

LOCATING THE POET WITHIN *THE TEMPLE*

“WHEN THE SOUL UNTO THE LINES ACCORDS”:  
LOCATING THE POET WITHIN *THE TEMPLE*

By

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to examine the ways in which the areas of art and religion coincide within George Herbert's *The Temple*. It is my contention that Herbert constructs the figure of the religious poet as a mediating tool; the religious poet, more than any other figure within *The Temple*, is granted access to both the secular realm and the divine realm. The religious poet, as constructed by Herbert, acts as a human interpreter of divine will and in doing so illustrates the importance of self-understanding in worship. Although the religious poet never fully attains union with God, it is within his failure to do so that some of the most moving and interesting poems are created, for self-understanding includes both grief and bliss.

Herbert's religious poet emphasizes the value of individual interpretation of scripture; of writing oneself into the divine story. His position within *The Temple* calls attention to the more "human" aspects of religion, such as the human struggle to understand divinity and locate itself in relation to it. As such, he functions as a model for Christian worship and his poetry becomes the prayer uttered by the devotee.

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## Introduction

*He who craves all the minde,  
And all the soul, and strength, and time,  
If the words onely ryme,  
Justly complains, that somewhat is behinde  
To make his verse, or write a hymne in kinde.  
"A True Hymne" ll. 11-15*

Even in a world where religion has ceased to have, for many, the vital force it once carried, the devotional poems of George Herbert remain captivating to many critics. What is it that we are hoping to discover anew within these centuries-old poems? I believe the answer is that these poems offer the reader a glimpse into a seventeenth-century understanding of humanity, of what it meant to be alive in a time when religion was seen as the ultimate path to knowledge: of the self, the world, and of divinity. Hence, the religious poet's task is a vital one in that he or she is a leading figure in the struggle for self-understanding. The religious poet is part artist and part priest, her poetry a curious combination of both moral and artistic beauty. The success of a devotional poem lies in its ability to bring home the poet's religious experience to his audience through the use of both poetic and religious rhetoric. Like the secular poet, the religious poet must present her argument, or experience, in a way that is both pleasing to the mind and the senses; she must consciously combine doctrine and poetic conceits in a novel and effective manner. As such, the religious poet becomes a liminal figure, positioned in the boundaries between art and religion, or the divine and secular. Yet the figure of the religious poet also functions as a means of bridging the gap between these two realms. Throughout the poems, the religious poet acts as a human interpreter who links poetic and

religious rhetoric. He is a window through which divine enlightenment is brought to both himself and his reading audience.

In examining the role of the religious poet in Herbert's poetry, my argument builds upon a study of self-representation in *The Temple*. The figure of the religious poet is by no means simply Herbert himself, but he *is* a distinctly human character whose task it is to lead us to a better understanding of our own humanity. His representation within the poems also shows us that in order to understand divinity, it is vital to first understand human nature. Herbert's religious poet illustrates the importance of self-understanding in worship; in order to properly praise God, one must first understand one's own nature. I am, of course, not the first critic to discuss the poet-speaker of *The Temple*. The ideas put forth in this thesis build upon the work of many of Herbert's best critics. However, as there is not enough room here to detail each critical position on Herbert, I have limited myself to those I believe most applicable to an understanding of the role of the religious poet at work in Herbert's poetry.

Published in 1954, Louis Martz's study *The Poetry of Meditation* is a critical starting point for this thesis. In this work, Martz takes the position that instead of reading a "Donne tradition" in seventeenth-century religious poetry, it is more accurate to read this poetry as stemming from a "meditative tradition." The particulars of the meditative process will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two of this thesis; for the moment I am limiting my discussion to an examination of the impact Martz's theory had on Herbert criticism. Martz reads *The Temple* as illustrating a process of meditation "that brings



together the senses, the emotions, and the intellectual faculties of man, brings them together in a moment of dramatic creative experience” (1). Martz sees Herbert’s poetry as stemming from a particular cultural tradition, and cites religious treatises by Lorenzo Scupoli, St. Francois de Sales, Savonarola and others as having a great impact on the process of self-analysis that he argues is present within the poems. Martz’s theory of meditation calls for the meditative subject not merely to imitate Christ, but in fact to become Christ-like by aligning his own will with the will of God. The task of religious meditation is to locate and unite the subject with the image of God, an image that can be found both within the subject himself and in his surroundings. It is this struggle to recover the divine image that is embodied by the “poetry of meditation.”

The influence of Martz’s theory of meditation continues in the theory of contemplation put forth by Arthur Clements, some thirty years later. Like Martz, Clements reads Herbert in light of a meditative or contemplative tradition in which the subject seeks union with a divine presence, a union that can be achieved “*in this life*” (xi). According to Clements, “the end or purpose of passing through the stages of mysticism in one or another kind of Vision is to effect a radical transformation of self, called ‘regeneration’ or ‘rebirth’; movement through the stages is a regenerative process” (10). Clements’s study focuses and expands on the ideas of self-examination postulated by Martz’s theory of meditative poetry. He sees the contemplative process as a relinquishing of a false, egoistic, finite self (the first Adam) in favour of the true, infinite self (the last Adam) who is at one with the divine will. Like Martz, Clements sees a tendency toward a

transformation of the speakers in Herbert's poems, and it is this idea that is emphasized in his work.

The work of both Martz and Clements focuses on the quest of the religious poet to align his will with divinity. The success of a meditative poem relies on this accomplishment; it relies not only on the poet's ability to see God in himself and his surroundings, but also on his ability to deconstruct the distinctions between the secular and divine. Thus, meditative poetry becomes an extension of God's omnipresence. In this reading, the religious poet is seen as a mystical figure, a prophet of sorts, who through careful contemplation is able to reach divine enlightenment. I agree with Martz and Clements that there are many poems throughout *The Temple* that exhibit the poet's struggle to unite his will with God's. My reading parts from theirs regarding the success of this venture, for it is my contention that Herbert's religious poet is never able to subsume his will to God's, and it is in this failure that some of the most moving and interesting poems are created. Herbert's religious poet does not become God-like; however, through striving to unite his will with God's he is able to perceive divinity within himself and his secular surroundings. His most successful poems acknowledge and celebrate both the similarities and the differences between himself and his God.

Stanley Fish views the alignment of wills between poet and God as an act of consumption. He sees this transformation of self as a process of "letting go" (158) of individualism, of original thought and speech, in favour of that which has been said before. "Hence," states Fish, "the title of this study, self-consuming artifacts, which is

intended in two senses: the reader's self (or at least his inferior self) is consumed as he responds to the medicinal purging of the dialectician's art, and that art, like other medicines, is consumed in the workings of its own best effects" (3). Fish's critical approach is perhaps best described as a reader-response approach; he takes into account the reader's reaction, or the experience of the reader when engaged with Herbert's poems. Contrary to the self-actualizing that Martz and Clements argue occurs in union, Fish claims that "if God is all, the claims of other entities to a separate existence, including the claims of the speakers and readers of these poems, must be relinquished" (156). For Fish, then, the religious poet does not become one with God, but rather allows God's will to subsume his own: "to stop saying amiss is not only to stop distinguishing 'this' from 'that' but to stop distinguishing oneself from God, and finally to stop, to cease to be" (157). To identify with God results in a loss of one's self-identity; any individualism is erased by an all-encompassing 'all.'<sup>1</sup> Reading Herbert in this vein, Fish concludes that poetry which seeks to portray God's word causes the poet's words to disappear. Fish's argument relies in part on the idea that the poet's will and God's will are separate, and that in order to identify with God the poet must 'let go' of his individualism. However, this does not appear to be the case in Herbert's *Temple*. Even those poems in which the

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1. I have used the term "individualism" in this paragraph, as it is Fish's term and an essential part of his argument. In my own work, I have chosen to use the term "humanity" as a substitution for "individualism," as the latter term connotes romantic and modernist ideas of the self as an autonomous island. It is this view of the self which leads Fish to read Herbert's poetry as self-consuming, as these later notions of the self were not prevalent in seventeenth-century thought, and hence remarkably absent from Herbert's work.

speaker seeks to deny his voice are in fact an affirmation of that voice, by the simple fact of their existence. It is my contention that to identify with divinity is not a self-consuming act; rather, it is self-affirming in that it allows the poet to view himself within a divine spectrum.

Barbara Harman's *Costly Monuments*, published in 1982, is in part a reaction against Fish's ideas of the self-consuming aspects of Herbert's poetry. Harman reads Herbert in terms of a discourse between culture and self; to use her words, "we do not simply want to ask how the culture disables speech and self-hood but also how, and in what ways it enables them" (34). She does not see, as Fish does, a disappearance of the speaker's voice in Herbert's poetry; rather, she reads in *The Temple* a kind of fragmentation of the self. "In Herbert's poems, I shall argue, self-representation is a central, and also a vexed enterprise, and one of the clearest signs of this fact is the rather frequent appearance . . . of a speaker who bears a disturbed relationship to his own [story]" (35). Poems that demonstrate this fragmentation Harman terms "collapsing poems;" they are poems in which the speaker shares his story so that he may deconstruct it. Even so, they represent an emergence of the speaker's voice and self by their very existence. It is Harman's contention "that texts make available to us that part of experience which manages to be subject to representation, to embodiment in writing— and that such embodiment does not give us historical persons in writing but rather gives us what can be said of them. Not the self, but the self made manifest in writing" (37). Harman uses the term *reinscription* (59) to describe what occurs in *The Temple*, a word

that I have borrowed from her to illustrate, in part, the creative process undertaken in *The Temple*. Harman uses this term to refer simply to the process whereby the poet shapes his life into writing. My use of the term goes further in that it is my contention that Herbert's religious poet seeks to rewrite biblical text, with one important difference; he injects himself into the story. The speaker's struggle for self-expression is both solved and problematized by his reliance on Christ's story and words to express himself, for it both enables and hinders his individual expression.

Ira Clark's study, *Christ Revealed: The History of the Neotypological Lyric In the English Renaissance*, also published in 1982, takes the position that Herbert's poetry is built upon neotypology, an interpretive practice first used during the English Renaissance. Clark dedicates a chapter of his work to examining the use of neotypology in Herbert's poetry. Beginning with Rosamond Tuve, typology has long been recognized as an important aspect of *The Temple*. Clark's study moves a step beyond typology to look at how Herbert positions himself and his readers as *neotypes*, contemporary figures that are identified with biblical types. Neotypology provides a means for the religious poet to link the divine and the secular, allowing himself and his audience to be portrayed as a part of the divine story. Clark emphasizes that the divine story was seen as a very real part of history. By identifying with biblical types, Herbert's religious poet places himself and his audience as a part of this history, thereby validating their struggles and accomplishments as part of the divine plan.

Like these critics I work from, I believe that there is a very human aspect to

Herbert's poetry, and furthermore that this aspect is carefully constructed. It is my argument that Herbert constructs within *The Temple* the figure of the religious poet who, as both poet and preacher, acts as a kind of middleman between God and the Christian reader. This is a rather uneasy position held between the secular and the divine; it is the job of the religious poet to filter divine truth in order to make it accessible to himself as well as his reading public. The position is troublesome since it demands of the poet an ability to access divine truth, which I hold can only be attained through intense self-exploration and a deeply felt awareness of both God's immanence and transcendence. The task of the religious poet is to transcribe religious belief into the rhetoric of poetry, thereby uniting the language of the secular arts with that of divinity. In doing so, the religious poet becomes a model of Christian worship and a figure through whom the Christian may regard his or her own identity. The figure of the religious poet is used to illustrate the relationship that exists between God and human, particularly in his struggle to understand this relationship and see himself as part of a larger whole.

The poems that exhibit the figure of the religious poet are those whose speaker engages in or contemplates the act of praise, as this is the primary duty of divine poetry. Often, the speaker will refer to his poetry directly, as 'verses' or 'rymes', or indirectly, as his 'song.' The religious poet is nowhere defined as Herbert himself, nor is it the goal of this thesis to determine which speaker most represents Herbert. However, as Clements notes, "a poet may write one or a few . . . poems for the sake of literary exercise or for whatever other reasons. But to suppose that a poet might compose a large body of

meditative and contemplative poems with no relation to or revelation of his own spiritual life is simply silly, not genuinely scholarly” (xvii). The stance taken by the figure of the religious poet throughout the poems is not unified, ranging from self-assured to despairing. Hence, I often refer to the ‘poet-speaker’ of any particular poem; the poet-speaker may vary, but his position as a poet, or composer, remains consistent. It is significant, I believe, that this figure re-occurs more than any other within *The Temple*. In many cases, the figure of the religious poet may be interchangeable with that of the preacher; however, as my focus is on the combining of religious and poetic rhetoric, the position of the former is emphasized. The religious poet holds the singular task of combining both the divine and secular realms in a way that is distinct from the task of the preacher. For the devotional poet not only needs to make his argument accessible to his audience, but he must also make it palatable to their artistic sense.

Throughout this thesis the terms *religious rhetoric* and *poetic rhetoric* will be used to describe the art of the religious poet. Poetic rhetoric refers to those devices used in poetry to persuade an audience: conventional poetic techniques such as voice, tone, metaphor, and so on. It also refers to some of the more technical aspects of poetry— meter, rhyme, and form. Poetic rhetoric is, quite simply, the rules of poetry which the religious poet must follow in order to produce an artistically ‘valid’ piece of work.<sup>2</sup> Herbert’s use

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2. For a detailed discussion of the specific rhetorical techniques common in seventeenth- century devotional poetry, consult John Houston’s 1983 study, *The Rhetoric of Poetry in the Renaissance and Seventeenth Century*. Houston offers a discussion of Herbert’s poetry as a continuance of the “low style . . . peculiar to English poets” (186).

of poetic rhetoric allows us to critique his work in the same manner as we would a secular poem. Artistically, the task of the religious poet is similar to that of the secular poet, as regards his use of poetic rhetoric; however, his duty differs in that his poetry must also include religious rhetoric. The term ‘religious rhetoric’ is used in reference to the doctrines of the Christian Church which are inherent in Herbert’s poetry.<sup>3</sup> Religious rhetoric includes not only Herbert’s use of typology and neotypology, but also his understanding of Christ’s sacrifice and God’s omnipresence. Within this category is the religious poet’s reliance on the ultimate truth of God’s word over any other. With this last statement, it becomes clearer how these two forms of rhetoric differ from one another. One form of rhetoric relies on conventionally defined artistic values and places the human intellect on a sort of pedestal, while the other looks outside of the human intellect towards a higher authority, that of divinity itself. It is the religious poet’s task to somehow unite these two areas of thought, to bring the divine and the secular together within the form of the religious poem. Hence, the figure of the religious poet represents the struggle to find divinity in humanity and vice versa. His art becomes a metaphor for Christian worship in that it aspires to view humanity in light of a greater, universal meaning.

The structure of this thesis follows that of the poem “The Windows,” which is itself a metaphor for the poet-priest. “The Windows” examines the task of the religious

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3. I have chosen the more generic term “Christian Church” over any other, since the argument over which denomination Herbert belonged to continues to this day but is not pertinent to my reading of Herbert’s poetry.



poet as he moves from inspiration to communication. Chapter One examines the religious poet's use of conventional poetic techniques in the composition of his poems. Focusing on the two "Jordan" poems, this chapter looks at the use of mimesis and sacred parody as tools for understanding how poetry works to persuade an audience. Both tools allow the religious poet to self-consciously explore the act of composition, and they justify the use of poetry as a means of expressing religious devotion. They also emphasize the act of reinscription that is undertaken by the poet whose compositions are a combination of invention and imitation. The ideas expressed by the religious poet are both old and new; they are embedded in a long tradition of Christianity, but are made new by the poet's unique expression of them. The "Jordan" poems refute the idea that poetic and religious rhetoric must necessarily remain separate from one another, and examine the poet's position as composer. The religious poet is figured as a type of scribe, who translates God's words into poetry. In this sense, he acts as a window through which divine knowledge passes into the poetry.

The focus of the second chapter shifts from poetic rhetoric to religious rhetoric. The theories of meditation and contemplation are examined regarding the duty of the religious poet. In particular, this chapter looks at the question of how the religious poet accesses divine knowledge in order to reinscribe it. The devotional poet is figured in his struggle to achieve union, and it is this struggle that is shown to be most important in defining his role in relation to both God and poetry. This chapter looks at the moments of anxiety expressed by the poet-speaker in his inability to reach a 'plateau of assurance.'

The religious poet is figured as “racked” between two worlds: the divine and the secular. Yet it is through these anxieties that the religious poet is brought to a better understanding of divine grace. Through his inability to achieve Union, the poet is brought to a deeper understanding of both joy and grief, of what it means to be a human living with the promise of redemption but not the attainment of it. Chapter Two, then, focuses on the religious poet as a figure caught in the boundaries “betwixt this world and that of Grace” (“Affliction (IV)” l. 6). He is not God-like, but through his efforts to become God-like he enables a portion of divine will to reside within himself.

The third, and final, chapter looks to the communication of the religious poet’s knowledge, and the audience’s role in understanding and interpreting this knowledge. The figure of the religious poet is seen to be constructed within the poems in order to explore the benefit of reading oneself in light of biblical text. Ira Clark’s theory of neotypology is introduced in this chapter to illustrate the ways in which identification with biblical types allows the poet and his audience to see themselves in the biblical story, as a part of a continuum between the Fall and redemption. By figuring himself both inside and outside of the divine story, the religious poet provides a further link between the realms of the divine and the secular. Thus, while the religious poet remains a liminal figure, he also exhibits the ability to access knowledge from both realms.

There is no single resolution for the plight of the religious poet, no moment of Union in which all things unite under God. Herbert’s religious poet often vacillates between intense joy and overwhelming grief, and in doing so illustrates the complex

nature of the Christian's relationship with God. The intensity of his poetic expression, as well as the variety of emotions expressed, have caused Herbert's poetry to remain intriguing after centuries of criticism. His poetry represents a combination of humanity and divinity, of poetic and religious rhetoric, within which the religious experience exists.

## Chapter One: The Emergence of the Poet-Speaker

*Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?  
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 key idea expressed in this chapter lies in the question posed at the beginning of the poem “The Windows;” “Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?” How can humans, who are fallible and finite, preach the will of one who is omniscient and infinite? It is my contention that the answer lies in the figure of the religious poet who, by virtue of his position as interpreter, participates in God’s immanence and transcendence. The religious poet’s duty is not to ‘invent’ but to reinscribe, as is highlighted through the use of rhetorical techniques such as mimesis and sacred parody. In other words, his role is not to create truth but to represent it by accessing it through his imagination. In doing this, he becomes representative of the human task to strive for understanding of divinity, and in particular of his own position in relation to divinity.

I would like to start this study with an examination of the two “Jordan” poems. More than any other poems in *The Temple*, the “Jordan” poems have been singled out as representing the collection’s poetic theory. On a first glance these poems appear to applaud the effort to write divine poetry and criticize those who write in the highly stylized clichés and images popular in contemporary love poetry. However, the two poems are somewhat paradoxical if we read them simply as a condemnation of “quaint

words and trim invention” for, as Barbara Harman notes, “The speakers of Herbert’s poems often make use of a language they also reject – so that the importance of speaking, and the difficulties associated with it, are analyzed and explored at once” (43). The question of whether or not poetry is a proper medium through which one may examine and express one’s relationship with God is emphasized by both the poet’s struggle and his success (or failure) to use his art for religious purposes. Thus, the difficulties that arise during any discussion of the “Jordan” poems stem from the fact that although they appear to be critiquing certain poetic techniques, they are engaged in an act similar to that which they challenge. Stanley Fish evades this difficulty by reading the “Jordan” poems as redefining “the criterion of eloquence . . . [which] is not aesthetic, but moral-philosophical” (*Self-Consuming Artifacts* 194). According to Fish, ‘eloquence’ for Herbert lies in the ideas expressed, not in the manner by which they are expressed. While there is certainly a desire evidenced in the poems to favour ‘truth’ over beauty, I argue that the hope of the religious poet is to successfully combine these two areas so that truth and beauty become reflective of one another, rather than have one area totally override the other.

It seems appropriate to begin my study of the “Jordan” poems with a discussion of the title itself, as it provides the most obvious link between the subject matter of the two poems. The title of the poems has been interpreted as alluding to the process of baptizing

secular poetry at work throughout *The Temple*.<sup>4</sup> In the Old Testament, the Jordan marks the boundary of the Promised Land and the spot at which the Israelites were directed to raise an altar to God. The Jordan also figures into the New Testament as the site at which early Christians were baptized, and their sins washed away. Thus, “the Jordan whose crossing was already a symbol of redemption in the Old Testament became a yet more powerful one in the New” (Tuve 184). The title, according to this particular reading, can be seen as exhibiting the intent of the speaker to effectively cleanse secular poetry and provide it with a kind of access to divine knowledge. Yet we might also read it as a personal, spiritual baptism; as the poetry undergoes a redemption, so the speaker and reader are made aware of the possibility of their own redemption through Christ. In this manner, then, the poetry is used to mirror the state of the Christian subject, who is also represented by the figure of the religious poet himself. The poetry makes necessary the active participation of both poet and reader in order to understand how they themselves can participate in and benefit from the divine story. At the same time, the reference to the Jordan’s role in the Old Testament, as the site at which the Israelites were directed to raise an altar to God, calls attention to that most famous poem, “The Altar,” which lends to a reading of the poems as simultaneously an offering to God and a gift from God.<sup>5</sup> If

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4. Rosamond Tuve was the first to explore this typological reading of the “Jordan” poems in her 1952 study, *A Reading of George Herbert*. Her idea of the baptismal process at work in the poems has been widely accepted by critics to the present day.

5. For an intriguing and insightful interpretation of the self-asserting and self-consuming aspects of “The Altar” see Stanley Fish’s *Self-Consuming Artifacts* 207-215. Fish reads this poem as one of the more self-assertive poems in *The Temple*, regarding it

the poems are an ‘invention’ of any kind, they are ‘invention’ that is directly inspired by God. This idea echoes themes present from “The Dedication”: “Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;/ Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,/ And must return” (ll. 1-3). These lines address one of the main problems that the religious poet faces; namely, how does one negotiate the self into a poem that claims to originate in and, in a sense, represent God? Herbert’s religious poet must discover whether or not divine rhetoric disallows individual interpretation and creation. If this is the case, his task is an unnecessary—perhaps even subversive— one; the poet and the public would be much better off reading the Bible. In other words, we are directed back to our original question: “Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?”

One response to this question lies in the area of sacred parody, which is used by Herbert throughout *The Temple*. In its most neutral understanding, parody refers to “the substitution of one text for another” (Martin 456). Parody is used by Herbert in a very specific manner in that it is a self-conscious means of examining the similarities and differences between secular and devotional poetry. Herbert’s use of parody reinforces the idea of the religious poet as a liminal figure; his art may appear similar to that of the secular poet in its use of “quaint words and trim invention,” and yet it is, quite literally, a world apart. In parodying secular poetry, the religious poet is provided with a means of writing poetry that is self-conscious of its own conventionality, or lack thereof. The poet

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as the one poem which most clearly calls attention to the individual will of the poet while it simultaneously attempts to ‘conquer’ this self-will by making it God’s.

can borrow from conventional poetic rhetoric while simultaneously highlighting its inadequacy to express a divine message. The juxtaposition of these two art forms places the reader in a position similar to that of the religious poet. For, if the reader recognizes that parody is being used, she is then positioned as an interpreter, both in and outside of the text she is reading.

“Jordan (II),” which follows some fifty poems after its counterpart, “Jordan (I),” is a poem that deals specifically with traditional poetic rhetoric through the vehicle of ‘sacred parody.’ The use of ‘sacred parody’ has been attributed to Herbert by many critics, although Martz was the first to discuss it in great depth. In his study, *A Poetry of Meditation*, Martz views sacred parody as a baptismal process whereby the religious poet reclaims poetry’s sanctified origins. Martz’s interpretation works well with the title of this poem, as discussed above, since he sees the religious poet as a types of baptismal figure. Herbert’s use of sacred parody aids in defining the task of the religious poet in relation to the secular poet. Like the secular poet, the religious poet endeavors to sway his audience, to convince them of the validity of his argument. Poetry, whether divine or secular, should appeal to both the intellect and the emotions; a good poem must conform to certain recognizable standards— poetic rhetoric— and contain an argument which intrigues both the senses and the mind. In many ways, the features that make a secular love poem outstanding apply to religious poetry. The obvious difference between the two lies in subject matter. While the secular love poet sees fit to position humanity as his or her subject, the religious poet ‘cleanses’ the rhetoric of secular poetry, using it as a means



to express religious devotion.

Beginning with Louis Martz, many critics have noted the parallels between “Jordan (II)” and the first and third sonnets of Sir Philip Sidney’s “Astrophil and Stella.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there are enough similarities between these poems to warrant the belief that “Jordan (II)” is in some ways a commentary on the poetic rhetoric used in this popular sequence.<sup>7</sup> Herbert’s religious poet is presented in the act of composition, as he struggles to comprehend the duty that lies before him. He struggles with the idea of invention— a concept lauded by Sidney’s poem— only to realize, in the third stanza, that his task calls not for invention but for *reinscription*. Thus, the demands placed upon the secular and religious poet are seen to diverge not only in subject matter but in the process of composition and inspiration itself:

When first my lines of heav’nly joyes made mention,  
Such was their lustre, they did so excell,  
That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;  
My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,  
Curling with metaphors a plain intention,  
Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.

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6. Louis Martz, William Pahlka, and C.A. Patrides are among those who link these two poems together. Martz’s chapter “Herbert and Sidney” is perhaps the most comprehensive study on the similarities between the two poems. To view sonnets 1 and 3 of “Astrophil and Stella” see Appendix A.

7. Martz’s discussion on Herbert and Sidney focuses on the similarities between *The Temple* and *Astrophil and Stella*. It is Martz’s position that “the search for simplicity is a constant element” (269) in both works. He also examines Sidney’s translations of the Psalms as directly influencing Herbert’s translations. While I agree that Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* was influential to Herbert’s work, my discussion of Herbert and Sidney focuses on the differences between their styles rather than on the similarities.

Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,  
 Offring their service, if I were not sped:  
 I often blotted what I had begun;  
 This was not quick enough, and that was dead.  
 Nothing would seem too rich to clothe the sunne,  
 Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head.

As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,  
 So did I weave my self into the sense.  
 But while I bustled, I might heare a friend  
 Whisper, *How wide is all this long pretence!*  
*There is in love a sweetness readie penn'd:*  
*Copie out onely that, and save expense.*

Herbert's poet-speaker, like Sidney's Astrophil, comments on the act of composition.

Both speakers are represented as laboring over the proper manner in which to express their devotion; Herbert's speaker to the image of God, and Sidney's speaker to the image of Stella. Both poems are presented in the past tense; thus we can infer that whatever writing problem the speakers experienced during the composition phase has now been resolved, and that both poems are a product of that resolution. Yet the problems that the two speakers encounter are quite different and reflect the difference in duty between a religious poet and a secular poet. Sidney's speaker appears to be facing a severe case of writer's block, frantically searching his brain for the words that will win Stella's love: "But words came halting forth, wanting Inventions stay" (l. 9). Words elude Astrophil as he attempts to "paint the blackest face of woe" (l. 5). In response he turns to the works of other poets, hoping to find inspiration in the beauty of their lines, but once again his efforts prove futile.

Herbert's speaker, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by a surplus of words;

“Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,/ Off’ring their service, if I were not sped” (ll. 7-9). In “off’ring [his] service” to the praise of God, Herbert’s speaker finds himself in a kind of verbal ecstasy, desiring to best his latest attempt at praise so that he “often blotted what [he] had begunne” (l. 9). Unlike Sidney’s speaker, who finds himself unable to ‘invent,’ there is no limit to the creative prowess of Herbert’s poet-speaker, whose “thought began to burnish, sprout, and swell” (l. 4) both with “quaint words and trim invention” (l. 3) and with pleasure at his own ingenuity. However, it is the speaker’s intoxication with his own abilities that leads him to “weave [him]self into the sense” (l. 14) so that he loses sight of the object of his poem – in meaning to praise God, he has succeeded only in praising himself. Thus, although his problem is the opposite of Astrophil’s the result for both is failure.

Since the dilemmas faced by the speakers are basically opposite to one another, we would expect the resolutions to differ as well. In fact, they are remarkably similar, both relying on the intervention of their respective muses:

Sidney: “Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write.”<sup>8</sup>

Herbert: “But while I bustled, I might heare a friend  
Whisper, *How wide is all this long pretence!*  
*There is in love a sweetness readie penn’d:*  
*Copie out onely that, and save expense.*”

Barbara Lewalski interprets the last lines of “Jordan (II)” as referring directly to the act of

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8. Pahlka (p. 7) also notes the similarity between this line and the concluding couplet of the third sonnet in “Astrophil and Stella”: “What Love and beautie be, than all my deed/ But Copying is, what in her Nature writes.”

copying the holy scriptures.<sup>9</sup> While I agree that this reading has merit, it seems unwise to ignore the openness of the term “love;” for while it is to be found within the Scriptures, it may also be found in the hearts of believers. This idea is supported by those poems throughout *The Temple* that refer to the interaction between God and the human heart, such as “The Altar,” “The Sinner,” and “Good Friday.” Thus, the resolution for the speakers of both poems is in part to find their inspiration within their hearts; but whereas Stella’s image resides in Astrophil’s heart, the divine image can be found in the heart of Herbert’s speaker. Examining his heart leads Sidney’s speaker to the possibility of invention, while it brings the speaker of “Jordan (II)” to a greater understanding of imitation, and the realization that his previous efforts stemmed not from their true source –God– but from his own ego. The task for the speaker in “Jordan (II)” is one of filtering all the words running through his brain in order to find the ones truest to the image of God in his heart. The religious poet, unlike the secular poet, is not a builder, but a window; through him and his poetry the divine word may reach an audience, whether that audience be merely the poet himself or a reading public. His poet-speaker undertakes an act of *reinscription*, which refers not only to a translation of the divine word –the Bible, the church– into poetry, but also to the process of transcribing the image of God that resides within the poet’s heart.

The original title of “Jordan (II)” was “Invention,” a term which connects it to

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9. Lewalski supports her argument with the fact that Herbert takes many of his words directly from Scripture – the concluding lines of “Jordan (I)” are in fact a direct reference to Psalm 145 (Lewalski 298).

“the Sidneian idea of poetry” (Tuve 193) expressed in Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*, as well as to lines 6, 9, and 10 of sonnet 1 of “Astrophil and Stella.” In examining Herbert’s use of this term for the original title of “Jordan (II),” Elizabeth Clarke states: “In the original meaning of the term, as a ‘finding out,’ the word could be used with or without connotations of effort. However, it soon came to signify ‘fabrication’ with its suggestions of the effort to deceive” (47). Clarke’s definition is cynical; “invention,” in the seventeenth-century understanding of the term as it applies to art, means simply “the devising of a subject, idea, or method of treatment, by exercise of the intellect or imagination” (OED). However, I believe Herbert’s use of the term calls attention to the secondary nature of invention, or of any poetical conceits that focus more on form than on content. In his use of sacred parody, Herbert comments on ideas of invention versus imitation, simultaneously critiquing a genre that takes the human form as the ultimate object of poetic devotion. In the case of “Jordan (II),” it is the awareness of the need to “copie out” that which is “[al]readie penn’d” that returns the speaker to his true purpose and enables his writing to continue. Furthermore, as noted by Clarke, “this rewriting of scripture involves true ‘writing on the heart,’ an intimate interaction of biblical text and human psyche, sacred word and human emotion” (139). I would like to emphasize Clarke’s use of the term “interaction,” for the poet is not literally ‘copying out’ a biblical text; rather, he is giving us an interpretation of the text filtered through his intellect and experience. Thus, the figure of the religious poet is almost as important as the poetry itself, since his figure represents the interaction that takes place between sacred text and

reader.

Much has been made of the fact that “Jordan (II)” ends with the imagined words of Christ, the “friend” referred to in line fifteen. Stanley Fish sees the ‘intrusion’ of Christ as a rather extreme form of the idea of “plain style” postulated in “Jordan (I)”: “while the plain style limits the area in which the poet operates, it is a *self-imposed*, or voluntary, limitation for which he and his art can take credit. The solution imposed (not chosen) by this poem [“Jordan (II)”], or by the voice that enters to preempt it, is more radical, not the plain style, but no style at all and, in a way, silence” (199). It does seem rather dramatic to have an ‘outside’ voice take over the ending of a poem, particularly one that deals with issues of composition and the relation of the individual intellect to poetry, yet we must not forget that the voice of the ‘friend’ is truly the poet-speaker’s rendition of “His” words. Thus, the ‘outside’ voice is not foreign to the poet; rather, it is an example of God’s immanence; Christ’s voice resides within the poet and merges with the religious poet’s own voice. A helpful reading can be found in Harman’s idea that the concluding lines of “Jordan (II)” “suggest that the alternative to personal writing is not *no writing*, but rather *rewriting*, not silence but instead reinscription of a rather particular kind” (59). While the poet-speaker is not necessarily relating his own personal story, his story is nonetheless implicit within his interpretation. His ‘story,’ in a sense, *becomes* his interpretation, as self-expression and religious expression are inextricably linked.

Thus, sacred parody allows the religious poet a means of using poetic rhetoric to reinscribe the divine story into poetry. As we have seen, this process calls for the active

participation of the religious poet, whose intellect and emotions function as a means of interpreting the divine message. The figure of the religious poet provides the link between the divine and secular, which accounts for his presence in this and many other poems throughout *The Temple*. In order to act as interpreter, the religious poet must have some sort of access to divinity; he must be aware of a 'true' image beyond his individual imagination. Mimesis, a prominent theory in "Jordan (I)," explores one means by which the poet can achieve this access to divinity.<sup>10</sup> It assumes that divine truth is not dependent upon the human imagination, yet is made real to humans through the use of imagination. Again, the focus here is not on inventing or creating a truth for oneself but on the ability to access and somehow reinscribe this truth through the imagination. Mimesis provides a means for the poet-speaker to merge creativity and originality with a faithful representation of 'truth.' It is the religious poet's struggle to comprehend and express that truth that I would like to focus on here. He is, in a sense, stuck between two worlds, both with their own set of rules as to how he is to perform his task. The theory of mimesis provides a means by which the two sets of rules may combine and make room for both a poetic rhetoric and a divine, or religious, rhetoric.

The idea that art is a form of imitation was first developed in depth by Plato. In

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10. One critic who has specifically applied ideas of mimesis to Herbert's work is William Pahlka, in his study *Saint Augustine's Meter and George Herbert's Will*. Although Pahlka claims to be interested in "Herbert's esthetics, not his theology, except insofar as the two might come into conflict" (xv) his ideas on mimesis prove useful in understanding both. I have borrowed from his ideas that Herbert "was reaching back into the Platonic origins of mimetic theory and restoring to the term *imitation* some of its native significance" (13) and used mimesis to explore, not just the esthetics of the poetry, but the role of the poet in the composition of the poetry.

*Book X* of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates discusses his conceptions of art, in particular the role of the poet as copyist. For Socrates, a poet, like any other artist, is "thrice removed" from his true subject. He is a verbal painter whose talent lies in imitating an imitation of a true form. Thus, however beautifully the artist constructs the image, it still remains merely a copy. Socrates presents what may be seen as a rather harsh criticism of poetry since he believes the poet is incapable of knowing his true subject; his abilities lie in merely skimming the surface of truth:

In like manner the poet with his words and phrases may be said to lay on the colours of the several arts, himself understanding their nature only enough to imitate them; and other people, who are as ignorant as he is, and judge only from his words, imagine that if he speaks of cobbling, or of military tactics, or of anything else, in meter and harmony and rhythm, he speaks very well – such is the sweet influence which melody and rhythm by nature have.  
(*Republic* in *Critical Traditions* 25)

Socrates' argument is in part based on the assumption that poetic language itself claims to portray truth, and his dialogue on poetry presents his desire to shatter the illusion that poetry can claim to be anything other than "thrice removed" from its subject. The poet becomes a deceiver, albeit a clever and entertaining one, whose words are absorbed by those who will themselves to be deceived.

The Platonic theory of mimesis has been perceived as "threatening" in that it places the poet in an artistic realm removed from truth; the artist copies from an image accessed through his imagination.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as William Schweiker notes,

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11. Arne Melberg, in his book *Theories of Mimesis*, differentiates between the Platonic and Aristotelean theories of mimesis by viewing the former as cynical and threatening to poets and poetry, while the latter is more forgiving, allowing the artist to "disclose the universal through the particular" (9).



traditional imitation theory . . . held that thought is a 'reflection' of transcendent ideas, the divine mind, nature, or the transcendental act of mind itself. And it also held that works of art, language, and ideas are imitations, representations, or copies of some external reality or mental acts. Thus the meaning and veracity of thought and language consisted in a relationship between them and their referent. (1-2)

What is interesting about this theory is that while it assumes the existence of a 'true' referent, it allows for creativity and originality through the artist's interpretation. Mimesis takes on meaning because it explicitly links the individual with an external reality. For Plato, there was one true form behind every imaginable object and being. For Herbert, behind the messages conveyed by his poetry lies the religious image of God, personalized by his own understanding of what God is. My point here is that even while a poet participates in the act of mimesis, the poem produced cannot be seen as a 'true' copy, void of personal interpretation, nor need it be. The religious poet differs from the secular poet in his recognition that his writing is grounded upon an "external reality," that it is based on imitation rather than invention. To again quote Schweiker, "what imitation allowed was a way to think and articulate the unity of reality since it explained the relation, proper or distorted, of concrete entities to the first principle, however conceived" (9).<sup>12</sup> Mimetic theory, then, allows for a connection between what is imagined and what simply *is*, placing the poet in the role of interpreter whose job it is to decipher between

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12. I would like to emphasize that Schweiker's ideas on personal expression in mimesis differ from the romantic (and still popular) idea that "expression is primarily self-expression" and the "concentration on the autonomous self as a centre of desire, freedom, and will." The romantic view, according to Schweiker, "removes the human from its deep participation in the world and potentially neglects language as a crucial medium for that involvement" (11).

these two areas. The poem, like the poet himself, is linked to the 'external referent' through the use of mimesis.

William Pahlka's study on Herbert discusses the Platonic theory of mimesis as one of the many influences on his poetic theory (10-15). It is his contention that the "Jordan" poems are in part a response to the mimetic concept of poetry. According to Pahlka, "Herbert echoes this criticism of poetry that deals in images of painted objects, objects of imitation too far removed from truth and reality, but he goes beyond Plato in allowing the poet a capacity to represent truth as well as appearance" (12). Unlike Socrates, Herbert does not see the words of the poet as necessarily deceptive. Thus, throughout "Jordan (I)," he both acknowledges and refutes Socrates' depiction of poetry through his use of language and poetic conventions as a path to truth. I agree with Pahlka's idea that the Platonic theory of mimesis is addressed in Herbert's writing, as it corresponds to ideas of invention and imitation that are present throughout *The Temple*. However, I would like to extend the idea of mimesis from a rhetorical 'trick' to a concept of the role of the religious poet, who is less of an inventor than he is an interpreter. To do this, we must examine the content and rhetoric of "Jordan (I)."

Who says that fictions onely and false hair  
 Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?  
 Is all good structure in a winding stair?  
 May no lines passe, except they do their dutie  
 Not to a true, but painted chair?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves  
 And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?  
 Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?  
 Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines,

Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:  
 Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:  
 I envie no mans nightingale or spring;  
 Nor let them punish me with losse of rime,  
 Who plainly say, *My God, My King*.

As with “Jordan (I),” the speaker of this poem is constructed as a religious poet. This claim is substantiated by the question posed at the beginning of the poem, which challenges the conventions of secular love poetry as the only ‘becoming’ way to write verse. The poet-speaker’s challenge forms the foundation of the poem; the question faced by the speaker is, how is one to write a poem that successfully praises God? The question of how to properly devote oneself to God is a concern for every Christian, but this poem places that concern directly in the context of writing religious poetry. While the figure of the religious poet may be used as an analogy for the duty of the Christian, for my purposes I would like to look at those traits which differentiate the role of the religious poet from that of the ‘ordinary’ devotee.

As Stanley Fish has noted, one of the interesting aspects of this poem is that while it searches for a way to praise God, it effectively calls our attention to the poet-speaker himself. According to Fish, “its effect is to call our admiring attention to the very individual will of the speaker. Nearly every line is an overt or implied request for applause” (195). While I believe this last statement is somewhat exaggerated, Fish’s point remains valid. The figure of the poet-speaker does not disappear in the attempt to praise

God; rather, it is made more evident.<sup>13</sup> The presence of the poet-speaker calls our attention to the very act of writing which is both undertaken and critiqued within “Jordan (I),” and invites us to examine the role and duty of the religious poet as he attempts to answer the question, “how can man preach thy eternall word?”

As it is my argument that the religious poet makes use of both poetic and religious rhetoric in order to bring together the secular and the divine, it falls upon me to illustrate the use of such rhetoric in Herbert’s poetry. This is where I would like to bring in the idea of mimesis as both a rhetorical trick and a means of navigating one’s position in relation to God. The Platonic theory of mimesis appears to be directly addressed when the speaker of “Jordan (I)” asks, “May no lines passe, except they do their dutie/ Not to a true, but painted chair?” (ll. 4-5), which calls attention to the Platonic idea of ‘true’ forms and their ‘painted’ counterparts. The question raised by the poet-speaker addresses the very nature of poetry itself; is poetry a suitable medium in which to praise God, or must it necessarily cover the truth with a coat of sensual delight? Upon a first reading of these lines, this question appears to answer itself; after all, this is a self-proclaimed religious poem, one obviously designed to portray the ‘true’ chair. Yet Herbert’s poems are by no means as simple as this – they rarely offer, or allow us to infer, a one-word answer. We may read these lines as expressing the poet’s desire as well as his frustration; he knows what he wants to accomplish but is not entirely confident that he will be successful in doing so. It

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13. Fish mediates his statement through claiming that the final lines of “Jordan (I),” in which the poet-speaker quotes scripture, mark his attempt to write himself out of the poem.

is his duty to provide a copy of the truth, but his difficulties lie in the concern that the language he has available may not be adequate to convey this truth.

Is it necessary, as Socrates suggests, that language mars truth simply by virtue of its being a medium through which the ‘true’ message must pass in order to reach its audience? The poet-speaker of “Jordan (I)” takes up this challenge when he asks, “Must all be vail’d, while he that reades, divines,/ Catching the sense at two removes?” (ll. 9-10). In other words, does the relating of experience necessarily remove one from the immediacy of experience? If this is the case, then the task of relating religious conviction or experience becomes futile, for religious rhetoric is not merely an exercise of the intellect; instead, it calls for the participation of the mind, body and soul of the devotee. Thus we begin to see the difficulty inherent in writing religious poetry, the task of relating personally felt convictions through a medium which, it has been suggested, removes one from these convictions. The poet-speaker of “Jordan (I)” acknowledges this complication, but is not willing to give in to it; his poem becomes a testament to the expressive potential of art. Underlying the question posed in line 9 is the idea that the Bible itself uses language –poetry– as a medium through which the divine message is expresses. If language is capable of representing truth in Biblical text, perhaps it will remain capable of doing so in poetry.

Furthermore, “Jordan (I)” raises the question of how one is to represent beauty if not through the use of elegant language. The poet-speaker mocks the traditional rhetoric of secular love poetry which makes use of “enchanted groves/ And sudden arbours” to

enhance its meaning. The “purling streams” mentioned in line 8 provide a counterpart to the poet-speaker’s river Jordan; while his river is meant to cleanse the soul, the “purling streams” serve only to “refresh a lovers loves.” As Barbara Harman notes, “both [“Jordan”] poems . . . point to the dangers inherent in practicing the verbal arts; one risks getting lost in language, losing one’s self or one’s purpose or both. They suggest, in other words, that speech and writing are problematic activities and their conclusions emphasize the virtue of relinquishing the literary enterprise altogether” (44). Harman perceptively notes that the very act of writing is one of the key anxieties expressed in the “Jordan” poem, and she goes on to address the fact that her statement is complicated by the existence of the poems. The poet cannot seriously think that “relinquishing the literary enterprise” is the most virtuous act, or presumably he would have done so. Thus, she draws the tentative conclusion that “it seems we need to read [the “Jordan” poems] in order to know that we need not read them” (45). I would argue that this is precisely because the poems emphasize experience just as much as they do expression. It is not enough for this poet-speaker to paint an imaginary vision of God; rather, he must inject his own being into the process of worship by relating his difficulties in composing a poem dedicated to truth. The mimetic theory of poetry allows for precisely this by providing the poet with a forum through which he can claim to portray an external, universal reality through his own particular understanding.

The word that Harman chooses to describe Herbert’s poetry – “reinscription” – seems to me to be at the heart of both “Jordan” poems; the idea of reinscription is

emphasized by the references to mimesis and sacred parody made by the poetic forms and language chosen by Herbert. It is the religious poet's task to write what has already been written (in the Bible), but also to use his own intellect and conviction to personalize this story. But to what extent does the idea of reinscription negate the freedom of poetic expression? In other words, must the poet effectively remove himself from his work in order to provide a successful reinscription of the Holy Scriptures? The answer for Fish is a resounding 'yes,' and he reads the importance of the "Jordan" poems as stemming from their emphasis on the consuming of the self by a higher authority:

Herbert's answer is to make [his poems] 'not mine' by making the experience of his poems their true authorship. That is, the insight to which a particular poem brings us is often inseparable from the realization that its source is not Herbert, but God . . . Herbert writes himself out of his poems (weaves himself out of the sense) and leaves them to the prior claim of another. In short, he lets his poems go, so that both they and the consciousness whose independence they were supposedly asserting give themselves up to God, exchanging their separate identities for a share in his omnipresence. Rather than affirming (and therefore denying) that God's word is all, these poems become, literally, God's word.  
(190)

In Fish's analysis, the 'success' of a religious poem depends on the extent to which the speaker is able to let go of his claims of authorship, resulting in a self-imposed silencing of the speaker's independent will. He contends that in "Jordan (II)" this is illustrated by the relinquishing of the poet's voice to the voice of Christ, while in "Jordan (I)" this is illustrated when the speaker quotes Scripture: "*My God, my King.*" While I do not disagree with the idea that the speaker struggles to find a way to make the poems God's, I believe that it is precisely within these documented struggles that the poetic self is portrayed most strongly. His struggle for poetic expression of devotion is simultaneously

a struggle for self-understanding, for if the poet is to act as interpreter he must be able to receive divine truth.

I would like to turn back now to the question that launched this chapter: “Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?” The “Jordan” poems, with their critique of conventional poetry, seek to create a poetic rhetoric capable of relating religious belief. Not surprisingly, the figure of the religious poet plays a central role in this process. He becomes the interpreter of God’s word, which is expressed through his artistic gifts. His ability to write spiritually moving poems results from an understanding of God, or the poet’s ability to enter into His “temple.” Thus, the religious poet becomes a “window;” he receives God’s grace and transcribes it, or to use Harman’s term, ‘reinscribes’ it into his poetry. He is a conduit of divinity in that while he writes he is able to access “this glorious and transcendent place” that is perception of divinity. Yet even while the poet is able to grasp this transcendence he is aware of the fact that he is but a “brittle crazie glasse” and must be constantly aware of his reliance on divinity. The rhetorical devices studied in this chapter (mimesis and imitation) can be read as self-conscious means by which the poet explores his own position in relation to the poem. Of course, it is impossible to say that the speaker in either poem is Herbert himself, but it is logical enough to suppose the dilemmas the speakers face are not alien to Herbert’s own experience. The religious poet must respond to the “viewpoint current in the English Reformation” that “the poetic impulse is always sinful and self-glorifying” (Clarke 239) by writing poetry in which the self becomes a vehicle for divine knowledge.



## Chapter Two: The Poet as Mediator

*But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,  
Making thy life to shine within  
The holy Preachers; then the light and glorie  
More rev'rend grows, & more doth win:  
Which else shows watrish, bleak & thin.*

The second stanza from “The Windows” illustrates why many critics tend to read Herbert’s poetry in light of a ‘meditative tradition.’ These lines emphasize the connection between the divine and the human subject – in particular, the religious poet. God’s light, his very essence, is seen to “shine within/ The holy Preachers” which, as the stanza continues, is portrayed as altering the very nature of the holy Preachers. Unlike the first stanza of “The Windows,” this one focuses less on the act of writing itself than on the inspiration behind the work. In keeping with the rather humble position of the religious poet, inspiration is here said to originate from divine will; God allows his “life to shine within” the “holy Preachers” who then transcribe this into poetry. The meditative poet, like the speaker of “Jordan (II),” must look for that “sweetness readie penn’d” within himself and his surroundings; he creates by imitating both the transcendent and immanent qualities of the divine. Thus, in a rather paradoxical manner, the meditative subject looks outward to God to discover his inner self. Within this process are echoes of mimesis, as the religious poet becomes the linking factor between the ‘external reality’ and the artifact produced. The concept of the religious poet as an interpreter of the divine message will be extended in this chapter to include the effects of this role on the person of the religious

poet, and on the Christian subject in general. The process of meditation is one that demands of the human subject direct participation in the divine story; the meditative goal is that the subject's will becomes one with divine will. The subject is not a passive observer but rather an active participant in her own salvation, a salvation brought about through her ability to perceive divine will and merge it with her own will. This participatory factor extends to meditative poetry for, as Elizabeth Clarke notes, "the aim of meditation on a text is that the reader will enter into it, not just as a spectator of events, but as a participant in the sacred drama" (77). The religious poet's ability to perceive and understand God is transferred to the reader through the vehicle of divine poetry.

Though I believe there is indeed some merit in reading Herbert within a meditative tradition, placing Herbert as a strict adherent of this tradition presents the reader with many problems, leading her to ignore some of the most complex and 'human' moments in the poetry. There are many moments of certainty and clarity for the speaker(s) throughout *The Temple*, and yet practically all these moments have as their counterpart moments of doubt. I see no reason why one should emphasize the former over the latter, or vice versa. Herbert's religious poet is a liminal figure, one who is "betwixt this world and that of grace" ("Affliction (IV)" l. 6). He strives for union, insofar as Union can be understood as comprehension of the divine, while at the same time is aware of his separation from the divine. Yet, it is the very duality of this situation which makes it uniquely human. The task of Herbert's religious poet is not, as the theory of meditation would have it, to become God-like, but instead to be able to perceive

divinity within a secular world. Thus, the striving for Union is in fact *more* important than the actual attainment of it, since it is within the struggle to achieve Union that the role of humanity figures into the relationship with God. Herbert's religious poet does not become one with God, or with divine will; rather he strives to become knowledgeable of this will and to inscribe this knowledge into text.

Louis Martz was the first critic to explore in depth the meditative process as it appears in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry. He views meditative poetry as following four basic precepts: it "begins . . . with a firm, direct statement of the topic to be considered," then "announce[s] the purpose of the meditation, the end to be achieved, and the method to be followed," moving on towards "a summary of the total situation," until finally "comes the process of the understanding, as the speaker quickly grasps the meaning of the incident and brings it home to the affections" (58-9). In order for a poem to be considered a meditative poem it must follow this path of exploration and explication. Thus, says Martz, Herbert's meditative poems are those that "first compose the problem, then analyze its parts, and end with resolutions and petitions in colloquy with God" (61). In other words, Martz offers a mini plot summary for Herbert's meditative poems which charts the progression of the speaker from a state of ignorance to one of enlightenment. Martz sees a 'meditative' pattern not only in specific poems, but also within the arrangement of the poems throughout *The Temple*, and dedicates an entire chapter to proving its unity as a meditative work. It is Martz's assertion that *The Temple* follows a meditative progression towards what he terms a "plateau of assurance," which

basically corresponds to the mystical state of Union, wherein the subject finds his will (or desires) in direct accordance with God's will.<sup>14</sup>

In justifying his placement of Herbert within a meditative tradition, Martz focuses on the act of self-examination that is both represented and enacted throughout the poems. "Self-examination," states Marts, is "inseparably related to the art of meditation. It is . . . an indispensable preparation for all exercises directed toward the love of God, whether devotional or mystical" (118). Thus, the poet can only reach a meditative state by looking inward and truly knowing himself, an idea supported by the influence of Lorenzo Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat* on those at Little Gidding, with whom Herbert was "closely connected" (Martz 126). One of the theories put forth by Scupoli's treatise is the "conquest of the self," the idea that one must continually search oneself for vices in order to abolish them. This process of self-betterment, for lack of a better term, is achieved only through self-awareness: "Thus the process of self-scrutiny does not end in self-contempt, but moves beyond this to a recovery of self-esteem; self-contempt is only half-knowledge: full self-knowledge demands a recognition of the incalculable value of the Image which lies beyond and beneath all deformity" (Martz 152). In a sense, then, the process of self-examination can be seen as one in which the subject peels off the layers of vice from his soul in order to discover the image of the divine within himself.

Arthur C. Clements's study, *The Poetry of Contemplation*, further develops and

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14. The idea that *The Temple* works towards a "plateau of assurance" has been upheld by both Arthur C. Clements and Barbara Lewalski. It is a popular though, as I hope to show, flawed, framework through which to read *The Temple*.

refines Martz's theory of meditative poetry. Like Martz, Clements sees a progression throughout *The Temple*: "'The Church' begins in meditation or an early stage of the spiritual life and ends in contemplation, the advanced stage of religious life" (83). The meditative process, as outlined by Clements, consists of four stages: Purgation, Illumination, the Dark Night of the Soul and, finally, Union. Purgation, the first phase, is a sort of awakening of the soul; it realizes an existence and affiliation with something outside of and greater than the physical body and seeks to strengthen this bond by denying "things of sense" (5). Illumination is best described as a stage of enlightenment in which the meditative subject begins to feel "a certain apprehension of the Absolute, a sense of Divine Presence: but not true union with it" (Underhill in Clements 5). This stage is characterized by a feeling of elation, an emotion which is subsequently squelched by the next stage, the Dark Night of the Soul. Here Clements deviates from Martz's analysis of the meditative process by inserting a seemingly backwards step into an otherwise forward trajectory. During the Dark Night of the Soul, the subject "now suffers under an equally intense sense of the Divine Absence, learning to dissociate the personal satisfaction of mystical vision from the reality of mystical life" (Underhill in Clements 5). It is described as the surrendering of the self in preparation for Union: the meditative subject no longer congratulates himself on his ability to comprehend God, but rather sees once again – as in Purgation – that he still has more of himself to relinquish. In this state the self "desires nothing, asks nothing, is utterly passive and is thus prepared for Union"

(Underhill in Clements 5).<sup>15</sup>

This brings us to a discussion of Union, the pinnacle achievement of the meditative process. Union is the moment in which the self becomes one with the will of God. This achievement is what Stanley Fish views as the consumption of the self by God's will. Yet the meditative tradition sees it not so much as a total surrender of self-identity, but as an adjustment of the self in order to realize its full potential; the self, in a sense, becomes God-like. Union is the stage in which the external and the internal coincide perfectly. The body once again becomes a valid means of knowing the divine as the senses are reawakened and used as a means of perceiving God in one's environment. As Clements notes, "mystical experiences may be 'extrovertive,' aware of immanent divinity through the redeemed senses, or 'introvertive,' conscious of transcendent divinity beyond all sense" (6). In Union, the subject perceives the image of the divine both within himself and within all that surrounds him, so that "the learning, the logic, the philosophy that help to form this individual self are easily joined with perceptions of a bird, a broom, or a love ballad, for all these things are viewed as issuing . . . from an omnipresent source of creative power" (Martz 324).

The goal of the meditative poet is to reach Union through the process outlined by both Martz and Clements. Within the state of Union the meditative poet is both of and out

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15. Clement's theory of meditation also makes use of what he terms the "two selves:" the regenerative process of transformation within oneself from the first Adam (fallen) to the second Adam (redeemed through Christ). Although this theory works well with Herbert's use of typology, I will not emphasize it as it is my position that Herbert's religious poet remains between these two 'Adams' and is never fully one nor the other.

of this world in the sense that his consciousness is raised to a higher degree. His participation in this world consists of his seeing God as immanent in all things. For the meditative subject in Union, there is no fundamental separation between the secular and the divine; both are seen as aspects of God's omnipresence. As will be shown, there are moments in Herbert's poetry in which his religious poet exhibits such a state; yet there are other moments in which the poet-speaker agonizes over the stark contrast between the secular and divine realms. In many ways it is this contrast that makes necessary the role of the religious poet, since his task is in part to translate the divine into the secular; a job that would be unnecessary if the two worlds were in harmony with one another. The trouble for the religious poet is that the two worlds, while they occasionally coincide, never exist in harmony long enough to give comfort to the religious poet who often feels, in his act of interpretation, that he is being 'racked' between the secular and the divine.

"The Temper" (I) and (II) provide an illustration of the precarious position of the religious poet. These poems, presented as they are in succession, self-consciously deliberate on the idea of a "plateau of assurance," or the ability to achieve Union. "The Temper (I)" offers a tentative solution to the religious poet's dilemma; the idea that through faith he might be able to "Make one place ev'ry where" (l. 28) and thus live within God's presence on earth. However, just as we reach this resolution we are launched back into despair by the opening lines of "The Temper (II)": "It cannot be. Where is that mightie joy,/ Which just now took up all my heart?" The placement of these two poems within *The Temple* offers the reader a glimpse of the human plight in relation

to comprehending – and representing – divinity. In other words, it offers up the proposition that while humans are not god-like – they are ‘brittle crazie glasse’ – they are capable of fleeting glimpses of divinity, even in this world. Herbert’s religious poet, therefore, is not reliant on attaining Union (becoming God-like) in order to represent divinity, but in striving to attain Union he achieves a better understanding of the nature of divinity and his own nature in relation to divinity.

“The Temper (I)” illustrates the dual poles that shape the poet-speaker’s words: the emotions of elation and anguish, or of faith and despair. The opening lines give us a hint of something both gained and lost, a power acknowledged by the speaker but beyond his ability to represent. It is the speaker’s comprehension of divinity (elation) which leads to his realization that he is separate from it (anguish). Thus, it would appear that one emotion is never far from the other, and it is these circumstances that lead the speaker to feel “racked”; stretched between these two conflicting emotions, one divine and the other despairing:

How should I praise thee, Lord! How should my rymes  
Gladly engrave thy love in steel,  
If what my soul doth feel sometimes,  
My soul might ever feel!

Although there were some fourtie heav’ns, or more,  
Sometimes I peere above them all;  
Sometimes I hardly reach a score,  
Sometimes to hell I fall.

O rack me not to such a vast extent;  
Those distances belong to thee:  
The world’s too little for thy tent,  
A grave too big for me. (ll. 1-11)



The opening exclamation once again situates the speaker as a poet, one who appears to be bargaining with God to improve his poetry (ll. 1-4). The proposition put forth by the poet-speaker is equivalent to his asking for Union in exchange for beautiful –even divine– poems in praise of God. It is a request that goes unanswered, as illustrated by the ensuing moments of despair.

The imagery used throughout the first four stanzas of “The Temper (I)” portrays the religious poet as a figure torn between duty and perception. His position is perhaps best expressed by lines 10-11: “The world’s too little for thy tent,/ A grave too big for me.” Here the poet-speaker acknowledges the impossibility of himself and God both fully existing within the same realm. These lines refute not only the idea that Herbert’s poet-speaker has achieved Union but even the idea that such an achievement is possible. God is far too immense to be contained within a secular world or understanding and the speaker feels much too minuscule to measure with God in a metaphysical realm. The poet-speaker appears to feel that in order to comprehend divinity he must be completely severed from his secular self, hence the sentiment that “A grave [is] too big for me.”

The speaker of “The Temper (I)” attempts to avoid this dilemma through his reliance on faith:

Yet take thy way, for sure thy way is best:  
Stretch or contract me thy poore debter:  
This is but the tuning of my breast,  
To make the musick better.

Whether I flie with angels, fall with dust,  
Thy hands made both, and I am there;  
Thy power and love, my love and trust

Make one place ev'ry where.

(ll. 21-28)

Herbert's poet-speaker does not attempt to make sense of his despair; rather, he comes to terms with God's terms simply by accepting them as right. This is not the same as Union; the speaker's will is not matched to God's or presumably he would understand the purpose of his despair. Instead, he views God as playing him like an instrument; an important analogy since an instrument cannot make its own music nor understand the inspiration of the composer or player, while without the instrument there would be no music. In other words, rather than becoming one with God (becoming god-like) the speaker retains his humanity as distinct from but integral to God's message. It is not the speaker's becoming god-like but his faith in God's ability as the grand conductor that makes "one place ev'ry where" (l. 28). Thus, there is a kind of Union achieved, although it is not an amalgamation of the wills of God and human. The poet-speaker aligns himself with divinity by placing his trust in it and accepting both his elation and despair.

"The Temper (I)" appears to follow the meditative process outlined by Martz earlier in this chapter. The first stanza delivers the problem, the speaker's frustration with emotional fluctuations, which is further explored and then resolved as the necessary experience of faith. Following Martz's theory of meditative progression we would then expect "The Temper (II)," which immediately follows the first poem, to continue this trajectory, perhaps by further exploring the elements of faith. Instead we are presented with the same despair and confusion that make up the body of "The Temper (I)": "It cannot be. Where is that mightie joy,/ Which just now took up all my heart?" The speaker

appears to have lost the faith he so carefully reasoned for in the preceding poem; thus, his crisis of faith has not been resolved, as he continues to be pulled from faith by the emotion of despair. Herbert's speaker is no longer content to be God's instrument, and he once again pleads for comprehension of the divine plan. Unlike "The Temper (I)," however, this poem does not follow a meditative 'progression'; the poem ends in the same manner with which it began as the poet-speaker is left to wallow in his despair. The final two stanzas of "The Temper (II)" are akin to the opening stanza of "The Temper (I)":

O fix thy chair of grace, that all my powers  
May also fix their reverence:  
For when thou dost depart from hence,  
They grow unruly, and sit in thy bowers.

Scatter, or bind them all to bend to thee:  
Though elements change, and heaven move,  
Let not thy higher Court remove,  
But keep a standing Majestie in me.

(ll. 9-16)

The poet-speaker reverts back to his bargaining stance; though the tone is somewhat less despairing, the meaning is the same: if you (God) will reveal to me your wisdom, I will be a much more contented devotee.

Why does Herbert's speaker seemingly revert to his previous stance? I do not believe we can seriously argue that the poet-speaker is denouncing the doctrine of faith, as this would be completely out of keeping with Herbert's own religious background. Perhaps we can make sense of this apparent 'regression' by reading "The Temper (II)" in

light of another of Herbert's series poems, "Affliction (IV)." The theme of the "Affliction" series is similar to that of "The Temper" poems in that it deals with a speaker's desire to place himself in God's service, and the difficulties (or afflictions) that arise when he attempts to do so. Within these poems the speaker works on defining his relationship to God in order to determine the exact nature and duty of his service to God. "Affliction (IV)"—originally entitled "Temptation"—is, like "The Temper (II)," a backwards movement towards despair. The speaker again feels racked; "a wonder tortur'd in the space/ Betwixt this world and that of grace." Arguably, the "Affliction" poems leading up to and following "Affliction (IV)" represent a progression in the speaker's understanding of his role and relation to divinity.<sup>16</sup> In the fourth poem, however, the speaker is once again at war with himself:

All my attendants are at strife,  
 Quitting their place  
 Unto my face:  
 Nothing performs the task of life:  
 The elements are let loose to fight,  
 And while I live, trie out their right. (ll. 13-18)

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16. The "Affliction" poems portray the transformation of a speaker from a state of ignorance to enlightenment. In "Affliction (I)" the speaker looks upon his task as a means to advance his own reputation, only to end by questioning his ability to serve God. The second poem develops the speaker's emotion of despair until he comes to see his grief as a sign of Christ's presence and accepts grief as the counterpart of joy, as "Thy crosse took up in one" (l. 14). This newfound acceptance is examined in "Affliction (III)," in which the speaker sees grief as "a gale to bring me sooner to my blisse" (l. 12). Thus, by the end of the third poem, the speaker no longer laments his thankless situation; rather, he comes to perceive Christ's immanence in even his most distressful emotions. "Affliction (IV)," as noted above, marks a shift in tone as the speaker pleads to God to end his suffering. The speaker of the fifth poem, however, returns to the sentiments expressed in "Affliction (III)." Grief is seen as a strengthener of faith, as a consequence of the Fortunate Fall, which allows humans to appreciate fully the complexity of their relationship with God.

It is my contention that this poem, like “The Temper (II),” is placed in the series in order to emphasize that the acceptance of grief and misfortune in one’s life is an ongoing struggle. A union-like state may reward the faithful with the fulfillment of their hopes, yet just as often faith can be ‘rewarded’ with despair and confusion. One who remains loyal to divinity in exchange for secular happiness is not a true Christian; thus, the poetry is meant to reflect both times of despair and joy. In this line of thought, it is the *striving* for Union that is more important than the attainment of it. While Union may be the reward of effort, it is effort itself which is being exalted in Herbert’s poetry.

“Affliction (III)” offers yet another view on the purpose of grief. Here it is represented not just as a test of faith but as a faith-empowering force, so that the speaker’s sorrow actually becomes a manifestation of divinity:

My heart did heave, and there came forth, O God!  
 By that I knew that thou wast in the grief,  
 To guide and govern it to my relief,  
 Making a scepter of the rod:

(l. 1-4)

The speaker’s sorrow is seen not as a force pulling him away from divinity but as a tool that propels the speaker towards God by allowing him to perceive both the bliss and the suffering inherent in their relationship. God’s presence can be felt through the speaker’s sigh, a sign that divinity has a part in human sorrow as well as in human joy. Grief is portrayed as “A gale to bring me sooner to my blisse” (l. 12). While grief is not a pleasant experience it is integral to the comprehension of divinity and one’s role in relation to it; thus, sorrow is not necessarily a force to be overcome but an aspect of life that must be

embraced in order to appreciate the bliss and complexity of the Christian's relationship with God. Once again we see that Union, with its focus on total contentment and peace of the human mind and soul, falls short of the ideal situation for comprehension put forth by Herbert's poet-speaker. The "plateau of assurance" emphasized by Martz and Clements is exposed as a false ground, one from which a Christian may easily fall.

If the religious poet's primary role, then, is not to achieve Union, we may return to the original proposition of his task; to 'reinscribe' divine rhetoric into the rhetoric of poetry, thus making it accessible both to the philosophical and sensual aspects of the human mind. During the religious poet's efforts to comprehend and represent divinity, he himself becomes altered by it. His understanding of his role as a Christian shifts and expands during his examination of the relationship between the Christian and God. As we have seen, one of the most important aspects of this relationship uncovered by Herbert's religious poet is the importance placed on the human role. Herbert's poetry often stresses the central role that humanity plays, whether as devotee or doubter.

So, while the religious poet's humanity affects his portrayal of God's message, so does God's message affect the religious poet's understanding. The two components in the relationship have an impact on each other and *both* their wills can be shown. This is not to say that the human factor alters divine will, but just as the human interpreter inevitably alters God's message, he is inevitably altered *by* it. Until now, the focus of this chapter has been to show that the task of the religious poet is not to become god-like, but rather to be able to perceive divinity in a secular world. However, although the poet does not

become a god-like being, his disciplined attempt to interpret God's message allows a fraction of divine will to reside within the poet. Recall the second stanza of "The Windows":

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,  
 Making thy life to shine within  
 The holy Preachers; then the light and glorie  
 More rev'rend grows, & more doth win:  
 Which else shows watrish, bleak & thin.

The verb "anneal" means to "burn in colours upon glass; [to] enamel by encaustic process" (OED). Thus, we begin to understand that the process of reinscription may have a profound and painful effect on the interpreter. There is a sense of divine enlightenment whereby the religious poet's otherwise transparent soul/ mind becomes 'stained' by God's intervention. This is not to say that God takes over the process of reinscription; rather the intervention is one in which God provides the means by which the poet views divinity.<sup>17</sup> It is not divine possession but divine guidance that inspires and resides within the poet.

A poem which I believe celebrates this process of enlightenment is one which also celebrates the transition from human form to ethereal, the poem "Easter":

Rise heart, thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise  
                                     Without delayes,  
 Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise  
                                     With him mayest rise:

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17. In discussing the "Jordan" poems, Stanley Fish posits the argument that the voice of God enters into the poetry and subsumes the voice of the composer (190). I disagree that the entrance of divinity into a poem necessitates the disappearance of the poet's voice. Rather, it marks a moment in which the two realms—divine and secular—which at many times seem distant from one another coexist within the person of the religious poet.

That, as his death calcined thee to dust,  
 His life may make thee gold, and much more just.  
 (ll. 1-6)

The last two lines of this stanza (ll. 5-6) are, for my purposes, the most important.

Perhaps the most obvious interpretation of the final couplet is to read it as an observance of the promise of eternal life, given to Christians upon Christ's resurrection. In other words, if Christ's death illustrates the transience of the human body (l. 5), his life (as the definitive Christian), as well as the after-life promised by him, give the human soul a path to divinity (l. 6). What I would like to extrapolate from this interpretation is the idea that Christ's essence changes the essence of human nature. Although we are made into "dust" by Christ's absence (his death), we can be made "gold" by his presence (his life). Thus, just as "brittle crazie glasse" can become vibrant with colour, so can dust be transformed into gold. It is the divine ability to alter human nature that is, in part, being exalted in this poem.

The second and third stanzas further develop this idea, this time through the use of a musical metaphor. As mentioned above, the music analogy is quite relevant to this study as it reflects the duty of the religious poet, who is himself a sort of musician:

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part  
   With all thy art.  
 The crosse taught all wood to resound his name  
   Who bore the same.  
 His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key  
 Is best to celebrate this most high day.

Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song  
   Pleasant and long:  
 Or since all musick is but three parts vied



And multiplied;  
 O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,  
 And make up our defects with his sweet art.  
 (ll. 7-18)

In the second stanza, Christ's suffering is said to resound in all aspects of the music. Even an inanimate object such as the lute—or to extend the metaphor, the pen—is stamped with Christ's sacrifice. This seems to leave little room for interpretation, as the tools through which the music is played have already been “taught . . . what key/ Is best to celebrate this most high day.” Likewise, the opening of the third stanza parallels the heart with the lute, leading the reader to infer that the heart too has been taught Christ's message, if one would only look for it. However, we may also infer that the heart, the human soul or will, has a different note to offer from the lute, since the two “twist” together to sing. The close of the third stanza, in my opinion the climax of the poem, ties the art, artist, and inspiration together in a way that shows the outcome of the collaboration to be larger than its components; it becomes “three parts vied/ And multiplied.” Divine will, human will, and material substance combine to form the song in praise of Easter. Or, to quote C.A. Patrides, “the Spirit is added to the heart and the lute to complete the *three parts* of the common chord” (62).

These three components of religious poetry make up a kind of holy trinity of its own; the spirit of Christ both transcends the music and is immanent within it. Unlike “The Temper” poems, in which the poet-speaker laments his separation from divinity, “Easter” portrays divine will as having a direct impact on the outcome of a poem. The effect of this collaboration is both the poem in its entirety and the ‘song’ offered in the

final three stanzas of “Easter.” Within the last three stanzas Herbert (or presumably the religious poet, God, and the art of poetry itself) offers us a poem-within-a-poem, which once again focuses the reader’s attention on the creative act being undertaken throughout *The Temple*. Far from emphasizing the separation between human and divinity, “Easter” focuses on the interaction between the “Spirit” of divinity and the religious poet. The interpreter maintains his own identity while combining his will with the will of Christ to compose poetry both written for and, in a sense, *by* divinity. Thus, during the act of composition, the religious poet becomes not just an interpreter of but also a vehicle for the divine message. His nature is different during such an act than it is at other times in the sense that while the religious poet composes he enables divine “life to shine within” himself and his poetry.

Another poem that emphasizes the interplay between the religious poet and divinity is “The Priesthood.” This poem exhibits some of the anxieties the poet-speaker feels when undertaking his duty:

But thou art fire, sacred and hallow’d fire;  
And I but earth and clay: should I presume  
To wear thy habit, the severe attire  
My slender compositions might consume.  
I am both foul and brittle: much unfit  
To deal in holy Writ.

(ll. 7-12)

The “thou” addressed in line seven can refer to both the priesthood and to God himself; in both readings the meaning of the stanza remains fairly similar. The religious poet is portrayed in this poem as part prophet; when he writes he claims a certain ability to

comprehend divinity, or at least the ability to comprehend his own role in relation to divinity. The poet-speaker expresses two prominent anxieties in this stanza: that he (falsely) “presumes” to have the ability to represent God, and that in performing his duty his own essence will be completely consumed by the spirit of God. Particularly effective is the pun on the word “compositions.” The poet-speaker fears that the priestly habit will consume him bodily (by covering up his form, his ‘composition’), but by pluralizing the word “composition” the poet-speaker is also referring to his poems. Thus, not only does he fear the loss of his identity as a human being, he also fears that his poems might be exposed as mundane and insufficient instruments through which to praise God.

The beginning of “The Priesthood,” like the opening stanza of “The Windows,” assumes that humans are “both foul and brittle” simply by virtue of being human. However, this thought is refuted further on in “The Priesthood” by the poet-speaker’s recognition that divinity can be present in things formed from “earth and clay.” He uses eucharistic imagery to emphasize that divinity can be present within material objects, thereby transforming them into vehicles of divinity (stanzas four and five). This metaphor is further extended to include humanity:

Wherefore I dare not, I, put forth my hand  
To hold the Ark, although it seem to shake  
Through th’ old sinnes and new doctrines of our land.  
Onely, since God doth often vessels make  
Of lowly matter for high uses meet,  
I throw me at his feet. (ll. 31-36)

The “I” that stands alone between commas in line 31 calls attention to the poet-speaker himself as he attempts to “hold the Ark”; a typological reference to the Church. Although

this poem is, in general, depreciative of the human form, lines 34-35 recognize that this form can in fact be used to exalt God. The poet-speaker then throws himself at God's feet, in a sense begging to be made a vessel for God's purposes.

Although "The Priesthood" may appear to emphasize the passivity of the religious poet as he waits for God to speak through him, it simultaneously offers an optimistic view of humanity overcoming secular concerns in exchange for divine concerns. Like the poem "Easter," "The Priesthood" celebrates God's ability—or inclination—to interact with humankind. God not only inspires, but may even alter the nature of the devotee by endowing him with divine enlightenment. However, this enlightenment does not remove the need for a human interpreter; rather it makes the role of the human interpreter even more prominent. The task of the religious poet is essential to the act of writing religious poetry since it is his job to figure *himself* into the relationship between the world and God. This is why the figure of the religious poet is so prominent throughout *The Temple*; he represents the human struggle to understand and obey divinity.

Although enlightenment may be, in some cases, divinely bestowed, it does not alleviate the efforts to comprehend divinity that are undertaken by the religious poet. Even when enlightenment is achieved it can be fleeting, as seen in both "The Temper" and the "Affliction" poems. Enlightenment does not correspond to the state of Union, which is a constant and peaceful state of being on the part of the meditative poet. As both the above mentioned poetic series illustrate, grief is as important as joy in the comprehension of the human condition; for, as the poet-speaker of "Affliction (V)" notes:

“there is but joy and grief;/ If either will convert us, we are thine” (ll 13-14). The religious poet, as constructed by Herbert, is not reliant on attaining Union in order to represent divinity, but in striving to attain Union he attains both a better understanding of the nature of divinity and his own nature. He looks outward towards God only to be directed inward, towards himself. What Herbert’s religious poet discovers through his efforts is that there is indeed a divine presence in the outcome of this process, that God’s life, or light of knowledge, “shine[s] within” both the interpreter and the work. The poetry, the poet, and divinity combine during the creative process to create a work part divine and part secular.

### Chapter Three: The Poetic Link

*Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one  
When they combine and mingle, bring  
A strong regard and awe: but speech alone  
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,  
And in the eare, not conscience ring.*

Until now, the focus of this thesis has been on the question of *how* a religious poem is created; specifically, how the religious poet locates and transcribes divine will. Chapter One examines the religious poet's use of poetical rhetoric and the ways in which he is able to manipulate conventional poetic conceits in order to refit them with religious meaning. In Chapter Two, poetical inspiration itself is examined; the religious poet's role in locating divine will within and without himself and placing this understanding into a poetical format is explored. Both chapters are based on the supposition that the religious poet acts as a human interpreter of the divine message. He is a window through which divine will accesses a specific audience. Hence, having looked at some of the means by which the poetry comes into existence, it is now necessary to ask the question of *why* the poems are created.

The theory proposed in chapter one, that the religious poet reinscribes biblical text rather than 'invents' purely from his own imagination, complicates the question of why the poems exist. For, if writing religious poetry simply involves rewriting Biblical text, the task would appear futile and readers would presumably be better off engaging themselves with the original text. In other words, what are readers expected to extrapolate

about God, or religion, from Herbert's religious poetry that they cannot extract from the Bible alone? The answer to this question lies, I believe, in the figure of the religious poet himself as a representation of the duty and privilege of each Christian subject. The religious poet's story is both his personal struggle and an example of Christian worship. The figure of the religious poet mediates between the divine and secular realms and encourages Herbert's Christian readership to do likewise. Thus, *The Temple* is not the Bible rewritten; it is Biblical text as interpreted through a human subject. In this way, the figure of the religious poet emphasizes the role of the individual in both the composition of poetry and in the Christian's relationship with God. The poems are not, as Stanley Fish terms them, self-consuming artifacts; rather, they are self-affirming since they enable both poet and reader to locate their place in a divine spectrum. Ideally, within the poems, self-will coheres with divine will but is not overcome by it.

The focus of this chapter therefore shifts from the nature of the religious poet to the nature of his relationship with his audience. In the preceding chapter, the religious poet's desire to understand or locate God is seen as integral to the process of comprehending his own role in relation to divinity. Herbert's religious poet is exposed as a very active figure. He does not wait for enlightenment to seek him out; rather, he actively strives to understand God's ways— an often impossible task, yet meaningful in the effort alone. The active participation on the part of the religious poet (as he examines his own task) can be extended to the audience of the poetry, who are in many ways encouraged to locate themselves within the poems. A religious poem represents a kind of

literary culmination of “Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one” (l. 11). The idea is that the work— the meditation, self-exploration— that the religious poet devotes to his art should in fact be mirrored in the daily lives of Christians. The religious poet’s art becomes a model not only for Christian worship, but a means through which the Christian can position herself in relation to God. The third stanza of “The Windows” emphasizes that one’s relationship to the divine is a complex and fluctuating one, which needs to be tended constantly. Since “speech alone/ Doth vanish like a flaring thing,/ And in the eare, not conscience ring” a more active means of reading and comprehending the poems is needed. The passion that a particular poem may produce in both composer and reader is but a “flaring thing,” present one moment and gone the next. Thus, there is a need for some kind of a link between passion and constancy, a way for both poet and reader to place their lives in divine terms.

As noted above, the religious poet’s task is to rewrite the divine story— with one very significant alteration; he inserts himself, and by extension his readers, into the story. This is one area in which my reading of Herbert’s poetry differs greatly from that of Stanley Fish and others who read in Herbert a process of “letting go” (158) of poetic voice in favour of divine voice.<sup>18</sup> In the previous chapter it was shown that the voice of the poet merges with his inspiration to produce the religious poem. The poems themselves, then, provide a link between the divine and the secular as human voice and effort combine with divine enlightenment to offer a model of worship. The process of

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18. For Martz and Clements, the process of meditation is seen as a letting go of the poet’s secular concerns in exchange for divine union.



composition— in which the religious poet seeks to understand divine will— does not alleviate the need for a poetic, human voice; rather, it allows that voice to grow stronger and more clearly defined.

Fish's reading of Herbert's poetry is relevant to this chapter in that he focuses not only on the experience of Herbert's speakers, but on the experience of the reader as well. In Fish's analysis, the seventeenth century produced two types of religious writing: the dialectical and the rhetorical. A rhetorical presentation "satisfies the needs of its readers" in that it works "to mirror and present for approval the opinions its readers already hold" (1). Contrarily, a dialectical presentation does not necessarily support its reader's expectations; instead, the reader is held in "dialect" with the writing. Meaning is produced through the reader's interaction (or conversations) with the "artifact" itself. According to Fish, "It follows then . . . that a dialectical presentation succeeds at its own expense; for by conveying those who experience it to a point where they are beyond the aid that discursive or rational forms can offer, it becomes the vehicle of its own abandonment" (3). Fish sees the relationship that exists between poet and reader in a dialectical experience as analogous to that of a physician and patient; the poet provides the means by which the healing may take place, yet it is the patient who is responsible for this healing. Fish's interpretation of the religious poet as the 'good physician' is not entirely in opposition to my view of the religious poet as interpreter. Both present the religious poet as a bearer of special knowledge which he seeks to impart to the reader. As Fish notes, the metaphor of the 'good physician' "belongs preeminently to God" (2),

causing the poet himself to be read as a kind of prophet. In his analysis,

The good physician aesthetic, then, is finally an anti-aesthetic, for it disallows to its productions the claims usually made for verbal art— that they reflect or contain or express Truth— and transfers the work to its effects, from what is happening on the page to what is happening in the reader. A self-consuming artifact signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture.

(3-4).

In Fish's reading, then, the extraction of Truth from a poem does not occur by the reader merely accepting the poet's words as "truth", but by using them as a guide to working out his own feelings or interpretation of them. Hence, the religious poet (or the poetic voice itself) becomes lost, and is taken over by religious rhetoric and by the reader's own experience. In Fish's words: "Dialectic raises the level of the mind, and raises it to the point where it becomes indistinguishable from the object of its search, and so disappears. This is what happens in Herbert's poetry" (155). According to Fish, by pointing to a truth greater than, or outside of poetry the poem itself becomes a negligible force in reaching that Truth.

Fish sees Herbert's poems as self-consuming in their acknowledgment of the role of the divine in the composition of the poetry. By acknowledging both God's immanence and transcendence,

Herbert's poems characteristically ask us to experience the full force of this admission in all its humiliating implications. If God is all, the claims of other entities to a separate existence, including the claims of the speakers and readers of this poem, must be relinquished. That is, the insight that God's word is all is *self-destructive*, since acquiring it involves abandoning the perceptual and conceptual categories within which the self moves and by means of which it separately exists.

(156-7)

It seems that if we are to agree that God has a hand in the production of the work then He must be credited with the work as a whole. In support of his argument, Fish begins his chapter on Herbert with three lines from “The Flower”:

We say amisse,  
This or that is:  
Thy word is all, if we could spell.  
(19-21)

Fish points out that these lines serve to break the barriers between things of the physical world. The speaker emphasizes that God is present in everything, from a flower to the poem itself. Yet, must this necessarily be self-effacing? For, if God is present in everything, then He is present in the poet himself and in his readers. I would argue that the speaker is thus not denying his self-hood but rather recognizing that there is a divine aspect to even his secular, human form. Hence, these lines can be read as self-affirming as they allow the speaker’s self, and all humanity, to be included within the constant presence of the divine. Instead of writing himself out of God’s universe (by silencing his poetic voice), the speaker recognizes that he too is a fundamental part of it, that his nature is in part made up of divine nature.

If, in some poems, Herbert’s speaker is seen as attempting to subsume his will to God’s,<sup>19</sup> in others, the speaker celebrates the distinctions between his station and that of the divine. This occurs primarily in those poems that celebrate the Fortunate Fall. If the goal of the speaker is, as Fish suggests, to subsume his will entirely to God’s, then it may

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19. Some poems in which the poet-speaker unsuccessfully attempts to subsume his will to God’s include “The Thanksgiving,” “Affliction (I),” and “The Temper (I)”

be expected that he would lament the loss of humankind's earlier existence in Paradise, in which the wills of humans cohered with the will of God. This, however, is not the case in many of Herbert's poems, including "Affliction (V)." In this poem, Herbert's poet-speaker places free will above ignorant obedience, arguing that the state of humankind after the fall of Adam and Eve is preferable to their own earlier existence. "Affliction (V)" marks a clear diversion from the first poem in the "Affliction" series, in which the speaker attempts to live as though he *were* God. "Affliction (I)" represents the speaker's belief that, through being a good Christian, he will achieve Union with God in his life on earth:

I looked on thy furniture so fine,  
And made it fine to me:  
Thy glorious houshold-stuffe did me entwine,  
And 'tice me unto thee.  
Such starres I counted mine: both heav'n and earth  
Payd me my wages in a world of mirth.  
(ll. 7-12)

The speaker's bliss is short lived, however, when he finds that his will cannot be so easily aligned with divinity. For his existence on earth is, by definition, fraught with uneasiness. His body ages and becomes ill (stanza 5), as do his friends, whom he sees as being taken from him by God (stanza 6). The speaker becomes confused by these apparent discrepancies and is no longer able to define his purpose in life:

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me  
None of my books will show:  
I reade, and sigh, and wish I were a tree;  
For sure then I should grow  
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust  
Her houshold to me, and I should be just. (ll. 54-60)

Thus, by attempting to subsume his will to God's the speaker loses sight of what it is to be human, preferring to be an inanimate object like a tree rather than a fallible human being. The speaker even goes so far as to put the responsibility for his love of God on divinity itself: in the last line of the poem he pleads to God: "Let me not love thee, if I love thee not." (l. 66). The speaker's stance in this poem is troubled, though he himself is unable to see the flaws in his reasoning. He sees only two possibilities of existence: either full union with God, or total separation from God. However, in the poem following "Affliction (I)", "Repentance", we are offered a different reading of what it is to be human.

The speaker in "Repentance" acknowledges a vast separation between his own humanity and the will of God. He now sees what he has ignored in "Affliction (I)"; that through the Fall, humans have become alienated from a life of union with God:

Mans age is two houres work, or three:  
Each day doth round about us see.  
Thus are we to delights: but we are all  
To sorrows old,  
If life be told  
From what life feeleth, Adams fall.  
(ll. 7-12)

The speaker of "Repentance" views his life as necessarily arduous and mercifully short. His view of life is not particularly optimistic, but it is a reaction against the idea that it is possible to align one's will with that of divinity. It is not until death that humans will attain peace:

But thou wilt sinne and grief destroy;  
That so the broken bones may joy,

And tune together in a well-set song,  
 Full of his praises,  
 Who dead men raises.  
 Fractures well cur'd make us more strong  
 . (ll. 31-36)

In the last line, the speaker's outlook becomes more positive. He begins to see that his life on earth is an important experience: transgressions that have been righted are in fact more important than living a faultless existence, as they lead to a proper understanding of human nature. Thus, his separation from divinity is viewed as an important step towards returning to it. Separation is no longer proof of complete divine absence.

The speaker of "Affliction (V)" takes this understanding even further, as he learns to see God in his humanity, in his very separation from divinity:

My God, I read this day,  
 That planted Paradise was not so firm,  
 As was and is thy floting Ark; whose stay  
 And anchor thou art onely, to confirm  
 And strengthen it in ev'ry age,  
 When waves do rise, and tempests rage.  
 (ll. 1-6)

In this, the first stanza of "Affliction (V)," God's "floting Ark" – a typological reference to the Church– is said to be a stronger bearer of faith than Eden itself. The imagery used to describe both is quite significant here; Paradise is "planted"–stable, unmoving– while the Church "floats" (not sails) through "tempests," anchored by God. How, then, can the "ark" be said to be firmer than Paradise?

An answer to this question lies in the idea that, through the Fall, humans gained awareness of their true potential; both for good and for evil. Thus, we now have multiple

paths to choose from, and following divine will is only one of these paths. Those who choose to follow divine will do so in full knowledge of the temptations that surround them; thus, their efforts are more commendable than the efforts of those who are ignorant of any other path. Hence, it appears that in order to know God's will, one must first view oneself as separate from it. Humankind's position after the Fall is part of the divine plan, since "What Adam had, and forfeited for all,/ Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall." ("The Holdfast" ll. 13-14). Humankind, through the fall, has been given a key to examining its own nature, as both distinct from divinity and as a part of it, since Christ's sacrifice has secured redemption for faithful Christians. This separation is never fully bridged by Herbert's speaker, hence his need to give voice to his thoughts. It is this aspect of the poetry of *The Temple* which underlines the need to reinscribe religious rhetoric, to bring the self into the divine story. It is not denying oneself to include oneself in a divine hierarchy, and the writing of Herbert's poems proves the need to personalize this story even to the extent of making the figure of a religious poet a prominent aspect of many of the poems.

This personalization of the divine story is the key to the act of reinscription that occurs in the poems. It is also our answer to *why* the poems are written, why the poet gives us his interpretation of biblical text instead of simply directing us back to the original. The idea of reinscription is an area of confusion for critics on Herbert, and one often comes across statements like the one made by Barbara Harman, that "we need to read [the poems] in order to know that we need not read them" (43). Although *The*

*Temple* holds biblical text as the superior ‘art’-- as in “The H. Scriptures” (I) and (II)-- this is not done to negate the need for a personalized story. *The Temple* is not only homage to the divine, but also a careful exploration of the role of the individual Christian within a biblical history and tradition. The figure of the religious poet, who contemplates his position and strives to understand his duty, is analogous to the Christian everyman whose duty is not to write praise, but to live it in every aspect of his life. The religious poet’s intermediary position is to be viewed as a model for individual worship, the art produced no longer poetry but prayer: “For [Herbert], a poet becomes an intensified or supreme human being because of his divine calling to make poetic that which is every human’s duty-- the praise of God” (Clark 81). Thus, the reader’s engagement with the poetry breaks down barriers of author and reader, and even of history and the present, as becomes clear through Herbert’s use of neotypology.

Neotypology is a term used by Ira Clark in his study *Christ Revealed: The History of the Neotypological Lyric in the English Renaissance*. Typology is an interpretive practice long engaged in by the Christian church. It involves a reinterpretation of the Old Testament prophets and events in light of the New Testament. As a biblical practice, typology works in a twofold manner; the Old Testament can only be fully understood through the New, and the New Testament can only be fully understood through the Old. Both Testaments enhance one another, and a reading of the New Testament is a culmination of knowledge built upon the Old. Moreover, as Ira Clark puts it, “both covenants reveal and are revealed by Christ” (1). It is important to remember, however,



that types themselves are not merely seen as metaphors, but as real, historical, and whole people who have identities and histories independent of their typological meaning. Yet, their identities can only be fully grasped in relation to the knowledge given through Christ in the New Testament.

Neotypology differs from typology in that it involves not simply a re-reading of the Old Testament in light of the New; instead it extends this metaphor into the lives of Christians. Christians are asked to identify both with the plights of the Old Testament figures, and to view themselves as types: real people whose identities lie partly in their interpretation through Christ. According to Ira Clark, neotypological devotional poets, “recreated themselves and their circumstances in personae imitating Old Testament types— to the degree that they virtually reincarnated them. By doing so, they added themselves as personae who fuse a second metaphoric link, extending the Christian reading of history through types” (5). Thus, neotypology allows the devotional poet to view himself as a part of history, as a component of the divine story. It is neotypology that, in part, gives reinscription its purpose, for it allows a personalization of Biblical text through the poet’s interpretation. It also allows the religious poet to unite, in a sense, the divine and secular realms by extending Biblical tradition in order to include both himself and his contemporaries. The neotypological poet does not seek to define himself *with* God, but rather to define himself *through* God. His life and self have meaning on their own, yet their purposes becomes clearer and their meaning deeper when seen through the light of divinity. Thus, it is not surprising that Clark, unlike Fish, sees *The Temple* as

exhibiting “dramatic, self-examining, personal portraits [which] made [Herbert] a potent Christian exemplum for his congregation” (80).

According to Clark, the movement of a neotypological poem is very similar to the movement in “The Windows.” The religious poet figures himself as a metaphorical window through which the light of God brings knowledge. In Clark’s reading the analogy of the poet-priest as a window “releases the potential expressiveness of multiple referents by identifying the window’s value both as inherent in itself and as granted by the sun’s light. All it lacks is the context of a seventeenth-century neotype identifying with a type in order to become part of the interaction with the antitype” (82).<sup>20</sup> In other words, the window (the poet or priest) has meaning and existence both on its own *and* when defined through God’s light (the poet or priest blessed with divine enlightenment). “The Windows” is not a neotypological poem, since it does not contain a recognizable biblical type, yet, as noted by Clark, the flow of the poem works in much the same manner as a neotypological poem. Clark’s analysis of the neotypological lyric focuses on the poet’s identification with biblical types as a means of presenting himself as saved by Christ, without “being damned for presumption in the midst of sin” (4). He looks at neotypology as a metaphor for self-understanding in the seventeenth-century subject. It is my contention that neotypology provides a connection “betwixt this world and that of grace,” allowing the religious poet to position himself in a divine continuum after the fall and before redemption. My reading goes beyond Clark’s in that I argue that, through his use

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20. Ira Clark uses the word “anti-type” to refer to Christ. For the purpose of simplification, however, I will not be using this word.

of neotypology, the religious poet himself becomes a type, and the reader a neotype. That is, the religious poet becomes a *third* “metaphoric link”, and a further persona with whom the reader may identify. Hence, the figure of the religious poet throughout *The Temple* becomes as important as the types themselves in aiding the reader’s comprehension of his or her own location within a divine spectrum. The poems I have chosen to discuss illustrate the role of the religious poet as both a neotype and a type through which the audience reads themselves.

It is my contention that the third stanza of “The Windows” encourages the reader—and the poet-speaker himself—to find a means to a constant devotion. Neotypology offers such a means; it is inclusive interpretation which focuses not on a moment of passionate feeling but on a history which spans thousands of years and is seen to continue in the persons of the poet and reader. The poet-as-interpreter can be taken as a model for proper engagement with biblical text, and in doing so positions himself as a type with whom readers may identify. Readers of the Bible, like readers of Herbert’s poems, are expected to place themselves within the text, to reinterpret biblical stories in light of their own experience. To use Fish’s terms, the reader is expected to have a dialectical reading experience rather than a rhetorical one. Herbert’s poems are not meant to mirror previously held beliefs but to enable the reader to use the poetry as a window through which he or she may access divine enlightenment. The poetry, like the figure of the religious poet himself, offers a link between the divine and secular and asks readers to view themselves as a living part of the divine story.

“The Bunch of Grapes” uses neotypology as a means for self-examination on the part of the speaker, who then seeks to impart his knowledge to the audience.<sup>21</sup> It is perhaps the most straightforward of the neotypological poems in that the neotypological experience presented by the first stanza is explained by the ensuing stanzas. The self-exploration is broadened to include the audience, who then become a central component of the poem:

Joy, I did lock thee up: but some bad man  
 Hath let thee out again:  
 And now, me thinks, I am where I began  
 Sev'n yeares ago: one vogue and vein,  
 One aire of thoughts usurps my brain.  
 I did toward Canaan draw; but now I am  
 Brought back to the Red sea, the sea of shame.  
 (ll. 1-7)

Here, the “narrator enacts in his life the wanderings of the Israelites from the *Red sea* (l. 7) to the Promised Land (*Canaan* 6)” (Patrides 139). Like the Israelites, he sees himself as backtracking, wandering in circles only to end “where I began.” The second stanza includes all Christians in this journey and encourages them to identify with the plight of the Israelites: “So now each Christian hath his journeys spann’d:/ Their storie pennes and sets us down.” (ll. 10-11). The journey of each Christian is seen by the speaker as having already been written down; their story is defined by the Israelites, and yet not, for the Israelites did not have Christ’s sacrifice to ensure redemption. The identity of Christians relies significantly on history; their stories have, in a sense, already been “penned” by the

21. Surprisingly, Clark does not discuss neotypology in either “The Bunch of Grapes” or “Joseph’s Coat,” aside from a brief mention of the former in reference to “The H. Scriptures (II).”

past. By placing himself and the reader in a neotypological relationship with the Israelites, the speaker in effect illustrates that their own existence was foreordained by history: “God’s works are wide, and let in future times” (l. 13).

Having established his and his reader’s location within a biblical frame, the speaker then proceeds to differentiate them from the Old Testament limitations. He and his fellow Christians are *not* the Israelites, for they are more fortunate in their present state:

Then have we too our guardian fires and clouds;  
                   Our Scripture-dew drops fast:  
 We have our sands and serpents, tents and shrowds;  
                   Alas! Our murmurings come not last.  
                   But where’s the cluster? where’s the taste  
 Of mine inheritance? Lord, if I must borrow,  
 Let me as well take up their joy, as sorrow.

But can he want the grape, who hath the wine?  
                   I have their fruit and more.  
 Blessed be God, who prosper’d *Noahs* vine,  
                   And made it bring forth grapes good store.  
                   But much more him I must adore,  
 Who of the laws sowre juice sweet wine did make,  
 Ev’n God himself, being pressed for my sake. (ll. 15-28)

The speaker’s neotypological position allows him to identify both with the Israelites and with Christ. He places himself and his audience in a continuum between the Fall and redemption. Thus, they can read themselves as encompassing the whole of the divine story, through their history and experience. Instead of the wanton meandering of the first stanza, the Christian’s search for his ‘self’ is brought home by the fourth stanza, in which he recognizes Christ’s sacrifice within his own existence.

“Joseph’s Coat” examines the religious poet’s duty through the use of typology, and through neotypology this sonnet places the poet-speaker within a biblical narrative:

Wounded I sing, tormented I indite,  
 Thrown down I fall into a bed, and rest:  
 Sorrow hath chang’d its note: such is his will,  
 Who changeth all things, as him pleaseth best.  
 For well he know, if but one grief and smart  
 Among my many had his full career,  
 Sure it would carrie with it ev’n my heart,  
 And both would runne until they found a biere  
 To fetch the bodie; both being due to grief.  
 But he hath spoil’d the race; and giv’n to anguish  
 One of Joyes coats, ticing it with relief  
 To linger in me, and together languish.  
 I live to shew his power, who once did bring  
 My *joyes* to *weep*, and now my *griefs* to *sing*.

This poem makes use of the biblical story of Joseph and his ‘coat of many colours’ given to him by his father. The coat is both an indication of Joseph’s favored status and a burden, for it creates jealousy among his brothers, who attack him and leave him in a ditch to die. Joseph is a type of Christ through his superior status and through his suffering. Like Christ, Joseph is left for dead only to be resurrected to a new and better life, although his resurrection is physical whereas Christ’s resurrection is supernatural. Read as a typological poem, the “I” in the poem becomes the first person voice of both Joseph and of Christ recounting his suffering on earth. Christ lived to “shew” the power of the divine (l. 13), which he did successfully in death and resurrection as well as in life. Joseph’s story prefigures that of Christ, illustrating a divine continuum throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Read as a neotypological poem, however, the “I” becomes the voice of the poet-

speaker examining his own troubles and his task. The 'coat' he wears is the distinction of being able to compose devotional poetry, which is also his burden; for his 'singing' is both 'wounded' and 'tormented' (l. 1). The trouble that plagues the poet-speaker is akin to that which is illustrated in the "Affliction" poems; the dilemma of how to unite grief and joy within the art of praise. Paradoxically, the answer is found in his metaphorical 'Joseph's coat,' which not only distinguishes the poet-speaker but protects and comforts him through his grief:

But he hath spoil'd the race; and giv'n to anguish  
One of Joyes coats, ticing it with relief  
To linger in me, and together languish.

(11. 10-13)

God alleviates the poet-speaker's suffering by dressing him in the metaphorical 'Joseph's coat,' a constant reminder of divine presence. The coat "lingers" in the poet-speaker alongside his "anguish" and provides him with the power to overcome, or at least subdue, his grief. The poet-speaker describes his plight through a biblical story which identifies him with the Old Testament figure, Joseph. This is what Clark speaks of as neotypology, the extension of a Biblical narrative to include the poet and audience. Thus, the poet-speaker himself becomes, like Joseph, a type of Christ; his personal story is placed within a continuum between Joseph and Christ. He is, according to the theory of typology, a person in and of himself who has meaning innate in his very existence; however, his full purpose and meaning relies on Christ's story, as does his work. The poet-speaker of "Joseph's Coat" provides his readership with at least three distinct stories: Joseph's story, Christ's story and the speaker's own story. It is important to note that all three of

these stories give meaning to the poem. In other words, one story does not cancel out the significance of the others. Aligned with the Christian story, the speaker's story is given fuller meaning and is not negated or consumed by the divine.

Since the figure of the religious poet can be read as metaphor for the Christian subject, the poet-speaker of "Joseph's Coat" may be seen as providing a metaphor under which the Christian may view his own life. While the Christian's duty is not to write God's praise, she must still actively examine her own faith and give praise in the form of prayer and life. Through Herbert's use of neotypology, the Christian readership is encouraged to view themselves as typological figures, as extensions of Joseph's story. In this case, 'Joseph's Coat' becomes a metaphor for the covenant of religion which both protects and in a sense confines the lives of Christians. This freedom of interpretation justifies the act of reinscription (not that it particularly needs to be justified), for it offers the readers another means of regarding the original text, a means which places them directly within this text and allows them to identify with both poet, biblical figure, and even further, with Christ himself. Yet, the question that arises through this argument is whether or not the poet-speaker promotes action and participation in the neotypological poems alone. For, placing oneself and one's readers as neotypes is not the only way in which the poet-speaker validates humanity and freedom. In illustration of this point, I will turn to Herbert's most volatile poet-speaker and one of his most interesting poems, "The Collar."

"The Collar" is not, strictly speaking, a neotypological poem; there is no



identification of the speaker with a biblical type. In fact, there is no direct reference to scripture within the poem. However, “The Collar” reads like a neotypological poem in that it presents a poet-speaker who acts as a typological figure, while the reader becomes the neotype. The figure of the religious poet acts as the type with whom the reader is asked to identify, to view herself in light of his predicament and resolution. Barbara Harman’s reading of “The Collar” as a “collapsing” story works well with the function of the religious poet as type. It is Harman’s contention that “the suppression of information plays a crucial role in [“The Collar”], for one of the things the speaker suppresses is his awareness of the inappropriateness of the story he tells— so that the withholding of knowledge is precisely what permits him to tell the story” (65).<sup>22</sup> Hence, as with the neotypological poems, it is up to the reader to fill in the blanks, to provide the meaning that goes unmentioned by the poet-speaker.

The speaker of “The Collar” relates a history: or, not an Old Testament story but the poet-speaker’s own experience. The true nature of this experience, however, cannot be understood until the reader has read the entire story. The reader must then return to the beginning and re-read the poem, infusing the lines with the meaning gained by the last couplet:

I struck the board, and cry’d, No more.  
I will abroad.  
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?

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22. Harman does not refer to neotypology in her study *Costly Monuments*. However, her ideas on “collapsing stories,” in which a speaker recounts the story of his earlier, misguided self from a position of enlightenment, works well with the idea of the religious poet as a typological figure.

My lines and life are free; free as the rode,  
 Loose as the winde, as large as store.  
     Shall I be still in suit?  
 Have I no harvest but a thorn  
 To let me bloud, and not restore  
 What I have lost with cordiall fruit?  
     Sure there was wine  
 Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn  
     Before my tears did drown it.  
 Is the yeare onely lost to me?  
     Have I no bayes to crown it?  
 No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?  
     All wasted?  
 Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,  
     And thou hast hands.  
 Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
 On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute  
 Of what is fit, and not; forsake thy cage,  
     Thy rope of sands,  
 Which pettie thoughts have made, and made to thee  
 Good cable, to enforce and draw,  
     And be thy law,  
 While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
     Away; take heed:  
     I will abroad.  
 Call in thy deaths head there: tie up thy fears.  
     He that forbears  
 To suit and serve his need,  
     Deserves thy load.  
 But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde  
     At every word,  
 Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Child*:  
 And I reply'd, *My Lord*.

(ll. 1-36)

The majority of the poem presents a poet-speaker in the act of rationalizing his intended disobedience towards God. He arrives at the recognition that "My lines and life are free" (l. 4) and asks "Shall I be still in suit?" (l. 6). Having received no tangible reward for his services, the poet-speaker contemplates his own sacrifices, regarding them as futile. He

vows to make up for lost time and lost pleasure, to seek earthly rewards instead of divine rewards (ll. 17-26).

The speaker's argument remains uncontested until the final four lines. It is in these lines that the poet-speaker abruptly changes from disobedience to compliance. His acknowledgment of God's words allows the reader to reinterpret the earlier lines as the words of a misguided speaker. Significantly, it is the reader who must interpret this meaning, the poet will not do it for her. Thus, the religious poet steps back from his role as interpreter of type and becomes the type himself, while the reader takes on the role of neotype. The reader of "The Collar," after reading the final couplet, no longer fully identifies with the speaker's stance in the first 32 lines. He now understands the poem in light of the "suppressed knowledge" that, for the true Christian, there is no other path available than that of following Christ's example. Hence, the role that the religious poet has hitherto performed— that of interpreter— is transferred to the reader, providing a further link between the figure of the religious poet and his audience.

The poem "Redemption" works in the same manner as "The Collar," in that the reader is presented with a misguided speaker whose error in judgement is withheld until the final couplet. "Redemption" gives us the story of a poet-speaker who seeks his "landlord"-- Christ— in order to ask him for a new contract, since he feels he can no longer keep up with the payments demanded by the old.. The poet-speaker is presented as an Old Testament figure; he is working under "th'old" (l. 4) covenant which he desires to renegotiate. Significantly, Herbert does not choose to use an identifiable biblical type;

rather, he creates his own out of the figure of the religious poet. As with “The Collar,” the reader must act as interpreter in order to release the full meaning of the poem; which is that the speaker’s request has already been granted without his asking. In other words, the reader knows what the poet-speaker does not, that Christ has already granted him more than he can possibly demand. The reader, then, becomes the neotype who, unlike the poet-speaker, is aware that she exists within the new covenant.<sup>23</sup>

“The Bunch of Grapes” and “Joseph’s Coat” offer readings of biblical text that allow it to be lived by followers of the Christian faith. In this manner, the poetry, like the religious poet himself, functions as a mediator between divine text and experience. The poetry, which is a culmination of personal experience, study, history and divine enlightenment embodies the spirit of interpretation. It acts as a tool through which the audience gains access to divine enlightenment. Thus, the poetry is not self-consuming but self-affirming in that it allows both poet and reader to examine all aspects of their natures, both divine and secular. “The Collar” and “Redemption” work like a neotypological poem by placing the religious poet as the typological figure and encouraging readers to act as the neotype; to see themselves in the plight of the religious poet, while at the same time interpreting his error in judgement. Each poem urges the Christian to examine his life and actions in light of the knowledge given by scripture, and to alter those aspects of himself that do not reflect his position under Christ’s sacrifice. None of these speakers is passive; each actively seeks to define himself within both a secular and divine context,

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23. Other poems in which the speaker takes on the function of type are “Affliction (I),” and “Love Unkown.”

and in doing so reflect the unique position that humanity holds in relation to God.

## Conclusion

*A wreathed garland of deserved praise,  
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give  
(A Wreath ll. 1-2)*

Herbert's religious poet represents a culmination of both religious and aesthetic experience. He is a kind of spiritual musician, unique in the sense that he is at once the instrument, player, and composer. As God's instrument, the religious poet acts as a "secretary of praise" (Diana Benet's term), a means through which the divine will is able to reach the reading audience. As the player, he reinscribes God's holy word into his own unique song; he becomes an active interpreter of divine text and divinity itself. As the composer, the religious poet relies on his own personal experience to add to the divine story. These three facets of composition combine to form the religious poet's song which is, by extension of the metaphor, also the song of God. While the religious poet's will and divine will are not inseparable, they are able to merge in moments of artistic and philosophical beauty: in the poems of *The Temple*. Thus, Herbert's religious poet provides the missing link between the divine and secular. He is both in and out of this world, a position which mirrors that of divinity itself in its immanence and transcendence.

My reading of *The Temple* seeks to answer the question posed at the beginning of "The Windows": "Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?" It is my contention that the figure of the religious poet is created by Herbert as a response to this query. While every human can, in theory, follow God's word, it takes immense discipline to enable oneself to preach God's word. The religious poet is *not* like all other humans. On the one

hand, he is an example of the human effort to understand and abide by God's will; yet, he is also a liminal figure, one who dedicates his life to the sharing of knowledge brought about through both hard work and divine enlightenment. He exists, in a sense, "betwixt this world and that of Grace" ("Affliction (IV)" l. 6); between secularity and divinity. His efforts to understand divinity may sometimes remove him from his immediate reality; however, he never achieves direct union with the will of God.

So, how *can* "man preach thy eternall word"? First, he must turn to sacred text and reinscribe it in a way that makes it accessible to his audience. Herbert's religious poet does this partly through the use of sacred parody and mimesis. The self-conscious use of these rhetorical techniques calls the reader's attention to the fact that she is reading a human interpretation of biblical text. The religious poet is contemporizing a text that is thousands of years old, creating a means for understanding his own life and art, and offering his interpretation to the reader. He examines the nature of poetry and of language itself as a means of communicating religious experience and concludes that language does not necessarily cause experience to be "thrice removed" from either poet or reader. His poetry becomes a testament to the communicative power not just of language, but of poetry itself.

In his attempts to give his own interpretation of biblical text, the religious poet must also actively seek to understand divine will. In doing this, he is brought to an awareness of his own separation from divinity, which is the basis of his humanity. Through his failure to become God-like, the religious poet becomes mindful of what it

means to be human, of the true nature of his relationship with Christ. The religious poet learns to accept, even embrace, his moments of grief as being a direct result of Christ's redeeming sacrifice. To read Herbert's religious poet as a meditative poet leads the reader to disregard these moments of confusion and/or grief which are integral to understanding the human condition. For, despite his moments of despair and grief, the religious poet is able to discover that there is indeed a divine influence within his work. By striving to understand divinity, the religious poet enables God's "life to shine within" ("The Windows" l. 7) himself and his work.

Understanding his own nature as both secular and divine is essential to the composition of successful religious poetry; however, by itself it is not enough. The religious poet must also encourage his readers to do likewise, to feel God's presence within their own lives. Herbert's poetry accomplishes this through the careful construction and positioning of the religious poet persona. The figure of the religious poet becomes a representation of each Christian's duty to worship God and to follow Christ's example. He illustrates that the Christian is himself a product of divinity, and encourages him to read himself in light of the Christian tradition. The use of neotypology enables the religious poet to place himself and his readers firmly within this tradition. It allows the reader to see himself as an integral part of history, after the Fall and before redemption. Here, the distinctions between the religious poet and the average Christian are broken down, and the audience is encouraged to reenact, in their own lives, the process undertaken by the religious poet. The outcome for the average Christian will not



necessarily be religious poetry, but rather prayer and a deeper understanding of her own human nature.

A poem which, I believe, successfully portrays the nature of the religious poet, and of devotional poetry itself, is “A Wreath.” Within this poem, the religious poet presents himself and his poetry as a reflection of God’s holiness, albeit a muted reflection. The poem itself is a kind of wreath created by the religious poet as a homage to the crown of glory (the crown of thorns) worn by Christ. The circular motion of the poem also represents the life of the religious poet in his oscillations between understanding divinity and secularity:

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.  
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.

The poem’s forward motion is also a circular motion, representing the cycle of life and death as a return to God (ll. 4-6). The life of the religious poet is presented as a struggle to locate God within himself or his poetry (which is a reflection of himself). The proffered “wreath”-- the poem-- is a symbol of the religious poet’s task to understand and incorporate God’s will into his life (ll. 10-12). “A Wreath” is remarkable in its successful

unification of both poetic and religious rhetoric. The structure of the poem indicates the back and forth motion of faith itself, or at least of faith as represented by the speakers of the other poems, who often exchange joy for anguish and vice versa. “A Wreath” is an example of human wit working with divine enlightenment to produce a work that is at once pleasing to the intellect and the emotions. Within “A Wreath” the religious poet weaves himself, his art, and divinity together in a work of artistic and philosophical merit.

Religious understanding shines through Herbert’s poetry in a way that is, arguably, unequalled by later devotional poets. For the speakers of *The Temple*, Christianity is not just the best path one may take, it is also the only path to self-knowledge. The religious poet’s duty is to successfully combine religion and art without affecting the integrity of either discipline. Herbert’s poetry proves that this is not an impossible task; both artistic and moral intent remain intact, and are perhaps heightened by their combined usage. The union of religion and poetry is itself a kind of union between the secular and the divine, mirroring the job undertaken by the religious poet. Because it combines the two areas of religion and art, Herbert’s poetry invites critics from many different disciplines to examine and give their own interpretations of it. However, I believe the best approach to *The Temple* is given through Herbert’s own words in “A True Hymne”:

Yet slight not these few words:  
If truly said, they may take part  
Among the best in art.  
The fineness which a hymne or psalme affords,  
Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.

## Appendix A

The following are sonnets One and Three from Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*:

1

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show  
That she (deare she) might take some pleasure of my paine:  
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,  
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,  
I sought fit words to paint the blackest fact of woe,  
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:  
Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flow  
Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.  
But words came halting forth, wanting Inventions stay,  
Invention Natures child, fled step-dame Studies blowes,  
And others feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.  
Thus great with child to speake, and helpless in my throwes,  
Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,  
Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write.

3

Let daintie wits crie on the Sisters nine,  
That bravely maskt, their fancies may be told:  
Or *Pindares* Apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,  
Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold:  
Or else let them in statlier glorie shine,  
Ennobling new found Tropes with problemes old:  
Or with strange similies enrich each line,  
Of herbes or beastes, which *Inde* or *Afrike* hold.  
For me in sooth, no Muse but one I know:  
Phrases and Problemes from my reach do grow,  
And strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites.  
How then? Even thus: in *Stellas* face I reed,  
What Love and Beautie be, than all my deed  
But Copying is, what in her Nature writes.

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