

## Conversing with the Divine: The Unique Poetic Voice of George Herbert

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### Abstract

This paper offers an in-depth analysis of George Herbert's significant contributions to the Metaphysical poetry movement, underscoring his distinctive poetic style and religious fervor. It probes into Herbert's critical reputation, the quintessential characteristics of his poetry, and his predominant inspirations, most notably the scriptures, Saint Augustine, and Donne. The paper also examines Herbert's penchant for a plain and conversational style, his application of everyday language and imagery, and his novel approaches to sonnet and patterned poetry. It measures Herbert's unembellished and personal tone against the elaborate conceits and lexicon of his contemporaries, such as John Donne and Andrew Marvell. Additionally, the article probes into Herbert's spiritual facet and his expressive imagery presenting his mystical experiences. Through a categorization of Herbert's imagery, the article elucidates his proficiency in harmonizing terrestrial and spiritual motifs, crafting a rich tapestry that mirrors his devout commitment and the human quest for the divine. This study finds Herbert as a focal figure whose work incorporates the essence of Metaphysical poetry, however, his plain style, everyday language, his genuine religious feelings, his commitment to his faith in his poetry, and plain imagery makes him a distinctive voice among other famous metaphysical poets.

**Key terms:** George Herbert, metaphysical poetry, style, form, imagery.

التحدث مع الإلهية: الصوت الشعري الفريد لجورج هربرت

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### المستخلص

يقدم هذا البحث تحليلاً لمساهمة الشاعر جورج هربرت لحركة الشعر الميتافيزيقي وذلك من خلال إبراز أسلوبه الشعري المميز وحماسه الدينية. فهي تتقصى سمعته النقدية و الخصائص الجوهرية لشعره والمصادر الرئيسية للإلهام خاصة تلك المستوحاة من الكتاب المقدس والقديس أوجيستين وجون دونون. كذلك تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على ولع الشاعر للأسلوب التقليدي الواضح واستخدامه للغة اليومية والصورة الشعرية. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى أن هيربرت هو شخصية مركزية في تلك الحركة وأن شعره يمثل جوهر الشعر الميتافيزيقي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** جورج هربرت، الشعر الميتافيزيقي، الأسلوب، الشكل، الصور.

### 1.1. Introduction

During the 17th century, the literary scene was packed with the prowess of the Metaphysical poets. Among these figures, John Donne irrefutably stood out as the most prominent poet. However, there was another phenomenal poet within this group who deserves special attention - George Herbert. Alongside other distinguished metaphysical poets like John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and Andrew

Marvell, Herbert evolved a poetic style that amalgamated spiritual themes with reason and paradox. However, while he shared the intellectual and spiritual fervor of his metaphysical peers, Herbert was endowed with a unique flair that set him apart from the rest of the Metaphysical poets. This essay works towards exploring the distinctive features of Herbert's work and explicates how he differed from his contemporaries in terms of his use of particular style, form, and content.

By examining Herbert's poems, we will fathom out how he impressively applied ordinary language and everyday imagery to impart sincere ecclesiastic truths. His talent for fostering a sense of intimacy and immediacy in his poetry, which was rare among his peers, further accentuates his finesse and mastery. Moreover, we will delve into how Herbert's unwavering faith shines through his verses, forging a distinct relationship with the divine characterized by both devout devotion and playful questioning. This analysis is not pushing towards undermining the contributions of Metaphysical poets with all their splendor. It is, in fact, striving to praise the diverse fabric of 17th-century poetry through an appreciation of Herbert's distinctive voice. By looking at the different voices within the movement, we acquire a more profound understanding of each poet's potency and the unique way they brought their unique experiences to the common themes of the era.

## 1.2. Critical Reputation and Main Characteristics of Herbert's Poetry

What largely attracts our attention to George Herbert's biography is how a short span of life is filled to the brim with poetic activity polished with a high sense of religious seriousness of a public orator and reader of rhetoric. Throughout history, the admirers of Herbert's poetry can generally be categorized into two distinct groups: "the religious readers who bowed to Herbert's piety and the literary men who praised the 'wit' and 'ingenuity' or perhaps the form and language" (Summers 11).

Herbert's critical reputation runs throughout ages, as stated by great critic and men of letters, from S.T. Coleridge up to the present time. Critics stress various aspects of his poetic career and achievement. Coleridge thinks that the experience of reading Herbert involves a high degree of "a cultivated judgement, classical taste, . . . [and] even poetic sensibility . . . [together with] both [being] a devout and a devotional Christian" (Blain, 5). In other words, a first-hand experience of faith and devotion is highly important in the process of evaluating this poet.

Herbert's poetry is the poetry of the conflict of personal experience, without which it would be nothing more than a bundle of 'entirely doctrinal and didactic [verse]' (Grierson, xii). It is this kind of conflict and experience which imparts Herbert's poetry a psychological dimension: "He transferred to religious poetry the subtler analysis and record of mood which had been Donne's great contribution to love poetry" (Ibid, xiii). T.S. Eliot, on the other hand, focuses his attention on the idea of sin which haunts Herbert and his poetic production. Herbert is described as "a man of his time for whom sin was very real and the promises of death very terrible, and as a man who happened to be something very near a saint" (Blain, 4).

Herbert's poetry can be further characterized by "his craftsmanship, his mastery of language, his poetic and religious subtlety, the profoundness of his spiritual experience" (Ibid). It is highly spiritual (religious), philosophical and at the same time ambiguous. In fact, these characteristics stem from the fact that Metaphysical poetry is "a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence" (Grierson, xiii). The personal quality of Herbert's poetry is yet another axis around which it revolves, engaged with a specific doctrinal tenet (Gallu, 42).

The dialogic nature of Herbert's poetry is also of great importance. His poetry is talk; and God, whether speaking or silent, is Herbert's constant interlocutor (Ibid, 43). This feature allows for a discussion of the Poet-God relationship. It is the most complex relationship because of the changing self of the poet which is wavering, flickering and hesitating among a large circle of modes, states and conditions. In this sense, there is Herbert's reality of opposition-submission, of protest-surrender, which becomes obvious throughout his poetry. This is the introduction of the poet's severe psychological struggle. At times, there seems to be an element of doubt and equivocation in his poetry, for instance in, "Ah my dear God! though I am clean forgot, Let me not love thee, **if** I love thee not" (Affliction I, 1. 65-66).

Herbert's attitude toward his poetry is thought to be ontological, even sacramental, to recognize that Herbert saw the poetic process as analogous to the sacraments (Lull, 77). This is chiefly Herbertian. It stems from his personal and psychological being as a poet and saint. In this sense, Herbert's poems are "an ongoing conversation whose topic is the place of the individual believer in the drama of redemption, a drama whose primary elements are Christ's sacrifice . . ." (Gallu, 43).

Another focal feature of Herbert's poetry is that it could be read autobiographically: "The Temple is often read, quite rightly, as a highly stylized form of spiritual autobiography. . ." (Gallu, 45). This is also endorsed by Eliot when he maintains that The Temple is "a record of the spiritual struggles of a man of intellectual power and emotional intensity who gave much toil to perfecting his verses" (Blain, 6).

### 1.3. Major Influences

Probing into Herbert's poetry, one assuredly finds the Bible as the source of raw material from which the poet, Herbert, as a poet and a Christian, drinks deep. Biblical allusions and stories spread in every corner of his poetry. There is also the use of Biblical language, with its simplicity of expression and depth of meaning. In a sense, Herbert's poetry could be seen as another Bible which echoes the original one. Herbert as a poet is strongly affiliated to medieval Christianity, shaped by distinctively protestant ways of reading the Bible. He engages with the doctrines of divine grace classically formulated by Augustine in the late fourth and early fifth centuries and revived in the work of the major protestant reformers (Mackenzie, 3).

The second source of influence is Saint Augustine. He is the true father of classical rhetoric and a great figure in the history of rhetoric who sought to adapt classical doctrines to Christian perspective. In "Rhetoric, Style and George Herbert",

Gallagher states that metaphysical poets generally opted for a plain style, and that “Augustinian views on style can offer a particularly useful context for discussion of Herbert” (Gallagher, 496). Herbert’s literary production can be seen as a sharp reflection of so many classical ideals such as order, neatness, clarity and commitment to other standards preached by the classical authors. In the art of oration, for instance, Herbert is strongly influenced by the Ciceronian style, which has effectively influenced his poetry. As a disciple of classical rhetoric, Herbert learnt a great deal from Cicero. The plain style, with its varying degrees of wit, cleverness, elegance and refinement, is but one thing Herbert took from Cicero in this respect. In fact, his style is understood “as a flexible and urbane level of speech and in many cases, they based their views on Cicero’s account of the Attic orator” (Gallagher, p. 498).

Contemporary scholarship acknowledges Donne’s influence on Herbert. However, Herbert’s work is distinguished by more familiar patterns of mind and a broader appeal in its religious discourse. Herbert’s poetry, compared to Donne’s, is “quieter, more graceful, less obviously dazzling in its argument and imagery” (Safier 273). His imagery, typically drawn from the mundane, operates through intellectual engagement rather than sensory experience. Herbert’s verse exhibits a simplicity relative to Donne’s, as the poet himself has narrower range of personal experiences. Donne is both a lover and a worshipper. Herbert, on the other hand, is aware of the insufficiency of earthly love, finding fulfillment solely in divine affection. His poetic endeavors, with the exception of verses dedicated to his mother—a woman of remarkable fortitude and fervent faith—remain devoted to the glorification of God (Abjadian 219). In “Dulness,” Herbert’s subject matter aligns with that of romantic poets, yet it is God, not an earthly beloved, to whom his words are directed.

## 2. Herbert’s Poetic Theory

As a matter of fact, the bases of Herbert’s poetic theory are deeply rooted in Religion as well as in his mystic relation with God. His poem “Quiddity” sharply reflects these bases, in which he speaks confidently of the essence of a poetry that should lead him to God. Herbert discovers the essence of the objects he declines in spiritual poetry, which leads him to God, the force behind all these qualities. What we see in Herbert’s poetry is stepping over all worldly pleasures in favor of a real mystical union with God.

Herbert considered poetry a means of sanitizing his language and life, offering his talents to God as a form of worship and service. He, furthermore, saw it as a tool to renovate and purge himself and his audience. As such, one of the bases of Herbert’s poetic theory seem to lie in stepping over all worldly pleasures in favor of a real mystical union with God – (it is that which while I use /I am with thee, and most take all).

Donald Mackenzie, in *The Metaphysical Poets*, explains that Herbert’s standpoint at the end of ‘Jordan I’ gives an idea “of what the poetry he wants might be like. It



will presumably be a poetry of direct statement that confesses and adores (Mackenzie, 81)". Both confession and adoration are parts of the service of God.

## 2.1. Style

In terms of style, Herbert adopts a plain style in his poetry which comes from both Augustine and classical authors. George Herbert develops a direct conversational style in which his tone is relaxed and informal, aiming at naturalness and simplicity. His verse is marked by precision and effectiveness in word selection. His poems are known for their clear and powerful use of words. In Herbert's poetry, each word carries a strong meaning, especially when he's composing on religious themes. While influenced by John Donne and the metaphysical poets, Herbert's writing sets itself apart with clear, straightforward language that explores profound spiritual themes. When addressing the Lord, he establishes a kind of reverent familiarity, creating an intimate connection, and informal style. Unlike certain metaphysical poets, Herbert steers clear of overly intricate intellectual puzzles. In a much renowned poem 'The Collar,' Herbert openly challenges God's divine plan and grapples with his inner desires, revealing a deeply personal conflict. Herbert's employment of colloquial language and overall structure of the poem in "The Collar" exemplify a powerful example of conversational style in poetry. The poet addresses the reader directly using pronouns "I" and "you" throughout the poem, and creates a feeling that he is having a one-on-one talk with his potential reader. "The Collar" resorts to elements of conversation to promote a sense of rapport and immediacy. The poem does not employ a strict rhyme scheme, refrains from complex vocabulary, uses a rather plain style. All these factors gathered in this poem can feel informal and close, creating a plain style, just like what we observe in everyday speech:

the plain style meant an area of discourse where the stress fell on dialectical qualities rather than on emotional power. Within this area of discourse many levels of style could be found, ranging from direct and colloquial speech and styles whose main characteristic was brevity and pointedness, to others more elegant and graceful, making quiet but subtle use of the figures and tropes of rhetoric. One could speak in fact of high, middle and plain within the plain style itself, and Herbert's poetry will be found to offer excellent examples of this variety (Gallagher, 499).

The conversational tone is traced back almost everywhere in Herbert. In 'Love Bade Me Welcome,' he says, "What sweetnes can be found in me / That you should find me out for you? / Have you made a cheat of time? / Are you too good for true". Here, George Herbert employs straightforward and unadorned questions, adopting an intimate tone that suggests a personal dialogue. Through these inquiries, he questions God's affection for him. In Love III, exclamations like "O admit me then!" infuses the poet's appeal with a feeling of immediacy and informality. In 'Virtue', Herbert directly addresses Virtue as if he is a person the poet is having a discussion with: "Sweetest of sweets, I call thee; for most sure / Thou art the ground

on which all sweets endure". Here, Herbert makes use of everyday words, and avoids intricate vocabulary.

### Virtue

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky:  
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;  
For thou must die.  
Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave  
Bids the rash gaze wipe his eye:  
Thy root is ever in thy grave,  
And thou must die.  
Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets compacted lie;  
My music shows you have your closes,  
And all must die.  
Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
Like season'd timber, never gives;  
But though the whole world turn to coal,  
Then chiefly lives.

This poem is a perfect example of Herbert's style. It is deeply devotional but follows a precise structure. The use of simple diction and common images taken from the world of nature makes 'Virtue' an outstanding example of Herbert's simplicity of poetic expression and style. This poem is plain, direct and simple, and sounds almost like music. It applies metaphors and symbols to manifest how all the alluring and beautiful things in nature fade away, but a good soul lasts forever. The poem is like a sturdy well-crafted palace with four well-ordered sections, each rhyming in a specific particular pattern (ABAB). This orderliness reveals how Herbert cherished discipline, both in composing poetry and his faith. The words in this poem are simple but carry a lot of meaning. Each section makes reference to something attractive and ravishing in nature – a day, a rose, and spring – that at the end of the day wither away. Yet, as the poem claims, a 'sweet and virtuous soul' will never perish, even if the whole world falls apart. It is, in fact, the stanza form which avails the poet a great opportunity to illustrate various aspects of a world which is subject to nonexistence and utter annihilation. The stanza has yet another significant merit. The pictorial character of the stanzas may highlight their distinction and monumental quality which emphasizes a sense of reassuring, extensive and continuous substantiality.

When addressing simplicity of style in Herbert's style, Jordan poems stand out among other pieces. Jordan (I) is a short poem that raises objections to the traditional poetic norms. Herbert contests the notion that the beauty of poetry is contingent

upon fictitious components and ornate diction. He inquires if genuine beauty resides in unadorned simplicity and posits whether each verse should fulfill a function that transcends decorative embellishment.

The poem discloses Herbert's aversion to deceit, indirection, and the self-congratulatory nature of finely crafted compositions. He disapproves of poetic expressions that avoid directness and authenticity. Herbert underscores the notion that the true aim of poetic creativity should be the acquisition of knowledge, the expression of love, and the exaltation of the Divine. Jordan II, on the other hand, pursues the motif of a poet's commitment to religious themes and topics. Herbert contends that poetry ought to be synonymous with simplicity and veracity, as opposed to dependence on artifice. He recommends a poetic form that mirrors sincere piety and profound spiritual understanding. Jordan II is also an emblem of Herbert's allegiance to simplicity, directness, and devotion. Just like in Jordan I, Herbert highlights the significance of substance over embellishment.

The metaphysical values of difficulty and wit no longer seem worthwhile, and the poet's lengthy search for an embellished style is to be labeled mere 'pretense.' A different style-plain, concise, harmonious, and sincere-will apparently convey to the poem a deeply religious power (Jones, 162).

In fact, the two pieces can function as Herbert's manifesto of style: 'Jordan' (I) with a range of contemporary styles which it mockingly characterises and rejects, 'Jordan' (II) with the style of Herbert's own first attempts at religious poetry which he rejects no less caustically (Mackenzie, 80).

Herbert's quest for the plain style is directly stated in the last stanza when he refers to the shepherds as honest people. As we have already mentioned, direct statement is the target of poetry for Herbert. This directness is in contrast with all means of the artificial worldly style. Simplicity of style is one of the most important requirements for creating poetic communication to deliver a message which is not an easy one. It is a message related to the task of the metaphysical poet whose poetry is "a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence" (Grierson, xiii).

George Herbert quite frequently employs direct address in his poetry to forge an intimate and direct bond between the speaker and the subject, often involving God or the reader. This literary device empowers readers to perceive the speaker's genuine, untold thoughts, rendering his verse intensely personal and a mirror of his deep-seated impressions on and conflicts with the religion. Direct access is especially prominent in his collection "The Temple," where poems such as Love III depict an exchange between the speaker and God, drawing the reader into the conversation and even encouraging their engagement. In "The Bunch of Grapes", Herbert also uses this literary device to engender a sense of asking for information, just like when a person asks a question during a conversation to comprehend a point. In 'Content', the cordial address to Peace gives a sense of casual greetings, "Peace, peace art all". In this poem, moreover, the brevity of lines and straightforward

syntax lend a sense of promptness and forthrightness, similar to spoken language. In 'The Glance,' the interjection "O Thou, whose essence sickens worldly sight" also fosters an element of shock and informality. In this poem, the language remains simple and clear though it is handling a theological concept: "Because that sinful darkness like a night / Does thicken my best beams, / Stiffen these nerves and blunt this edge of might".

However, it should be also noted that Herberts poetry is not purely conversational due to its structure, language choices, and themes they employ. They seem to be more a lofty and sublime form of dialogue, devised to prompt reflection on the narrator's internal conflict. His poetry successfully employs conversational elements to give the reader a more intimate and engaging experience. In the world of Herbert's poetry, the readers turn into active partakers in the emotional and sacred odyssey of the speaker.

In contrast to Herbert's, Donne's poems are marked by their mind-bending metaphors, called 'conceits.' He has a fondness for taking two apparently discrete things and smash them together, compelling the reader to ponder deeply about the connection. For instance, in 'The Flea,' Donne uses a tiny insect to represent both physical intimacy and a deeper spiritual connection, creating a complex argument about love and desire. His style is often sharp and full of arguments. Moreover, Herbert uses at times complex vocabulary. Words such as 'apotheosis,' 'viceroy,' 'entrall,' 'trepidation,' 'cosmographers,' 'hydroptic,' 'Ventricle,' 'Equinoctial' and 'sublunary' seem to be too complex to appear in the world of Herbert's poetry.

Andrew Marvell, as one of the prominent metaphysical poets, also has a tendency for a more complex vocabulary and formal style. While Herbert uses simpler words to enquire into his internal feelings and religious commitment, Marvell's vocabulary is richer and more complex, reflecting his fascination with nature, humanity, and the spiritual. Words such as 'Quincunx,' 'Despotique,' 'Paternoster,' 'Ambergris,' and 'Myrmidons' seem too formal to appear in Herbert's poetry.

Marvell's poems are a charming mix of wit, intellectual depth, and sensuality. He doesn't avoid from big topics like politics, philosophy, and life's ultimate purpose. "To His Coy Mistress" is a great example of his talent for crafting complex arguments. Likewise, "The Garden" uses vivid imagery and philosophical reflection to explore themes of life, nature, and the fleeting nature of time.

Richard Crashaw's poetry is also super fancy and detailed, with lots of big words and creative comparisons (conceits). This style is applied to forge a sense of awe and wonder in the readers. He is a Baroque poet whose education in the world of Latin literature is perceptible in his choice of words and his use of classical allusions.

Overall, Herbert's poems are direct and straightforward, while Donne's poems are like puzzles, and Marvell's poems scrutinizes many layers of meaning, and Crashaw uses an ornate style. Even though their styles are dissimilar, all three poets contribute their own unique voice to the tradition of metaphysical poetry.



## 2.2. Poetic Form

Herbert paid special attention to the formal features of his poetry, like structure, rhyme, rhythm, and sound, using them to enhance the meaning in his poetry. In fact, Herbert's genius shone through his proficiency to master many different poetic forms. He used both established structures and new experimental ones in his poetry.

While other poets of his time were pushing boundaries and experimenting new forms in their poetry, Herbert stuck with the established structures. He used the sonnet frequently, and this gave his poems a feeling of order and comfort. He also cherished traditional forms for religious expression, like hymns. Herbert desired poems people could easily use for religious observance and worship.

'The Sonnet', also called 'Sonnet,' is a poem by Herbert which interestingly does not doesn't quite fit the usual template of a sonnet. Unlike the sonnets of distinguished poets like Shakespeare and Petrarch, which abide by strict rules about how they are structured, Herbert's poem is more flexible. Traditional sonnets have a specific number of lines, follow a certain rhyming pattern, and might even have a special turn in the middle. Herbert's poem doesn't follow those same rules. Even though Herbert's 'Sonnet' adheres to the fourteen-line format, it bends the rules in other ways. He plays around with the rhyming pattern and rhythm throughout the poem, making it less predictable than a traditional sonnet. Another peculiarity is that Herbert's sonnets at times go without a clear volta, that moment where the poem takes a sharp turn in thought. This flexibility enables him to explore his religious themes and concepts in a way that feels natural for him and fits the poem's message.

### The Sonnet

Let forrain nations of their language boast

What fine varietie each tongue affords:

I like our language, as our men and coast:

Who cannot dresse it well, want wit, not words.

How neatly doe we give one onely name

To parents issue and the sunnes bright starre!

A sonne is light and fruit; a fruitfull flame

Chasing the fathers dimnesse, carri'd farre

From the first man in th' East, to fresh and new

Western discov'ries of posteritie.

So in one word our Lords humilitie

We turn upon him in a sense most true:

For what Christ once in humblenesse began

We him in glorie call, The Sonne of Man.

In this poem, the first three lines approximate the exordium and narration of the oration; the fourth line is the proposition. Lines five and six indicate the direction of the defense, thus serving as the partition. Lines seven through ten, the

confirmation, are an assimilation of the multitude of meanings to be found in the sun-son word sound. The last four lines are the peroratio, applying the combined meanings of sun-son to the Son of God and in so doing suggesting that any language which could say so much about both the humility and the glory of Christ in a single word could hardly be judged inadequate (Von Ende, 173). The Pun on the words 'son' and 'sun' is the central figure of speech upon which the whole meaning of the poem is based: "the basic play-on-words is developed through the various connotations which the two words have in combination to climax in the concluding couplet with the image of Christ as both the Son and the Sun of Man" (Ibid). This emphasis on the image of Christ is both an embodiment of the religious meaning of the poem and the capacity of the English language for glorifying the Son of God. This poem extends beyond being a simple religious song praising Christ. It's a powerful statement and demonstration, wrapped up into a classic, formal style. It tries to indicate that the English language is highly capable to fully venerate God's son. In other words, 'The Sonne' is a way of defending and celebrating the English language itself (Ibid). Obviously, the sonnet form acquires a new dimension in the hands of Herbert. It is no longer the traditional form associated with love and other classical themes. Rather, it becomes a vehicle to express patriotic identity in defending language as one of the pillars of national identity.

In addition to the established forms and patterns, Herbert at times used a discrete form of poem called a 'pattern poem.' These poems are like sketches made with words on the page. The way the lines are arranged looks like the thing the poem is conferring about. This adds another layer to his work, making the religious ideas even clearer and more accessible. Herbert produced different shapes like wings, pillars, altars, and windows to visually convey his messages in his poetry. As clear, his poem 'The Altar' is literally shaped like an altar on the page. His Easter Wings is a visual poem where each stanza is similar to a set of open wings when viewed sideways.

These poems are also known as concrete poetry. Concrete poetry conceives of the poem as ideogram; as an instantly assimilable, visually ordered text in which the word stands both as physical spatial object, and as a plurality of simultaneously existing meanings. (Childs, 32) Preoccupations with both typographical form and semantic content create confusions in which the text is seen as being somehow 'between poetry and painting', readers being unsure whether they are confronted with a picture for reading, or a poem for looking at (Ibid).

Herbert believes that meaning can be divinely hidden within the basic elements of language itself, and this is clear not only in the well-known concrete poems like 'The Alter' and 'Easter Wings,' but also shorter poems like 'Iesu,' 'Love-joy,' and 'The Sonne': "This "hieroglyphic" approach connects to how he uses symbols and metaphors that foreshadow Christ throughout history" (Elsky 252).

Unlike Herbert, who experimented with form and created visual poems, Donne, did not focus on that. Donne's poems were more like mental games, full of contradictions, surprising comparisons, and deep philosophical ideas. His language

is packed with meaning and he often tackles complex questions about life and existence. Marvel as well, though sharing some key features with other metaphysical poets, is not famous for creating visual poems. Richard Crashaw's work also does not usually follow the style of the poems the experiment with structure and visuals, that is pattern poems. Crashaw was famous for his religious poetry.

### 2.3. Religious Facet

A pillar of seventeenth-century literature, George Herbert was not just a poet, but also a priest in the Church of England (Hanson). His poems about faith are still powerful today. Herbert's poems are packed with strong feelings of religious dedication. He probes into what it means to have faith, how much God loves us, and the connection between our souls and God himself. Herbert's poems delve deep into questions about faith, doubt, sin, forgiveness, and God's affection. He often explores the inner battles of someone who believes but wrestles with their faith, along with the deep desire for a stronger connection with God. The charm and elegance of Herbert's poetry "is as much the result of art as it is an expression of a cultivated, but not forced, spiritual humility" (Sanders 203).

Herbert is considered as the finest of religious metaphysicals (Abjadian 218). Herbert brings complicated religious ideas to life with metaphors and symbolic images. He especially loves using nature to represent the spiritual. Flowers, seasons, and even the sun all become ways to talk about faith and God. It is noteworthy that even though Herbert uses metaphors to spell out his concepts, he keeps the language mostly clear and straightforward. This makes his poems understandable by everyone, even those without much education. Herbert aspired to "develop a Biblical poetics that renounces conventional poetic styles- 'fiction and false hair'- to depend instead on God's 'art' wrought in his own soul and displayed in the language and symbolism of Bible" (Greenblatt 1707).

George Herbert's *The Temple* serves as a poetic exploration of the inherent tension between the demands of earthly life and the unwavering commitment required by Christian devotion. The work delves into the profound significance of core symbols and tenets within Protestant Christianity. Through his poems, Herbert offers a fresh and emotionally resonant expression of the yearnings and disappointments he encounters on his spiritual journey. Central themes consistently revolve around Christian concepts of Incarnation, the Passion, and redemption. There is a notable absence of interfaith conflict within the text, as Herbert demonstrates unwavering fidelity to his Anglican faith. 'The Dedication' in this collection focuses on God as the sole source for inspiration rather than a human patron, "Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee / Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came / And must return. Accept of them and me, / And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name". The end of the dedication connotes that "divine patronage can best ensure the successful future of the book and protect the writer from unfriendly readers" (Malcolmson 57). *The Temple* was published posthumously in 1633, and by 1670,

over twenty thousand copies had been sold, solidifying Herbert's position as one of the most influential religious figures of the seventeenth century (Abjadian 218).

In *Prayer (I)*, a joyful celebration of prayer, Herbert describes prayer as a luxurious feast that nourishes the soul. The poem paints a picture of prayer as a bridge between heaven and earth, where God's breath flows back down to humanity. The use of images like angels, God's breath, and the soul's journey all highlight the poem's focus on the spiritual side of prayer. The poem connotes that prayer relays us beyond everyday life and lifts us closer to the happiness and joy of heaven. The last line, 'something understood,' implies that through prayer, we can experience a profound spiritual connection that goes beyond what words can express.

In *'The Alter'*, Herbert concentrates on an altar. The speaker admits that even if they don't say a word, the very stones of the altar will keep praising God. This altar represents the speaker's deep devotion, willingness to sacrifice, and their desire to connect with the holy. The speaker yearns for being part of the sacrifice, not merely an observer. Once the altar is sanctified, it acts as a channel for this spiritual exchange, allowing the speaker's devotion to reach the divine.

The *Alter* suggests that the speaker wants to change, moving from quiet observation to actively praising God. They believe that by consecrating the altar, they will be taking a step closer to God's will and aligning themselves with a higher purpose.

What sets Herbert apart from some other metaphysical poets is that his religious feelings seem genuine and come straight from the heart. Herbert was not the only metaphysical poet who wrote about religion. Some other metaphysical poets were known for their amazing ability to use shocking conceits and vivid imagery to explore religious themes. However, at times it seems that these poems are more like riddles or brainteasers than sincere expressions of religious belief. For example, John Donne's poem *'Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God'* proclaims a desperate longing for a religious experience. But the poem's complex metaphors and dramatic monologue style add another layer of intellectual challenge. This complexity might make it harder for some readers to connect with the poem's core emotional message.

In his world of poetry, Herbert concentrated wholly on religious themes, demonstrating a deep and unwavering dedication to his faith. Other metaphysical poets, like John Donne, addressed both religious and non-religious themes in their work. This is what distinguishes Herbert with the other members of the metaphysical club. John Donne at times wove religious themes together with philosophical questions and intellectual exploration. He tackled challenging concepts like sin, redemption, and the complexities of faith itself. Andrew Marvell, on the other hand, discusses poetry in an indirect way, along with nature imagery and philosophical rumination. Henry Vaughan examines a deep, personal connection with God in a mystic way and describes feeling God's presence directly. His poems are filled with joy about the beauty of the natural world, which they see as a reflection of God's splendor. Abraham Cowley focused on worldly themes that did not explore religion directly. John Cleveland is not generally known for



religious themes in his work. Instead, he is renowned for his witty and at times a bit rude poetry that deal with non-religious topics. Richard Crashaw, on the other hand, was highly devoted to Christ. His poems are filled with dramatic images and metaphors, designed to stir feelings of intense exhilaration and a deep craving for a spiritual connection with God.

Metaphysical poetry explores religion in a variety of ways, reflecting the poets' own experiences and aims. George Herbert is a distinct voice within this movement, known for his focus on personal devotion and straightforward language.

## 2.4 Imagery

Poetry is the language of images. Poetic diction is highly pictorial, conveying the poet's thoughts and consciousness. Discussing Herbert's use of imagery will ultimately lead us to throw light on his mysticism. In fact, mysticism, consciousness, and imagery are interrelated and contained within the framework of phenomenology. In its essence, mysticism is a subjective experience. It may be an expression of some sort of direct consciousness of the presence of God. At the same time,

phenomenology is the attempt to describe whatever we perceive exactly as it appears to us. the main contribution of phenomenology to . . . philosophy remains its insistence on the importance of subjectivity in any account of knowledge. It is the concern with the subjective nature of experience that links phenomenology with literature since we view [literary works] as in some sense an expression of the author's view of the world (Child, 172-173).

To gather threads together, one can say that imagery seems to be the production of a subjective experience whose main target is a union with God. Images record the mystical experience of the poet who views poetry as a means of divine communication, "it is that which while I use / I am with thee", to use Herbert's own words.

George Herbert's poetry is imbued with vivid imagery that mirrors his spiritual motifs and individual piety. His poetry, while grounded in religious subject matter, is animated through the employment of concrete imagery, weaving a rich mosaic of striking visual representations. Herbert frequently employs commonplace objects and experiences to conjure a more profound spiritual meaning, thereby ensuring accessibility to readers who may be daunted by intricate conceits used by other metaphysical poets. Nature acts as a conduit of aesthetic splendor and a testament to the divine act of creation. Illustrations of this can be found in the depiction of flowers (The Quip), birds (The Pulley), and the sun (The Day). Herbert, moreover, utilizes ordinary household items such as altars, as depicted in "The Altar," and rings, as in "The Collar," to forge metaphors that resonate with his spiritual encounters. Furthermore, Herbert's poetry is enriched by allusions to biblical narratives and personages. Instances of this include mentions of the Jordan River in "Jordan I" and the narrative of Isaac's sacrifice in "The Sacrifice."

In Easter Wings, the structure of each stanza is crafted to evoke the image of outspread wings. The central motif revolves around the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Herbert, confronting his own spiritual desolation, yearns to ascend in jubilation akin to a lark on Easter, commemorating the triumph of Christ over mortality. In 'The Collar,' Herbert expresses his defiance towards the limitations imposed by religious observance. The very title, "a collar," conjures notions of restriction and restraint. He harbors a yearning for liberation, akin to the unbounded nature of the wind and the open roads, in pursuit of worldly delights.

A classification of imagery in Herbert's poetry is of paramount importance to illustrating the poet's typical use of images serving to illuminate his mystical experience. A bird's-eye-view of Herbert's poetry can show that we have a variety of categories of images which decorate almost all his poems. Bird imagery such as larks, wing, "Easter wings", "bird of paradise" in "prayer 1" and nightingale, (Jordan I) may express the poet's ardent desire to join the divine world inhabited by these birds. Floral imagery such as flowers in "Affliction 1" and "sweet rose in "Virtue" may signify the withering beauty of the physical world and that of the metaphysical world of eternity which is the main concern of the poem and its metaphysical conceit. Imagery of natural forces such as storm and wind in "Affliction 1". Such natural forces play their role in a universe charged with God's grandeur. As for the images of height and light: stair, tower, flight, spheres in "vanity I", they may be purposeful to lift the reader's soul up to a spiritual world of sublimity, loftiness and eternal greenery.

However, this set of images may stand in opposition to the Imagery of materials such as steel, dust in The "Temper 1", "a brittle crazy glass" in "The Windows", and "seasoned timber" in "Virtue" which imply a sense of inferiority of the physical world, its metamorphosis, ephemerality and fateful and final death. There are also some images related to the five senses such as eye and ear images: ear in "The Windows" and "thy silent ears" in "Denial". They may stand for man's means to grasp, response and interact with the untold universal phenomena which directly and sermon the human mind. Consequently, all those images derived from the world of nature may convey the idea of the here and now which preoccupies the mystic-poet who is constantly in quest for truth and a union with a higher ideal.

### 3. Conclusion

Considering all what was argued here, we can conclude that George Herbert stands as a distinct and influential voice within the realm of metaphysical poetry. This is not merely for his adherence to the movement's core tenets, but for the unique way he infuses them with his own fervent faith. Herbert's unwavering faith permeates his poetry with a personal piety, shunning intricate conceits for clear expression. He explores intricacies of faith, navigating doubt and sin while craving for a closer connection with the divine. Through vivid imagery taken from nature and everyday objects, Herbert makes profound religious themes accessible to a wider audience. His enduring relevance lies in his ability to illuminate the human experience of the divine in ways that are universally understandable. George Herbert is a central poet

who embodies the core characteristics of Metaphysical poetry. Yet, it is his unadorned style, use of common language, sincere religious sentiment, dedication to faith within his work, and straightforward imagery that distinguish him from his renowned contemporaries in the genre.

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