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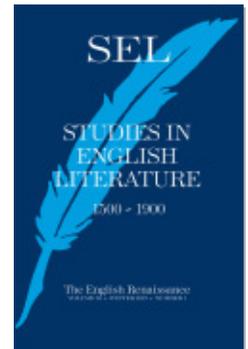
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The Poetics of Ethical Eating in George Herbert's *The Temple*

ANDREA CROW

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.
 Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
 Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.
 —George Herbert, “The Dedication” to
 The Temple (1633)¹

From the first line of George Herbert's 1633 volume of devotional poetry *The Temple*, food is on the table. “The Dedication” opening the collection alludes to food redistribution practices described in Deuteronomy. The Israelites are instructed to gather their first harvest in the Promised Land and deliver it to the priest, collectively reciting the speech that Herbert's poem paraphrases: “behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given mee.”² The scriptural passage explains that this ritual, which is to be repeated yearly in the form of the mandatory tithing of agricultural produce, is not merely symbolic; it also performs a necessary function, redistributing resources to “the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled.”³ This biblical directive to feed the hungry held particular significance for Herbert and his seventeenth-century audience: harvest failures, rapid inflation,

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and changes in agricultural practices made the 1620s and 1630s some of the worst years of food scarcity that England had ever encountered, leading to widespread hunger and even starvation across the country.⁴ For Herbert, this crisis was personal; as rector of the rural parish of Bemerton, where he served from 1629 until his death in 1633, he was responsible for feeding his parish both spiritually and literally. Like the Levite priests to whom "The Dedication" alludes, English parsons were charged with collecting agricultural tithes—including crops, such as grain and fruit, as well as goods produced by livestock, such as milk and cheese—and redistributing them among parishioners.⁵ Priests were entitled to live on a portion of this produce, but were required to prioritize putting most of that food back into the community by distributing food to the poor, hosting parishioners for meals, and keeping their personal gardens and cupboards open to the hungry.⁶ In keeping with this mandate, "The Dedication" opens *The Temple* by establishing not just spiritual concerns but also the basic provision of daily bread as a matter of primary importance to the community of believers.

"The Dedication" takes a standard feature of dedicatory verse, the modesty topos, and uses it for specific social ends: Herbert's dedication modestly decenters the author in order to set up a larger idea developed throughout *The Temple*—namely, that feeding one another is a shared responsibility. The poem employs a number of poetic strategies to invite readers into this role. A full third of the words in this six-line poem are pronouns, which Herbert uses to destabilize notions of individuality. Although the speaker initially refers to "my first fruits," he quickly corrects himself, saying that the harvest was never his ("Yet not mine neither") nor even a credit to his labor ("for from thee they came"). Each of the first two lines introduces a first-person singular possessive pronoun ("my" in the first line and "mine" in the second) but follows it with a third-person plural ("themselves" and "they"), ultimately joining these two parties, the individual and the group, together in the third line with a conjunction: "them and me." This joining becomes incorporation at the end of the quatrain as these two parties become a collective "us ... striv[ing]" alongside each other to do the Lord's work. The closing couplet reiterates this prioritization of mutual interest: "Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain: / Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain." In a pun that Herbert will use throughout the collection, these lines ask readers to turn their "eyes" to the subsequent poems and also to reorient their "I[s]," that is, their individual appetites, to serve collective needs.⁷

The speaker asks those who would maintain divisions, “hurt[ing] themselves or me,” to “refrain.” This appeal to “refrain” the divisive from disrupting social harmony also punningly alludes to one of the means by which *The Temple* hopes to bring about this unity. In poetic terms, the refrain is a set of repeated lines, especially at the end of a verse. Herbert employs refrains in many of his poems, evoking the hymns and recitations of public worship, in which the congregation speaks with one unified voice.⁸ The play on words in the use of “refrain” in “The Dedication,” posing the poetic refrain as a means through which discord can be subdued and harmony achieved, indicates a method and set of ends that I argue infuses Herbert’s poetics throughout *The Temple*. One of *The Temple*’s driving concerns is the need to address the pressing, real-world problem of hunger, and in this volume Herbert uses poetic form as a means of persuading readers to adopt a model of ethical consumption that he hopes will restore the body of the community to a sustainable state.

A number of factors brought hunger to Herbert’s village parish of Bemerton in the southwestern region of Wiltshire. Although the short-term crises caused by harvest failures such as the famine of 1623 most severely affected isolated, less arable regions of the country in the north, the impacts of grain shortages and increased food prices were felt throughout England.⁹ Bemerton and its surrounding areas were also destabilized by several gradual yet pervasively damaging long-term trends. The textile industry on which Herbert’s parishioners relied underwent a severe depression, leading many to turn to agricultural day labor at a time when the real value of wages for such work had reached new lows.¹⁰ Rapid enclosure in the region—Ronald W. Cooley notes that “by the seventeenth century about three-quarters of the region was enclosed”—increased barriers to food access, forcing people to turn to wage labor rather than growing food for themselves.¹¹ Finally, dearth in Wiltshire was exacerbated by the practice of exporting grain to higher bidders elsewhere, leaving the community’s supplies depleted.¹² The vexation expressed by the speaker of Herbert’s “The Collar” at having “no harvest but a thorn” speaks to a concern that was immediate and material in Herbert’s parish and across the country (p. 526, line 7). “The Dedication” opens *The Temple* with a biblical allusion authorizing its argument that the religious community must prioritize the problem of hunger.

“The Dedication” insists that this problem requires a collective effort: the priest oversees the redistribution of the harvest,

but the harvest is gathered and presented by the community. This emphasis on collaboration was significant in the context of dearth because food scarcity made parishioners reluctant or even unable to tithe.¹³ While clergy faced added pressure to open their cupboards to parishioners during times of dearth, decreased tithing left many priests struggling to put food on their own tables.¹⁴ Clerical resources were also strained by heavy taxes: the “first fruits” mentioned in “The Dedication” allude to a specific early modern context, the Act for Firstfruits and Tenths, under which newly appointed priests owed the crown a payment equal to their first year’s income (what the Act calls “*First Fruits*”) as well as ten percent of their incomes in subsequent years.¹⁵ This burdensome tax exacerbated the difficulty that parsons faced in feeding not only their parishioners but also themselves.¹⁶ In pointing to the economic struggles of priests, “The Dedication” emphasizes that addressing dearth cannot be the responsibility of the priest alone—who may be hungry too—but rather demands collective effort.

Although Herbert came from a well-connected family and was financially comfortable in comparison with many rural priests, hunger was nonetheless a central part of his life. Izaak Walton described Herbert as “so far from being cumbered with too much flesh that he was lean to an extremity.”¹⁷ Although Walton’s biographies tend to be hagiographical, Herbert’s writings indicate that he saw thinness as an ideal, and he became a persistent advocate for severe dietary restriction, which he frames as an ethical practice. In his collection of maxims, *Outlandish Proverbs* (1640), Herbert includes observations such as “The bit that one eates, no friend makes,” “Anothers bread costs deare,” and “Gluttony kills more then the sword,” suggesting that overeating does not just threaten one’s health but constitutes a social threat as well, straining relationships between members of the community.¹⁸ Herbert develops this point of view more fully in his guidebook for priests, *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson*, in which he argues that the ideal parson “*thinks it not enough for him to observe the fasting days of the Church ... but adds to them ... and by these he keeps his body tame, serviceable, and healthful.*”¹⁹ As in *Outlandish Proverbs*, Herbert advocates dietary restriction not just for personal health but also as a social good, “tam[ing]” the appetite to make the individual “serviceable” to others. Herbert likewise urges parsons that when they encounter parishioners with “refined and heavenly disposition[s],” they should urge them to put health aside entirely, willfully undereating so that they

might achieve a “double aim, either of abstinence, a moral virtue, or mortification, a divine.”²⁰ The holiest people, in other words, not only will control their appetites but also will deny them outright, becoming Christlike (“divine”) by symbolically putting their bodies to death (“mortification”) in refusing to nourish themselves. Critics have responded with uncertainty to such moments in Herbert’s writing: as one commenter incredulously remarks, such “logic ... would drive one to a kind of social anorexia.”²¹ Though anachronistic, this phrase nonetheless captures a crucial aspect of Herbert’s solution to the problem of dearth. Herbert’s “social anorexia” might better be described as an austerity diet, attempting to restore stability to the community through appetite restriction. While *The Country Parson* and *Outlandish Proverbs* expound this doctrine through more explicit directives, *The Temple* turns to verse as a source of alternative methods of persuading the reader to adopt this model of ethical eating. *The Temple* has long been noted for the variety and complexity of its verse form; I argue that one of the major influences guiding its poetics is Herbert’s urgent objective of inducing readers to adopt dietary austerity measures.

Critical attention to food in *The Temple* has focused almost exclusively on its symbolic significance: the Eucharist is famously evoked in the first (“The Altar”) and last (“Love (III)”) poems of the main section (“The Church”) of the collection. Herbert criticism has dwelt on how his poetic meditations on bread and wine address conflicts between Laudian ceremonialists and Puritan reformers as expressed through ceremonial feasting and fasting, as well as how these poems approach theological problems surrounding the nature of the divine and the proper devotional spirit.²² While these concerns are indeed central in *The Temple*, I argue that the problem of feeding the hungry, which the structure of agricultural tithing and the mandate of hospitality brought to the rural parson’s door, is an equally driving concern throughout the collection. Michael C. Schoenfeldt, one of the few critics to consider Herbert’s concern with food in quotidian rather than ceremonial or theological terms, perceives Herbert’s interest in eating as primarily personal. He argues that Herbert turns to diet as a means of “authoriz[ing] individuality”: making choices about what to eat, Schoenfeldt posits, is a way of asserting independence, marking oneself as more than “the product of sociocultural discourses, institutions, and practices.”²³ Under this model, Herbert’s dietary restriction and his writing of devotional poetry are solitary endeavors of self-construction with the goal of individuation.

In contrast, I propose that the concern with eating that pervades *The Temple* aims to persuade readers to deny individuality in order to prioritize the larger social body on which they depend and which in turn depends on them. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, to which the title of Herbert's volume alludes, declares that "your bodie is the Temple of the holy Ghost which is in you ... and ye are not your owne."²⁴ *The Temple* asks seventeenth-century readers to apply this principle to every moment of eating, seeking not to fill their own stomachs but to nourish the body of believers as a whole. My approach to *The Temple* draws on the growing interest in early modern scholarship on the connections between eating, sociality, and literary production, such as David B. Goldstein and Amy L. Tigner's studies of early modern food politics, Wendy Wall's research on recipe books, and Joan Fitzpatrick's work on food in Shakespeare.²⁵ Turning to Herbert, who has largely been absent from these discussions, allows us to think about the relationship between diet, community formation, and lyric form. For Herbert, lyric served as a means of achieving stability in the face of dearth through quite literally reshaping the social body. His formal experiments aim to draw his readers to participate in a program of dietary austerity, which he hopes will restore harmony to his community.

"*Perirrhantarium*," the primary poem in "The Church-porch" (the opening section of *The Temple*), indicates from its first stanza Herbert's understanding of poetry as a tool for social reform. The speaker tells the reader to "Hearken unto a Verser, who may chance / Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure," explaining that "A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies" (p. 50, lines 3–5). In describing his rhyme as "bait," the speaker depicts his poem as whetting readers' appetites through poetic pleasures. The notion that rhyme and meter have special power to influence behavior was put forward by many early modern literary theorists. George Puttenham, for example, in describing poetry's power to "reduc[e] the wild and beastly people into public societies and civility of life," stresses that the poet must make "the words and clauses of his meters ... [as] well tunable to the ear as stirring to the mind," so that the ear may be "ravished with their current tune" as "the mind is with their sententiousness."²⁶ Samuel Daniel identifies rhyme in particular as able to change behavior, "giv[ing] both to the ear an echo of a delightful report, and to the memory a deeper impression of what is delivered therein."²⁷ "*Perirrhantarium*," the title of which is a form of "perirrhantion," a ritual device used for sprinkling water to cleanse worshippers, prepares

readers to enter “The Church” section of *The Temple* by leading them through seventy-seven stanzas of maxims for behavioral reform. These precepts, transformed through “verse” and “Ryme” into pleasurable “bait,” teach readers to control their impulses in relation to everything from drinking wine to managing money to the most literal context in which the appetite emerges: eating.

The ethics of consumption in “*Perirrhantarium*” extends from farm to table. The poem attempts to persuade readers that individual appetites must be restrained for the benefit of the community, whether dividing up agricultural land or carving up a meal, explaining,

If God had laid all common, certainly
 Man would have been th’incloser: but since now
 God hath impal’d us, on the contrarie
 Man breaks the fence, and every ground will plough.
 O what were man, might he himself misplace!
 Sure to be crosse he would shift feet and face.
(p. 50, lines 19–24)²⁸

The poem argues that while individuals may feel that they have been disenfranchised by enclosure, this “impal[ing],” or fencing in, is part of God’s plan. Opposing it threatens to turn the body of the community upside down, “shift[ing] feet and face.” The speaker asserts that, though “Man breaks the fence,” these boundaries are divinely ordained, and mankind must hedge in their desires accordingly. Although agricultural land is not “laid all common,” accepting this uneven individual distribution, Herbert contends, keeps the collective body upright.

“*Perirrhantarium*” applies this prioritization of the collective over the individual to daily meals. The poem continues,

Look to thy mouth; diseases enter there.
 Thou has two sconses, if thy stomack call;
 Carve, or discourse; do not a famine fear.
 Who carves, is kind to two; who talks, to all.
 Look on meat, think it dirt, then eat a bit;
 And say withall, Earth to earth I commit.
(p. 53, lines 127–32)²⁹

Readers are called to carve the meat at mealtime, repressing hunger pangs by preoccupying themselves with feeding others,

both through discourse and with the meat itself. These lines exemplify how Herbert's poetic method moves beyond the "delightful report" of rhyming couplets to make an impression on the reader. As the poem describes restraining the appetite, its meter mimics what it advises. The first two lines are divided in half by caesuras ("Look to thy mouth; diseases enter there. / Thou hast two sconses, if thy stomach call"), the third line is broken up by two such pauses ("Carve, or discourse; do not a famine fear"), the fourth line contains three ("Who carves, is kind to two; who talks, to all"), and the fifth line again contains two ("Look on meat, think it dirt, then eat a bit"). These disruptions divide the poem into smaller portions that aurally and visually represent the work of carving up and redistributing the "bit[s]" of food that the poem describes.³⁰ These pauses break up the poem's otherwise metrically regular pentameter, causing the reader to pace themselves, as one should at the table.

"*Perirrhantarium*" presents the restrictive measuring of appetite, food, field, and verse as corresponding instantiations of an ideal overarching order. In defense of this ethos of restriction, the poem advises,

Slight those who say amidst their sickly healths,
 Thou liv'st by rule. What doth not so, but man?
 Houses are built by rule, and common-wealths.
 Entice the trusty sunne, if that you can,
 From his Ecliptick line: becken the skie.
 Who lives by rule then, keeps good companie.
(p. 53, lines 133–8)

The ruled appetite is part of a total order that gives rise to a healthy household economy ("Houses ... built by rule"), a stable political state ("common-wealths"), and an orderly natural world ("the trusty sunne"). The term "common-wealths" indicates the kind of state that "*Perirrhantarium*" calls readers to build, one whose defining purpose is promoting the common welfare, even if the common welfare requires normalizing individual deprivation. The "sickly healths"—that is, "unhealthy toasts"—to which the speaker refers invoke images of convivial drinking, a countermodel of sociability in which community-oriented consumption consists not in collective indulgence but rather in ethically motivated appetite restriction.³¹ Adhering to this diet "keeps good companie," a term etymologically referring to the sharing of bread (*com* meaning "together with" and *panis* meaning "bread").³² "Good companie,"

the poem argues, is achieved by giving one's food away. By placing these dietary guidelines in the list of precepts that the reader must adopt before entering "The Church," "*Perirrhanterium*" makes one's entry into the body of believers contingent on falling into one's proper place within the economy of food distribution that sustains this community.

Within "The Church" section itself, the mandate to restrict the appetite is taken further. "The Size," a poem within this section, exemplifies the ethics of consumption to which Herbert alludes in *The Country Parson* of "abstinence, a moral virtue, or mortification, a divine." In part, the title of "The Size" refers to social rank or status, and it has often been interpreted in this light.³³ However, the title also refers quite literally to the size of the body as it is shaped by diet. "The Size" begins,

Content thee, greedie heart.
 Modest and moderate joyes to those, that have
 Title to more hereafter when they part,
 Are passing brave.
 Let th' upper springs into the low
 Descend and fall, and thou dost flow.
(p. 480, lines 1–6)³⁴

The "greedie heart," the seat of both spiritual and physiological urges, is called to "Content" itself, a paradoxical command that at once tells the heart to "Content" itself, that is, to satisfy itself, yet to do so by "Content[ing]," that is, containing itself. Satisfaction through self-restriction is achieved through the "Modest[y] and moderat[ion]" described in the subsequent line: the heart must find its contentment in controlling itself. Herbert's poetic method aims to convey how pleasure can be derived from this kind of restraint, turning it into an aesthetic. The irregular lengths of the first four lines of the stanza resolve into the regular tetrameter of the final couplet, mimicking the measuring of desire by metrically echoing the assertion of order and control over the intemperate demands of the appetite.

At the same time, "The Size" expresses the difficulty of maintaining this control by incorporating metrical irregularities that disrupt this drive toward order and resolution. In the third stanza, the speaker reminds himself that

To be in both worlds full
 Is more than God was, who was hungrie here.
 Wouldst thou his laws of fasting disanull?
 Enact good cheer?
 Lay out thy joy, yet hope to save it?
 Wouldst thou both eat thy cake, and have it?
 (p. 480, lines 13–8)³⁵

As in “*Perirrhantarium*,” the admonishment to deny oneself for others’ benefit is presented as a divine mandate, modeled and commanded by God, who has instituted “laws of fasting” to which he too adhered when, in the person of Jesus, he “was hungrie here.” The stanza’s closing couplet metrically echoes the struggle to achieve contentment as the believer seeks to follow the divine model: the resolution achieved through the rhyme and metrical consistency of the couplet depicts the effort to restrain the excessive appetite. This attempt at control is set at odds with the unruly appetite, the intemperate desire to “eat thy cake,” expressed in the excessive length of the closing couplet’s feminine endings. This poetic representation of the conflicting drives to restrain and consume embodies the internal struggle that the poem exhorts the reader to overcome.

“The Size” further communicates Herbert’s message of constraint through the distinct shape of its stanzas. *The Temple* is known for its treatment of poems as emblems; for example, “The Altar” and “Easter wings” take the shape of the objects that they describe, explicating these images to draw out spiritual meanings. In “The Size,” the poem’s exploration of the relationship between physical appearance, diet, and social virtue is expressed in the shape each stanza takes—namely, that of an emblem of thinness (see Figure 1). The short dimeter lines in the middle of each stanza of “The Size” allude to the pinched waistline of the believer’s underfed body, emblemizing the virtue of denying the appetite to the point that the effects of constant hunger become visible.³⁶ Accordingly, the speaker declares,

A Christians state and ease
 Is not a corpulent, but a thinne and spare,
 Yet active strength: whose long and bonie face
 Content and care
 Do seem to equally divide,
 Like a pretender, not a bride.
 (p. 481, lines 31–6)

The short line, "Whereas a bit," signifies restrained consumption: a "bit" is a mouthful of food (a bite) as well as the mouthpiece of a horse's restraining bridle. The shift between the dimeter line "Whereas a bit" and the subsequent tetrameter line mimics the gradual satisfaction of desire that moves forward with "hopes of more." Yet these "bit[s]" come measured out in small, carefully controlled portions echoed by the monosyllabic meter of this line ("Doth tice us on to hopes of more"), achieved intentionally through the shortening of "entice" to "tice." Contentment, the poem shows the reader, can come through reduction and control; food refusal not only is an ethical good but also can be satisfying in itself.

If "The Size" turns the gaunt body of the believer into an aesthetic and ethical ideal, then Herbert's psalm adaptation "Providence" represents how this model of restrained consumption should materialize in the community as a whole. Psalms would have been part of every church service that Herbert oversaw, the congregation reciting together psalm readings designated by the Book of Common Prayer.³⁸ As a psalm adaptation, then, "Providence" presents itself as a collective expression, the prayer of the community presented with one harmonious voice. "Providence" is addressed to the personified spirit of "sacred Providence" (p. 416, line 1; see also lines 6–8); the poem seeks in its thirty-eight stanzas to praise the divine order that brings all creatures what they need to survive and, in so doing, to present evidence that this force of providence indeed exists. The scriptural passage that "Providence" loosely paraphrases, Psalm 104, depicts God's providence as bounteous, giving "food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man: and oyle to make him a cheerefull countenance, and bread to strengthen mans heart ... when thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good."³⁹ In contrast to this image of plenty and openhandedness, Herbert develops a notion of providence that is providential in that it supplies precisely what is necessary—and only what is necessary.

The majority of "Providence" consists of a hymn developing this reworking of the original psalm's subject; however, prior to the start of the hymn proper, the poem opens with seven stanzas that prepare readers for their crucial role in the social operations of divine providence. Although the speaker begins by asking Providence, "shall I write ... of thee" (p. 416, lines 2–3), by the second stanza he turns this personal act of praise into a collective responsibility, saying that

Of all the creatures both in sea and land
 Onely to Man thou hast made known thy ways

.....
 And made him Secretarie of thy praise.

(p. 416, lines 5–8)

The individual speaker is replaced by the collective “Man,” who, in affirming through their psalm the sufficiency of providence, perform the managerial role that they are called to play, supporting the work of providence by becoming providers themselves. Part of what they provide is psalms of praise on behalf of creation: “Beasts fain would sing; birds dittie to their notes; / Trees would be tuning on their native lute ... but they are lame and mute” (p. 416, lines 9–12). While the natural world mutely displays the evidence of divine providence, the ability to verbalize the nature of providence is “brought to Man” alone. In addition to offering praise, “Man” has another responsibility: as in “The Dedication,” “Providence” ties the collective voicing of praise to the offering of food on the altar, explaining, “Man is the world’s high Priest: he doth present / The sacrifice for all” (p. 416, lines 13–4). The title of “Providence” does not refer to divine providence alone but to the kind of providence that Man performs in this role as “high Priest” for the natural world. As these lines indicate, this role paradoxically is said to perform a benefit “for all” of nature, yet revolves around “sacrifice”—both giving up what would otherwise be consumed and sacrificing some of those “Beasts” that “fain would sing,” on whose behalf Man is said to be working. The poem suggests that accepting not just lack but also threat of death must be understood as part of a divine plan to which Man must consent. Just as the priest guides the body of believers in how to perform the work of stewardship, Man, as the “high Priest” of nature, mediates the work of divine providence. This mediation, moreover, involves the production and use of both poetry and food.

Echoing the directive in “*Perirhanterium*” to “Carve, or discourse” during a meal, restraining the appetite in order to feed others through both food and edifying words, the speaker of “Providence” describes converting the desire to eat into work that will be productive for others. The speaker continues his address to Providence, saying,

The beasts say, Eat me: but, if beasts must teach,
 The tongue is yours to eat, but mine to praise.

The trees say, Pull me: but the hand you stretch,
Is mine to write, as it is yours to raise.

(p. 417, lines 21–4)

Acceptance of self-sacrifice as natural and compulsory is expressed not only by the “beasts” who “say, Eat me,” but also by the speaker who refrains from consumption: “to eat” is Providence’s prerogative, whereas to offer the sacrifice and “to praise” is Man’s. The trees offer up their fruit, but Man’s hand is meant for the work of composing hymns, not of satisfying the appetite. The hymn following this introductory frame elaborates on this relationship between appetite restriction and social productivity, portraying hunger as a catalyst motivating Man to perform his role in sustaining the Providential economy.

The opening lines of the hymn introduce the austere vision of “Providence” that the poem imagines. It begins, “We all acknowledge both thy power and love / To be exact” (p. 417, lines 29–30). The enjambment between these lines underscores the reorientation of assumptions that the poem undertakes. The first line evokes the plenty that one might expect divine omnipotence (“power”) and God’s care for creation (“love”) to provide. Yet the subsequent line declares that Providence’s gifts are not bounteous but “exact,” meted out with precision and frugality. The collective voice of the hymn (“We all acknowledge”) solicits the reader to assent to this perspective, viewing paucity as a sign of divine foreknowledge of exactly what is required. The poem insists,

Thy cupboard serves the world: the meat is set,
Where all may reach: no beast but knows his feed.
Birds teach us hawking; fishes have their net:
The great prey on the lesse, they on some weed.

(p. 418, lines 49–52)

While Providence’s cupboards are open to all, the meat therein is only gained through labor. Nature does not offer up food freely, but rather reveals how to acquire food (e.g., “hawking” or the “fish[ing] ... net”). Moreover, the natural world indicates that unequal hierarchies are part of providential order: Greater animals prey on lesser animals, who in turn consume vegetation. The creatures of the natural world accept this inequality without objection; the next stanza explains, “Some creatures have in winter what to eat; / Others do sleep, and envie not their cheer” (p. 418, lines 55–6).

Just as hibernating animals forgo food in winter while other animals eat, so should those who experience hunger understand it as part of the workings of Providence, accepting disparity without complaint. By way of justification, the poem explains,

The pigeons feed their tender off-spring, crying,
 When they are callow; but withdraw their food
 When they are fledge, that need may teach them flying.
(p. 418, lines 62–4)

In complement to the argument that appetite restriction is socially beneficial, Herbert here makes his case for undereating via another tactic—asking readers to perceive the involuntary experience of hunger as a sign of divine approval, a withdrawal of care prompted by their spiritual maturity. For those who conform to the spirit of Providence, consumption itself becomes productive: “Sheep eat the grasse, and dung the ground for more” (p. 418, line 69). Even while eating, sheep are productive, converting food into the manure that is the means of producing “more” in excess of what they have consumed. While hunger is productive in the sense that it leaves more for others or teaches one to fend for oneself, “Providence” contends that even eating itself should ultimately create more food.

The implicit arguments behind these exempla from the animal kingdom become explicit as the poem turns to the human community. The poem praises the economy of the household of Providence, on which mankind relies: “And as thy [i.e., Providence’s] house is full, so I adore / Thy curious art in marshalling thy goods” (p. 419, lines 93–4). “[M]arshall[ed]” is a term commonly used in reference to banquets to describe the arrangement of people by rank at the table.⁴⁰ Although Providence’s stores are full, they are distributed inequitably across such hierarchies, as at a banquet. This differential distribution is described as “curious,” a word also commonly used in relation to banquets, to refer to delicately prepared foods such as the molded sugar sculptures that graced the tables of the well-off.⁴¹ Characterizing unequal food access as part of Providence’s “curious art” frames this differential treatment as curious in the sense of being difficult to comprehend yet also curious in the sense of being exacting and precise, ultimately providential though seemingly unjust.

“Providence” extends this logic to a global scale, explaining that although different goods are located in different places, “All countreys have enough to serve their need,” and that if mem-

bers of the community fail to be satisfied with their allotment, "thou [i.e., Providence] dost make them run / For their offence" (p. 419, lines 105–7). Transgressing regional boundaries to seek goods elsewhere is an "offence," one that throws the body of the community into a state of imbalance. Temperance is achieved when this body is self-sustaining, when members learn to use the resources at hand to serve their needs. The poem turns to examples from the English countryside to describe how readers can learn the resourcefulness that will allow them to make use of the precise and sufficient goods that providence has distributed to their community. Things that one might perceive as troublesome have a particular purpose that readers simply need to discern: for example, "thorns" are "harsh ... to pears! and yet they make / A better hedge, and need lesse reparation" (p. 420, lines 121–2). Similarly, the prudent can find in a single homely food varied and even opposing useful qualities:

Cold fruits warm kernells help against the winde.
 The lemmons juice and rinde cure mutually.
 The whey of milk doth loose, the milk doth binde.
 (p. 420, lines 130–2)

These descriptions of how to find everything the body needs in one's own backyard echo advice that Herbert offers in *The Country Parson*. He argues that learning the healthful properties of food is important primarily because it allows the community to maintain itself independently, the "home-bred" being "both more easy for the ... purse, and more familiar for all men's bodies."⁴² Herbert provides as model for readers the parson's wife, who "seeks not the city, but prefers her garden and fields."⁴³ This advocacy for the seventeenth-century equivalent of eating local had particular topical relevance: as mentioned above, one of the major causes of food insecurity in Herbert's parish and elsewhere was the exporting of food outside of the community for the profit of those who sold it.⁴⁴ "Providence" enjoins readers to accept their place, not just in the sense of an allotted social position, but also in the sense of restricting themselves to consuming the resources of their own region. The poem invites readers to view this lifestyle of restrained consumption as engendering a true feast: under the providential order, "creatures leap not, but expresse a feast, / Where all the guests sit close, and nothing wants" (p. 420, lines 133–4). When everyone "leap[s] not," but remains in their proper place, "all the guests sit close," that is, there are no gaps at the

table. When that order is achieved, nobody experiences “want[],” not because they consume without restraint but because they keep within their given bounds and thereby sustain the whole. Just as harmony and providential order are embedded in the “curious” disparities of the natural world, “Providence” solicits a community made up of people occupying unequal social positions and divergent in their views to become harmonious, to voice its hymnic text together and accept their role in the divine plan that providence has for their community.

We can get a glimpse of what this ideal community might have looked like in practice by turning to the editor of *The Temple*, Herbert’s friend Nicholas Ferrar. Like Herbert, Ferrar was responsible for managing a body of believers. He had converted his estate in Little Gidding into a strictly organized religious community made up largely of his extended relatives as well as frequent visitors.⁴⁵ Herbert supported Ferrar’s efforts, assisting him in gathering funds to restore a nearby church and aiding him in his literary endeavors, acting as his editor.⁴⁶ On Herbert’s death, he asked that the manuscript of *The Temple* be sent to Ferrar, “to read it: and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public.”⁴⁷ Looking at the example of Little Gidding gives us a sense of why Herbert might have seen Ferrar as suited to understand the aims of *The Temple* and carry its project forward.

The Ferrar household is best known for the construction of gospel harmonies, cutting up printed bibles and pasting them together to create one unified text out of the four gospels.⁴⁸ This project served a dual purpose: engaging the community in productive labor and creating texts that they actively used, reading the assembled gospel narrative aloud together at set times each day.⁴⁹ This collective work of repurposing given materials for the benefit of the group corresponds to the conversational ethic that Herbert’s poetry promotes. The Ferrars’ creation of trimmed and pared devotional texts to regulate life in their exacting community embodies in a different form the ethos of literary austerity that drives *The Temple*. As in *The Temple*, at Little Gidding such texts of public worship were directly connected to the sharing of daily bread.

Diet and devotional literature together formed the center around which the Ferrar household was organized. When they gathered for meals, “[w]hilst they were ... feeding y^r: bodyes, one whose turn it then was (as every one tooke his turne at Meale time) of the yonger sort read a Chapter in the Bible ... so y^r Eares

& heartes might not want the best Spirituall food."⁵⁰ They distributed psalm books to children from the neighboring towns and invited them to join the family each Sunday for a free dinner provided they could recite a psalm that they had memorized that week.⁵¹ As in *The Temple*, this hospitality was enabled by dietary restriction. While Nicholas Ferrar took appetite suppression to an extreme, causing friends to fear that his "[s]trictness ... of Diet, & his fastings, watchings &c: might impaire his health & shorten his Life," a less drastic but still rigorous form of dietary austerity was practiced by all residents at Little Gidding.⁵² The members of the household kept a careful kitchen register that included provisions for making space for guests at meals and distributing food to the poor.⁵³ In order to ensure that they could keep their cupboards open, as Walton recounts, the community "did always eat and drink by the strictest rules of temperance," limiting their consumption so that "this frugality and abstinence [could be] turned to the relief of the poor."⁵⁴ These practices were central to how the Ferrar community defined itself, as foremost "inclined to practical piety and devotion" rather than "needless disputations."⁵⁵ In other words, they perceived spiritual pursuits as empty unless done in the service of "practical piety," pursued for the benefit of others. As in *The Temple*, dietary restriction at Little Gidding was not just an ascetic practice but also directed at literally nourishing the larger community.

The example of Little Gidding illustrates the practical social ends guiding Herbert's poetics. In *The Temple*, devotional life rests on serving the community, not just spiritually but also in terms of basic, material needs such as hunger. Herbert's celebrated formal experiments attempt to poetically persuade his audience to respond to this mandate. By drawing on the collectively voiced forms of public worship, he urges readers to view themselves as part of a larger communal body, the needs of which outweigh the demands of any individual appetite. Through emblemizing thinness as an ethical and aesthetic ideal and metrically modeling the pleasures of restriction, Herbert encourages his readers to view dietary austerity as both necessary and, in itself, satisfying. Adopting this mode of selfless consumption is what authorizes the reader at last, in the closing line of "Love (III)," to "sit and eat" (p. 661, line 18).

NOTES

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¹ George Herbert, *The Temple*, in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 37–687, 45, lines 1–6. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references to Herbert's poems are from this edition of *The Temple*; they will be identified by title and will appear parenthetically in the text and notes by page and, where applicable, line number. I have cited variants where relevant. The 1633 Bodleian manuscript does not vary greatly from the first printed edition, but in the Williams manuscript, believed to have been largely composed before Herbert became a parson, a number of the poems most concerned with diet are missing (see Herbert, *The Bodleian Manuscript of George Herbert's Poems: A Facsimile of Tanner 307*, ed. Amy M. Charles and Mario A. Di Cesare [Delmar NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1984]; and Herbert, *The Williams Manuscript of George Herbert's Poems: A Facsimile Reproduction*, ed. Charles [Delmar NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1977]). This absence reinforces the claim I make in this article that these poems address concerns related to Herbert's responsibility as parson for food distribution in his community. For a broader account of the revisions between the Bodleian and Williams manuscripts see Cristina Malcolmson, *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999).

² Deut. 26:10 (AV). With the exception of the Psalms, which I quote from the Book of Common Prayer (the source that Herbert uses in his psalm adaptations), this and all subsequent references to biblical passages are taken from [*The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament, and the New*] (London: Robert Barker, 1611); EEBO STC (2d edn.) 2217.

³ Deut. 26:12 (AV).

⁴ See Joan Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions, 1500–1760* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 60; and Felicity Heal, "Economic Problems of the Clergy," in *Church and Society in England: Henry VIII to James I*, ed. Heal and Rosemary O'Day (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), pp. 99–118, 108.

⁵ See Heal, p. 100; and Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church: From Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), p. 78.

⁶ See Heal, p. 100.

⁷ For Herbert's most well-known use of the eye/I pun in *The Temple*, see "Love (III)," p. 661, line 12.

⁸ For examples of Herbert's use of refrains in *The Temple*, see "The Sacrifice," pp. 96–103; "Antiphon (I)," pp. 186–7; "Grace," pp. 217–8; "Praise (I)," pp. 221–2; and "Home," pp. 384–6.

⁹ See Andrew B. Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1978), esp. chaps. 7–10.

¹⁰ On the cloth industry in Wiltshire, see Ronald W. Cooley, "Full of All Knowledge": George Herbert's "Country Parson" and Early Modern Social Discourse (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 95. On wage decline, see Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), p. 48.

¹¹ Cooley, p. 95.

¹² See John Kuhn, "‘To Give Like a Priest’: George Herbert, Dearth, and the Transformation of Charity in Caroline Wiltshire," *ELR* 46, 1 (Winter 2016): 129–54, 132–4.

¹³ See Hill, pp. 99–100.

¹⁴ See John Walter, "The Social Economy of Dearth in Early Modern England," in *Famine, Disease, and the Social Order in Early Modern Society*, ed. Walter and Roger Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 75–128, 109–10.

¹⁵ "Act Annexing Firstfruits and Tenths to the Crown, 1534," in *Tudor Constitutional Documents, A.D. 1485–1603, with an Historical Commentary*, ed. J. R. Tanner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 36–9, 37.

¹⁶ Heal and O’Day, introduction to *Church and Society in England*, pp. 1–14, 12.

¹⁷ Izaak Walton, "Izaak Walton's *The Life of Mr George Herbert*," in *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, by Herbert, ed. John Tobin (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 267–314, 288.

¹⁸ Herbert, *Outlandish Proverbs, Selected by Mr. G. H.* (London: Printed by T. P. for Humphrey Blunden, 1640), [A6v], [B4v], C3r; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 13182.

¹⁹ Herbert, *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson*, in *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, pp. 199–263, 213. Subsequent references to *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson* in the article and the notes will appear as *The Country Parson*.

²⁰ Herbert, *The Country Parson*, p. 241.

²¹ Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), p. 106. A notable precedent to Herbert's ethics of food refusal can be found in medieval women's ascetic diets, as discussed in Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, *New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics* 1 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987).

²² See Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998); Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and Ryan Netzley, *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2011).

²³ Schoenfeldt, p. 12.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 6:19 (AV).

²⁵ See David B. Goldstein, *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013); Amy L. Tigner, "Eating with Eve," *MiltonQ* 44, 4 (December 2010): 239–53; Goldstein and Tigner, eds., *Culinary Shakespeare: Staging Food and Drink in Early Modern England*, *Medieval and Renaissance Literary Studies* (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2016); Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); and Joan Fitzpatrick, *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern Diets and the Plays*, *Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2007).

²⁶ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 280–1.

²⁷ Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Rhyme (1603)*, in *Sidney's "The Defence of Poesy" and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 205–33, 211.

²⁸ These lines are missing from the earlier Williams manuscript, suggesting that agricultural reform disputes came to the forefront for Herbert when he was revising these poems after becoming a parson.

²⁹ The earlier Williams manuscript has a variant at line 128, "Tast all, but feed not. If thy stomach call." This alteration supports my thesis that Herbert's advocacy of food restriction increased after he became a parson.

³⁰ On advice books addressing the painstaking task of carving and serving meat, see Wall, pp. 161–2.

³¹ This gloss of "sickly healths" as "unhealthy toasts" comes from Tobin ("Notes" to *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, pp. 324–451, 327n133).

³² *OED*, 3d edn., s.v. "companion, *n.*¹"; and *OED*, 3d edn., s.v. "com-, *prefix.*"

³³ See, for example, Tobin's note on the title (p. 391n).

³⁴ "The Size" does not appear in the earlier Williams manuscript, again indicating that Herbert's concern with dietary restriction increased after becoming a parson.

³⁵ Line 18 in the Bodleian manuscript reads "Wouldst thou both eat thy Cake & Save it?," which does not change my analysis here.

³⁶ Herbert uses a similar technique in the first stanza of "Easter wings," in which lines gradually decrease in length down to the two-syllable line "Most thinne," the thinnest point of the wing-shaped stanza, before expanding again in length as the speaker describes grafting himself onto the Lord's "wing" to rise out of sin (p. 147, lines 15 and 19).

³⁷ Herbert, *The Country Parson*, p. 204.

³⁸ See Wilcox, introduction to *The English Poems of George Herbert*, pp. xxi–xxxvi, xxvii.

³⁹ Ps. 104:15, 28, in *The Booke of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England* (London: Robert Barker, 1632), [C5r–v]; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 16388a.5.

⁴⁰ *OED*, 3d edn., s.v. "marshal, *v.*," II.2a.

⁴¹ *OED*, 2d edn., s.v. "curious, *adj.*," II.7b.

⁴² Herbert, *The Country Parson*, p. 236.

⁴³ Herbert, *The Country Parson*, p. 236.

⁴⁴ See Kuhn, pp. 132–3.

⁴⁵ See Walton, p. 308.

⁴⁶ See Christopher Hodgkins, "The Church Legible: George Herbert and the External of Worship," *The Journal of Religion* 71, 2 (April 1991): 217–41, 223.

⁴⁷ Walton, p. 311.

⁴⁸ On the Little Gidding harmonies, see Paul Dyck, "'So rare a use': Scissors, Reading, and Devotion at Little Gidding," *GHJ* 27, 1/2 (Fall 2003/Spring 2004): 67–81; and Dyck, "A New Kind of Printing": Cutting and Pasting a Book for a King at Little Gidding," *The Library*, 7th ser., 9, 3 (September 2008): 306–33.

⁴⁹ See Walton, p. 308.

⁵⁰ John Ferrar, *A Life of Nicholas Ferrar*, in *The Ferrar Papers*, ed. B. Blackstone (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938), pp. 1–94, 40.

⁵¹ See Ferrar, p. 35.

⁵² Ferrar, p. 75.

⁵³ See Ferrar, pp. 31–3.

⁵⁴ Walton, pp. 307–8.

⁵⁵ Walton, p. 308.