shroud that wrapped him as an infant; the grave he voluntarily stepped into; the knell he joyfully listened to; the coffin

he purchased; and finally the chair he gratefully sat in have all conspired to 'convey him to the house of death.'

A further sixth level of narrative probes man's inherent fear of death by deliberately facing these fears with irony and black humour. If dying is so dreaded, why do we cheerfully embrace these appurtenances of life when really they are those of death? The poem's final seventh narrative level ultimately tricks the reader into believing that this is a story about life, when in effect, there is no story to be told. The infants never grow to be boys; the boy's never reach youth; the youths die before they are men; whilst old age is conveyed, almost against his will, to the house of death. No-one, the speaker explains, goes where he wishes. Death has the final, inexorable word. It is a narrative about the futility of narrative, for we can never know how our life will develop. St. Paul says:

> For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan [...] not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (II Corinthians 5.4).

Only God has the key to our existence, and that is why the speaker implores: 'Lord, instruct us so to die,/That all these dyings may be life in death'(35-36). As T.S. Eliot writes: 'In order to arrive at what you are not/You must go through the way in which you are not.'[8]

The poem moves the reader along a narrative of life events which can be interpreted in terms of exclusive preparatory fixtures for death. Here, Herbert uses these different levels of narrative to explain and compress the ordinary events of life, from birth to death. As he takes the reader through the inescapable facts of death, the speaker utilises the present tense in order to reinforce his message that man is doomed from the day he is born: 'When clothes are taken from a chest of sweets' (2)

[8] T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, 9th edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), p.201. 'East Coker' (Stanza III) from *The Four Quartets*.

he argues, and we expect him to say, because of the title of the poem, and the compelling two words 'soon' and 'decay' - 'Your fate is sealed', which indeed he does: 'Those clouts are little winding sheets/Which do consigne and send them unto death' (5-6). The reinforcement of the word 'When' commencing five stanzas, also has the disturbing effect of concentrating on a personal mortality that is the ultimate fate of all mankind. None can escape, the speaker argues, and the ironic fact is that 'When boyes', 'youth, 'Man', and age are so unconscious and unprepared for death, it is then that it strikes.

The narrative is controlled by the speaker, as God controls man's life; death cannot be avoided. The routine of birth through to death is as predictable as the accounts in the poem. The first four lines in each stanza describe in humdrum detail the experience of all individuals. What makes the poem unique is the observation the speaker makes in the final two lines of each stanza: 'Those clouts are little winding sheets [...] send them unto death' and so on. The omniscience that places the speaker in this position, allows him to take a holistic view, and permits him to see that death is the overwhelming destiny of man. Viewing death in this way allows for the opening up of new way towards immortality, as shown in the poem 'Death', here the speaker almost jokes with death:

> Death, thou wast once an uncouth hideous thing,
> Nothing but bones,
> The sad effect of sadder grones:
> Thy mouth wast open, but thou could'st not sing (1-4).

Nevertheless, Christ does not see death like that, and the speaker, anxious that we should not either, explains that 'since our Saviours death did put some bloud/Into thy face;/Thou art grown fair and full of grace' (13-15). Gene Veith suggests that 'human beings are generally too short-sighted, seeing only the

temporal process of decay, when considering death.'[9] 'Mortification' moves from the everyday to the supernatural, and throbs with the pulsating dance of death. For whilst man is able to recognise that danger lurks everywhere, what he is unaware of is how deliberate are his own actions that propel him to 'the house of death' (18 & 30). For this is his permanent home, and as such he should feel comfortable in it. The poem is unnerving to modern eyes and ears. Yet the poet is but stating the obvious. Neither the infants nor the 'boyes' as yet know this obvious fact of death; but as man progresses he learns to embrace his swift end through the slow process of life.

'Mortification' proceeds with the solemnity of a funeral procession, which is another level of narrative, paralleling the process of physical decay. Having explored the theme of birth and death, through the change in tense from future, present and past. The speaker sets in motion the possibility of linear time to encompass eternity through the emblematic images of swaddled infants and rolling waves; now the narrative moves onto yet another level. This is the most profound and possibly subtlest level: for here Herbert explores the psychological and emotional aspect of the poem, through man's inherent fear of death. It is a fear that is instinctive and universal. By using imagery that is simple, yet subconsciously dreaded (as well as the previous comforting images referred to), the 'sheets', 'graves', 'knell', 'coffin' and so on, serves to make the movement in the poem both insidious and deadly.

8.8.4. The Satire of Death

The poem is presented to the reader as a sermon, using metaphor and parable to drive home the message to man, to look to his way of life. The poem recalls the parable Jesus tells, whereby:

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[9] Gene E. Veith, Jr. *Reformation Spirituality* p.169.

> The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought [...] I will pull down my barns, and build greater [...]. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke12.16-21).

Herbert attempts to relates Christ's message through the familiar and the acceptable. For, however great our barns are, they can never accommodate us after death. It is only in the final stanza that God is remembered, and only on man's death bed: 'while he has breath/As yet to spare (33-4).' The speaker evokes an urgency in the single syllable words that appear to shrink in on themselves: 'aware', 'breath', 'spare', 'die' in the final evocation to God: 'Lord, instruct us so to die,/That all these dyings may be life in death' (35-36). In 'Mortification', the expanding and contracting lines are a mimesis, not only for the breathing in and out of the individual, but for the for the dismissal of all material objects out of his life.

Arnold Stein, in describing 'Mortification', observes that

> special effects will occur at the end of the third line, where the syntax will prevent anything more than a slight rhymical pause - ending in 'breath' but not permitting the reader to breathe until he completes the sense in the next, the shortest, line.[10]

Such care in designing a narrative that emulates the laboured or gasping breath of the dying, together with the *caesurae* at the end of each fourth line, plays to the reader's most intimate fear of dying and its agonised process. For this death is not swift nor unexpected, it is long and drawn out, and we prepare for it as soon as we are born. The infants are taken from the womb as man takes clothes from a 'chest of sweets' and with as much or as little care. As boyes cheerfully step into their bed, they lie in their graves. Each voluntary movement man makes in day to day living he makes involuntarily in death.

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[10]Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics*, p.157.

'Mortification' is personal in a confidential almost sensual way, for the infants are observed in a developmental process that might be termed voyeuristic by less charitable readers. The narrator intimates that he has an insight into the individual's life, yet he cannot warn either the 'boyes', nor 'youth', nor even 'man', of the danger that entraps them. The best that he can attempt is the demonstration of the activities that fill the person's life at that moment in time; then with iconoclastic precision, that is almost cruel, the poet uses that same demonstration as a mimesis for death. It is the very first activity that heralds death for: 'When boyes go first to bed' it is then that they step into their graves, and they do it willingly. Therefore the inescapability is decided from their first breath.

Each stanza, therefore, presents the reader with a microcosm of a life narrative. Set within the whole poem it becomes the *Bildungsroman* of macrocosmic existence. Moving through the ages of man from birth to death, the speaker narrates each parabolic event that occurs to the individual within the six lines of each stanza. It therefore allows the reader the luxury of seeing the event through his, the speaker's eyes, rather than through the individual's. The stanza form is tight and controlled, the rhyming 'breath' and 'death' encapsulating the demise of the soul (or mind) as well as that of the flesh. Raymond Martin and John Barresi point out that when

> Socrates was alive, many Greeks thought that the soul leaves the body when the person who dies expels his last breath; they also thought that at least at that moment the soul *is* that last breath.[11]

We can thus argue for the subtlety of the use by Herbert of the word 'breath' as a representative of the *anima* or soul, rather than the more usual word of life in his echo of the third and sixth lines throughout the poem. And we can note also that

[11]Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p.2.

'breath' and 'death' never leave either the poem, nor the individual, but act as accompaniments to the heart beat of life; a musical rhythm that is inescapable.

Describing Herbert's use of the 'breath/death' theme within the poem, John Holloway argues that

> the poem can be seen as the application, five times over, of one and the same rule [...] 'whenever X stands for something in mortal life, rewrite for X, X - plus - death. Clothes + death = winding sheet. [...]. The structure of the poem simply is to rewrite 'breath' as 'death' in various contexts [...] no fewer than five different ways. [12]

Holloway continues saying that 'whenever marked emotion or intellectuality is present the standard word-order is abandoned.'[13] It seems that the ambiguity of the conceits takes precedence over and above the word-order; and whilst the poem is written in the iambic, the musical pulse of the pentamic second and sixth lines, which complement each other, both in rhythm and context, is the crux of the whole poem. In his seminal work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bœthius states:

> Since God abides forever in an eternal present, His knowledge, also transcending all movement of time, dwells in the simplicity of its own changeless present [...] just as ye see certain things in this your temporary present, so does He see all things in His eternal present.[14]

The Christian idealism that propels the human being into a state of final decay, yet at the same time invigorating him with endless hope, is presented by the speaker through the funeral conceits. Such funereal actions are the physical acts offered by man to his fellows, and mirror the acts of God in the dissolution of the flesh. Both are preparations for an altered state of being over which the person has no control. In his book *Death and Western Thought*, Jacques Choron shows how in the Renaissance,

[12]John Holloway, *Narrative and Structure: Exploratory Essays*, pp.129-130.
[13]John Holloway, *Narrative and Structure: Exploratory Essays*, p.128.
[14]Anicius Manlius Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by H. R. James, in *The Portable Roman Reader*, 17th edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp.1-656 (p.650).

> The moment of death became of the utmost importance, since the deathbed came to be seen as the battleground of the last and desperate fight which the Devil and his cohorts waged for the soul of man. Because of this contest between the forces of Good and Evil in the last hour it was indispensable to avail oneself of the help of the Church [...] and this was the reason why sudden death was a manner of dying dreaded above all others.[15]

To prepare man for sudden death, the *BCP* states:

> Yet, forasmuch as in all appearance the time of his dissolution draweth near, so fit and prepare him, we beseech thee, against the hour of death.[16]

The speaker can only relate what he knows of death as he has witnessed here on earth. And it is interesting to note the poet's use of the word 'decay'; for to decay is to be part of a process, and by default a process must lead to something else. Man decays from the hour he is born. Only when 'breath' and 'death' become united can the process of mortification begin, and pursue a narrative.

> Our birth dyes in infancy, and our infancy dyes in youth, and youth and the rest dye in age, and age also dyes, and determines all [...] this *exitus mortis*, the issue of death, is *liberatio in morte*, A deliverance in death.[17]

Thus argues John Donne in his final Sermon 'Deaths Duell', or 'a Consolation to the Soule, against the Dying Life, and Living Death of the Body', preached in 1631. The whole of 'Mortification' resonates with the vibrancy of death. Each emblem acts as an *aide memoire* to the transitoriness of life, and is a narrative of the powerlessness of man to control his existence on earth. We 'borrow' life, as it were, the speaker argues, then we must hand it back to God who has issued it. It is therefore apt that we remember this philosophy, and present ourselves as worthy to die before we come into God's presence.

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[15] Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York, London: Collier Macmillan Ltd, 1963), p.92. (In a footnote Choron remarks that 'it is interesting that in our time the preference is markedly in favor of sudden death').

[16] *The Book of Common Prayer* 'A Prayer for a sick person, when there appeareth small hope of recovery.' From 'The Visitation of the Sick.'

[17] *John Donne, Selected Prose,* ed. by Neil Rhodes, pp.310. & 314.

Written as a linear poem which moves inexorably towards death, the images entrap the reader with their circular emblematic form. The tightly bound infant, almost mummified; the sleep that figuratively 'bindes' the boys into oblivion; the 'rounds' of musick (14) are an appropriate metaphor, for Herbert, we know, sang and played as part of a consort; and finally the 'circle of his breath' (21).[18] R.G. Collmer, in his discussion of the iconography of death, explains how this 'devotional effect of thinking about one's own death was acquired by using an object, picture or scene, and became in effect a 'hieroglyphic.''[19] If death was to play such an important role in one's life, then we should revel in the pleasure of it whilst still alive. Let us address the issue of death that becomes a precursor to life eternal, the speaker urges. For although he presents us with the symbols and conceits of life, dynamic and spirited, they are in reality conceits of death, it is simply that our eyes are hidden from this truism.

Choron quotes Michel de Montaigne, who argues that

> life is destined for death, which threatens it at every moment. [...] One has to live with this thought [...] it [death] is natural [...] it is the condition of your creation, a part of yourself [...] death is the goal of your existence [...]. To suppress the thought of death is the remedy of the vulgar.[20]

Apperception allows the speaker to see beyond the grave; by allowing him to view the holistic picture, enormous power is offered to the individual. For as man presents his life in a series of illuminated vignettes, it is only *after* death that the comprehensive overview of a life can be appreciated: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face' argues St Paul (1 Corinthians 13.12).

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[18]'Round' - Short unaccompanied vocal 'perpetual canon'at the unison or octave in which the voices enter in turn. Popular in England after the16th century. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music,* 3rd edn.ed.by Michael Kennedy, p.545.
[19]R. G. Collmer, 'The Meditation on Death and its appearance in Metaphysical Poetry,' *Neophilogism* 45 (1961) 323-333 (p.328).
[20]Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York & London: Collier Macmillan, 1963), pp.98-99. In Montaigne, *Essays* Bks.1 &111

The narrative of 'Mortification' is written with a rhythm that emulates a tranquil lullaby. Stein describes a 'rocking motion of their (the boys) breath and a tempo change with weak and thawing.'[21] Nevertheless, this lullaby is the sleep of death, the rhyme scheme of abc, abc has a comforting pacifying calmness to it, and belies the abrasive context of the actual verse. The emjambement of: 'breath/Scarce knows the way' (3-4) demands control of the reader's breath to speak the sentence in a single breath; this intimate involvement of the reader with the dying subject is both confidential yet disturbing in its audacity. The paradoxical action of death as both movement, through the dissolution process, but also as stillness, is presented through the juxtaposing words 'soon' and 'decay' of the initial first line. This parallels the future with the past, as both words are self-reflexive and yet address mankind universally. The peace that death imposes is all-encompassing, it stills the most restless individual: 'Be still and know that I am God' sings the psalmist in Psalm 46.

Thus the incessant motion of birth and death heralds the circularity of the poem that promises life eternal. Stein argues that

> sleep is the familiar simulacrum of death [...] the sense of speed is a product of the adoptive perspective [...] there is one small but definitive counter movement which resists being drawn into the imaginative perspective [...] onely their breath 'makes them *not* dead'.[22]

This observation of the boys' breath does not prove that they are alive either in the spiritual sense. The breathing is but a mechanical effect, an act that can be ignored or noted at will; their real life is in their minds, in thoughts and dreams, and this is hidden from all, except God. In a Sermon of 1627, John Donne writes:

> First then, Christ establishes a Resurrection, A Resurrection there shall be, for, that makes up God's circle. The Body of Man was the first point that the foot of God's compass was upon.[23]

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[21]Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), pp.160-165.
[22]Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics*, pp.164-5.
[23]John Donne, *Selected Prose*, ed. by N. Rhodes, p. 287.

Man becomes the pivotal compass of God and views his life as an endless circle of birth to death. St. Augustine, supporting this argument, says,

> If you subtract those immense spaces of time [...] but without limit, it is all to no avail; you will never reach the beginning, because there is no beginning at all.[24]

So man, even though he is unaware of it, is part of God's plan argues the speaker in 'Mortification' in preparing himself for death, although totally oblivious as to when it will happen. Paul Ricoeur reaffirms the argument, pointing out that 'time has no being since the future is not yet, the past no longer, and the present does not remain.'[25] Nothing, the speaker argues in 'Mortification' is as how it appears, for both man and God see life from different perspectives. The speaker takes each event in a life and re-evaluates it, refashioning it, so to speak, to mirror God's will:

> For in the midst of life we are in death [...] deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death [...]. Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts.[26]

Thus says the priest at the funeral service, for this is the only time man cannot exculpate himself from his misdeeds, or proffer any explanation for his actions. Death obliterates all good deeds as well as evil ones.

The poem is written as a life narrative in parable form to make the reader think about his own life, and delivered as a sermon. For all life's experiences have an ultimate purpose, it just takes application and interpretation to understand them. If we were to live forever, the entrance to eternal life in Heaven would never occur. Death is the necessary adjunct to a life with God. St. Augustine suggests that

> in fact, from the moment a man begins to exist in this body which is destined to die, he is involved all the time in a process whose end is death.[27]

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[24]St. Augustine, *City of God,* Book 2nd edn. X11:13, p. 487.
[25]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols,(Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 1, p.7.
[26] *The Book of Common Prayer*. 'At the Burial of the Dead.'
[27]St. Augustine, *City of God,* Bk.111:10, p.518.

In the very title of the poem, the speaker juxtaposes life and death in an almost playful way. The OED's first attestation of the word 'mortification' is 1386, where it can mean: 'In religious use: the act of mortifying the flesh or its lusts: the subjection of one's appetites and passions by the practice of austere living, especially by the self-infliction of bodily pain or discomfort; whilst its use in pathological terms is described as: the death of a part of the body while the rest is living; gangrene, [or] necrosis.' The more modern meaning of the word, whereby the individual has a feeling of humiliation caused by a disappointment, a rebuff, or a slight, originates from around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is recorded, in the diary of John Evelyn (1645), whereby he states: 'frustrated by my designe, to my very greate mortification.' It is interesting to also learn that in the seventeenth century, mortification was often applied to the state of torpor and insensibility preceding death.[28] This latter meaning may account for the hypnotic 'breath/death' in the poem, as well as the tight, carefully constructed rhyme endings 'sweets/sheets' etc., whereby we recite them without thinking, almost in a mesmeric state.

The poem can also be read as an allegory, a humble realisation that God has control of the individual's life each day, whilst we pursue life in a state of inertia, and that the death man experiences is also the death of the wilful self. Ricoeur suggests that

> expectation is thus the analogue to memory. It consists of an image that already exists [...]. However, this image is not an impression left by things past but a 'sign' and a 'cause' of future things which are [...] anticipated, foreseen [...]. Predicted.[29]

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[28]*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn. prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982-89), 1X (1989), [a. F. Mortification (14thc.), ad. Eccl. L. Mortification - em, n. of action F. Mortificare to MORTIFY.
[29]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols, 1, p.11.

The speaker relies on the reader's memory to recall the impedimenta of death: 'decay', 'winding sheets', 'graves' and so on. For although he has not, as yet, experienced them, as Ricoeur says they become the 'cause ' of future things which he knows is inevitable. This is Herbert's narrative art. Not wishing to scare his reader, he presents each icon as a small manageable artefact that transforms itself into the subject's life. The internal perspective that the speaker employs regarding the 'otherness' of the individual's life, the preparation for a funeral, rather than for a celebratory life, as proposed earlier, suggests an omniscient narrator.

For it is here that the narrative moves into yet another level in the form of the speaker, who knows about man's decay even before he has tasted life. Stanzel argues that

> omniscience always presupposes the external perspective of an [...] authorial narrator. The latter has at his disposal unlimited insight into the thoughts and feelings of the Characters. [30]

Life, however, cannot be lived in the way suggested by the speaker, and he acknowledges this also. Yet he is anxious that we do not lose our fear of death, for it is the most powerful hold God has over man; and man must realise that: 'all these dyings may be life in death' (36). Herbert blurs the boundaries between life and death, making the latter attractive, whilst negating the appeal of life. The use of the word 'melt' in line 27, is interesting in that it holds a multiplicity of connotations. The speaker explains: 'Till all do melt, and drown his breath/When he would speak.' Taken literally, the abstract 'thawing' (26) draws a picture of the winter snows flooding in the spring of a new birth. But taken as a conceit, it refers initially to a context of helplessness, both in infancy and in old age; it can also be read whereby the solid mass of the body is eventually liquefied and returns to the earth. But there

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[30]F. K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative,* p.126.

is another level of interpretation, whereby the solid certainty of unconscious belief is challenged through the dissolving of religious truths.

8.8.5 The Artes Moriendi

In his analysis of the iconography of the *Artes Moriendi*, Alberto Tenenti suggests that 'the dying man attends his own drama as a witness rather than an actor.'[31] 'Mortification' becomes an icon for contemplation and reflection, a meditation on the fleeting experience of life vis-a-vis the permanence of death. We are relieved to find ourselves in the present, but are grateful for the insight into death. As Ricoeur argues, 'the solution of the *aporia* of the being and non-being of time through the notion of a threefold present (through the memory), continues to be fragile so long as the enigma of the measurement of time has not been resolved.'[32] Stanzel suggests that

> the opposition person and perspective have in common the problem of the point of view from which something is narrated or perceived. The differences between them lies in the consequences which follow from the choice of the point of view.[33]

This lies at the heart of 'Mortification', and whilst the narrative offers no preference for one over the other, that is, life nor death, neither does it urge man to embrace death. The poem is also presented as both a prayer and a parabolic sermon as it explores the *Artes Moriendi*, whilst being delivered as a *Momento Mori.* The key argument in the poem is that it is a narrative poem that negates the narrative. There is no story to be related. It is a poem about the futility of attempting to write a narrative of man's life. We can never know the outcomes that will befall us, argues the speaker, that is why it is essential to acknowledge this by praying: 'Lord, instruct us so to die,/That all these dyings may be life in death.' As Hardy says 'realism and

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[31]Alberto Tenenti, *La Vie*, p.55 cited in Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, p.109.
[32]Paul Riceour, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols 1, p.12.
[33]F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, p.111.

fantasy are coexistent in our judgements of literary narratives. We never complete our autobiographies, although we all know how it will end.'[34] For we are too intimidated by the thought of our own death to finalise our personal life narrative. In 'Mortification' Herbert has no such fear, as he describes the unwrapping of life to emulate death.

The poem moves on the level of irony and black humour to allegorise the life history that never was, and to teach man that God controls man's life. The poem deconstructs and defamiliarises the mundane and the narrative implodes upon itself. As the body falls apart at death through decomposition, so do the conceits and our image of ourselves as powerful and important. We are the observers in this drama of dying. For although we see the boys' 'breath [which] makes them not dead', this is not the crucial facet for life. In our modern world, we speak of 'brain death', true, there is breath, but it is not the breath of life, it is simply the mechanical movement of the chest. Herbert's poem 'Mortification' is reconstructed by the reader as God reconstructs mankind at the Resurrection. As the narrative becomes more dislocated, so do the efforts by the reader to restore them to make a holistic unified circle again. In 'Dooms-day' the dead take on a life of their own:

> Come away,
> Make no delay.
> Summon all the dust to rise
>
> While this member jogs the other,
> Each one whispring, *Live you brother?*
>
> Lord, thy broken consort raise,
> And all the musick shall be praise' (1-3, 5-6, 29-30)

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[34]Barbara Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, p.4.

are the final prophetic and humorous words Herbert utters in this eschatological poem. 'Mortification' is an allegory on immortality through the paradox of death and resurrection. And it is immortality in Herbert's poems that is now explored.

8.8.6 Immortality

A poem that attempts to describe immortality is 'Vertue', yet it is different from enacting or embodying it as the previous poems have done. The first and last stanzas are quoted:

> Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
> The bridall of the earth and skie:
> The dew shall weep thy fall to night;
> For thou must die.
>
> Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
> Like season'd timber, never gives;
> But though the whole world turn to coal,
> Then chiefly lives (1-4,13-16).

In 'Vertue' the beginning and the end of life, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, are mirrored in the brief lines, a conceit for the transience of life. The opening stanza of the 'bridall of the earth' to the final stanza of a 'whole world turn to coal' reflects the saying of Jesus: 'I am the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the first and the last' (Revelation1.8).

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests that

> it is only the *content* of the memory, fear, or hope that constitutes a past or future event [...]. It is because of the present cognitive or emotional act that such events retain, at least partly, their 'normal' place in the [...] narrative.[35]

If this theory is contextualised in relation to what Herbert is attempting to achieve in 'Vertue', it can be argued that Herbert must have a vision of the future as he tries to create it through the present tense of the final paradoxical word 'lives.' Here, the poet frees the constraints of mortality through the peripeteia that occurs immediately

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[35]Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: contemporary poetics,* 7th edn (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p.51.

following the first line of each stanza. The 'Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright' with its anaphora that heralds a comforting rhythm, metamorphoses into 'The dew shall weep thy fall tonight' with its ominous warning of the Fall that no individual has escaped. The future tense of the last two words 'must die' of the first three stanzas is subtly altered in stanza four to the present 'Then chiefly lives.' What is realised is that 'must die' is a statement of fact, indisputable and a certainty as iterated in 'Mortification'; yet what the poet suggests is that the final stanza embraces the soul, which cannot be destroyed. The soul parallels the conceit of timber which metaphmorphoses into coal to offer heat and life-giving warmth. Now the poet includes the subsequent metamorphosis of the words from 'must die' to 'chiefly lives' to promote the concept of eternity. Rimmon-Kenan proposes that

> the disposition of elements in the text, conventionally called text-time, is bound to be one-directional and irreversible, because language prescribes a linear figuration of signs and hence a linear presentation of information about things.[36]

In 'Vertue', Herbert suggests that the conventional norms of beauty are but transient, yet the 'one-directional' rhetorical device of anaphora ('Sweet day', 'Sweet rose', and so on) is given its own place in the final stanza ('a sweet and vertuous soul'). Nevertheless, the poet makes the verse more accessible and more like an 'utterance' by the initial word 'Onely', as he takes the reader through the conceit of darkness and hellfire, via the images of timber and coal, ingredients used to kindle fires both literally and metaphorically. Ricoeur suggests that 'time has recovered its mythical grandeur, its sombre reputation of destroying rather than generating', he further proposes that by 'such a shift in attention from the narrative statement to its

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[36]Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p.45.

utterance, the specifically fictive features of narrative time take on a distinctive outline.'[37]

The shift in tenses, which the poet adopts to relate to temporality, is recognised in the dramatic reversal of tense in the final line: 'Then chiefly lives.'[38] What is notable is that it is the soul that lives and not the body. It is perfectly acceptable that the body be cast off to permit the soul the freedom to live in eternity. By not introducing characters and conversation into the poem, the speaker allows the reader access to his innermost thoughts. It is a meditation on what the speaker understands it is to live in Christ, whereby the elements of physical decay 'season'd timber' (tree), or 'coal' (carbonised vegetation) become artefacts, simply to be used functionally then cast aside. Each stanza becomes, in effect, a mini-narrative, which moves from the present to the future. The 'Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright' moves into a hesitant future that portends 'shall weep thy fall tonight;/For thou must die.' Even the 'day', the 'rose', and the 'spring', with their prefixes of 'Sweet', are discarded in due course. The day ends, the rose has thorns, and the spring turns to winter. Herbert, the musician, allows even his 'musick' to interpolate into the perfect beauty that he enjoys, as it ends or 'closes' in a cadence.[39] Herbert has constructed a resolved ending that deliberately subverts the earlier endings with their factual 'must die.'

The total narrative in 'Vertue' is thus freed from the constraints of death and obscurity through the mobility of the tenses: 'But though the whole world turn to coal' (15), Herbert has the answer: 'Then chiefly lives.' The system of tenses is

[37]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols, 11, pp.61 &109.

[38]'Chiefly' initially appears a rather unusual word to chose. However its origins suggest that: 'Chief', Head man; (feudal law) in chief (OF en chief), *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, p.73.

[39]'Cadence' any melodic or harmonic progression which has come to possess a conventional association with the ending of a composition. Cadences can also be Perfect, Interrupted, or Imperfect. *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, p.140.

independent from its intuitive distinction between present, past, and future. Ricoeur shows how 'the tense system provides a storehouse of distinctions, relations, and combinations from which fiction draws its resources for its own autonomy and lived in experience.'[40] Now Herbert asks the same question as the critics 'to what extent the system of tenses can be free of all reference to phenomenological experience of time?' [41] Of course in 'Vertue' the reality of the seasons, of decay, of metamorphosis submits to the poet's wish to demonstrate how the immortality of 'a sweet and vertuous soul' is acceptable to God and thus lives.

Yet what is seen is Herbert deliberately subverting the idea that time is a destroyer. He makes it generate life. Ricoeur argues that

> a guarded confidence in the everyday use of language forces us to say that, in some way, which we do not yet know how to account for, time exists [...] time has no being since the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present does not remain [...] language is itself put into question by the gap between the 'that' and the 'how.'[42]

The 'how' that Ricoeur asks, is answered by Herbert, through the operation of the tenses. In the cyclical poems that have been mentioned earlier, the 'if' 'can' and 'would', later become the 'did'st' and 'since' of a comprehensive holistic love of God. John Donne, in a sermon, asks,

> Doth not a man die even in his birth? The breaking of prison is death, and what is our birth, but a breaking of prison? As soon as we were clothed by God, our very apparell was an Embleme of death.[43]

This concept is a negation of narrative, in that as soon as man is born, he is preparing for his death. Herbert's impulse to narrative subverts this concept. He acknowledges that man creates his world through stories. For although man

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[40]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols,11, p.62.
[41]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols, 11, p.62.
[42]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols, 1, p.7.
[43]*John Donne: Selected Prose*, ed. by Neil Rhodes (London: Penguin, 1987), pp.178-9

prepares for death as soon as he is born, he makes his endings closed or open, and his life either cyclical or circular; while his gateway to immortality is narrated in the present, not future, tense.

Chapter Nine

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

9.9.1 A Summary of the thesis

In this thesis a number of reasons, as well as methods, have been examined as to why Herbert used narrative as a vehicle for his poetry. Although many of the poems are contemplative and reflective, many also tell a story. It is a story that is familiar to readers of the Bible, yet unique to Herbert, and it is this latter reason that makes Herbert different to many other lyric poets. It is acknowledged that Herbert is essentially a lyric poet. His love of the musical form combined with his love of the Bible allows him to combine the two; a story where the speaker finally realises his God is in control as he exclaims: 'Ah! No more: thou break'st my heart.'

The initial poems are those of conflict; poems such as 'The Holdfast' or 'The Rose', where the vacillating Herbert needs to assert his steadfast belief in God. Some poetic images are unfamiliar as in 'The Crosse', or 'The Church-floore'; while others are very familiar as in 'Christmas', yet we do not expect Herbert to be in Bethlehem with the infant Jesus, or witness the crucifixion as in 'Redemption.'

As Herbert travels through *The Temple*, so the reader travels with him experiencing his doubts and anxieties. I have attempted to show how these conflicts within Herbert are resolved by his use of narrative. In many poems the speaker challenges God; in others he uses characters with which to converse and to whom to listen. There are a selection of poems that are linear and move with the speaker directly from A to B as Jesus travels from Galilee to Jerusalem, poems such as 'The Pilgrimage' or 'Redemption.' Then there are poems that herald the speaker's consciousness of sin, these might be cyclical or circular; poems such as 'Clasping of

hands' or 'A Wreath' in which there is successful progression in the former, but little progress is made in latter.

Drama and theatre must have played a significant role in the mind of the juvenile Herbert, reaching and developing out into his adulthood, and this has also been considered. His thorough learning of the classics, together with the popularity of plays and masques at both the court and at Trinity College, may have pushed him towards a narrative style. As I explain in the thesis, many of the narrative poems have characters who come and go at will, known often only as 'one ' and 'a friend' and who have conversations with the speaker. Rarely are there more than two or three of these 'characters' cited in the poem, which mirrors Aristotle's remarks on the number of actors Aeschylus preferred.

Although little is known of Herbert's personal life, we do know that he had in his possession a copy of *The Story-Books of Little Gidding*, which was in the inventory of his assets at his death. He also bequeathed the works of St. Augustine and the Spiritual commentaries of Lucas Brugensis to colleagues in his will. As to his personal reading matter and his views on it, Herbert states:

> Wherfore he hath one Comment at least upon every book of Scripture, and ploughing with this, and his own meditations, he enters into the secrets of God treasured in the holy Scripture.[1]

The influence of Ferrar's work in *The Story Books of Little Gidding*, as well as his prefatory address In *The Preface to the Reader*, not in the MSS., but which is found in all printed editions 1633-95 [2], is concentrated on the narrative of Herbert's life, in which he says,

> Quitting both his deserts and all the opportunities that he had for worldly preferment, he betook himself to the Sanctuarie and Temple of God, choosing to serve at God's Altar, then to seek the honour of State-employments [...]

[1] F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, Chapter 1111, 'The Parsons' Knowledg.' p.229.
[2] F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, pp.3-4.

> Next God, he loved that which God himself hath magnified above all things, that is his Word: so as he hath been heard to make solemne protestation, that he would not part with one leaf thereof for the whole world, if it were offered him in exchange.[3]

These comments allow the reader to acknowledge the love Herbert had for the Bible, and its narratives in shaping thought. In Barnabas Oley's observations on Herbert, noted in the Præface to the 2nd edition of 'The Countrey Parson' the reader can see a man who is aware of time slipping inexorably by, as Oley notes Herbert's practice of taking his own pulse, as well as his practice of mortifying the flesh.

9.9.2 'One' and 'A Friend'

Herbert utilised narrative to retell the familiar Biblical story, yet as the final section on defamiliarisation shows he told it in a unique and idiomatic way. Herbert attempts to make his characters real people, although they never have names, but are simply known as 'one' and a 'friend.' Nevertheless, they hold conversations, make asides, and slips of the tongue and are readily recognised. In the poetry, Herbert creates a drama for his characters. The scene Herbert paints is as vivid as any that can be seen on the stage, as shown in 'The Bag':

> Hast thou not heard that my Lord Jesus di'd?
> Then let me tell thee a strange storie.
> The God of power, as he did ride
> In his majestick robes of glorie,
> Resolv'd to light: and so one day
> He did descend, undressing all the way.
>
> The starres his tire of light and rings obtain'd,
> The cloud his bow, the fire his spear,
> The sky his azure mantle gain'd.
> And when they ask'd, what he would wear;
> He smil'd and said as he did go,
> He had new clothes a making here below (9-18).

This is hardly a story to be easily recognised in the Bible, but in Herbert's hands it becomes familiarly accessible as we learn about Christ's miracle of calming the

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[3] F.E. Hutchinson, *Works*, p.3.

storm: 'Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart' (6). Later we are told: 'There came one/That ran upon him with a spear'(25-6). Slowly we see Christ in the crucifixion scene and the story makes sense.

There is little doubt that the influence of Calvinistic thought penetrated Herbert's psyche; yet the idea that if salvation is the function of God's will it is secure, permeates through *The Temple.* John Stachniewski points out how 'despair was a widely recognised and widespread phenomenon in England in the late sixteenth century.'[4] It was attributable to both Calvinism and Puritanism. In 'JESU' Herbert offers a tangible means of expression in narrative terms by the re-aligning of his broken heart to an ultimate message of comfort.

I also argue in the thesis that literary theory in the hands of the Formalists, Structuralists and Post-Structuralists allows the reader a greater insight into the poetry. I have therefore referred to a number of narratologists where I have felt that their observations can be accurately applied to Herbert. As Terry Eagleton argues,

> There is always more meaning where that came from. [...] for words to oppose some relatively coherent meaning at all, each one of them must, so to speak, contain the trace of the ones which have gone before, and hold itself open to the trace of those which are coming after.[5]

In the final chapter which corresponds to the ending of the speaker's life, death is the final drama. There is movement in the poem 'Mortification', but it is the final dissolution of the body into the earth. Nevertheless, the last poem is one that displays hope through immortality - 'Vertue'; and it is this upbeat message that permits Herbert's poetry to be as accessible today as it was in 1633.

As the author of the poems, Herbert has died but his reader is reborn. He is the authorial voice that controls the narrative, making the words live on the page for

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[4] John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p. 27.
[5] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an introduction* 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.128.

all eternity, and this is his idiomatic legacy. To summarise Herbert in a few words is an impossible task, but I think Enright has got it about right when he states,

> The human psyche has not changed radically since Herbert's day. He is a poet, if not for all seasons, then for seasons which most of us live through at one time or another, and perhaps repeatedly.[6]

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[6] *George Herbert*, ed. by D.J. Enright, p.xviii.

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