Words, links, and meaning: The versification of George Herbert's The Temple.

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WORDS, LINES, AND MEANING:
THE VERSIFICATION OF GEORGE HERBERT'S THE TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Although the criticism of George Herbert's poetry has been sporadic over the centuries, today it has settled to a rather consistent admiration of his work. In this paper, I propose to deal with the technical aspects of his poetry: alliteration, assonance, meter, enjambment, caesura, repetition, and rhyme. Herbert uses these elements of versification to enhance the meaning of his poetry; this will be shown by a technical analysis of some of his poems.

Herbert's concern with versification appears in his careful choosing of words. The language ranges from the spare monosyllables of "Discipline" to the rich, complex language of "Dotage." This change in diction corresponds to the subject matter of the two poems.

The importance of his versification is also apparent in the poems in which he plays with words. Although these poems are often dismissed as being merely witty, a closer analysis shows how Herbert matched the word-play with the meaning of the poem, to produce an integrated work.
The conscious attention to versification in order to enhance meaning is apparent not only in Herbert's choice of words, but also in the shape of his lines. Some poems exhibit his use of meter, pauses, and enjambment either to emphasize important lines, to change the speed of appropriate lines, or simply to display in the lines themselves the meaning of the poem. In other poems, Herbert molds the shape of his lines to create a particular tone, or voice. In still other poems, the lines work to create an entire form for the poem, thus enhancing its meaning.

The analysis of a poem's versification, when combined with a full explication of the meaning of a poem, produces a much better understanding of Herbert's poetic skills. Without this attention to the technical aspects of Herbert's poetry, in fact, much of the meaning may be lost.
CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE

Only in this century have critics looked closely at George Herbert's *The Temple* with regard to the technical aspects of poetry: alliteration, assonance, meter, enjambment, caesura, repetition, rhyme, and so on. Up until the twentieth century, *The Temple* varied in its popularity and its value in the eyes of critics. Published in 1633 after Herbert's death, *The Temple* was at first immensely popular; fifteen editions came out, for example, before 1700. In addition, other poets attempted to imitate Herbert's techniques.

Henry Vaughan published his series of poems, *Silex Scintillans*, in 1650 and 1655 as an imitation of *The Temple*. Christopher Harvey imitated Herbert as well, in *The Synagogue*, which for many years was bound together with Herbert's *The Temple*.¹

In the eighteenth century, however, *The Temple* lost its initial popularity, as shown by the few editions that were published during that period. The public's taste in poetry had changed; Addison, for instance, writing in the *Spectator*, called Herbert's shaped poems examples of "false wit."² Admittedly, *The Temple* was still


being read but, for the most part, by people who read it because of Herbert's piety and religious devotion, not because he was thought to be in any sense a "great" poet.

Then in the nineteenth century *The Temple* began to make a comeback, although it was an erratic one. The first critic of any note to praise *The Temple* for its literary merit was Coleridge. Even after that, however, "...potential appreciation of Herbert often seems confined to well-bred members of the Church of England with a taste for the quaint. In 1885, Ernest Rhys could remark with justice, 'Quaintness is the term that has been most usually applied by the critics to Herbert's poetry,' and the word was used with its full aura of affectionate patronization."

Not until the "rediscovery" of John Donne did George Herbert come to be recognized fully for his literary merit. H. J. C. Grierson's edition of Donne's poems in 1912 and the early essays of T. S. Eliot aroused an interest in the metaphysicals and their poetry. After that, some brilliant criticism of Herbert was written, especially by P. E. Hutchinson whose 1953 edition is the standard edition of Herbert's poetry. In 1952 Rosemond Tuve published *A Reading of George Herbert*, in which she deals with the seventeenth century perspectives on his poetry. Following

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Although much work has recently been done on *The Temple*, most of this criticism deals with the explication of the poems. Various methods and theories have been developed as to the interpretation of these poems, and pages have been written discussing the meaning of this or that line. The technical aspects of Herbert's poetry, unfortunately, have been either neglected or dealt with summarily, with brief references or articles on one point—form, for example, or meter. This scattered criticism is valuable, of course; but when discussing a poet's literary merit, criticism of every element that the poet has used in his poetry is necessary to provide a complete and full view of his work. I intend, therefore, to break down some of the poems of *The Temple* into their various technical elements in order to show how skilfully Herbert made his poems. The first section of this analysis is devoted to Herbert's use of words; the second section is devoted to Herbert's combination of words into lines. Then, since the purpose of versification after all is to enhance the meaning of the poems, I will combine a discussion of all the technical matters with an explication of each poem, to show how a fuller understanding of Herbert's skill can be seen by both methods of criticism: technical and explicative.
II

WORDS

Beautie and beauteous words should go together. "The Forerunners." 6

Joseph Summers says that "Herbert's mastery is continually manifested in the extraordinary range of language within The Temple." 7

Indeed, although in many poems Herbert professes to speak plainly, in others his diction is on quite a high level. Summers also observes that "The one constant is that words and metaphors are suited to the subject and intent of the poem." 8 This control, this conscious choosing of the appropriate words, is what reveals Herbert's genius.

The range of language that Herbert uses is evident in a comparison between "Discipline" and "Dotage." The words in "Discipline" are plain, short, and spare. Most of them are monosyllables: "Throw...thy rod,/ Throw...thy wrath;/ O my God,/ Take the...path." The longest word in the entire poem is "frailties," which has only two syllables, and is long only because the sounds take long to pronounce.

The rhyme scheme of the poem is a simple abab cdcd efef, etc. In the first two stanzas, however, the words have been chosen so


7 Summers, p. 116

8 Summers, p. 118.
that not only is there a rhyme at the ends of the lines, but there
is also internal rhyme and assonance. In the first stanza, for
example, this occurs between line one and line three:

THROW away thy rod,
Throw away thy wrath:
  O my God,
Take the gentle path.

Again, in the second stanza it occurs between lines one and
three:

For my hearts desire
Unto thine is bent:
  I aspire
To a full consent.

Obviously, something is happening here; rhyming very short
lines is difficult enough, but when internal rhymes occur in such
short lines without the lines becoming doggerel, and all the words
have been chosen for their simple, lean quality, there must be a
reason. Indeed, this reason appears in the very title of the
poem, “Discipline.” In this poem, the poet advises God the
way to discipline the poet—through love, not wrath and physical
punishment (the rod). One wonders, however, why the poem shows so
much harshness and discipline, when God is being asked to be loving,
not harsh. The answer lies in the second stanza, in which the poet
says that his desire is bent wholly unto God’s, and that he aspires
to a full consent, or compliance with God’s commands. Thus, the
harsh discipline that appears in the choice of words and rhyme of
this poem, as well as in the short lines, is the poet’s way of
saying, “You don’t have to be harsh with me—look how well I can
discipline myself of my own accord, simply because I want to do
your will." Clearly, in this poem, especially in the first two stanzas, Herbert's manipulation of the words adds a tremendous amount of meaning, and a much better understanding of the poem results from studying the words.

In contrast to the simple language of "Discipline" is the rich, complex language of "Dotage." Dealing with life on earth as opposed to the spiritual life with the mind and heart looking towards God, the words and lines of this poem are striking in their roughness, harsh sounds, and polysyllabic words:

FALSE glozing pleasures, casks of happinesse, Foolish night-fires, womens and childrens wishes, Chases in Arras, guilded espitnesse, Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career, Embroider'd lyes, nothing between two dishes; These are the pleasures here.

The first line takes long to say because of the sounds of the words. The repetition of the "l" and the "s" in the first three words creates an alluring and sinfully pleasing sound. This superficially pleasing start to the line is appropriate, for the first word is "false," and the line deals with the "glosing" pleasures, that is, "flattering, coaxing, cajoling" pleasures on this earth. Again, in the second half of the line, a sound that can be pleasurable is made harsh—the "s" surrounds the hard sound of the "k" in "casks," and the assonance between "casks" and "happinesse" is also a hard, open vowel sound. "Casks of happinesse" probably refers to wine, which was stored in casks in the seventeenth century. It is an ironic comment on the drinking habits of mortal men, who think that wine brings them happiness,
while it is, in fact, only a "false glazing pleasure."

The first word of the second line, "foolish," is emphasized by the "f" in the word "false" in the preceding line. Again, the "f" is heard in "night-fires," which means "will-o'-'the-wisps," and is another example of a flighty, false pleasure.

With the second half of line two begins a hypnotic passage which draws the reader into the sounds and rhythms created by the words, just as man is mesmerized by the pleasures of the world, and falls under their spell. The similar sounds at the ends of the words "women's" and "children's" start this hypnotic passage, and that sound is echoed slightly in "wishes," and then intensifies with the words "Chases in Arras" in the next line. The driving force of this passage slows down in "gilded emptiness," which returns to the "g" and "l" sounds of "glossing," and rhymes with "happiness," thus emphasizing what this happiness really is: emptiness.

Herbert continues this list with "shadows well mounted," that is, portraits of men on their horses, popular in the seventeenth century, "dreams in a career," elaborate lies, and "nothing between two dishes," all of which exemplify "gilded emptiness." With the word "dishes," one can see that even the rhyme scheme is intricate: abacbc. Like the complex words, whose sounds echo and intertwine, the rhyme scheme also is intertwined.

The content of this poem along with the title explains why Herbert uses this kind of diction. "Dotage" means a "folly," and
the richness of the language is very appropriate for the riches and pleasures of this world that are being described as man's follies. The words, therefore, support and help to explain the meaning of the poem. This is a far cry from the plain language of "Discipline."

Obviously, then, Herbert chooses words very carefully so that they subtly support his meaning. In other poems, however, this attention to words is not so subtle. These are the poems in which Herbert has called attention to particular words by playing with them. Many people have treated these poems with less seriousness than they deserve, simply because they exhibit so much wit.

Joseph Summers, however, points out that "aside from the courtiers to whom any exercise in ingenuity was welcome, this type of poem had its serious religious adherents in the seventeenth century. If biblical exegesis demanded the solution of anagrams, and if the good man was truly 'willing to spiritualize everything,' the composition of such poetry was a logical result."

Indeed, Herbert used each form only once, which is an indication that he took these poems seriously, and was not using them merely to show off his wit. As Summers continues, "In The Temple there is one true anagram (labelled as such), one echo poem, one 'hidden acrostic,' one poem based on the double interpretation of initials, one based on a syllabic pun, and 'Paradise,' which can only be described as a 'pruning poem.' For his unique example of

9 Summers, p. 138.
each type, Herbert usually chose that Christian subject which was most clearly illuminated by the device.\textsuperscript{10}

In "Paradise," for example, Herbert's choice of subject for this particular kind of word-play becomes evident as the poem progresses, and the word-play in turn reinforces the understanding of the subject:

\begin{quote}
I BLESSE thee, Lord, because I GROW
Among thy trees, which in a ROW
To thee both fruit and order OW.

What open force, or hidden CHARM
Can blast my fruit, or bring me HARM,
While the inclosure is thine ARM?

Inclosse me still for fear I START.
Be to me rather sharp and TART,
Then let me want thy hand & ART.

When thou dost greater judgements SPARE,
And with thy knife but prune and PARE,
Ev'n fruitfull trees more fruitfull ARE.

Such sharpnes shows the sweetest FRED;
Such cuttings rather heal then REND;
And such beginnings touch their END.
\end{quote}

The poem is directed to God, and in the first stanza the word-play becomes obvious: the last word in the line is shortened by eliminating one letter in each successive line. The image contained in the first stanza, and throughout the poem, is of the speaker as one of God's trees. He admits that he owes "both fruit and order" to God, and in the second stanza he asks what harm can possibly come to him while he is being protected by God. In the

\textsuperscript{10} Summers, p. 138.
third stanza, however, the speaker asks God to be more harsh to
him, so that he will never lack God's "hand of ART." Then follows
the fourth stanza, where the purpose of this word-play becomes
clear. The speaker tells God to "prune and PARE" his trees so
that they are more fruitful. Thus, the reader can now see that
all along Herbert has been "pruning" his own words in each stanza,
perhaps so that his poem is more fruitful, just as God prunes
his vine (man), so that he draws closer to God and becomes more
fruitful. Clearly, this poem has serious intentions, and it
was not written with frivolous purposes in mind.

Another of these witty poems is "Anagram," which consists
of only one couplet:

\[
\text{Ana-} \{\text{MARY}\} \text{grass.}
\]

\[
\text{HOW well her name an \textit{Army} doth present,}
\]
\[
\text{In whom the \textit{Lord of Hosts} did pitch his tent!}
\]

This is the perfect form for this poem, for "Mary" and "army"
were often connected in verses and sermons of the day. Herbert
does not need to elaborate the known connections between Mary
and army—he simply points out the metaphor of Christ "pitching
his tent" in Mary, or growing in her womb. As Rosemond Tuve says,
"Two traditional associations made this poem both less startling
and more enjoyable to its writer and its first readers than to us.
The first is the image of an \textit{army} with banners for the Virgin
Mary, in biblical commentary, in the liturgy of many of her
feasts, and in the motets which a person knowledgeable about
church-music would know." The second association is "to think of that Army as 'The Church Militant' as well as Mary....The last line is not only, in other words, a reference to the event of the Incarnation, but to the Incarnation as itself a great metaphor." Thus, the two words work together, and this play on words is completely appropriate for its subject.

Another poem in which Herbert uses words for an important effect is "Heaven," in which the last sound of every line is repeated in the next line as the answer to a question posed in the first line:

O WHO will show me those delights on high? Echo. I.
Thou Echo, thou art mortall, all men know. Echo. No.
Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves? Echo. Leaves.
And are there any leaves, that still abide? Echo. Bide.
What leaves are they? impart the matter wholly. Echo. Holy.
Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse? Echo. Yes.
Then tell me, what is that supreme delight? Echo. Light.
Light to the minde: what shall the will enjoy? Echo. Joy.
But are there cares and business with the pleasure? Echo. Leisure.
Light, joy, and leisure; but shall they persever? Echo. Ever.

"Echo" in this poem signifies that this is "an artifice in

12 Tuve, p. 139.
verse, by which one line is made to consist of a repetition
(such as might be given a literal echo) of the concluding syl-
lables of the preceding line, so as to supply an answer to the
question contained in it, or otherwise to give a continuous
sense" (OED). Since this was apparently a popular device in
Herbert's day, he would have been familiar with it, and we
know that at least he did not purposely invent this form.
We do, however, have to ask why he chose this particular
form for his poem on Heaven. Admittedly, the poem is clever,
but it contains much more besides the tricky answers to the
questions.

For one thing, the poem is unified; Herbert does not
simply ask a string of questions which say "How clever I am!"
One question leads into the other until the entire poem inten-
sifies at the end with the line "Light, joy, and leisure; but shall
they persever?" The first three words of that line were the
echoes of the previous three questions. Thus, while the poem is
witty, it is also well-written. This, however, still does not
answer why Herbert chose this form. Certainly, his reason is not
as obvious as in "Paradise" or "Anagram." Yet, within the poem
Herbert tells why he has chosen this form for his poem.

He first attacks the problem in line three, when he says that
surely the Echo is mortal, and will go the way of all mortals
eventually. The Echo, however, contradicts him. Herbert's echo,
then, is much more than the simple reverberation of sound. It
must be some kind of entity in itself, capable of existing without man. The poet continues, as in disbelief, to question the Echo in order to find the truth. He then asks if the echo was not born "among the trees and leaves"; that is, when man calls out, it often seems that the source of the echo is in the surrounding countryside. The Echo answers "Leaves," and, since each answer of the Echo changes the meaning of the last word in some way, we know that he does not mean the green leaves of trees. The poet is still puzzled, as he thinks that all the leaves have gone on Doomsday. He finally asks for clarification as to what "leaves" the Echo means, and the Echo tells him that they are Holy leaves, which is a reference to the Word of God. "Leaves," then, changes to mean "pages."

Finally, in line eleven, we discover who this Echo is—it is the Word of God ("holy leaves"), the Echo of bliss. The holy leaves, then, are derived from bliss, and we also learn that God's bliss is much greater than its echo in the Bible. The discovery of the identity of the Echo completed, the poem enters the concluding verses which delineate the three things that shall be found in heaven: light, joy, and leisure.

In addition to the elaborate working-out of the identity of the Echo in the poem, perhaps another reason for using this form is to portray the ethereal quality of Heaven. Echoes seem to be carried on the wind, and the ring of sounds in the poem is at once other-worldly and reassuring.
In yet another poem in which Herbert deals specifically with words, he shows relationships between things by using similar words in conjunction with one another. This poem is "The Water-course." A "water-course" meant a stream of running water, but it also meant "an artificial channel" (OED), a meaning that fits this poem and helps to explain why Herbert has set up these words together.

THOU who dost dwell and linger here below,  
Since the condition of this world is frail,  
Where of all plants afflictions soonest grow;  
If troubles overtake thee, do not wail:

For who can look for lease, that loveth {Life?  
Strife?  

But rather turn the pipe and waters course  
To serve thy sinnes, and furnish thee with store  
Of sov'reign tears, springing from true remorse;  
That so in purenesse thou mayst his adore.

Who gives to man, as he sees fit, {Salvation.  

Herbert begins by addressing those who dwell "here below," that is, on earth. He goes on to say that since the world is frail and contains many afflictions, people should not wail over their troubles. The image of afflictions as plants springing up all over the world is appropriate, since it relates to the plants and fertile growth that would naturally take place around a water-course. These plants, however, are not desired by man. It is after these lines that Herbert uses the word-play: "For who can look for lease, that loveth {Life?  
Strife?  

By pitting these words against each other, Herbert emphasizes their relationships to each other not only in sound, but in
meaning. This juxtaposition, then, makes the reader consider what meanings these words have in relation to one another.

The line itself has two possible meanings, depending on what "lesse" refers to. First of all, "lesse" can refer to "troubles" in the previous line, in which case the line says, "How can someone who loves life expect less troubles?" The second meaning is "You can't get any lower than to love life." That is, one cannot look for less because there is nothing lower than loving life. Whichever reading is used, it is obvious that the speaker is against the love of life, of the things of this earth. It becomes clear, then, why he couples "life" with "strife," for the love of life will bring only strife—troubles, pains, and hardships—"afflictions." This juxtaposition of the two words says much more, and makes the relationship much more intense, than if Herbert had compared life with strife, or said that life is strife. At the end of the line, then, the reader can choose whichever word he wants, for they are one and the same.

In the second stanza, Herbert continues with the image of a water-course by telling people that they must control this stream, which now refers to tears ("do not wail" in stanza one). Here it becomes clear that this water-course is the artificial, man-made channel which can and should be controlled by man. Instead of wailing at the troubles of the world, man should cry for his own sins, and feel remorse for them. He should do this so that he may purely adore Christ, who determines whether or not man shall
be saved. Again, the juxtaposition of the two words, in this case, "Salvation" and "Damnation," points out their relationship and emphasizes their connection in a way that no other comparison can. Although in this case the words do not mean the same thing, they are both determined by Christ, who deals them out "as he sees fit." There is also no avoiding at least one of them—that is, man is going to be saved or damned, this is the choice, and there is nothing in between. There is also in these words an implication that if man does not heed the message of this poem by leaving his love of life and looking toward Christ, he will be damned.

Thus, one can see that this word-play is not merely clever or witty. Herbert has chosen his words well, and he has treated a serious subject here using this device to produce an effect that could not be duplicated using any other method.

Three other poems in The Temple in which Herbert looks closely at words all deal with Jesus Christ. These are "JESU," "Love-Joy," and "The Sonne." In each of these poems Herbert uses his play with words to support the meaning of the poem and to add to the understanding of his subject in a way that would not be possible without the word-play.

The first of these poems, "JESU," deals with breaking up and becoming whole again:

JESU is in my heart, his sacred name
Is deeply carved there; but th'other week
A great affliction broke the little frame,
Ev'n all to pieces, which I went to seek,
And first I found the corner, where was J,
After, where ES, and next where U was graved.
When I had got these parcels, instantly
I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
That to my broken heart he was I ease you,
And to my whole is JESU.

The image throughout the poem is of the word "JESU" carved on the speaker's heart. Thus, the heart and Jesu are closely connected—in fact, inseparable. But some affliction broke his heart into pieces which he went to look for. Herbert then creates the marvellous image of the speaker looking around for the pieces of his heart, finding them, and piecing them together. He discovers when he does this, that if the word "JESU" is broken apart, it reads "I ease you," or "J" (this was often used as an "i" in the seventeenth century), "ES," "U." And, of course, when he pieces it together it reads "JESU." This discovery alone can be called witty; however, it is the coupling of this word-play with the image of the heart that shows Herbert's genius. He does not want only to point out how clever this word-play is; he wants to tell the reader something serious about his relationship to God, and this happens to be the best way to do it. Thus, when the speaker's heart has been broken, like the word "JESU," Christ eases his heart. When his heart is whole again, Christ takes up residence inside it once more.

In the second poem of this group Herbert also plays with words—in this case the initials of "Jesus Christ," "J" and "C":
AS on a window late I cast mine eye,
I saw a vine drop grapes with J and C
Anneal’d on every bunch. One standing by
Ask’d what it meant. I, who am never loth
To spend my judgement, said, It seem’d to me
To be the bodie and the letters both
Of Joy and Charitie. Sir, you have not miss’d,
The man reply’d; It figures JESUS CHRIST.

In this poem, "Lovejoy," Herbert tells us something about Jesus Christ by relating his initials to something else. He begins by creating a situation in which the speaker looks at a window, probably a stained glass window which contained a picture of a grape vine with "J and C/Anneal’d on every bunch." While for the twentieth-century reader this may seem a ridiculous situation, (why would someone put Christ’s initials on grapes?), it was perfectly understandable and appropriate for the seventeenth century. Rosemond Tuve points out that there were a "set of conceits clustered around the ancient symbol of Christ as the miraculous grape-bunch which figured forth the inheritance of the Chosen People, crossing over Jordan into the Promised Land." This image often appeared in stained glass windows. If the reader does not know this, the poem seems to have "over-cleverness and toy-like triviality." With this knowledge, however, the reader can see how natural and meaningful this image is.

"Anneal’d" means "to burn in colours upon glass, earthen-

13 Tuve, p. 112.
14 Tuve, p. 132.
ware, or metal, to enamel by encaustic process" (OED). This is a precise word to describe the stained glass, and thus the reader knows exactly what the situation is. The speaker continues by saying that someone standing by him asked what it meant, and he eagerly answered, perhaps with a bit of pride in his understanding, that it was the "bodie and the letters both" of Joy and Charity. Here, of course, is where the word-play begins, by taking Christ's initials and applying the words "Joy" and "Charitie" to them. But Herbert writes not only "letters," but "bodie," which means "embodied manifestation." The grapes, then, are the "body" or figure of Joy and Charity, and the letters are the initials. The man standing by agrees with Herbert's interpretation of the initials and says, indeed, it "figures JESUS CHRIST." Thus, we can see the levels of representation here: the letters "J" and "C" stand for both "Joy" and "Charitie," and "Jesus Christ." We find, however, that these are one and the same when we consider the figuring of the bunch of grapes, for if the grapes are the "bodie" of Joy and Charity, and they also figure Jesus Christ, then Jesus and Joy and Charity are one.

One last note—the poem is called "Love-Joy" as a reference to the two words "joy" and "charity." "Charity:" in the seventeenth century still retained its meaning of Caritas, or love.

In the final of these three poems, "The Sonne," word-play is not so much used as discussed by Herbert:

15 Tuve, p. 133.
As soon as the seventeenth-century reader saw the poem's title, "The Sonne," he would have recognized it as a pun. It is this pun that Herbert discusses here. He begins by referring to other nations who speak other languages. He says that one should let them boast what variety their language has; he likes the English language, as well as its men and its land. Those who have problems with English lack wit; certainly not words; the problem is in the person, not in the language.

Then, in line five, Herbert reveals the reason for all this pride in the English language; it gives only one name to "parents issue," that is, "son," and the "bright starre," the "sun." Once he has pointed out this homonym, he continues by elaborating on the two words. Not only do they sound alike, but they also have many things in common and are closely related.

He shows this relationship by saying that a son is light and fruit to his father. The son is fruit in that he is the fruit, the creation, of his father. He is light because he enlightens,
helps, and is virtuous; thus, he is a "fruitfull flame" that follows after the father's "dimnesse," his faltering in old age. This son was the result of the light and fruit which derived at first from Adam, the first man in the East, and can be traced from Adam in the East to his posterity in the West in Herbert's time.

Thus, Herbert concludes, in only one word English depicts both the Lord's humility, which is that he clothed himself in flesh to be a "son," as well as his godliness as a "sun." The pun, then, has been explained in detail, as well as simply being used cleverly in this poem. Again, Herbert has used words not simply for the cleverness they exhibit, but to make his meaning clear and to give the reader a better understanding of Christ.

Herbert, in addition to varying his levels of diction and using clever plays on words, also uses alliteration to further the meaning of his poetry. An example of this appears in the poem "Grace" in which the poet calls for help from God.

Alliteration first appears in the first stanza, as Herbert describes his hopeless condition on earth:

MY stock lies dead, and no increase
Doth my dull husbandrie improve:
0 let thy graces without cease
Drop from above!

The "d's" in "dead," "Doth," "dull," and even "husbandrie" create a kind of rhythm or chant of death, and they certainly make the
lines sound dull. He uses the image of a farmer whose stock, or cattle, are all dead, and no prosperity or fruitfulness improves his farming. Because of this, he calls for help in the form of God’s grace dropping from heaven. Herbert is referring not to an actual farm, of course, but to the condition of his own soul.

In the second stanza Herbert sets up a hypothetical situation in which the sun would disappear, the earth would become a dungeon, and all of God’s creation would become prisoners of night. Again, alliteration contributes to the meaning of this stanza. Instead of the dull “d’s” of the first, however, Herbert now uses the sharp, harsh sounds of “s”:

If still the sunne should hide his face,
Thy house would but a dungeon prove,
Thy works nights captives: O let grace
Drop from above!

These “s’s” gradually build up to a climax in the third line of the stanza with “works nights captives,” a phrase which is difficult and harsh to say, and which makes the reader plunge into a kind of prison by trying to read it. This alliteration stops only with the refrain, which deals with the soothing grace of God.

In the third stanza alliteration is used for even another purpose—to further comparison between two things that drop from above:
The dew doth ev’ry morning fall;  
And shall the dew outstrip thy Dove?  
The dew, for which grass cannot call,  
   Drop from above.

These two things are the “dew” and the “dove,” or holy spirit of God. By pitting these familiar-sounding words against each other, Herbert emphasizes their similarities, especially in the second line in which those two words take the most accented feet of the line. Both the dew and the dove, or grace, fall from the sky. The dew, however, comes uncalled for, and seems to be more than the dove, which is being called for desperately by the poet.

The alliteration in the fourth stanza relates it to the first, furthering the unity in the poem:

Death is still working like a mole,  
And digs my grave at each remove;  
Let grace work too, and on my soul  
   Drop from above.

“Death” and “digs” reflect the dull, dead sounds of stanza one. Another slight alliteration and assonance occur here, however, which again pit two words against each other: “grave” and “grace.” These two words are exactly alike apart from one letter, yet only grace can save him from death’s grave.

The fifth stanza is the last one that contains alliteration:

Sinne is still hammering my heart  
Unto a hardnesse, void of love;  
Let suppling grace, to crosse his art,  
   Drop from above.
Here the sounds are "h's," which are harsh and appropriate for the hardness of his heart without love. Thus, each stanza describes a condition of the poet, and each stanza contains alliteration or assonance to intensify the images. Only the last stanza does not contain such sounds, and this is the only stanza that does not deal with a description of the condition of the poet:

O come! for thou dost know the way;
Or if to me thou wilt not move,
Remove me, where I need not say,
  Drop from above.

The only noticeably clever choice of words here is the relationship between "move" and "remove." If grace will not come down to him on earth, he wants to be removed to where he does not have to ask for grace, that is, heaven. This molding of the word "move," however, does not produce some of the harsh results that earlier alliteration had—and rightly so, for this is the only stanza that deals with a possible life away from earth, and therefore the sounds are much smoother and more pleasant than the sounds in the previous stanzas.

Finally, it would be enlightening to look at a poem in which Herbert discusses the problem of words, to see what his views are on the use of appropriate words. This poem is "The Forerunners":

The harbingers are come. See, see their mark;
White is their colour, and behold my head.
But must they have my brain? must they dispart
Those sparkling notions, which therein were bred?
Must dulness turn me to a clod?
Yet have they left me, Thou art still my God.

Good men ye be, to leave me my best room,
Ev'n all my heart, and what is lodged there;
I passe not, I, what of the rest become,
So Thou art still my God, be out of fear.
He will be pleased with that dittie;
And if I please him, I write fine and witty.

Farewell sweet phrases, lovely metaphors,
But will ye leave me thus? when ye before
Of stews and brothels onely knew the doores,
Then did I wash you with my tears, and more,
Brought you to Church well drest and clad.
My God must have my best, ev'n all I had.

Lovely enchanting language, sugar-cane,
Hony of roses, whither wilt thou flie?
Hath some fond love tic'd thee to thy bane?
And wilt thou leave the Church, and love a stie?
Fie, thou wilt soil thy broider'd coat,
And hurt thy self, and him that sings the note.

Let foolish lovers, if they will love dung,
With canvas, not with arras, clothe their shame:
Let fannie speak in her own native tongue.
True beautie dwells on high; ours is a flame
But borrow'd thence to light us thither.
Beautie and beauteous words should go together.

Yet if you go, I passe not; take your way:
For, Thou art still my God, is all that ye
Perhaps with more embellishment can say.
Go to birds of spring: let winter have his fee:
Let a bleak paleness chalk the doore,
So all within be livelier than before.

The first stanza deals with the witticisms that lie in the
speaker's brain. A "harbinger" is "one that goes before and an-
nounces the approach of someone; a forerunner"(OED). In this case,
these harbingers are signs of old age—harbingers of death. After
announcing that these signs have come, the speaker points to their mark, which is his hair turning white. After admitting that they have his head, he questions whether they have to take his brain. He begins to complain about their taking all the wit that was bred in his brain, asking question after question in a kind of complaint. In the last line of the stanza, however, he is able to console himself. Even though the witty phrases and words have left his brain, he still has God and he can still aver his belief in plain language. This phrase in italics appears in variations throughout *The Temple*, whenever Herbert wants to call attention to an important, plainly stated passage.

In the second stanza the speaker addresses these harbingers, and says that they are good men because they have left him his best room, that is, his heart, along with what is lodged there, which would probably be his belief in God. He does not care what happens to the rest of him (his body and his wit), as long as he can say "Thou art still my God." He then says that God will be pleased with that saying; and that is all that is important to Herbert—pleasing God. No matter how plain and dull his words are, if they please God, his lines are fine and witty.

In spite of the second stanza in which he has just convinced himself that he doesn't really mind losing his witty language, in the third stanza the speaker again laments the loss of "sweet phrases" and "lovely metaphors." He asks them almost plaintively
if they will, indeed, leave him in this way. He then reminds
them, as if to make them feel guilty about leaving him, that
before he came along they knew only the doors of stews and brothels.
"Stews" is another name for brothel. By this, the speaker means
that before he came around, these lovely words were used only
in secular love poetry. Then, however, he washed the language
with his tears. By his sincerity and repentance, he cleaned
it and even took it to Church "well drest and clad." He did
this so that God would have his best, even though this was all
he had.

Again, in the fourth stanza he addresses this language.
Notice that as he addresses the language, his language itself
becomes beautiful. He probably cannot help it, as he is talk-
ing to, about, and with the same things: beautiful language.
He asks the language again where it is going. He asks if some
"fond love," perhaps another love poet, has enticed this lan-
guage to its harm. He questions whether it should leave the
Church and love a "stie," "an abode of bestial lust, or of mo-
ral pollution generally; a place inhabited or frequented by the
morally degraded" (OED). Then he mildly curses the language
for doing this, saying that it will soil its embroidered coat,
the coat that was probably given it by its elevation at the
hands of Herbert. The language will also hurt itself by gaining
a bad reputation, and it will hurt "him that sings the note."
This is most likely a reference to Herbert, or the poet who
writes the poetry, that is, since the note.

In the fifth stanza he tries another argument to persuade this beautiful language to stay with him. This argument begins with an image of clothing as he introduces foolish lovers, those who deal in secular, not religious matters, and who love dung—and notice, as he speaks of these matters, his language, too, lowers itself. Just in the use of the word "dung," one can see how Herbert, of course, cannot help but lower the level of diction when he describes these people. He says let them clothe themselves with canvas, a rough and low-class cloth, not with arras, "a rich tapestry fabric, in which figures and scenes are woven in colours" (OED). They should use canvas to clothe their shame. He is really speaking, of course, of the kind of language they should use—low levels of diction, instead of rich, beautiful language. Folly, he says, should speak in her own native tongue; "Folly" means either "the quality or state of being foolish or deficient in understanding" or "lewdness, wantonness" (OED). Whatever the meaning here, and I think that both work, folly should use words matching its own nature.

The speaker then becomes rather neoplatonic as he gives his views on beauty. He says that true beauty dwells on high, not on earth. Our beauty is only a flame that we borrow to light our way to the true beauty which resides in heaven—an interesting twist of the Platonic notions. Thus, he concludes that beauty and beauteous words should go together.
In the final stanza the speaker returns to his attitude in the second stanza, in which he seems not to care if beautiful words should leave him. He tells them that, if they do go, he does not care. In fact, he tells them to be on their way because in the end, when it all comes down to the truth, all that these beautiful words can say is "Thou art still my God," only with more embellishment. Thus, the only thing that is leaving the speaker is his embellishment, certainly not his true meaning.

The speaker then compares these beautiful words to the birds of spring. He tells them to leave so that winter can move in, or "have his fee." Thus, he puts this event into the cycle of nature, and seems to accept it as one must accept the passage of time and of seasons. Just as winter inevitably takes over the spring, so does old age and the loss of wit take over youth and sparkling notions. In acceptance, then, he says "Let a bleak paleness chalk the doore," which means let winter come, or let me grow old and have white hair; this means only that everything within will be livelier than before. That is, while his body is slowing down, just as the season seems to slow down in winter, his mind and his faith become more lively, just as people bring their activities indoors in the winter.

Thus, we see in this poem a number of statements by Herbert that are relevant to his use of words in other poems. First, as long as the verse pleases God, it does not matter whether it is plain or fancy. Second, God is all and must have all, so it is
all right to use fancy language in poems to and about him. Third, words should be appropriate to the meaning the poet wants to communicate, and fourth, in the end, both the plain and fancy words say the same thing. This is a rather complex theory on the use of language, but one that is, in fact, appropriate to his other poems.

Clearly, then, one can see that George Herbert is a true artist when he deals with words. As we saw in "Discipline" and "Dotage," Herbert varies the level of diction according to the meaning of his poem. He also consciously plays with words, as we saw in a number of his poems, and yet he does this not so much to show his facility and wit as to enhance the reader's understanding of his poems. And finally, we saw how Herbert uses alliteration; again, not to show off his verbal abilities, but to emphasize the meaning of his poems. Herbert does indeed choose the right words for the right things—or as he says it, "Beautie and beauteous words should go together."
May no lines passe, except they do their dutie  
Not to a true, but painted chair?

"Jordan (I)"

Just as Herbert used words in a variety of ways to create the effect that he wanted and that was appropriate for his poem, he also carefully molded the shape of his lines for the same reason. This attention to the shape of his lines appears throughout The Temple. Some poems exhibit his use of meter, pauses, and enjambment either to emphasize important lines, to change the speed of appropriate lines, or simply to display in the lines themselves the meaning of the poem—therefore, the lines enhance the meaning. In other poems, Herbert molds the shape of his lines to create a particular tone, or voice. In still other poems, the lines work to create an entire form for the poem, thus enhancing its meaning.

One of the most moving occurrences of Herbert's use of meter, speed, and shape of the lines to enhance the meaning of his poetry appears in a stanza of "The Sacrifice." This poem is spoken by Christ, and describes his ordeal and agony at his crucifixion. Basically, the poem is a kind of complaint against all that man has done to him. Christ first calls out to those who "passe by,"
presumably as he is on the cross. Then he tells of his betrayal by Judas, the sleeping of his disciples when he told them to watch, his capture by the Romans, his false accusations, his confrontations with Herod and Pilate, the freeing of a murderer and condemnation by his own people, his physical punishment, his crown of thorns, the carrying of his own cross, and his hanging on the cross. This is a lament full of despair and anguish, emphasized by the repetition of a refrain at the end of each stanza: "Was ever grief like mine?"

The poem comes to a climax in the fifty-fourth stanza as Christ hangs on the cross, and the grief and pain seem to overcome him completely:

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

Up until this point, the lines have been moving in more or less regular iambic pentameter for three lines, and then the refrain in iambic trimeter. In this stanza, the first two lines are still iambic pentameter, although the pauses in the line certainly make it sound broken, as they contribute to the reader's image of a gasping, sorrowful Christ on the cross. The climax really comes in the third line of that stanza— or, rather, it doesn't come as part of the words in the line, for it is effected by the complete breaking off of the line into nothing—silence. Surely, this is the supreme agony, the supreme grief. The reader
is left hanging, alone, at the end of the line just as Christ hung alone on the cross, and this is probably the closest any poem could come to describing the horrible pain of that event—by not describing it at all, as it is too enormous to be put into words. Thus, in this first instance, Herbert’s genius is evident in his control of his lines.

In another very different poem, Herbert controls the shape of his lines to emphasize the important parts in his poem, and to draw them together into a closer relationship. This poem is “The Agony.” It contains three six-line stanzas; the first line is iambic tetrameter, the second and third are iambic pentameter, the fourth is iambic tetrameter, and the last two are iambic pentameter. Herbert molds the shape of his lines, thereby emphasizing them, by creating variations in this base meter.

The poem begins with a discussion of how man has studied and measured practically everything imaginable:

PHILOSOPHERS have measur’d mountains,
Fathom’d the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
Walk’d with a staffe to heav’n, and traced fountains:
But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove:
Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love.

The only things that man has not measured, which, by the way, it
would be better for him to measure, are sin and love. Notice that these two words have been placed in probably the most important place in the stanza, and rightly so, for they are the two most important words in the poem, as one can see in the last two stanzas. Not only do they occupy the last part of the last line in the stanza, but they are preceded by a caesura which breaks the line in half, emphasizing them even more: "Yet few there are that sound them! Sinne and Love."

In the next stanza, it is apparent that Herbert is once again molding the shape of his lines to emphasize those that he feels are important:

Who would know Sinne, let him repair
Unto Mount Olivet, there shall he see
A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
His skinne, his garments bloudie be.
Sinne is that pressse and vice, which foreoth pain
To hunt his cruel food through evey vein.

In the first line of the stanza, by placing a pause after the word "Sinne," Herbert causes the reader to linger over that word, thus emphasizing it. Indeed, the entire stanza is an instruction for knowing sin. As the lines move on, Herbert describes the agonies of Christ as he bore all the sins of the world on his shoulders. The meter is quite regular here, although the placement of pauses and enjambment prevent it from sounding too regular. Suddenly,
in the fifth line of the stanza, the regular rhythm is jarred by an opening choriamb. Again, the heavy stress is placed on the word "sin," and this line stands out above all the others in the stanza because of its irregularity and forcefulness.

Herbert, however, does not stop here. He wants to tie together the words "sin" and "love," perhaps just as he wanted to show the close relationship between "life" and "strife," "salvation" and "damnation" in "The Water-course." Thus, the last stanza has the same meter as the second stanza, only this one deals with love:

Who knows not Love, let him assay
And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike
Did set again approach, then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood, but I, as wine.

Again, a pause occurs after the important word in the first line, this time "love." Thus, this same structure of lines puts both sin and love into parallel lines, drawing them closer together.

Again, the meter is regular until the next to the last line, when the line opens with a choriamb, placing the stress on the word "love." Once again, love has been pitted against sin, carrying the same position in the line as well as the same amount of stress. Also again, the meter returns to its regularity in the last line, thus
making the next to the last line parallel in its irregularity to the irregular line of the second stanza.

Herbert, then, while tying together both love and sin in the meaning of the poem, also ties them together more subtly by his manipulation of the shape of his lines, creating a tightly-knit, unified poem—a example, again, of his genius.

"Constancie" offers Herbert yet another chance to mold the shape of his line to exhibit in the line itself what he talks about with his words. This is most apparent in three of the poem’s seven stanzas. The first instance occurs in the first stanza:

\[ \text{WHO is the honest man?} \]
\[ \text{He that doth still and strongly good pursue,} \]
\[ \text{To God, his neighbour, and himself most true;} \]
\[ \text{Whom neither force nor fawning can} \]
\[ \text{Unpinne, or wrench from giving all their due.} \]

After asking who the honest man is, the stanza proceeds to answer the question: He is that man who always and strongly pursues good, and who is true to himself, his neighbor, and God. The lines themselves add to the meaning of this answer by strongly ringing out the regular meter, and being true to it. The regularity or constancy of the lines is apparent, too, in the end stops which appear regularly at the end of each of the first three lines. When Herbert speaks of what the honest man is not,
however, the line is enjambed, and the expected endstop does not occur just as Herbert talks about unpinning, or wrenching. Thus the line, too, is slightly wrenched, although it remains constant to its meter.

Again, in the second stanza, Herbert molds the shape of his lines to correspond to the meaning:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Whose honesty is not} & \\
\text{So loose or easy, that a ruffling wind} & \\
\text{Can blow away, or glittering look it blindes;} & \\
\text{Who rides his sure and even trot,} & \\
\text{While the world now rides by, now lags behinde.}
\end{align*}
\]

The first four lines of this stanza are in their regular iambic rhythms, although the words "ruffling" and "glittering" cause a slight increase in the lengths of the lines. The fourth line, however, is as regular as one can make it. Iambic tetrameter is the "sure and even trot" of this line; the endstop makes it sound even more regular. This, of course, goes along with the description of the honest, constant man traveling at an even pace. In the last line of the stanza, when Herbert contrasts this honest man with the rest of the world, his line also points out the difference. The last line is so far from the regular meter, that it is difficult even to find a pattern to it. The line itself seems to ride by, or lag behind, just as the world does compared with the honest man. This is surely a very effective mani-
pulation of the shape of the line to show, by means of the rhythm, what Herbert is trying to say in the words of his poems.

Another instance similar to what happened in the previous stanza occurs in the last stanza of this poem:

```
\[ ...
Whom nothing can procure,
When the wide world runnes bias from his will,
To writhe his limbes, and share, not send the ill.
This is the Mark-man, safe and sure,
Who still is right, and prays to be so still.
```

The second line in this stanza tells of the world's running "bias" which means "off the straight, awry, wrong, averse, to fall foul of, attack" (OED). That line, too, is much different from the rest of the lines in the stanza. Although it can be forced into a regular meter ("When the wide world runnes bias from his will"), it certainly sounds ridiculous that way, and is read much better by forgetting the meter. The line, in effect, "runnes bias from" the rest of the lines in the stanza.

Another example of Herbert's molding the shapes of his lines occurs in "Dulnessse." In this case, Herbert does not actually break the regular meter of his lines, but he changes the speed of the lines by his choice of words and pauses:

```
\[ ...
Why do I languish thus, drooping and dull,
As if I were all earth?
```
In this first stanza of the poem the poet is lamenting his dullness, and he asks why he languishes in this way. "Languish" here means "to grow weak, faint, or feeble; to lose health, have one's vitality impaired; to continue in a state of feebleness and suffering" (OED). This word, because it takes more time to say than most two-syllable words, begins the slowing down of the line. Followed by "thus" and a pause, the word causes the line to slow down even more. Another pause at the end of the line leads into the rest of the question. He asks why he languishes as if he were all earth, or "the type of dull, dead matter" (OED). This could also be a reference to earth as one of the four elements in the universe, the lowest and heaviest of the four. Thus, as Herbert is describing himself as "drooping and dull," the line itself is slow in speed, just as dull and languishing as he is.

The next two lines point out the contrast between the present state of the poet and the state in which he would like to be. He wants "quicknesse," which in this case means "animation, liveliness, briskness, vigour, freshness" (OED). Of course, it also has the meaning "speed, rapidity (of action, motion)" (OED) which would refer to the line itself, for these two lines move much faster than the first two. The words are easier to say, and the enjambment pushes the reader immediately on to the last line of the stanza. Thus, in one stanza, Herbert has presented a contrast
not only in meaning, but also in the speed of his lines, a con-
trast which enhances the meaning of the stanza.

Herbert uses contrast in another of his poems, "Vertue," this time between the first two stanzas, one describing a "sweet
day," the other describing a "sweet rose." The first stanza is regular in its lines of iambic tetrameter:

```
SWEET day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
  The bridal of the earth and sky:
The dew shall weep thy fall to night;
    For thou must die.
```

This regularity creates a serene mood which corresponds to the day that Herbert is describing. The only change appears in the last line of the stanza, which is shortened to only two feet. This, of course, emphasizes the message contained in that last line and, in fact, completely erases the tranquility of the first three lines by its shocking shortness and its shocking message.

The second stanza begins almost like the first, but instead of repeating the same pattern, Herbert varies his effect by creating a rose that overwhelms the gazer:

```
Sweet rose, whose hue angrie and brave
  Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
Thy root is ever in its grave,
    And thou must die.
```

These lines, too, overwhelm the regular lines of the first stanza,
and emphasize the harshness and intensity of the color of the rose. While the line begins regularly with two iambics, on the word "angrie" Herbert substitutes a trochee, disrupting the regular meter and emphasizing that word. The next line is even more irregular. The line begins with a trochee followed by a spondee, and then returns to the regular iambics. This disruption, however, corresponds completely with the meaning of the words—as the gazer is disturbed by the rose's hue—and the line's disturbance of the regular rhythm is a subtle but brilliant way of emphasizing the meaning of the stanza. Thus, in these first two stanzas, Herbert has used substitution to create a rhythm that corresponds to the meaning he is trying to put across.

One final example of Herbert's use of substitution to create an effect occurs in the first stanza of "Affliction (IV)":

```
BROKEN in pieces all asunder,
Lord, hunt me not,
A thing forgot,
Once a poor creature, now a wonder,
A wonder tortur'd in the space
Btwixt this world and that of grace.
```

The reader discovers, in subsequent stanzas, the pattern of this verse: one line of iambic tetrameter, two lines of two feet each, and three lines of iambic tetrameter. This pattern, however, is
extremely difficult to detect in the first stanza. As the speaker characterizes himself as broken and scattered, the line, too, seems to be broken as it does not settle into a satisfactory rhythmic pattern. Beginning the entire poem with a choriamb puts much emphasis on the word "broken," and the stanza itself seems to be hunting a meter, especially in the fourth line which does not lend itself to a metric pattern at all. Thus Herbert creates a stanza with lines that seem to be "broken in pieces all asunder," portraying in themselves the condition of the poet.

In addition to molding the shape of his lines to correspond to the meaning of those lines, Herbert also uses prosody to help him to create a tone of voice. One such example is "Redemption," which sounds almost like a narrative, in a rather conversational tone:

```
HAVING been tenant long to a rich Lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancel th'old.
In heaven at his manour I him sought;
They told me there, that he was lately gone
About some land, which he had dearly bought
Long since on earth, to take possession.
I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
```
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts,
At length I heard a ragged noise and Birth
Of thieves and murderers; there I his espied,
Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died.

Herbert introduces the situation in the first four lines, speaking rather casually as if he were dealing in business with a rich lord—indeed, the whole poem works with this image of the tenant-landlord relationship. The speaker says that he has for a long time been a tenant, or "one who holds a piece of land, a house, etc. by lease for a term of years or a set time" (OED), to a rich lord and, because he has not thrived, he decided to be bold and ask him to cancel the old lease for a new small-rented lease. This conceit, of course, refers to the speaker's relationship to God; not thriving in this relationship, he resolved to ask God to do something about it. The new lease is a reference to the New Testament of the Bible, and the old lease to the Old Testament.

Herbert, then, is dealing with an important and profound subject in a very worldly, casual way, and the prosody helps to create this casual tone. The poem is in the form of a sonnet, so its base meter is iambic pentameter. While the lines could be forced into this meter, the natural reading is much more like prose—or even speech. Thus, the first line begins with a choriamb, and is followed by an iamb, a pyrrhus, and a spondee.
Likewise, the second line does not follow the metric pattern. In fact, no metric pattern has even really been established, since this is the beginning of the poem. Only by reading the rest of the poem and knowing that this is a sonnet can one say that there is a regular metric pattern in the poem.

Again, line three does not follow a metric pattern, and it continues the effect of a simple narration in prose. Since this is the first line in which a rhyme occurs, however, one would expect the poem to emerge as a poem here. However, Herbert de-emphasizes the rhyme with an enjambment at the end of the line, carrying the reader into the next line; again, with the effect of conversation.

This conversational tone, then, is the result of the shape of the lines using substitution and enjambment. It continues throughout the rest of the poem, showing Herbert's skill in the use of lines to create a voice.

Another poem in which Herbert molds the shape of the lines to create a voice is "Conscience." Reminiscent of Donne's "The Sun Rising" in which he chides the sun, this poem begins with the speaker directly addressing and commanding his own conscience:

```
PEACE prattler, do not lowre;
Not a fair look, but thou dost call it foul;
Not a sweet dish, but thou dost call it sower;
Musick to thee doth howl.
By listning to thy chating fears
I have both lost mine eyes and eares.
```
The speaker's tone in the opening lines is one of impatience and a fair amount of anger. He tells his conscience to be quiet, and not to "lowre," or "to frown, scowl; to look angry or sullen" (OED). He then further upbraids his conscience by telling it why he is angry with it—every time he perceives something pleasant with his senses, his conscience ruins it in a number of ways. He begins with the sense of sight; when he sees something fair, his conscience calls it foul. When he sees or tastes a sweet dish, his conscience calls it sour. When he hears music, his conscience makes it howl. The speaker sums it up in this first stanza by saying that in listening to all the chatting fears of the conscience, he has lost his eyes and ears, that is, he has lost the ability in his senses to perceive and enjoy beauty.

Part of the beauty of this poem is the way Herbert personifies the conscience, making it a kind of separate entity from the speaker himself. The problem introduced in this poem is, of course, how to prevent an over-active conscience from interfering with and preventing the enjoyment of the senses in moderation. Apparently, every time the speaker felt some pleasure he often immediately felt guilty because of his enjoyment. But Herbert, instead of writing a pedantic poem on this problem, simply creates a conscience separate from the speaker. Thus, the speaker can address his conscience and carry on a conversation with it, and still deal with the problem in a more interesting way.

In creating this rather informal situation, Herbert has
molded the shape of his lines to add to the conversational tone of the poem. The regular pattern of the stanzas is a line of iambic trimeter, two lines of iambic pentameter, another of iambic trimeter, and two lines of iambic tetrameter. Notice in the first stanza how Herbert has used substitution to create the unexpected rhythms and, consequently, to create lines closer to speech.

In the first line, for example, Herbert substitutes a spondee for the first iamb, creating a dramatic opening and emphasizing the first two words of the poem—an appropriate effect, considering that this is an exhibit of anger and impatience in the speaker. The second and third lines of the poem scan exactly the same in their irregularity. They begin with a trochee followed by a spondee, and complete the last three feet regularly, with iambs. This rhythm, of course, points out the parallel structure of the lines, and the endstops give the poem some sense of form which it does not get from regular line length or regular rhythm within the lines. The fourth line begins with a choriamb which again makes it sound closer to speech. The last two lines are the only lines in the stanza which are regular, but Herbert does not allow them to sound too much out of place, as these are the only two lines in the poem with enjambment, so that the conversational sound of the poem is maintained.

Thus, one can see and hear clearly in this poem that it does, indeed, have a conversational tone. This tone is created, in part, by the careful molding of the shape
of the lines to approximate natural speech more than the regular, sing-song rhythm of some poetry.

One more poem in which the shape of the lines works to create the tone is "Bunch of Grapes." Again, from the first stanza of this poem one can see Herbert’s skill in shaping his lines:

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 years ago: one vogue and vein,
One air of thoughts usurps my brain.
I did towards Canaan draw; but now I am
Brought back to the Red sea; the sea of shame.

Once again, as in "Conscience," the poem begins with a direct address. The difference here, however, is that almost immediately the speaker changes from a direct address to a kind of contemplation within himself, and he seems to forget about his address to joy. In fact, this address may have been only a device within the speaker’s own mind to think of joy, and not a creation of a personified joy on the part of Herbert.

The speaker says that he locked joy up; that is, he had attained joy earlier and thought that he could keep it, or capture it within him forever. He was mistaken, however, because a "bad man" let joy escape from him again. The identity of the bad man is not clear here, but this ambiguity is effective because it
makes the reader ponder over who or what would make someone lose his joy. There are probably two identities of this man: he is either the devil, who of course by tempting the speaker to sin would have caused his joy to escape from him; or the speaker himself, who in a weak moment succumbed to sin, causing his joy to escape him. Whoever this was, the joy is gone and the speaker is now back where he began seven years ago. This is a biblical reference to the story of Jacob, who worked seven years for his beloved's father so that he could marry her. At the end of these seven years instead of receiving Rachel, her father gave Jacob Esther, the older sister. He had to work another seven years to gain Rachel. Thus, the speaker is now as he was seven years ago: "one vogue," that is, "general course or tendency; general character or condition" and "vein," or "an inclination or desire, a tendency, towards something specified" and one "aire of thoughts" usurps his brain (OED). Since he has lost joy, he has had a one-track mind. In the next few lines he reveals what this vogue of thoughts is—shame. While before, he drew near Canaan, the promised land where all is fruitful and joyful, he now comes back to the sea of shame.

Clearly, the speaker here is a frustrated, depressed, ashamed man. His condition is evident in the lines themselves, because they are full of hesitations and pauses, reflecting the contemplation of a troubled mind. Their meter is irregular as well, which makes it sound as though this speaker is talking to himself,
trying to reach some sort of answer to his problem.

The first line begins with a chorlaab, which emphasises the word "joy." The pause after "joy," however, puts a tremendous stress on the first word of the poem, and it moves the second syllable of the poem over into the second foot, so that it sounds like an anapest instead of an iamb. There follow two regular feet, but the last foot in the line is a spondee which, with the previous iamb, creates three stresses in a row, once again placing much emphasis on a part of the line, this time on the last three words. In this way, Herbert has attained a kind of balance in this one line, and has also pointed out an antithesis between "Joy" and "some bed man."

The enjambed first line leads smoothly into the regular second line, whose regularity is not too obvious because of its shortness and the enjambment from the previous line. The third line, too, has a regular meter, although the pauses before and after the phrase "me thinks" make the line sound more like speech, as well as the enjambment into the next line which breaks in the middle. This leads into line five which is again regular, with an endstop. The last two lines in the stanza break between the third and fourth feet, and are enjambed, contributing to the speechlike lines; the last line adds its irregularity with substitutions.

This first stanza, then, is full of pauses, substitutions, and enjambments, all of which combine to help create the tone of
a man who is contemplating, or thinking to himself, about his problems.

Herbert, in addition to creating a tone or voice by molding the shape of his lines, uses them to pack his poem with meaning—to exemplify in verse what he says in words. A fine example of this is the poem "Trinitie Sunday," which abounds in threes:

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LORD, who hast form'd me out of mud,
And hast redeem'd me through thy blood,
And sanctifi'd me to do good;

Purge all my sinnes done heretofore;
For I confesse my heavie score,
And I will strive to sinne no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,
With faith, with hope, with charitie;
That I may runne, rise, rest with thee.
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The most obvious trinity in this poem is the number of stanzas, and then the number of lines in each stanza. In the first stanza the speaker addresses God, and in that address he covers the creation of man to the crucifixion. The Lord has formed him out of mud, as he has made every person, and has redeemed him through his blood which was shed on the cross. God has also sanctified him to do good--perhaps this is a reference to Herbert's taking holy orders.
In the second stanza the speaker asks God to purge all his sins, for his "score" or number of sins is great; he confesses all of them and promises to try not to sin any more. Notice that another device that emphasizes the threes here is the rhyme scheme. In each stanza it is the same, so that the entire poem works out as aaa bbb ccc.

Finally, in the third stanza the poem intensifies with even more threes, and the meter, which was regular in the first two stanzas, changes slightly to emphasize these groups of three. The base meter is iambic tetrameter, but in the third foot of the first line Herbert substitutes a spondee, so that there are three stresses in a row, separated by pauses—a tremendous emphasis on the three separate objects in this line. Again, in the second line of the third stanza, the line itself divides into three equal parts, all separated by a pause, although the rhythm here is regular. Finally, this series of three is once again repeated in the last line of the poem with a supreme emphasis, more so than the other groups of three, because now Herbert has added alliteration of "r's" along with the three stresses in a row.

Clearly, in this poem Herbert has created lines that portray in themselves the trinity, and he builds up to the climax of threes in the last line of the poem very effectively.

Another poem in which Herbert uses this same technique, portraying in his lines the meaning of the poem, is "The Breath," although here Herbert applies this technique in a completely
different way, because, of course, his subject matter is different:

A WREATHED garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
I give to thee, who knowest all my ways,
My crooked winding ways, 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 wyes,
Know them and practise them, then shall I give
For this poors wreath, give thee a crown of praise.

A "wreath" is "a chaplet or garland of flowers, leaves, or the like, especially worn or awarded as a mark of distinction, honour, etc." (OED). It is also "something wound, wreathed, or coiled into a circular shape or form" (OED). This poem includes both meanings, for it is a garland of praise to God, and it is wound, by means of its lines, into a circular form.

The winding or wreathing that occurs in this poem is noticeable from the beginning. In the first line, the speaker says that he is giving to God this "wreathed garland" of praise. This garland is, of course, the poem, which the poet is writing to praise God because He deserves it. The phrase "of deserved praise" in the first line is repeated in the second line as "of praise deserved." Here, then, begins the coiling within the poem that makes the poem itself a wreath. The first and second lines are connected by the repetition of the end of line one in the beginning of line two.

As the poem progresses, one discovers that this chain-linking...
of lines occurs to the end. The speaker goes on to say that he
gives this poem to God who knows all his crooked ways which cause
him to die, not live, for life is straight and always "tends" to
God. "Tends" in this case means "to have a natural inclination
to move (in some direction)" (OED). "Unto thee I give" is repeated
in line three as "I give to thee"; "all my ways" is repeated in
line four as "My crooked winding ways"; and this continues to
the end of the poem.

In lines four to six, the speaker talks of the ways in which
he lives or dies. He calls them "crooked winding ways," and
these are, of course, against the ways that lead to God and life,
ways which are straight as a line. Yet, at the same time as he
extols a life as straight as a line, he seems to be pointing out
that this poem itself is full of "crooked winding ways." In
fact, the wreath by its very nature is winding. Perhaps the
speaker here is exhibiting his own doubts about even his poem
in praise of God—perhaps the poem, too, is the wrong way to
try to move towards God.

Nevertheless, the winding ways of the poem continue as the
speaker says that God is farther above deceit than deceit "seems"
above simplicity. Why bring deceit and simplicity into the poem?
This is clear once one considers their implications. "Simplici-
tie" has two possible meanings here. The first and most obvious
meaning is "freedom from artifice, deceit, or duplicity; sin-
cerity, straightforwardness; also, absence of affectation or
artificiality; plainness, artlessness, naturalness" (OED).

When applied to language, it means "absence or lack of elegance or polish" (OED). Thus, it seems that the speaker refers not only to his life when he asks for simplicity, but to his poetry, which is obviously anything but simple in this poem.

The speaker goes on to ask that he know God's ways and practice them. Then, after he has become closer to God, he will exchange a crown of praise for this "poore wreath."

By the end of the poem, some of the other "winding ways" of the poem become apparent. The rhyme scheme, for example, returns to itself at the end: ababcdcbbabb. Not only do the words rhyme, but they are exactly the same words, so that the subject matter of the poem turns back upon itself as well. For example, the last line of the poem corresponds to the first line; both deal with a wreath and praise to God. The eleventh line corresponds to the second line of the poem, as both deal with giving. The tenth line corresponds to the third line of the poem, as both deal with ways. The only place this does not work is between two lines, five and eight, and this is only because the intricate winding structure and rhyme scheme of the poem make this correspondence virtually impossible. Everything in this poem, then, is woven and wound together very tightly.

Yet, in spite of this close weaving of the poem in the form of a wreath, the poem does not end where it began in tone. The speaker has had a realization somewhere in the poem, because
the tone of the opening lines is confident and proud, while that of the closing lines is humble, calling the poem a "poore wreath" instead of a "wreathed garland of deserved praise." This realization that the poem is more a reflection of the poet himself than of God begins in line four, when the poet mentions his own winding ways, and cannot help but apply this to his poem. This consciousness of his artistic reflection of his own life increases, and he finally must ask for God's help not only in his life, but also in the writing of his poetry. It is for this reason that the poem does not end exactly where it began. Although it is, indeed, a wreath, there has been progress here, and perhaps it is a sign that the speaker's prayer to live a straight life will eventually be rewarded. Thus, the question Herbert posed in "Jordan (I)," "May no lines passe, except they do their dutie/ Not to a true, but painted chair?" may be answered negatively with the advice from this poem to strive for simplicity and straightforwardness in writing poetry.
IV

WORDS, LINES, AND MEANING

We have now seen how George Herbert uses lines to enhance, in themselves, the meaning of his poems, and also how he uses words. I would now like to combine a technical analysis with a full explication of one of Herbert's finest poems, "The Bag":

AWAY despair! my gracious Lord doth hears.
Though windes and waves assault my keel,
He doth preserve it; he doth steer,
Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel.
Storms are the triumph of his art,
Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart.

Hast thou not heard, that my Lord JESUS di'd?
Then let me tell thee a strange storie.
The God of power, as he did ride
In his majestick robes of glorie,
Resolv'd to lighti and so one day
He did descend, undressing all the way.

The starres his tire of light and rings obtain'd,
The cloud his bow, the fire his spear,
The sky his azure mantle gain'd,
And when they ask'd, what he would wear;
He smil'd and said as he did go,
He had new clothes a making here below.

When he was come, as travellers are wont,
He did repair unto an inne.
Both then, and after, many a brunt
He did endure to cancell sinne;
And having giv'n the rest before.
Here he gave up his life to pay our score.

But as he was returning, there came one
That ran upon him with a spear.
He, who came hither all alone,
Bringing nor man, nor arms, nor fear,
Receiv'd the blow upon his side,
And straight he turn'd, and to his brethren cry'd,
If ye have anything to send or write,
    I have no bag, but here is room;
Unto my Fathers hands and sight,
    Believe me, it shall safely come.
That I shall minde, what you impart,
Look, you may put it very neare my heart.

Or if hereafter any of my friends
    Will use me in this kinde, the doore
Shall still be open; what he sends
    I will present, and somewhat more,
Not to his hurt. Sighs will convey
Anything to me. Harke, Despair away.

In "The Bag" the speaker tries to persuade despair to leave him. The title is a clue to much that occurs in the poem, as Herbert uses prosodic devices to mold the shape of his lines so that the metrics as well as the words convey the meaning of the poem. A "bag" is "a receptacle made of some flexible material closed in on all sides except at the top (where also it generally can be closed); a pouch, a small sack" (OED). Indeed, each stanza is a kind of "bag" consisting of six lines. The first and last lines are iambic pentameter, and they enclose four lines of iambic tetrameter. The rhyme scheme is ababcc, with almost all masculine endings that give force to Herbert's message. Clearly, this poem exhibits Herbert's ability to convey his meaning with words and lines.

The poem begins with lines of regular meter, as the speaker tells his despair to go away. This command is probably a reference to the previous poem, "Longing," in which the speaker exhibits despair. Now, however, the speaker has realized that God has heard his plea from the other poem, and despair must leave him.
The tone of this first stanza is rather triumphant and challenging to the feeling of despair. Yet, the speaker still feels the need to convince despair, and probably himself, that God is with him.

After exhorting despair to leave, the speaker expands on his present condition by introducing nautical imagery. The speaker is a ship, and his keel is being assaulted. The keel is the "lowest longitudinal timber of a ship or boat, on which the framework of the whole is built up" (OED). In this case, the basis for the speaker's framework is probably his spirit or his soul. This soul is being assaulted by "windes and waves," or the temptations of sin, which forcefully try to conquer his soul.

Although the speaker's soul is being assaulted by sin, God preserves it: "he doth steer,/ Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel." That is God has heard the speaker's plea and has taken control, or is guiding his body and soul. In a sense, God is now the captain of the ship. Even when the boat seems most to reel, even when sin has apparently gained control over the speaker's soul, in actuality God is still there, guiding the soul to salvation. In fact, line five claims that storms are the triumph of God's art. Only when a man is truly assaulted by sin does the real power and triumph of God appear through the struggle. This line is the only irregular line in the stanza; the meter changes to include a choriamb. By substituting a
choriamb, Herbert emphasizes the storms, the power of sin,
and in turn makes clear how really powerful God is: "Storms
are the triumph of his art."

The last line of the stanza returns to the base meter, as
the speaker sums up his message. Although God may close his eyes
to the trouble of the speaker by allowing him to fight the battle against sin, God does not close his heart, and he is always ready to welcome the speaker into his kingdom. Therefore, the speaker has absolutely no need of despair. Notice here how this line prefigures the later image of the place for messages near Christ's heart.

Apparently, despair has not been convinced by the first stanza, so the speaker continues to address despair in the second stanza, as he asks despair, "Hast thou not heard, that my Lord Jesus di'd?" This is, of course, actually a way for the speaker to convince himself that he should get rid of despair. This stanza is much less personal than the first, and the tone is rather full of awe at the "strange storie." "Strange" probably means "wonderful" or "unusual." Since despair must have answered the question negatively, the speaker must now give a brief retelling of Jesus' life, in the hopes that despair will realize that he is doomed.

To begin this story, Herbert uses a second image: clothes. He describes God riding in his "majestick robes of glorie," in

16 I am indebted to Professor Barbara Traister for this observation.
heaven, when God decided to "light," that is, to stop riding and go on foot, and also to come down from heaven and alight on the earth. The speaker continues his tale in a simple manner by saying "and so one day/ He did descend." This telling exhibits the tremendous power of God, who can resolve to do something, and simply do it with no obstacles. "Undressing all the way" continues the clothes imagery, as God had to shed his majestic robes of glory to appear in his humble bearings on earth.

Stanza three is a continuation of the "strange store" of God, still using the imagery of clothes. The stanza here focuses more specifically on the last line of the second stanza, God's undressing. The speaker describes in detail each piece of attire as it is discarded by God:

The starres his tire of light and rings obtain'd,
The cloud his bow, the fire his spear,
The sky his azure mantle gain'd.

God, then, discarded his "tire" or "dress, apparel, raiment; attire," of light and rings (OED). These went to the stars. The cloud received God's bow (probably the rainbow), the fire received his spear for lightning, and the sky received God's blue cloak. Thus, as each piece of clothing was removed by God, it was received by one of the heavenly elements. These elements--the stars, cloud, and sky--then asked God what he would wear. God, obviously a benevolent God, smiled and told the heavens that he had "new clothes" below, on earth. These clothes were, of course,
the flesh and blood of a man: Christ.

Although every line in the third stanza has a regular meter, Herbert molds the shape of the lines so that the stanza does not become monotonous. In the three lines quoted above, for example, Herbert moves from a slow line to a fast one, almost as if God himself undresses progressively faster. This movement serves to build more excitement over God's actions. The first line is long because it has the usual five feet instead of four. The second line, however, does not immediately move into a fast four feet. Instead, Herbert places a caesura in the middle of the line, causing the reader to pause, and, consequently, slowing down the line. Finally, the third line in this stanza moves quickly in four feet with smooth-flowing syllables and no pauses.

Stanza four, like the previous stanza, has a regular meter throughout. In this stanza, Herbert emphasizes his lines not through substitutions, but with repetition, caesura, and enjambment. The stanza begins with God's arrival on earth as a traveller, an image which is consistent with that of God "riding" in heaven in stanza two. Herbert relates that God "did repair unto an inne," like all travellers, thus making God appear a humble, normal, mortal man, not the God that he is.

The next line contains two pauses which break the line into jerky rhythms so that the reader can feel the brunts that Christ had to endure for us: "Both then, and after, many a brunt/ He did endure to cancell sinne." This line, however, is enjambed.
with the next line which moves smoothly, showing how God held up to these blows and endured them. "Brunt" as it is used here, is "an assault, charge, onset, violent attack" of either "fighting men, physical agents," or "sickness, temptation, persecution, etc." (OED). The repetition of the sentence structure in "He did endure" and "He did repair" unifies this stanza, and also relates it to stanzas two and three, where Herbert writes "He did descend," and "he did go."

The word "cancell" in stanza four means "to render (a thing) null by means of something of opposite nature; to neutralize, counterbalance, countervail; to make up for, compensate" (OED). Indeed, Christ compensated for man's sins by giving up his life, by paying what man owed for his time at the inn: "And having giv'n the rest before, / Here he gave up his life to pay our score." In other words, God had already given up his garments to heaven, and now he gave his life to "requit[e] an obligation" or pay the score (OED). Because these lines are so regular, they evoke little emotion, and continue in the vein of the simple tale that Herbert is telling.

Stanza five, however, begins to build with emotion, as the speaker's voice becomes agitated at the attack on an innocent man (Christ). This agitation appears in the irregular meter of lines three and four of the stanza.

Stanza five begins with Christ on the cross, dying: "as he was returning," that is, returning to heaven. Suddenly, the line speeds up with enjambment to the next line, as the speaker describes
the soldier who wounded Christ on the cross: “there came one/
That ran upon him with a spear.” The speed of this act is inherent in the speed of the lines. Immediately, the agitation of the speaker is apparent as he comments on the situation: “He, who came hither all alone,/ Bringing nor man, nor arms, nor fear.” The first line begins with a choriamb, throwing more emphasis on the word “He.” The next line, too, starts with a choriamb, although the strongest part of the line is in the repetition at the end.

After this interjection from the speaker, who apparently has been carried away by the tale, the story resumes in a regular meter: “Receiv’d the blow upon His side,/ And straight he turn’d, and to his brethren cry’d.” These lines introduce Christ’s speech in the following stanza.

Stanza six consists entirely of Christ’s own words. He begins by addressing the people around him while he is yet on the cross. He says that if any of them have a message for God, he will deliver it. Although he has no bag, he does have room for all their messages. He stresses that he will deliver them safely to his Father. In fact, he gives the people a guarantee that he will “minde,” or “remember, have in one’s memory” what they give to him (OED). He tells them that they may put the message “very neare my heart.” This is a grotesque image, for the place that he means is in the wound where the spear pierced his side.

This speech by Christ is extremely regular in meter, except
for a choriamb in the last line: "Look, you may put it very near
my heart." Perhaps this substitution slightly accents the grotesque
image of the hole in Christ's side.

While the sixth stanza was regular, stanza seven remains
regular but draws much nearer to normal speech patterns, as op-
posed to poetry. Through Christ's speech, the poet breaks away
from lines that sound like poetry to lines with enjambment and
caesura that approach natural speech. In this last stanza,
Christ looks to the future: "Or if hereafter any of my friends/
Will use me in this kind." This glimpse of the future takes the
reader away from the story of the time of Christ back into the
present time in which the poem began. Christ emphasizes that even
in the future, even in Herbert's time, his heart will be open.
Whatever man wants to send to God will be presented through
Christ. In fact, Christ will even go further and present more,
but not to hurt man, to help him. Even simple sighs will give
the message to Christ.

The poem ends with the phrase "Hark, Despair away." While
this could be considered part of Christ's speech, it is probably
the speaker of the poem again, for the entire poem is a kind of
a "bag." It is enclosed on all sides, the beginning and the end,
by the command to despair. Thus, not only is Christ a kind of bag
to carry messages to God, each stanza a bag enclosed by two
longer lines, but the entire poem is a bag. This poem, too,
will perhaps be conveyed to God so that the speaker can be suc-
cessful in ridding himself of the despair he so despises.

Clearly, the effects of technical analysis of Herbert's poetry are numerous. The reader can discover, if he cares to look closely enough, emphasis on important lines, unity, parallel structure, and even tone, all created by the versification of the poems. At times, the versification corresponds exactly to what is happening in the poem, as in the poems which contain word-play. In other poems the speed of the lines changes, always enhancing the meaning of those lines.

After taking such a close look at the words, lines, and meaning of Herbert's poetry, it becomes clear that he is one of the great poets of the seventeenth century. His skill is apparent in every line of his poetry, and he brilliantly chooses words and molds the shape of his lines to enhance his meaning. Admittedly, it takes time to read the poetry in this way. But as Rosemond Tuve very aptly put it, "Who are we, that our time is too short to understand George Herbert?" 17

17 Tuve, p. 99.
Select Bibliography


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