"'Wo'is me' and 'Ah my deare':
Parenthetical Metacommentary in Donne and Herbert"

By Jean E. Graham

No one doubts the sincere humility of Herbert's sacred poems; many have described Donne's as egocentric. There are many reasons for this—including the popularity of Donne's "secular" poetry and the relative obscurity of Herbert's (which is in Latin); and Izaak Walton's biography portraying Donne as first Jack the rake and then the Rev. Dr. John Donne, while depicting Herbert as consistently "saintly"—but I propose to examine an additional explanation hitherto neglected (except for the vocative, which is occasionally noted without much discussion): the differing use of parenthesis in the two poets. "Wo'is me" and "As in plaine Maps, the farthest West is East" represent the same type of construction but evoke quite different tones. Both are examples of Donne's use of parenthesis, a figure which helps to create the distinctive voices of the *Divine Poems*.[1] While Herbert also makes extensive use of parenthesis, the voices of *The Temple* differ from those of Donne; typical examples in Herbert are "Ah my deare" and "Thy workmanship," both addressing the deity.[2] In this article I argue that each poet employs parenthetical structures in two different ways in his sacred poems, creating two different voices, one filled with emotion and the other cool, analytical, didactic or homiletic. Despite both using parenthesis in these two ways, the poets differ in tone: while Donne's parenthetical

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[1] Whenever possible, quotations of Donne's poetry come from *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, gen. ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995-). For poems not yet available in the *Variorum*, I quote from John T. Shawcross's *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).
[2] All quotations of Herbert's poetry come from *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

constructions evoking an emotional voice tend to describe his own feelings, Herbert's nearly always reference either divine emotions or feelings elicited in the poet by his Lord; and while Donne's analytical parenthesis usually seems pedantic, most of the examples from Herbert—with the notable exception of "The Church-porch" and "The Church Militant"—seem pastoral.

The context of this discussion of voice and parenthesis is what Nancy Selleck describes as the construction of self, although she does not consider parenthesis.[3] Three articles from linguistics are also pertinent: Arthur L. Palacas's study of parenthetical structures (which he calls "parentheticals") in student writing, focusing on the creation of voice; Irma Taavitsainen's study of interjections in early modern prose and drama; and John Lennard's exploration of early modern usage of parenthetical marks (which he calls *lunulae*), in which he uses examples from neither Donne nor Herbert.[4] The focus of this current study is both more narrow—the sacred poetry of Donne and Herbert rather than early modern literature in general—and more broad than Taavitsainen's or Lennard's, since not all parenthetical constructions are interjections or use *lunulae*.[5] In his article "Parentheticals and Personal Voice," Palacas defines "parentheticals" as

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[3] Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[4] Palacas, "Parentheticals and Personal Voice," *Written Communication* 6 (1989): 506-27; Taavitsainen, "Interjections in Early Modern English: From Imitation of Spoken to Conventions of Written Language," in *Historical Pragmatics: Pragmatic Developments in the History of English*, ed. Andreas H. Jucker (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995), pp. 439-65; Lennard, *But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[5] Like Lennard, Angel Day in his 1599 *The English Secretary* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967) restricts himself to parenthetical structures marked by a specific form of punctuation—which he calls "halfe circles" (p. 83). I follow Palacas in using the broader definition, since other punctuation marks can easily perform the same function. Moreover, post-mortem publication and lack of autograph manuscripts typically means punctuation may not be authorial. For instance, Janis Lull writes in *The Poem in Time: Reading George Herbert's Revisions of* The Church (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Press, 1990) that "[i]n spite of Herbert's own attention to the position and formal features of each individual poem in *The Church*, some of these features were treated less than carefully by

structures outside the basic sentence, "words, phrases, or clauses grammatical in their own right . . . but not integral to the grammar of the basic sentence."[6] Other characteristics of parentheticals are that they are typically separated from the basic sentence by punctuation (including curved and square brackets, commas, and dashes); by intonation if read aloud; by a "distinctively loose structural connection in the sentence, verging on the absence of any structural connection"; and by a similarly loose connection semantically.[7] Similarly, in his 1555 *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammer and Rhetorike*, Richard Sherry provided a definition of the construction he termed "interpolitio" and explained as "a sense cast betwixte the speache, before the talke be al ended": such a construction is nearly unnecessary to the basic sentence, for "although [this figure] give some strength, yet when it is taken away, it leaveth the same speach perfect inough."[8] For instance, in *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577) Henry Peacham quotes from Ephesians, a quotation in which the information in parentheses provides the rationale and context for the sentence "I also cease not to give thanks for you," which is "perfect inough" without the addition: "Where I also (after that I hard of the faith which ye haue in the Lord Jesu, and loue unto all saintes) cease

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Herbert's first editor in 1633" (pp. 127-28). As Mario Di Cesare in *Textual Introduction to George Herbert: The Temple: A Diplomatic Edition of the Bodleian Manuscript (Tanner 307)* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) points out, "The autograph revisions . . . show that Herbert tended toward light punctuation" (p. xxi). However, differences in punctuation among the various editions and manuscripts may not be very significant regarding parenthesis: for instance, the Bodleian manuscript lacks punctuation before "I fear," which is still recognizable as a parenthetical in "*Your heart was foul I fear.*" Thus this article considers any element that exists in a looser relationship to the sentence, and that may serve as a commentary on the sentence's meaning.

[6] Palacas, p. 515.

[7] Ibid., p. 514.

[8] Sherry, *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammer and Rhetorike* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms). Cf. Joannes Susenbrotus (1540) in *The* Epitome Troporum ac Schematum *of Susenbrotus: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, trans. Joseph Xavier Brennan (Dissertation for the University of Illinois, 1953), who described parenthesis as "the interruption of the right order by the insertion of some idea," adding that it might also "occur . . . when some mediate idea interrupts the continuation of a discourse" (p. 33).

not to give thanks for you." The parenthesis comments on the basic sentence, "giv[ing it] some strength."[9] Furthermore, "I h[e]ard of the faith which ye haue in the Lord Jesu, and loue unto all saintes," which could function as an independent clause, is altered by being pressed into service as a comment on another sentence. Lennard notes that "[parenthesis] marks function not only epistemologically, as cues for the reader, but also ontologically, altering the status of the words which they enclose"; he adds that parenthesis may serve the same function as an aside in drama: "an aside grants to the audience information withheld from other characters in the play, and can thus involve spectators directly in the action. In texts written to be read silently or meditatively the effects which can be achieved with punctuation are necessarily of a different order, but remain comparable."[10] Similarly, Palacas argues that parentheticals in student expository prose indicate a writer's more "private" thoughts, "second-order thoughts about, or evaluations of, other presented meanings."[11] Thus parenthesis may be either more personally revealing than the main text or more analytical, a commentary on the main text.[12]

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[9] Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1954).

[10] Lennard, pp. 21, 83.

[11] Palacas, p. 509.

[12] Such reflection was frequent in early modern writing, according to George Puttenham, who wrote in *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), that "[t]he figure is so common that it needeth none example" (p. 252). However, parenthesis was often considered a potential vice. For instance, consider the comment from Peacham cited above: "although it give some strength, yet when it is taken away, it leaveth the same speach perfect inough." Similarly, after succinctly stating the definition of what he terms parenthesis—"the insertion of one sentence in the midst of another"—Quintilian presents a criticism in *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1921), 8.2.15: parenthesis "may seriously hinder the understanding of a passage, unless the insertion is short." That he immediately modifies his criticism with "unless the insertion is short" suggests that a vice in rhetoric could be a virtue under different circumstances, as William Poole argues in "The Vices of Style," in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 239. According to Poole, "the virtues were themselves unstable as a group, intermittently vicious" (p. 243). Only Susenbrotus is thoroughly positive

Donne’s emotional parentheticals are best exemplified by his “Holy Sonnets” and “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward,” and are typically combined with the first-person pronoun. Parenthetical structures include the vocative, the most frequent type of parenthesis in the “Holy Sonnets.” Because the vocative signals the addressee, it is nearly always more other-focused than other parentheticals. Thus, several sonnets begin with a vocative addressing the deity: “Batter my heart, three person’d God’; “Father, part of his double interest”; and “Show me deare Christ, thy Spouse.” In two of these cases, the first line creates a relationship between deity and speaker, who wishes to have his heart battered and to be granted a revelation of the true Church.[13] The first line of the sestet of “At the round Earths imagind corners” similarly holds God and the speaker in tension, in this case with “Lord” in an agentive role, that of prospectively permitting “me” to grieve for the dead and the speaker’s own mortality: “But let them sleepe, Lord, and me mourne a space.” In contrast, “As due by many titles I resigne / My selfe to thee O God” initially focuses on the speaker; the “many titles” may seem at first to belong to “I,” the only person in the first line. In this case, the pronoun “thee” and the vocative “O God” correct and redirect the focus, just as the speaker “resigne[s]” selfhood in favor of the deity. Nor is God the only addressee of the sonnets’ vocatives, the only one portrayed in relationship with the

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regarding parenthesis and other forms of “altered and figurative construction,” asserting that users would be justified in citing as precedents “the example of the greatest men who have written in the Latin language” (p. 24). In contrast, Puttenham went so far as to class parenthesis as a type of “disorder,” part of a group to which “the Greeks gave a general name *hyperbaton*, as much to say as the Trespasser,” and concludes that such “disorders” are “so foul and intolerable as I will not seem to place them among the figures, but do range them as they deserve among the vicious or faulty speeches” (p. 252). That Puttenham is much more negative than Quintilian seems to contradict Poole’s “tentative conclusion” that “*early-modern writers grew more tolerant of certain vices than were the theorists of antiquity*” (p. 238, italics Poole’s).

[13] In this last, after more than an octave devoted to the identity of this spouse, another vocative, “kind husband,” in the sestet, serves to remind us that the bride has a bridegroom: “Betray kind husband thy Spouse” (11).

speaker, since “Spitt in my face ye Iewes” and “Death be not proud” both begin with vocatives, and the latter continues to address death, emphasizing this topic and addressee with additional vocatives: “For those whom thou thinkst thou dost overthrow / Die not *poore death*, nor yet canst thou kill mee,” and the final line: “And Death shalbe no more, *Death* thou shallt dy” (emphasis mine).

The focus on the other is more complex when the vocative represents the poet’s soul, as in the sonnet beginning “Wilt thou love God, as he, thee?” which directs the soul as follows: “then digest, / My Soule, this holsome meditation.” Just as the poet orders his soul to internalize an idea, in “If faythfull Soules be alike glorified” he instructs himself to repent: “Then turne / O pensive Soule to God; for he knowes best / Thy griefe, for he put it in my brest.” Each of these constructions serves to distance the speaker from his own soul, drawing on phrasing from the Psalms—for instance, “Bless thou the LORD, O my soul,” the first line of both Psalm 103 and Psalm 104—to emphasize internal conflict.[14] The same is true in another sonnet:

> What yf this present were the worlds last night?
>
> Looke in my Hart, *O Soule*, where thou dost dwell
>
> The picture of Christ crucifyde and tell
>
> Whether that countenance can thee affright? (1-4, emphasis mine)

Immediately following the vocative, the soul is told that it dwells in close proximity to “[t]he picture of Christ crucifyde,” which thus should not terrify it. Similarly, “Oh my blacke Soule” shows a distance between the speaker’s soul and Christ, only to point toward the possibility of the poet becoming more Christ-like through Christ’s blood:

[14] All biblical quotations come from *The English Bible: King James Version. Vol. 1: The Old Testament*, ed. Herbert Marks (New York: Norton, 2012).

Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,

And red with blushing as thou art with Sin.

Or washe thee in Christs blood, which hath this might

That beeing red, it dyes red Soules to whight. (11-14, emphasis mine)

This last is an example not only of a vocative but also of the most common interjection of the “Holy Sonnets,” “o[h],” which nearly always expresses negative emotion. Another instance is the sonnet “As due by many titles,” which after suggesting hope of Christ “fight[ing]” for the speaker, shifts to impending “dispayre,” a shift marked by “O”:

Except thou rise, and for thyne owne worke fight

O I shall soone dispayre, when I do see

That thou lov’st Mankind well, yet wilt not choose mee,

And Satan hates me yet is loth to loose mee. (11-14, emphasis mine)

Despite the shift in tone, the sonnet’s emphasis remains on the relationship, or perceived lack of relationship, between “I” and “thou,” as it does in “Batter my hart,” where “Oh” expresses distress that the speaker’s efforts to establish a close relationship are inadequate: “I, like an vsurp’d towne, to’another dew, / Labor to’admit you, but *Oh* to no end” (emphasis mine).

Donne’s sonnets use three emotional interjections other than “oh”—“alas,” “woe,” and “poor”—all three paired with the first person pronoun and representing grief, repentance, or desperation.[15] “If poysonous Minerals” lists bad things that nevertheless “[c]annot be damn’d,” before lamenting, “alas why should I bee?” In “Why ame I by all Creatures wayted on?” the speaker compares himself to animals, which are sinless, and wails, “wo’is me.” “O might those

[15] Cf. Taavitsainen’s identification of “O” (or “oh”) and “alas” as the most common interjections in early modern prose and drama (pp. 453-61).

sighes and teares returne again” laments that “to poore me is allow’d / No ease” from grief. Whether or not “poore” is enclosed in parenthetical marks (as in Shawcross’s edition, for instance), it adds self-pity to a repentance characterized by “holy discontent,” mourning, pain, and “vehement griefe”; in full, the last lines lament that “to poore me is allowd / No ease; for long yet vehement griefe hath beene / The effect and cause; the punishment and Sin.” The adjectival or parenthetical commentary accentuates the main discourse, and all concerns the suffering self—although in this case not juxtaposed with another except by implication: the other is the one who “allow[s]” the speaker no relief. Using both “alas” and the more typical “oh,” “I ame a litle World” distances the speaker from his soul by portraying the individual as two worlds, one spiritual and one physical, although both mortal:

> I ame a litle World, made cunningly
>
> Of Elements and an Angelique Spright,
>
> But blacke Sin hath betrayd to endles night
>
> My Worlds both parts, and *Oh* both parts must dy.
>
> . . . .
>
> Powre new Seas in myne eyes, that so I might
>
> Drowne my World, with my weeping earnestly.
>
> Or washe it: if it must be drown’d no more:
>
> But *Oh* it must be burn’d; *alas* the fyer
>
> Of Lust and Envy haue burnt it hertofore
>
> And made it fouler; Let those flames retyre,
>
> And burne me *O God* with a fiery Zeale
>
> Of thee,’ and thy house, which doth in eating heale. (1-4, 7-14, emphasis mine)

The first three interjections bemoan the fate of the self, signaling a contrast between the positive nature of the speaker’s creation (as an angelic/angel-like spirit and a body that demonstrates the ingenuity of the Creator) and a recognition that sin results in the necessary death of “both parts” that comprise the little world of the self. The final lines express the poet’s hope for redemptive violence (as in “Batter my heart”), pairing an interjection and vocative, and combining them with an imperative: “burne me O God.” The demanded fire is neither punitive nor defiling; rather, since it is the “fiery Zeale” of love for God, it brings healing.[16]

Thus “burne me O God” represents not despair but a prayer for aid, a closely-related concept, as the recognition that a situation is without human remedy impels and necessitates a request for divine intervention. Another example is the sonnet “If poysonous Minerals,” which uses “O” to introduce (in the sestet) an impassioned plea that Christ forget sin because of his own sacrificial death and the speaker’s repentance: “O of thyne only worthy blood, / And my teares make a heauenly Lethean flood / And drowne in it, my Sins blacke memoree.” In the sestet, Brian Cummings asserts, the sonnet “turns inward in self-introspective reproach”; Cummings wonders if “O God, Oh!” (the punctuation in Shawcross) is “an exhalation, a groan, or an expletive”—as if the speaker is “swearing at himself, or . . . perhaps at God.”[17] Charlotte Clutterbuck, on the other hand, argues that Cummings “misses the change of address”: “The three questions of the octave were directed at the universe, challenging the justice of God’s threats. The single question of the sestet confronts and challenges the [speaker] himself, and goes

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[16] The final sonnet in the Westmoreland sequence once again expresses the contradictory impulses and negative emotions of the poet, beginning with the interjection of the first line: “Oh, to vex me, contraryes meete in one.”

[17] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 400.

on to make a direct appeal to God in the second person.”[18] The exclamation represents not “swearing” but the beginning of a heart-felt petition. Similarly, after comparing the Mosaic and the new covenants with two wills in “Father, part of his double interest,” the speaker chooses the law of grace with the exclamation “Oh let that last Will stand” This prayer is hopeful, as “thy all-healing Grace and Spiritt” have the capacity to “[r]evive and quicken what Law and Letter kill.” Continuing the theme of requesting God’s grace, the sonnet beginning “O might those sighes and teares returne againe” is less a prayer than a wish to be able to pray, to be empowered to “[m]ourne” productively, “with some fruite,” in contrast to the speaker’s previous grief, which was futile because not divinely inspired. All these interjections are more positive, since they turn the speaker’s desperation in the direction from which a remedy might come.

Only four instances of parenthesis in the “Holy Sonnets” differ from this pattern of mourning and petitioning. One, in “Show me deare Christ,” expresses incredulity that either the radical Protestant or the Roman Catholic Church could represent the true bride of Christ: “What is it She . . . ?” Like those parentheticals which are despairing because the speaker considers only the inadequate self, and those which are somewhat hopeful because the speaker calls on the only true source of salvation, “[w]hat” is filled with emotion. Similarly, in “As due by many titles I resigne,” the speaker describes himself as God’s “Sonne,” “Servant,” “Sheepe,” “Image,” and “Temple of they Spirit,” with on the last a parenthetical comment expressing remorse: “(till I betrayed / My selfe) a Temple of thy Spirit divine.” In contrast, the other two parentheticals explicate rather than expressing feeling. In the final line of “Why ame I by all Creatures wayted on?” the parallel appositives “his creatures” and “his foes” comprise a parenthetical defining

[18] Clutterbuck, *Encounters with God in Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate Press, 2005), p. 126.

"vs," and thus expressing the tension of created beings in rebellion against their source, who is also their redeemer: "But their Creator, whom Sin nor Nature tyed, / For vs, *his creatures and his foes* hath dyed" (emphasis mine). Similarly, in "Wilt thou love God, as he, thee?" the poet uses parenthesis to define and defend the concept of the Trinity, asserting that the Father's begetting of the Son does not imply a time when the latter did not exist: "The father havuing begott a Sonne most blest, / And still begetting, (for he nere begonne)." Both these appositives are explanatory, with "for he nere begonne" amounting to a doctrinal statement; each produces a tone quite different from that of "wo'is me" or any of the other parentheticals in the "Holy Sonnets."

Taking the emotive and the explanatory types of parenthesis together, we have a grammatical basis for Louis Martz's description of "the tone and manner of Donne's religious poetry" as "subtle theological analysis, punctuated with passionate questions and exclamations."[19] One type of parenthesis, represented by only two constructions in the "Holy Sonnets," helps to explain, even clarifying an issue of theology. The other type, heavily emphasized in the "Holy Sonnets," and most often accompanied by the personal pronouns on which Helen Gardner and others have remarked, is emotional. Overall, parenthesis makes the "Holy Sonnets" seem highly personal, autobiographical, and filled with feeling—even what Gardner describes as "[t]he almost histrionic note of the 'Holy Sonnets.'"[20] Yet within the

[19] Martz, *Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 47.
[20] Gardner, Introduction to *The Divine Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. xxxi. Cf. A. C. Partridge's characterization of the sonnets as expressing "an undoubted instability of the passions," in *John Donne: Language and Style* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978), p. 138. Also see Ramie Targoff's comment on "the personal and often anguished voice of the nineteen 'Holy Sonnets,'" in *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 92.

sequence, emotive parentheticals are not evenly distributed; several sonnets are completely free of parenthesis. Clearly, emotive parenthesis is not the only way to persuade readers that the poet is personally invested in a sonnet; for example, “At the round Earths imagind corners” is free of parenthesis other than the vocative “Angels,” but uses first-person pronouns, and concludes with the petition “Teach me how to repent; for that’s as good / As if thou hadst Seald my pardon with thy blood.” P. G. Stanwood sees this sonnet as “filled with personal effort and tribulation,” with the dilemma “resolved personally and internally.”[21] Nevertheless, the heavy use of parenthesis to express emotion contributes largely to the tone of the sequence.

In contrast, “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward” contains few parentheticals—and none at all in the first thirty-five lines, although these lines are filled with the first person singular (e.g., “I do not see,” “I durst not looke”). Yet although parentheticals are used sparingly in the poem, their employment is crucial, for in line thirty-six a vocative occurs to signal a change from the poet’s human perspective to Christ’s: “and thou look’st towards mee, / *O Saviour*, as thou hang’st upon the tree” (35-36, emphasis mine). Christ’s body is fastened to the cross, but he is capable of agency, for looking is a conscious choice: the speaker “durst not looke,” but Christ dares to look at him. Donne immediately returns to “I,” an “I” seemingly acting in revolt, for “I turne my back to thee,” but this act of apparent agency and rejection is “but to [passively] receive / Corrections” from Christ. The thou/me pairing of line thirty-five (in which “thou” is addressed with the exclamatory “O”) is reversed to I/thee, but an I/thee that still implies thou/me. Furthermore, it leads to an explicit thou/me, in which “thou” is once more invoked with “O,” as the speaker begs for violent cleansing:

[21] Stanwood, “The Vision of God in the Sonnets of John Donne and George Herbert,” *John Donne Journal* 21 (2002): p. 97.

I turne my backe to thee, but to receive

Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.

O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,

Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,

Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,

That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face. (37-42, emphasis mine)

In the poem's final line, the pronouns linking the speaker and his Savior have come full circle, as does the action of looking: the speaker who once dared not look has been transformed by Christ's looking so that he himself is able to look. Thus Donne retains the personal tone while changing his focus from self alone in the majority of the poem to self and Savior in its final lines. The vocatives join the personal pronouns to create this portrayal of a struggle as the self attempts to look outwards, to "turne [his] face" toward God rather than inward.[22]

In contrast to the personal, emotional "Holy Sonnets" and "Good Friday, 1613" are "La Corona" and three other poems, all more neglected by critics than those of the preceding discussion, and all largely lacking in emotive parenthetic constructions. In *John Donne, Body and Soul*, Ramie Targoff describes the "La Corona" sonnet sequence as "largely impersonal in tone."[23] Likewise, Diane Chambers notes that readers often find the sequence "impersonal and

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[22] Perhaps the tension expressed in the parentheticals as well as the pronouns is what influences Gardner to describe "Good Friday, 1613" as "a highly personal poem" (p. xxxiii). Clutterbuck, on the other hand, asserts that "the poem opens in an erudite, intellectual tone," and "comes to life" only after the "first, pivotal question of the poem" (i.e., line 18): "From being measured, abstract, and theological, it now reverts to the passionate and concrete language of the Sonnets" (pp. 139, 141). Neither Gardner nor Clutterbuck recognizes the role of parentheticals in creating the personal, passionate voice, whether they find that voice throughout or only in the second part of the poem.

[23] Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 108. Cf. Targoff, *Common Prayer*, p. 92. Earlier, Gardner posited that Donne "chose to

intellectual," while David Edwards compares "La Corona" to the "bookish" poem "The Crosse."[24] Yet "La Corona" is not completely "bookish" and "impersonal." Targoff exempts "the sonnet entitled 'Resurrection,' in which Donne implores God to enroll his name in 'thy little booke.'"[25] Barbara Kiefer Lewalski believes that the sequence as a whole is a "personal poetic emblem" even though constructed from "traditional meditative, liturgical, emblematic, and rhetorical materials"; she adds that the final sestet expresses "personal prayer to Christ."[26] The parenthetic structures of "La Corona" contribute to this mixed tone, impersonal overall, with personal moments. In form, the sequence is a prayer, and thus uses frequent vocatives, from the second sonnet's address to Mary using the interjection "loe" ("loe faithfull Virgin"); through the fourth sonnet, which addresses Joseph; to the final sonnet, significantly invoking Christ not once but in three consecutive lines, with the vocatives "O strong Ramme," "Mild lambe," and "Bright Torch." As Julia Walker asserts, "'I' is not the focus of 'La Corona,' but the 'you' of God, of Mary, of Joseph, of Christ."[27] In the first four sonnets, only one other parenthetical appears, in "Nativity," also addressed to Mary: "But *Oh*, for thee, for him, hath th'Inne no roome?" (emphasis mine). On the other hand, the two final sonnets—"Ascention" and "Resurrection," those that Targoff and Lewalski find at least partially personal—use interjections to reveal a preoccupation with the poet's emotions and with his soul, respectively. Directly before

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use the sonnet, a form he had used before this only for epistles, because he wished to write formally and impersonally . . ." (p. xxiii).

[24] Chambers, "'Salvation to All That Will Is Nigh': Public Meditation in John Donne's 'La Corona,'" *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 19 (1993): p. 161; Edwards, *John Donne: Man of Flesh and Spirit* (London and New York: Continuum Press, 2001), p. 224.

[25] Targoff, *John Donne*, p. 108.

[26] Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 259; cf. Martz, p. 110.

[27] Walker, "The Religious Lyric as Genre," *English Language Notes* 25:1 (1987 Sept.): 41.

“Ascention,” “Crucifying” serves as the sequence’s hinge. In this sonnet, the speaker bemoans what “the worst”—that is, those who envy Christ—do to the Savior:

> But *Oh!* The worst are most, they will and can,
>
> *Alas*, and do, unto the’immaculate,
>
> Whose creature Fate is, now prescribe a Fate,
>
> Measuring self-lifes infinity to’a span,
>
> Nay to an inch. (61-65, emphasis mine)

“Oh!” and “[a]las” reflect strong emotions about the Crucifixion, even though the sonnet lacks first personal pronouns until the conclusion: “Now thou art lifted up, draw mee to thee, / And at thy death giving such liberall dole, / Moyst, with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule” (68-70). Thus the poet moves from emotive parentheticals to a depiction of a potential relationship with his Savior, a relationship requested by the poet but initiated by Christ, who from seemingly-passive victim of violence is transformed into an active redeemer, “draw[ing],” “giving,” and “[m]oyst[ening].” This last line of “Crucifying,” with its thou/me juxtaposition, when repeated in “Resurrection” serves as the context for a two-line parenthetical describing the speaker’s soul:

> Moyst with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule
>
> Shall (though she now be in extreme degree
>
> Too stony hard, and yet too fleshly,) bee
>
> Freed by that drop, from being starv’d, hard, or foule . . . . (71-74)

Although this parenthesis explains rather than ejaculating “oh” or “alas,” the explication clarifies the state of the speaker’s soul. Moreover, the immediate context and the sonnet as a whole request divine intervention for the speaker, who wishes to be sustained by Christ’s blood, brought from death to life by Christ’s death, and his name “enroule[d]” in the Book of Life. The

final sonnet, “Ascention,” initially abandons the first-person pronoun because the speaker is addressing himself, telling himself to “Joy at the’uprising of this Sunne, and Sonne” and to “Behold the Highest”; Lewalski describes this octave as “extend[ing] to the public mode,” evidently reading these imperatives as corporate rather than individual.[28] When the interjections and the vocatives addressing Christ begin, however, the first-person singular returns; significantly, it is these lines that Patrick F. O’Connell asserts “have the tone of authentic prayer”[29]:

> *O strong Ramme*, which hast batter’d heaven for *mee*,
> *Mild lambe*, which with thy blood, hast mark’d the path;
> *Bright Torch*, which shin’st, that *I* the way may see,
> *Oh*, with thy owne blood quench thy owne just wrath;
> And if thy holy Spirit, *my* Muse did raise,
> Deigne at *my* hands this crowne of prayer and praise. (93-98, emphasis mine)

Thus the final lines of the sonnet sequence combine the other-focused and the self-focused, using first-person singular pronouns with a series of vocatives and two instances of the exclamation “o[h]” to create an emotional and personal tone, evoking a relationship between the poet and his Savior, between “my Muse” and “thy holy Spirit.”

Since parentheticals produce a personal tone in the final sonnets of “La Corona,” while a lack of these structures contributes to more formal tone in the first part of the sequence (and the octave of the final sonnet), one might assume that the “bookish” poem “The Crosse” contains no

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[28] Lewalski, p. 259.
[29] O'Connell, “‘La Corona’: Donne's *Ars Poetica Sacra*,” in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 129.

parentheticals. Many readers have responded negatively to this poem, from Francis Turner Palgrave, who in the nineteenth century wrote the marginal comment “Spoiled by its own cleverness,” to P. M. Oliver, who decries the poem’s “use of contentious words” and “the speaker’s aggressive certainty.”[30] In fact, three instances of the parenthetical occur, but all belong to the explanatory type. Two rename “[Christ’s] image”: “His image, th’image of his Crosse” (2) and “And be his image, or not his, but hee” (36). Another, “no Crosse,” renames “affliction”:

> . . . [T]he losse
> Of this Crosse, were to mee another Crosse.
> Better were worse, for no affliction,
> *No Crosse* is so extreme, as to have none;
> Who can blot out the Crosse . . . ? (11-15, emphasis mine)

Thus the cross is equated both with Christ, or at least Christ’s image, and with personal affliction, as the speaker experiences a metaphorical cross by being without the cross—or, rather, he would experience affliction if he should be without the cross, for the situation is hypothetical. Thus despite the “mee,” these parentheticals are analytical rather than emotive; indeed, the speaker seems entirely caught up in a scholarly mode, as distinct from that of prayer.

The same type of parenthetical occurs in “Upon the Annuntiation and Passion,” of which Gardner comments that “Donne writes with strict objectivity.”[31] The first appears in the second line, which names that which “My soule eates twice” as “Christ hither and away” (that is,

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[30] Palgrave, in *John Donne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. A.J. Smith (London and Boston: Routledge Press, 1975), p. 434; Oliver, *Donne’s Religious Writing: A Discourse of Feigned Devotion* (London and New York: Longman Press, 1997), pp. 72, 73.
[31] Gardner, p. xxxiii.

Christ’s Incarnation, anticipated by the Annunciation to Mary, and his Ascension, enabled by his death and Resurrection). Nearly all nineteen lines between this and the next occurrence of a parenthetical contain third-person references to the speaker’s soul as “she”; using “she” rather than “I” certainly contributes to a sense that this speaker’s emotions are not fully engaged in the poem. The other parentheticals are also quite “bookish.” One presents the simile “[a]s in plaine Maps, the farthest West is East” (21) to explain how an abridged account of Christ’s life on earth “makes one” his conception and his death. The next defines the Church as “Gods Court of faculties” (23). The final example explains exaggeration, as if to a child: where “it” refers to the Pole Star (which in turn serves as a metaphor for the Church), “we say it doth never stray” even though it does, and we can justify this hyperbole “because it strayes not farre”:

> . . . [B]y the selfe-fix’d Pole wee never doe
> Direct our course, but the next starre thereto,
> Which shows where the’other is, and which we say
> (Because it strayes not farre) doth never stray . . . . (25-28).

In the same way, most of the parentheticals of “A Litanie” are reflective but not emotive. Annabel Patterson calls this “an absurdly neglected poem,” and the tone, which the parentheticals help create, may contribute to the neglect.[32] As in “La Corona,” other-focused vocatives are frequent, such as the five to the Trinity and its individual members in the first four stanzas; later stanzas contain the refrain “deliver us,” frequently with a vocative such as “Good Lord” or “Lord.” These two types of vocative predominate, establishing the poem as a “[l]itanie.” Three parentheticals are explanatory: “Patriarches” are defined as “Those great

[32] Patterson, “A Man Is to Himself a Dioclesian: Donne's Rectified Litany,” *John Donne Journal* 21 (2002): 35.

Grandfathers of thy Church . . .” (55-60); the “bookes of life” are the Bible and the list of those rewarded with eternal life (“for love / To know thy Scriptures tells us, we are wrought / In thy other booke”) (111-13); and the three-fold task of those filled with grace is enumerated: “Since to be gratious / Our taske is treble, to pray, beare, and doe” (123-24). In the first example, the parenthesis exceeds the remainder of the stanza in length:

And let thy Patriarches Desire
(Those great Grandfathers of thy Church, which saw
More in the cloud, then wee in fire,
Whom Nature clear’d more, then us grace and law,
And now in Heaven still pray, that wee
May use our new helps right,)
Be satisfied, and fructifie in mee;
Let not my minde be blinder by more light
Nor Faith by Reason added, lose her sight. (55-63)

A more emotive parenthetical occurs when the speaker bursts out, “O decline / Mee” (80-81), yet this impassioned exclamation is also a grammatical pun, and its cleverness undermines its sincerity. Despite these relatively impersonal parenthetical constructions, however, a few critics have found personal elements in “A Litanie.” For instance, the tenth stanza, on martyrdom, contains lines which according to Dennis Flynn are “[e]vidence that Donne had to deal with such feelings [i.e., of guilt] even years later,” over his brother’s death in prison after sheltering a Catholic priest.[33] Edwards also comments on these lines, adding that “Donne’s own

[33] Flynn, “Donne the Survivor,” in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 19.

psychological needs come out even more clearly" in the fifteenth stanza, "when he asks to be given the wisdom to avoid the many pitfalls of daily life"; overall, though, Edwards concludes that the tone of the poem "suggests a recovery of balance after the highly disturbed sonnets of 1608-09" (i.e., the Holy Sonnets).[34] Other critics find the entire poem "markedly private" and "highly personal," in the words of Dominic Baker-Smith.[35] Scott R. Pilarz asserts that Donne "takes an historically communal prayer and turns it into an examination of his own conscience"; he finds the poem somewhat self-centered, noting that the poem ends as it begins, "on a note of self-concern."[36] Gardner's comments reflect the mixture of emotive and objective in the poem: "It appears impersonal, but is, in fact, highly personal" and "is an elaborate private prayer, rather incongruously cast into a liturgical form."[37] One of the most personal points occurs in the third stanza, which is also one of the poem's only instances of first person singular: "O Holy Ghost, whose temple I / Am" (19-20). Not only does this address incorporate the interjection "O" but also at the end of this stanza another parenthetical interrupts the speaker's plea that the Spirit of God fill him:

> Double'in my heart thy flame,
>
> Which let devout sad teares intend; and let
>
> (Though this glass lanthorne, flesh, do suffer maime)
>
> Fire, Sacrifice, Priest, Altar be the same. (24-27)

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[34] Edwards, pp. 239, 237.
[35] Baker-Smith, "Donne's 'Litanie,'" in *Review of English Studies* 26: 102 (1975 May): 173. Cf. Hannibal Hamlin, "Poetic Re-creation in John Donne's 'A Litanie,'" in *The Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Mary A. Papazian (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 190, 202; and Oliver, pp. 88-89.
[36] Pilarz, "'Expressing a Quintessence Even from Nothingness': Contextualizing John Donne's 'A Litanie,'" in *Christianity and Literature* 48:4 (1999 Summer): 413, 420.
[37] Gardner, pp. xxiv, xxviii.

The interruption expresses the intensity of the speaker's desire to serve as a lantern for the Spirit, and his understanding that a full revelation of divine glory would destroy his physical body.

Compared with Donne, Herbert uses fewer paragrammatical constructions—his syntax is simpler overall—but at first glance they sound much like those of Donne at his most emotional: "Alas, I did so, when I left my crown" and "Alas, what have I stolen from you?" But the speaker of both lines is Jesus, so rather than vocalizing his own despair, Herbert is giving voice and depth to the divine. A third example, "Alas, my God, I know not what," is the human speaker expressing his inability to respond appropriately to Jesus's sacrifice; thus Herbert's parenthetical words, even when apparently self-focused, emphasize the love and awe-inspiring holiness of Herbert's Lord. Stanley E. Fish argues that "Herbert writes himself out of his poems (weaves himself out of the sense) and leaves them to the prior claim of another. In short, he lets his poems go, so that both they and the consciousness whose independence they were supposedly asserting give themselves up to God, exchanging their separate identities for a share in his omnipresence."[38] Targoff argues that *The Temple* is at once public and intensely personal. Contrasting it with Donne's "ostensibly liturgical" but "consistently idiosyncratic" poem "The Litanie," she characterizes *The Temple* as filled with "Herbert's devotional generosity: his implicit willingness to render available to his fellow worshippers his formalized expressions of faith, doubt, hope, and praise. Far from restricting their voice to the poet's own, these largely first-person lyrics seem filled with a longing to contribute their rhymes to the collective project of worship."[39] Herbert's parentheticals encourage us to read his poetry in this way: as sincere and expressive.

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[38] Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), p. 190.
[39] Targoff, *Common Prayer*, pp. 93, 104.

In *The Church*, the central part of *The Temple*, vocatives are as frequent as they are in Donne's poetry, and the majority address God. Arnold Stein writes in an argument about Herbert's "art of plainness" that "Herbert addresses God directly or writes with the intention of being overheard by Him."[40] In the first line of "The Altar," for instance, the poet invokes the deity: "A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant reares." In fact, many of Herbert's poems begin by invoking God, usually as "Lord"; the first line of "Repentance," for example, is "Lord, I confesse my sinne is great." Similarly, the poem "Longing" pleads for a hearing from God: "Lord, I fall, / Yet call" (11-12); "Consider, Lord; Lord, bow thine eare, / And heare!" (29-30); and "Bowels of pitie, heare! / Lord of my soul, love of my minde, / Bow down thine eare!" (19-21). Herbert's God is so characterized by love and willingness to show mercy that he can be addressed not only as "Lord" and "love of my minde" but also with the synecdoche "[b]owels of pitie." Many of the vocatives that are not directed toward God still pertain to matters of the spiritual life, such as the Bible ("Oh Book! infinite sweetnesse") in "The H. Scriptures. I" and the clergy ("Blest Order") in "The Priesthood." Other examples include "Sweetest of sweets" and "Comfort" (music, in "Church-musick"), "O day most calm, most bright" (Sunday, in the poem of that title), and "Brave rose" and "O Mother deare and kinde" (the church, in "Church-rents and schismes"). In "Vertue," vocatives structure the poem, with successive stanzas beginning "Sweet day," "Sweet rose," and "Sweet spring"; only the fourth and final stanza differs, opening with "Onely a sweet and vertuous soul . . . ." In this case, the vocatives identify and address that which is mortal, before describing that which is immortal, the "vertuous soul."

[40] Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 2.

Unlike previous examples, that which is addressed in “Vertue” is not wholly spiritual. As in Donne’s “Death be not proud,” Herbert also uses negative vocatives, such as “Money, thou bane of blisse, & sourse of wo” (the first line of “Avarice”) and the opening vocative “Death” in the poem of that title. Although the poet never specifically addresses his soul, as does Donne, he begins “Easter” with “Rise heart” and the second stanza with “Awake, my lute,” inviting himself to praise the risen Christ with heart and verse. Conversely, he represses his less-spiritual longings with “Content thee, greedie heart” (the opening line of “The Size”); and in “Church-monuments,” he addresses his “Deare flesh,” telling it to “learn here [i.e., at a tomb] thy stemme / And true descent” (17-18). “Miserie” is perhaps the closest to a didactic Herbert poem in *The Church*; it concerns not the poet but mankind:

My God, Man cannot praise thy name:

Thou art all brightnesse, perfect puritie;

The sunne holds down his head for shame,

Dead with eclipses, when we speak of thee:

How shall infection

Presume on thy perfection? (31-36)

Stein describes the poem as “based upon a concealed dialogue between man’s folly and God’s love,” and as “a full review of human failure.”[41] Yet, as Fish writes, “In a way, the most prominent word in the poem is one that does not appear, although it is implied in every accusation: man, not I; he, not I; they, not I.”[42] Fish is correct that “I” is implied, but in his list of pronouns he ignores “we”—unlike Stein, who continues that, in addition to the goal of

[41] Ibid., p. 184.
[42] Fish, p. 180.

reviewing human failure, “Herbert has another, more personal, aim, which is marked by the management of personal pronouns. These move from ‘he’ to ‘they’ to ‘we,’ back to ‘he’ to ‘thou’ to ‘he,’ and then the final admission: ‘My God, I mean my self.’”[43] Although the stanza given above avoids the first-person singular, “[t]he sunne holds down his head for shame, / . . . when we speak of thee” includes the speaker in a corporate confession of inadequacy. Both Fish and Stein fail to note that the message of the pronouns is reinforced by vocatives used in combination with ejaculations; that is, the deity is addressed both in the stanza quoted above and in the final line as “My God,” a vocative which also acknowledges a relationship (especially in contrast with the opening vocative, “Lord,” which is modified by no pronoun), while mankind is addressed as “Oh foolish man!” and “Ah wretch!”:

Oh foolish man! where are thine eyes?
How hast thou lost them in a croud of cares?
. . . .
Ah wretch! what verse
Can thy strange wayes rehearse? (49-50, 65-66)

Of “ah,” Taavitsainen indicates that in early modern prose and drama it can be “used as an outcry in pain” as well as to express sympathy, admiration, consent, regret or sorrow; in “Miserie,” “Oh foolish man!” expresses judgment, while “Ah wretch!” seems more empathetic, joining in a corporate feeling of pain.[44] These two exclamations are framed by the poem’s two instances of the vocative “My God,” as are all the occurrences of the first person plural: that is, until the first “My God” (in line 31), the poem describes the faults of others; as soon as the speaker exclaims

[43] Stein, p. 184.
[44] Taavitsainen, p. 446.

"My God," he turns "Man" into "we," continuing with "our clay hearts, ev'n when we crouch / To sing thy praises, make them lesse divine" (39-40). Then reverting to the third person, he describes the human race as "foolish man" and "wretch." As the first "My God" marks a shift to the corporate "we," the final "My God" marks the shift to the poem's only first-person singular pronoun other than the one in "My God," as the speaker ends the poem by taking personal responsibility for the faults which are not merely external to himself:

But sinne hath fool'd him. Now he is
A lump of flesh, without a foot or wing
To raise him to the glimpse of blisse:
A sick toss'd vessel, dashing on each thing;
Nay, his own shelf:
My God, I mean my self. (73-75, 78)

As "My God" in "Miserie" demonstrates, Herbert's parenthetical ejaculations often point to God—unlike Donne's "woe'is me" and Herbert's own "Ah wretch!"—or sometimes to a relationship between himself and God (more like Donne's "Oh I shall soon despaire, when I doe see / That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not chuse me"). For instance, in "The Reprisall" Herbert pleads "*O* make me innocent . . ." and moans "*Ah!* was it not enough that thou / By thy eternall glorie didst outgo me?" (5, 9-10, emphasis mine). The third stanza of "Repentance" begs God for all humankind, not simply the speaker: "*O* let thy height of mercie then / Compassionate short-breathed men" (13-14, emphasis mine). The sighs continue in "The Jews," in which "*Oh* that my prayers! *mine, alas!*" (7, emphasis mine) attests to the speaker's concern for the people among whom Christ and Christianity arose, a source "whose sweet sap, and juice / Our cyens have purloin'd, and left . . . drie" (1-2). "Mine, alas!" means "my prayers, alas!"—suggesting

either his regret that the Jews are in such a state that they require much intercession or, perhaps, that since others do not join him, he cannot say “our prayers”—but it may also be read as “my alas,” the speaker claiming the exclamation as his own. The poem “Grief” also lays claim to sorrow, beginning “*O* who will give me tears?” (emphasis mine) and soliciting water from “springs” and “clouds, & rain.” The speaker continues by telling his poem’s verses to “cease, be dumbe and mute,” since grief “excludes both measure, tune, and time”; thus, all that remains will be the moan “Alas, my God!” (18, 19). This last ejaculation represents not merely the individual’s cries but also the sighs and groans of the Holy Spirit as that Spirit intercedes for humanity. As Stein writes, “Pure lament is a spontaneous cry of immediate feeling which—if I read Herbert right—must be converted into something else, praise, for instance.”[45]

Not only the human speaker but also Jesus uses ejaculations, in “The Bag”:

If ye have any thing to send or write,

(I have no bag, but here is room)

Unto my fathers hands and sight

(*Beleeve me*) it shall safely come.

That I shall minde, what you impart;

Look, you may put it very neare my heart” (31-36, emphasis mine).

“Beleeve me” and “Look” draw attention to the wound in the Son’s side as a route to his heavenly Father; that is, as a bag-substitute in which a message can be conveyed. In the poem’s final words, Christ concludes his address to the listeners by inviting sighs, which “will convey / Any thing to me,” followed by an ejaculation introducing an imperative banishing despair:

[45] Stein, p. 132.

“Heark despair, away” (41-42). The command against despair is in striking opposition to the emotion in Donne’s “Holy Sonnets” or in Herbert’s “Miserie.”

Not only does Herbert frequently employ vocatives and interjections but also he often combines them, usually to intensify a prayer. For instance, each stanza of “Sighs and Grones” begins and ends with “O” paired with a petition—the first stanza begins “O do not use me” and ends “O do not bruise me!” (6)—but in the final stanza, the speaker piles together vocatives and interjections: “But *O* reprieve me! . . . [B]ut *O my God*, / *My God*, relieve me!” (25, 29-30, emphasis mine). Another example occurs when, after braving many troubles, the speaker of “The Pilgrimage” reports that he “fell, and cry’d, *Alas my King*” (27, emphasis mine). Similarly, “Affliction (IV)” employs the interjection “[o]h help” and the vocative “my God” in its appeal for aid against the “elements” of the poet’s self, which he feels are warring against him:

> *Oh* help, *my God*! let not their plot
>
> Kill them and me,
>
> And also thee,
>
> Who art my life. . . . (19-22, emphasis mine)

“Dooms-day” is filled with vocatives addressed to humans, in this case repeatedly calling to everyone to “come away” out of the dust into rejoicing—for “[d]ust, *alas*, no musick feels”—at one point adding “*O* make no stay!” and concluding with the petition “*Lord*, thy broken consort raise / And the musick shall be praise” (9, 14, 29-30, emphasis mine). Even “A Parodie,” which addresses “Souls joy” and, when joy has left the speaker, exclaims “*O* what a damp and shade / Doth me invade!” ends with the poet pleading, “*Ah Lord!* do not withdraw” (11-12, 16, emphasis mine). In “Home,” petitions prefaced by vocatives accumulate, as the speaker pleads for a second advent, begging (thirteen times), “*O* shew thy self to me, / Or take me up to thee!” and

(once) “*Oh* loose this frame, this knot of man untie!”; the poem’s celebration of the divine response is also (and appropriately) intensified: “He did, he came: *O my Redeemer deare*” (61, 25, emphasis mine).

Often, the interjection and the vocative are combined in praise of God, such as in this last example, rather than in petitionary prayer. Likewise, in “Man,” after a discussion of how the world serves humankind, the speaker praises the Creator with “*Oh mightie love!* Man is one world, and hath / Another to attend him” (47-48, emphasis mine). Following this combination of interjection and vocative, the final stanza raises a petition to “my God,” also employing “O”: “Since then, *my God*, thou hast / So brave a Palace built; *O* dwell in it” (49-50, emphasis mine). “The Flower” addresses God in various ways, beginning with “ O Lord” and ending with “Lord of love” (43); in between are “Lord of power” (15) and “O my onely light” (39). “Bitter-sweet,” in which the speaker pledges to “complain, yet praise,” “lament, and love,” begins with the interjection “[a]h” followed by a vocative: “Ah my deare angrie Lord.”

Unsurprisingly, the dialogue poems abound in vocatives addressing God, as well as in vocatives representing God’s replies, but these poems also contain frequent interjections. “Dialogue” begins with the human speaker invoking his “Sweetest Saviour,” who then responds with a question such as God poses to Job, but made more intimate by “childe”: “What (childe) is the ballance thine, / Thine the poise and measure?” (9-10). After another interchange, the human speaker interrupts Christ’s tale of how he “did freely part / With [his] glorie and desert” (29-30) with the interjection (and final line) “*Ah!* no more: thou break’st my heart” (32, emphasis mine). Similarly, the short “A Dialogue-Antheme” opens with Death ironically echoing the Christian’s equally ironic “alas, poore” formula, with Christian repeating “poore” for a third and final time to underscore death’s defeat by Christ the King:

Chr. *Alas, poore Death*, where is thy glorie?

Where is thy famous force, thy ancient sting?

Dea. *Alas poore mortall*, void of storie,

Go spell and reade how I have kill’d thy King.

Chr. *Poore death*! And who was hurt thereby? (1-5, emphasis mine)

Unlike Donne’s “poore me,” this exchange is almost playful. In “The Odour, 2. Cor. 2,” the speaker repeats “My Master” (five times in all), and anticipates (with “O”) the response “[m]y servant”:

My Master, shall I speak? O that to thee

My servant were a little so,

As flesh may be;

That these two words might creep & grow

To some degree of spicinesse to thee! (11-15, emphasis in the original)

The most well-known dialogue poems are “Love (III)”—in which the speaker’s “Ah my deare” (9) is echoed by his Lord’s “My deare” (16)—and “The Collar.” The latter poem has been described by Michael Schoenfeldt as “a soliloquy overheard, and interrupted, by God”; Schoenfeldt continues by calling “The Collar” “remarkable for the ferocity of its rebellion and the authenticity of its submission.”[46] The speaker’s raving begins with a gesture and the exclamation “what?”: “I struck the board, and cry’d, No more. / I will abroad. / What? shall I

[46] Schoenfeldt, “George Herbert, God, and King,” in *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*, ed. Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 270.

ever sigh and pine?” The interruption is the unadorned vocative “Child,” to which the speaker answers simply, “My Lord”:

> But as I rav’d and grew more fierce and wilde
>
> At every word,
>
> Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Childe*:
>
> And I reply’d, *My Lord*. (35-36, emphasis in original)

Furthermore, both the vocative and the interjection are crucial to the trinity of poems on the Passion immediately following “The Altar”: “The Sacrifice,” from the perspective of Christ during the Passion and Crucifixion, and human responses provided in “The Thanksgiving” and “The Reprisal.” In describing Christ’s final hours, “The Sacrifice” uses few parentheticals, but they are focused in a few sections of the poem: the opening, to capture the reader’s attention; and during the Crucifixion, to underscore Christ’s suffering. The poem begins with the interjection “Oh” addressing human readers, depicted as people walking past the garden of Gethsemane: “*Oh all ye*, who passe by, whose eyes and minde / To worldly things are sharp, but to me blinde” (emphasis in original). There follows an explanatory parenthetical, defining drops of blood as “beads” (a type of “deare treasure,” and possibly playing on the older meaning of “bead” as a prayer), and an interjection representing Jesus’s words to his Father:

> Therefore my soul melts, and my hearts deare treasure
>
> Drops bloud (the onely beads) my words to measure:
>
> *O let this cup passe, if it be thy pleasure*:
>
> Was ever grief like mine? (21-24, italics in original)

No parentheticals appear for one hundred lines, after which three of four consecutive stanzas begin with an interjection, each of which draws attention to the behavior of the mob that rejects

Jesus in favor of Barabbas: “*Why*, Cesar is their onely King, not I”; “*Ah!* how they scourge me!”; and “*Behold*, they spit on me” (121, 125, 133, emphasis mine). Another line directly addresses the disciples (and the latter-day disciples reading the poem): “Weep not, *deare friends*” (149, emphasis mine). Then follows the Crucifixion, at which Jesus interjects “*Lo*, here I hang” (205, emphasis mine); his agonized words to his Father, “But, *O my God, my God!* why leav’st thou me,” are repeated, but broken off: “*My God, my God*—” (213, 215, italics in original). He concludes by exclaiming, twice, “Alas!” The first occurs when he responds to the mocking command “Now heal thyself, Physician, now come down” with “Alas! I did so, when I left my crown / And fathers smile for you, to feel his frown” (221-23). Finally, he comments on hanging between two thieves, “Alas! What have I stollen from you?” before answering his own question with “death” (231).

“The Thanksgiving” responds to “The Sacrifice” by describing the speaker’s desire to “imitate” the sacrificial giving of Christ (15-16). The poem begins and ends with parentheticals. First, there are two interjection/vocative pairings describing the divine king, bracketing a parenthetical commentary on the first vocative:

> *Oh King of grief! (a title strange, yet true,*
>
> *To thee of all kings onely due)*
>
> *Oh King of wounds!* How shall I grieve for thee,
>
> Who in all grief preventest me? (1-4, emphasis mine)

The poem concludes with more pairings of interjections and vocatives, this time addressing (with the interjection “O”) “my deare Saviour, Victorie” and followed by a cry of “Alas, my God” as the speaker relinquishes what he now sees as a vain endeavor, to find an appropriate response to each divine act or characteristic:

Nay, I will reade thy book, and never move

Till I have found therein thy love;

Thy art of love, which I’le turn back on thee,

O my deare Saviour, Victorie!

Then for thy passion—I will do for that—

Alas, my God, I know not what. (45-50, emphasis mine)

“Alas” interrupts the sentence “I will do for that . . .”; Schoenfeldt argues that this “broken syntax represents . . . internal violence”: “When he turns to the subject of the Passion . . . the meter falters, as the speaker stutters into authenticity, realizing that humans can never offer a sacrifice that would in any way match that of Jesus. . . . The poem concludes with the speaker stammering at his inability to find any mode of response to Christ’s sacrifice.”[47] Yet Schoenfeldt does not recognize the contribution of the parentheticals to the stammering and “authenticity” of the voice. After the stuttering of “The Thanksgiving,” the short poem “The Reprisall” concludes this brief sequence in calm but wry resolution. Only two parentheticals appear in four stanzas, both representing ejaculations directed toward God: “*O* make me innocent” and “*Ah!* was it not enough that thou / By thy eternall glorie didst outgo me?” (5, 9-10, emphasis mine). After turning his attention toward God, the speaker is able to conclude that he cannot repay any divine gift, “can do nought / Against thee,” but that he can “overcome / The man, who once against thee fought” (14-16).

One final example of Herbert’s emotional parenthesis is “Affliction (I),” in which the speaker describes illness and other obstacles, nearly determining to give up God’s service before

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[47] Schoenfeldt, “‘That spectacle of too much weight’: The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001 Fall): 576.

reversing this impulse with the final lines, the paradoxical couplet "*Ah my deare God!* though I am clean forgot, / Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" (65-66, emphasis mine). Whereas earlier the poet had accused his Lord of enticing him—"Thy glorious houshold-stuffe did me entwine, / And 'tice me unto thee" (9-10)—the possessive "my" and endearment "deare" simultaneously claim the speaker's ownership over the beloved and admit that the speaker has been seduced. Ilona Bell notes the self-centered nature of "Herbert's former point of view," highlighting the speaker's use of the first person: "'*I* thought,' '*I* writ down for *my* part,' '*I* looked . . . and made it fine to *me*,' '*I* counted *mine*'—the egocentricity so visible here is as much the speaker's emphasis as mine."[48] Other critics have also noted the personal nature of the voice, with Daniel W. Doerksen writing that "[i]n this poem Herbert is depicting personal experience," and that it is a "compelling picture of a real person's life."[49] Likewise, Michael Steven Marx describes the poem as "a presentation of spiritual progress," a "poetic autobiography," with the final stanza representing "the speaker's own voice of despair."[50] None of these critics comment on the contribution of "Ah my deare God!" to the tone of the poem, or to its shift from being oppressed by affliction to resolving to persist in a relationship of mutual love.

While many of the emotive paragrammatic constructions call out to God, many also represent sighs and tears. "The Search" begins with a dramatic situation and with vocatives

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[48] Bell, "Revision and Revelation in Herbert's 'Affliction (I),'" *John Donne Journal* 3:1 (1984): 79.

[49] Doerksen, "'Growing and Groning': Herbert's 'Affliction' (I)," *English Studies in Canada* 8:1 (1982 March): 4, 7.

[50] Marx, "Biblical Allusion and Intertextual Assurances in George Herbert's 'Affliction (I),'" in *The Work of Dissimilitude: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1992), pp. 257, 261.

deriving (as does the entire poem) from the Song of Solomon: "Whither, *O*, whither art thou fled, / *My Lord, my Love*?" (emphasis mine).[51] The speaker's desire for the beloved Lord expresses itself in sighs, commenting that he has a plentiful supply: "I tun'd another (having store) / Into a grone" (21-22). The third stanza of "The Crosse" parenthetically describes a spiritual "ague" as "the memorie / What I would do for thee, if once my grones / Could be allow'd for harmonie" (14-16). "A true Hymne" starts with the series of celebratory vocatives "My joy, my life, my crown!" but ends with the heart expressing itself with (parenthetical) sighs and an interjection before providing God's answer: "God doth supplie the want / As when the heart says (sighing to be approved) / *O, could I love!* and stops: God writeth, *Loved*" (18-20, italics in original).

The largest store of sighs is found in "Love unknown." The poem begins with the speaker's address to a "Deare Frend," inviting this friend to sit and listen to a "long and sad" tale of offering his heart to his Lord, only to have his Lord reject it and instead cause a servant to cleanse the heart (painfully, in a bath of fire). He comments on his tale by adding sighs (within parenthetical marks) at three points: "I sigh to say" (8), "I sigh to tell" (24), and "I sigh to speak" (50). To emphasize the story-teller's distress, each sigh interrupts a sentence, and the first two interrupt a clause, as with the first:

> To him I brought a dish of fruit one day,
>
> And in the middle plac'd my heart, But he
>
> (I sigh to say)
>
> Lookt on a servant, who did know his eye
>
> Better then you know me, or (which is one)

[51] Compare "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest . . ." (Song of Songs 1.7).

Then I my self. (6-11)

The servant takes and cleanses the heart. After having suggested in a parenthetical that the speaker and his “[d]eare Frend” are “one” and the same, Herbert continues by describing how the speaker offers “a sacrifice out of [his] fold” in place of his rejected heart (30). Once again his heart is seized for purification, and the speaker uses two lines of parenthesis—“My heart, that brought it” and “The offerers heart”— to emphasize the importance he places on his own heart and his sacrificial gesture, and his corresponding shock at God’s response. This parenthetical interruption is itself interrupted, as if the friend’s attention might be drifting, with “do you understand?”

But as my heart did tender [the animal sacrifice], the man,

Who was to take it from me, slipt his hand,

And threw my heart into the scalding pan;

My heart, that brought it (do you understand?)

The offerers heart. (33-37, emphasis mine)

The speaker concludes his story by again addressing his auditor as “[d]eare”:

But when I thought to sleep out all these faults

(I sigh to speak)

I found that some had stuff’d the bed with thoughts,

I would say thorns. *Deare*, could my heart not break,

When with my pleasures ev’n my rest was gone? (49-53, emphasis mine)

Meanwhile, the “[d]eare Frend” himself continually interrupts the story, so that his interruptions serve as a sort of parenthesis, commenting on the tale. The comments are accusatory, although modified by “I fear,” a parenthetical which simultaneously softens the criticism and suggests the

speaker's own emotional response to the repeated rejection and pain: "*Your heart was foul, I fear*"; "*Your heart was hard, I fear"*; and "*Your heart was dull, I fear"* (18, 37, 56, italics in original). After the story has been concluded, the auditor explicates the situation, beginning with the same vocative that has twice been offered to him, "friend": "*Truly, Friend, / For ought I heare, our Master shows to you / More favour then you wot of"* (61-63, italics in original). "Friend" not only works to establish the poem as a dialogue, but also reinforces the identification between the two speakers, one who is offended and hurt, and the other ostensibly a friend but probably the first speaker's more rational (and more faithful) self.

"Love unknown" demonstrates that Herbert's emotive parentheticals can operate together with explanatory parentheticals. Another example is "To all Angels and Saints," in a passage that opens with the exclamation "alas":

> But now (alas!) I dare not; for our King,
>
> Whom we do all joyntly adore and praise,
>
> Bids no such thing:
>
> And where his pleasure no injunction layes,
>
> ('Tis your own case) ye never move a wing. (16-20)

Here, Herbert explains to the saints—invoked in "Oh glorious spirits" (1) and "blessed Maid, / Mother of my God" (9-10)—that he cannot ask for their intercession because "our King" has not commanded it, under which circumstances the saints themselves "never move a wing." One final example is "Praise (III)," which contains two instances of explanatory parenthesis and one of emotive parenthesis. First, the speaker describes a bottle kept in heaven as a receptacle for human tears, comparing it parenthetically to "boxes for the poor":

> I have not lost one single tear:

But when mine eyes

Did weep to heav'n, they found a bottle there

(As we have boxes for the poor)

Readie to take them in . . . . (25-29)

The poem continues by describing one of Christ's tears dropping from his "right eye," adding a three-line parenthesis: "Which there did hang like streamers neare the top / Of some fair church, to show the sore / And bloudie battel which thou once didst trie" (33-35). Moved by the tear despite the analogy to romances, the speaker exclaims, parenthetically, "O that I might some other hearts convert" (39). Other hearts will fill up his Lord's "chests" with praises (41), since he fears that his own heart "runs thin" (38). This emotive parenthetical concludes the poem, which thus is framed by the initial vocative, in "Lord, I will mean and speak thy praise," and the final desire to be joined in praise by others.

Explanatory parentheticals are relatively rare in *The Church*, and even rarer without accompanying emotional parenthesis. In one instance, "Humilitie" explains that the crow brought "the Peacocks plume" because of the latter's pride: "For he would not" (17, 18). In "An Offering," the speaker complains that he has none, since the only possibility is too unworthy to offer: "Had I any, / (For this heart is none)" (32-33). In contrast, "Mattens" states that "mans whole estate / Amounts (and richly) to serve thee," with "and richly" as an intensifier (13-14). "The British Church" follows the vocative "dearest Mother" with a parenthetical explanation of the relationship between this "Mother," the Roman Catholic Church, and the Reformed churches: as the "mean" between two extremes, the British Church is "what those misse" (25). "Self-condemnation" describes the eye parenthetically as "that busie wanderer," inviting the one more

willing to judge others than himself (referring specifically to Christian alacrity to condemn "Jewish hate" for choosing to free Barabbas rather than Christ) to "Call home thine eye" (5).

A few of Herbert's explanatory parentheticals appear to be mere indications that someone is speaking. For instance, the first "said he" in "The Pulley" indicates a shift from third person to first, from a narratorial voice to the divine voice: "When God at first made man, / Having a glasse of blessings standing by, / Let us (said he) poure on him all we can" (1-3). When it reappears in the eleventh line, "said he" is merely a reminder, since the entire poem after the initial two lines is imagined direct quotation of God. Similarly, "The Glimpse" reports folk knowledge with "they say": "Lime begg'd of old (they say) / A neighbor spring to cool his inward heat" (13-14). But something more complex is going on in "Artillerie." With "If I refuse, / Dread Lord, *said I*, so oft my good" (12-13, emphasis mine), "said I" once again indicates direct quotation, this time of a human speaker responding to the voice of temptation by turning to divine aid (6-8). In the third stanza, however, the speaker (as in "Denial") complains that despite his "tears and prayers night and day," God appears not to hear: "yet thou dost refuse" (19-20). The parenthetical appears in the successive line: "I am (I must say still) / Much more oblig'd to do thy will" (21-22). "I must say still" indicates not only a reluctant understanding of duty in the face of God's apparent silence, but also the enforced speech of the poet.

Even among the explanatory parentheticals, though, some point directly to God. For instance, "The Elixer" addresses "my God and King," describing a divine "tincture" that can make all "grow bright and clean," and adding in parentheses "for thy sake":

> All may of thee partake:
> Nothing can be so mean,
> Which with his tincture (for thy sake)

Will not grow bright and clean. (13-16)

“Love (I),” which begins with two vocatives addressing the divine as “Immortall Love” and “authour of this great frame,” uses a parenthetical to describe the human “heart and brain” as God’s “workmanship,” in the indictment that “mortall love” and “invention” do “together / Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain, / (Thy workmanship) and give thee share in neither” (5-8). “Aaron” is the poem of a Christian clergyman dressing for holy services; in its final stanza, the parenthetical defines “Christ” as he “who is not dead, / But lives in me while I do rest” (23-24). In “The Odour, 2. Cor. 2” (discussed above), God’s call “*[m]y servant*” is said to have the ability to “sweetn” the human so addressed; and the parenthetical “As sweet things traffick when they meet” explains this “sweetning” process (26-27, italics in original). Similarly, “The Banquet” describes the “sweetness” of the Eucharistic wine in terms of the stars: “Is some starre (fled from the sphere) / Melted there, / As we sugar melt in wine?” (10-12); the parenthetical explains the original location of the star. Turning to a biblical figure, the first two lines of “Marie Magdalene” contrast the subject’s current act of submission with her former rebellious relationship with “her Saviour”: “When blessed Marie wip’d her Saviours feet, / (Whose precepts she had trampled on before).” Consequently, Mary also rates the appositive “[d]eare soul”: “Deare soul, she knew who did vouchsafe to deigne / To bear her filth; and that her sins did dash / Ev’n God himself” (13-15).

One of the most interesting exchanges involving an explanatory parenthetical is found in the very brief poem “Love-joy.” The speaker is asked to interpret the letters “J” and “C” appearing in the grapevine of a stained-glass window; he then misconstrues the letters as representing “Joy” and “Charitie,” only to be told by his anonymous questioner that his misunderstanding has inadvertently captured the truth of the window: “Sir, you have not miss’d /

. . . It figures JESUS CHRIST" (7-8). The explanatory parenthetical appears as the speaker's comment about his rashness in answering:

> . . . I (who am never loth
>
> To spend my iudgement) said, It seem'd to me
>
> To be the bodie and the letters both
>
> Of *Joy* and *Charitie*. . . . (4-6, italics in original).

The speaker uses an economic metaphor to acknowledge that he is quick to "spend" wisdom that is really folly, but the parenthetical also suggests that this figurative expenditure is not in vain, that the speaker is rewarded for identifying Jesus Christ as the combination of joy and love.

With more explanation than emotion, the exhortations of "The Church-porch" and the imperial march of "The Church Militant" differ markedly from the lyrical poetry of *The Church* in their use of parentheticals. As in the Donne poems that similarly emphasize the explanatory over the emotive, the less personal voice created partially by the parenthesis may explain why these Herbert poems have received less acclaim and less critical attention than those in the short lyrics of *The Church*. The prefatory "The Church-porch" (with the most learned subtitle in *The Temple*, "Perirrhanterium") is overtly didactic: "Harken unto a Verser, who may chance / Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure," the poet calls to his auditors (3-4). Thus we might expect explanatory parentheticals, and although in its 462 lines the poem contains six iterations of the interjection "O"—in one instance combined with a vocative: "O England!" (91)—all the other parentheticals are indeed explanatory, as befits this sermon in verse. Thus, "All in a shipwrack shift their severall way" provides a metaphor to support the instruction "If reason move not Gallants, quit the room" rather than give in to temptation (43-44). "Within thy power" limits "When thou dost purpose ought," since without that modification, the youth addressed

may be unable to follow the subsequent instruction, "Be sure to doe it . . ." (115-16). "But a proud ignorance will lose his rest, / Rather than show his cards" provides an exception, in the form of a proverb, to "Entice all neatly to what they know best; / For so thou dost thyself and him a pleasure" (295-98). Finally, "Love is a present for a mightie king" gives a moralizing reason for "[s]corn[ing] no mans love, though of a mean degree" (349-50). Similarly, "The Church Militant" concludes *The Temple* with several explanatory parentheticals, although it also employs a few vocatives. The first words invoke God as "Almightie Lord," and in the refrain deriving from Psalms 89 and 139, Herbert pairs an interjection with a vocative, "O God," in "How deare to me, *O God*, thy counsels are! / Who may with thee compare?" (emphasis mine). As with the interruption of the "Frend" in "Love unknown," the refrain itself can be seen as functioning in the manner of a parenthetical, as each iteration comments on the verses immediately preceding it. Every other parenthetical—and there are only three in 279 lines—is explanatory. Two provide commentary on the Greek and German empires: "Many a rent and struggling th'Empire knew, / (As dying things are wont)" (79-80) and "That as before Empire and Arts made way, / (For no less harbingers would serve then they)" (83-84). Later in the poem, the phrase "The marks of future bane" modifies and sums up "height of malice, and prodigious lusts, / Impudent sinning, witchcrafts, and distrusts" (237-39). Yet the refrain seems an odd commentary on the main text of the poem, perhaps because for later readers imperial expansion is neither "deare" nor divinely-ordained.

Both Donne and Herbert use parenthetical constructions as commentary on their poetry, thus suggesting reflection which is sometimes emotional and sometimes analytical. In both cases, the poems that receive the most critical praise and thus evidently resonate most with readers employ emotive parentheticals more frequently than the other sort. The two poets differ in that

Donne's emotional parentheticals seem to present his own feelings about his personal situation, while Herbert's often attempt to capture either God's feelings or the poet's emotional response to divine suffering and divine actions. The difference is more subtle, but still present, in the explanatory and didactic parentheticals, partly due to the interplay between these and emotive parenthesis. But in the case of both poets, parenthesis is an important part of the construction of self, and contributes the distinctive voice of the poem.