

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Attending to the Middle: George Herbert, Imagination, and the Structure of the Brain

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In 1695, Humphrey Ridley wrote with some consternation in *The Anatomy of the Brain* that no matter what he tried, ‘by the best enquiry [he] could make either into Brains dissected whilst fresh, or when boiled in Oyl’, he just could not find the distinct organs his predecessors had argued he should find: ‘Functions commonly going under the aforesaid Names of *The Common Sense*, or *Simple Apprehension*, *Imagination*, *Judgment*, and *Memory*’.¹ While he was writing, it must still have been commonplace to think of the brain as having individual organs or faculties, for Ridley is surprised, but pleased, when he reports that he has made a new discovery, that the brain contains no such organs. In the seventeenth century, the ‘organ’ at the centre of it all – literally – is the faculty of the imagination, a force that has incredible power over the rest of the brain and the body because of its central position in the brain, but a force that also inclines to falsehood and illness, so it must be restrained. Such restraint is particularly necessary because the imagination’s central location in the brain makes it a mediator in the brain and body, so if it misleads its juxtaposed parts, the whole person suffers immensely. Such a structure of the brain affects not only early modern ‘faculty psychology’, but early modern literature as well. George Herbert’s *The Temple* may seem an unlikely place to find literary repercussions of the early modern layout of the physical brain, but, I argue, the mediatory role of the imagination makes it essential, albeit fraught, in his poems. The very metaphors, similes, puns, and wordplay that Herbert uses depend on the recombinant nature of the early modern imagination. Indeed, although the imagination is a potentially dangerous, even heretical faculty, its mediatory nature – not only between the parts of the brain and body, but particularly

¹ Humphrey Ridley, *The Anatomy of the Brain* (London: Samuel Smith and Benjamin Walford, 1695), pp. 190; 191.

between the human and the divine – makes it particularly well suited to *devotional* poetry, in spite of what common criticism of the Renaissance imagination has concluded.

The Physical Organ of the Imagination

Recent scholarship on early modern literature and history has taken a new interest in the imagination and the nature of the brain, with the following works appearing in the last decade: Todd Butler's *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, Charis Charalampous' *Rethinking the Mind-Body Relationship in Early Modern Literature, Philosophy, and Medicine: The Renaissance of the Body*, and the collections *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period*, and *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*.² Such works represent a significant change in how modern scholars have viewed the early modern mind, and in particular the imagination. In older criticism, the imagination was commonly assigned a position of distrust and suspicion. Stephen Greenblatt, for instance, writes that early modern authors were concerned with 'the contaminating presence of the imagination',³ highlighting solely the fears that some Renaissance theorists had about the faculty. In contrast, critics such as Todd Butler present a more nuanced and integrative study of the imagination; in his monograph he acknowledges the mistrust that someone like Francis Bacon displayed for the creative power of the mind, but he also points to Bacon's interest in the faculty: 'Wariness and fascination exist side-by-side'.⁴ Charis Charalampous, Yasmin Haskell, Laurie Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn Tribble, in their respective monograph and edited collections, focus in particular on the harmful *and helpful* impact of the imagination on the body and vice versa. Johnson, Sutton, and Tribble, later echoed by Charalampous, even use a new phrase for the close link between the mental and physical in the Renaissance – the 'body-mind' or 'mind-body' – a phrase that underscores the inseparability of the two

² Todd Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Charis Charalampous, *Rethinking the Mind-Body Relationship in Early Modern Literature, Philosophy and Medicine: The Renaissance of the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Yasmin Haskell (ed.), *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011); Laurie Johnson, John Sutton, and Evelyn Tribble (eds.), *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare, with a new preface* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 113.

⁴ Butler, p. 19.

entities, and one that encourages critics to think both of the body as intelligent and the mind as a physical object.

Indeed, as Humphrey Ridley's *The Anatomy of the Brain* demonstrates, the brain is – and was – an organ in the body. What Ridley was looking for, though, was not the brain itself, but for the functions of the brain, such as the common sense, the imagination, and the memory. He must have performed his search because early modern English theorists inherited a classical and medieval sense of the imagination as a physical organ within the brain (hence the 'faculty' of the imagination).⁵ To other seventeenth-century theorists, the imagination's physical nature is at the same time common knowledge and worthy of attention. In his expansive *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton states unequivocally that the imagination has 'an organ or seat' in the brain, just as the other mental faculties. In the sensitive or sensible soul (the part of the soul that humans share with animals but not plants), the common sense, the imagination, and the memory each have a physical location as organs 'within the brain-pan'.⁶ Such an idea must have been commonplace, for it appears often in early modern English texts of all sorts. Richard Baker, for instance, in his treatise on the immortality of the soul, makes a distinction between the sensible and rational soul (the part of the soul belonging only to humans), and in the process demonstrates the physicality of the sensible soul and the imagination it contains: 'It is true, the Rationall Faculty makes use sometimes of the Fantasie, and issue from the Brain, and may therefore be counted a Bodily Organ'.⁷ And that is why Ridley's discovery during his dissection was so remarkable. He expected to find distinct organs but found only a single mass of grey matter.

The imagination was not only a physical element of the brain, but it had a specific place that most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors affirmed: of the faculties of the sensible soul, the imagination is the organ occupying the 'middle cell of the brain'.⁸ In 'Nosce Teipsum', John Davies expounds, 'One common power [the common sense] doth in the forehead sit', from where she 'straight transmits all forms she doth perceive / Unto a higher region of the brain' where the imagination resides, which faculty sends data 'To Memory's large volume', which 'lies in the brain behind'.⁹ In his text on

⁵ Murray Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1927), pp. 179; 182.

⁶ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Holbrook Jackson and William H. Gass (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), p. 1.1.2.7.159.

⁷ Richard Baker, *A soliloquy of the soule, or, a pillar of thoughts with reasons proving the immortality of the soule* (London: Francis Eglesfield, 1641), p. E1^v.

⁸ Burton, p. 1.1.2.7.159.

⁹ John Davies, 'Nosce Teipsum' (London: John Standish, 1599), pp. 46-7.

common questions about natural history, Robert Bassett explains that the common sense (or intellect), the imagination, and the memory are elements of the internal senses, using the same title Robert Burton employs. He asks, ‘Wherefore is it, that when wee would conceive any thing, we put our hands to the forehead, and when we would call a thing to memory, wee scratch behinde the head’? His answer: ‘By the reason of the diversity of the seates; for the Intellect is seated in the fore part, the Memory in the hinder part, and the Fantasie in the interstice betweene them: and therefore by those actions we doe as it were summon each by a peculiar motion to the use of its function’.¹⁰ John Angel, in his 1659 treatise on guarding the thoughts, writes in parentheses that ‘imagination (border[s] betwixt sense and reason)’.¹¹ The parentheses are significant, for they suggest that the location of the imagination was a well-known, taken-for-granted fact. Moreover, Angel was no natural historian, physician, or philosopher; rather, he was a well-educated preacher, and still he knew of the hypothesized nature of the brain and the imagination, and he clearly expected his readers to have the same knowledge.

The Imagination as Mediator in the Brain

Because imagination inhabits the middle of the brain, it interacts with the two parts before it and behind it – the common sense in front and the memory behind. From the common sense, imagination receives the sensory data collected by the five senses. That data transverses the imagination and is stored by the memory. To conceive of something new, the imagination can take new sensory data and old memories, combining them to make a new image or idea. Such combinations can be powerful and pleasurable, but also potentially dangerous. For instance, ‘In melancholy men this faculty is most powerful and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if it be stirred up by some terrible object, presented to it from common sense or memory’, Burton warns.¹² Nicolas Coeffeteau also presents a similar imaginative process: five external senses gather data, present it to the internal common sense which passes that data to the imagination, from whence the data proceeds to the memory, all faculties of the internal senses in the sensitive soul.¹³

¹⁰ Robert Bassett, *Curiosities: of the cabinet of nature Containing phylosphical, naturall, and morall questions fully answered and resolved. Translated out of Latin, French, and Italian authors* (London: N. and J. Okes, 1637), p. 199.

¹¹ John Angel, *The right government of thoughts, or, A discovery of all vain, unprofitable, idle, and wicked thoughts* (London: Nath. Alkins, 1659), p. A3^v.

¹² Burton, p. 1.1.2.7.159.

¹³ Nicolas Coeffeteau, *A table of humane passions with the causes and effects*, trans. by Edward Grimeston (London: Nicholas Okes, 1621), sig. a5^v-a6.

Bacon too affirms the physical positioning of imagination as Burton, Coeffeteau, and others define it. In his description of the brain, the imagination is between the faculties of sense and reason, and has a central role corresponding to its central position:

For sense sendeth over to imagination before reason have judged: and reason sendeth over to imagination before the decree can be acted. For imagination ever precedeth voluntary motion. Saving that this Janus of imagination hath differing faces: for the face towards reason hath the print of truth, but the face towards action hath the print of good; which nevertheless are faces,
Quales decet esse sororum [Such as sisters' faces should be].¹⁴

Neither is the imagination simply and only a messenger; but is invested with, or at least wise usurpeth no small authority in itself, besides the duty of the message.¹⁵

Imagination is no passive conduit, silently passing notes between sense and reason. The imagination has a 'Janus' face, which would be alarming if Bacon did not describe the two faces as 'truth' and 'good'. Moreover, the imagination has or steals 'no small authority' in the content and context of the messages it passes between its neighboring faculties. Bacon refers to 'reason' rather than 'memory' here, but Charalampous reminds his readers that 'reason' is not the rational mind in this case; rather, it is the mind's ability to form judgments, and thus still belongs to the sensitive or sensible soul, not the rational soul. (Indeed, although Bacon, Burton, and most seventeenth-century authors name only three parts of the sensible soul, a few of their earlier contemporaries considered the sensible soul to have five distinct elements: common sense, imagination, fantasy, memory, and reason.)¹⁶ Not only does he call the imagination an authoritative Janus of truth and good, Bacon emphasizes that its central location in the brain gives it another distinguished title:

The knowledge which respecteth the faculties of the mind of man is of two kinds; the one respecting his understanding and reason, and the other his will, appetite, and affection; whereof the former produceth position or decree, the

¹⁴ The quotation in Bacon's text is from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.14.

¹⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by Stephen Jay Gould (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 124.

¹⁶ Charalampous, p. 4. See Pierre de La Primaudaye, *The Second Part of the French Academie* (Printed by G.B. R.N. R.B., 1594), p. 131.

latter action or execution. It is true that the imagination is an agent or *nuncius* [ambassador], in both provinces, both the judicial and the ministerial.¹⁷

As an ambassador, the imagination is literally and metaphorically central to all negotiations in the brain and body.

Because of its vital role and position in the brain, the imagination could, of course, be dangerous, as scholars such as Greenblatt have emphasized. Another early modern theorist of the mind and imagination, Thomas Wright, emphasizes the danger of the mediatory role of imagination, caused by its physical presence in the brain. Imagination, he explains in a lengthy metaphor, can cause obsession:

For whatsoever we understand passeth by the gates of our imagination, the cousin german to our sensitive appetite; the gates of our imagination, being prevented, yea, and well nigh shut up with the consideration of that object which feedeth the passion and pleaseth the appetite, the understanding looking into the imagination findeth nothing almost but the mother and nurse of his passion for consideration; where you may well see how the imagination putteth green spectacles before the eyes of our wit to make it see nothing but green, that is, serving for the consideration of the Passion.¹⁸

Wright then reiterates his point about the dangers of the faculty when he describes a cloudy imagination which ‘interposeth a mist’, spreading out like a fog to affect our judgment and our senses.¹⁹ His metaphor of the obsessive imagination finds resonance in the 1595 writings of Philip Sidney, who concurs that the soul can be possessed by poetry: ‘[The poet] yeeldeth to the powers of the minde an image of that whereof the Philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description: which dooth neyther strike, pierce, nor possesse the sight of the soule so much as that other doth’.²⁰ I quote Sidney because his verbs are physically violent: the poet, who appeals most vigorously to the imagination, creates images that ‘strike’, ‘pierce’, and ‘possess’. Similarly, the metaphors Wright uses to describe the imagination are remarkably physical and material. The imagination has ‘gates’, and later he calls it ‘a court’. In that ‘court of our imagination’, the imagination is a sort of devious lawyer, who, as a ‘deceitful

¹⁷ Bacon, p. 124.

¹⁸ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in General* (1604), ed. by William Webster Newbold, *The Renaissance Imagination*, Vol. 15 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), p. 128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁰ Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poesie*, ed. by Risa S. Bear, *Luminarium* <<http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/defence.html>>.

Counsellor, corrupteth his Judge', a person's Understanding.²¹ Its physical nature makes the imagination physically impactful and theoretically physically dangerous. According to any number of excited and concerned early modern theorists, then, 'The Janus of Imagination', to use Bacon's term, is that middle section of the brain that is powerful, dangerous, and always productive.

Of course, early modern theorists gave careful attention to the matter of the imagination's utility and its restraint. Because it occupied such a vital position in the brain, can it be controlled? The most commonly endorsed control for the imagination is reason, under which 'this phantasy of ours [should] be a subordinate faculty', Burton writes.²² And yet for devotional potential (as we shall see in Herbert's poetry), reason is not enough to unite a person's imagination with God. Instead, something like inspiration or providence is necessary. Indeed, in his study of Francis Bacon's grappling with the imagination, Todd Butler spends considerable time debating the nature of inspiration. Bacon, Butler rightly notes, grandly equates the imagination with faith and religion, but while he makes the equation, Bacon also keeps the mediatory faculty in 'isolation', for 'Bacon acknowledges and then restricts the power of the imagination, initially granting it access to divine authority and then subordinating its influence to learning and textual knowledge'.²³ Butler emphasizes, too, that Bacon touches briefly on imagination as a devotional tool, but then turns his direction firmly to non-religious fields, writing about the imagination primarily in his concern to be sure that it is 'properly directed [to ensure] the proper working of both scientific and philosophic society'.²⁴ Other early modern English theorists were more willing to ascribe inspiration and divine intervention to the mind and human invention: Thomas Browne, for instance, writes that 'I do think that many mysteries ascribed to our own inventions have been the courteous revelations of spirits; for those noble essences in heaven bear a friendly regard unto their fellow-nature on earth'.²⁵

Also in contrast to Bacon, Thomas Wright offers a prominent, unequivocal, and spiritual role to the imagination. In fact, the mediatory nature of the imagination is again useful here to establish the devotional potential of the imagination. For, the imagination's mediatory and combinatory role extends beyond the physical and cranial

²¹ Wright, p. 129.

²² Burton, p. 1.2.3.2.253. For more on imagination's restraint, see Deanna Smid, *The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), especially chapter 4.

²³ Butler, p. 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁵ Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (University of Adelaide: eBooks@Adelaide, 2015), <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/browne/thomas/religio/complete.html>>, p. 1.32.

in the early modern period. In *The Passions of the Minde in General*, Wright invokes the imagination again in a rather unlikely spot: in his chapter on the power of music. A rather startling argument about the imagination appears in the middle of a longer debate about how exactly the ear hears musical sounds. His second hypothesis for the ‘miracle’ of hearing music is this:

The second manner of this miracle in nature some assign and ascribe to God’s general providence, who, when these sounds affect the ear, produceth a certain spiritual quality in the soul, the which stirreth up one or other passion, according to the variety of voices or consorts of instruments. Neither this is to be marveled at, for the very same upon necessity we must put in the imagination, the which not being able to dart the forms of fancies, which are material, into the understanding, which is spiritual; therefore where nature wanteth, God’s providence supplieth. So corporal music being unable to work such extraordinary effects in our souls, God, by his ordinary natural providence, produceth them. The like we may say of the creation of our souls, for men being able to produce the body but unable to create the soul; man prepareth the matter and God createth the form. So in music men sound and hear, God striketh upon and stirreth up the heart.²⁶

Wright uses the imagination as an analogy to explain the nature of sound: sound works just as the imagination, which needs God’s providential help to change the material into the spiritual. The imagination is part of the sensible soul, a statement that almost all early modern English theorists would endorse.²⁷ The sensible soul, however, is a part of the soul held in common with animals, and only the rational soul is a gift from God to humans. How can the imagination send advice, warning, even confusion, to the rational soul if it is constrained as a physical organ in the brain? Wright answers the question by making the imagination a conduit of divine intervention: God must change the physical information contained in the imagination into spiritual guidance to send to the understanding, part of the rational, human soul. Wright creates a new sort of combinatory, mediatory role to the imagination, then, a role that must be initiated and controlled by the active intervention of God’s grace to turn the physical into the spiritual. With such an active and providentially controlled role in the middle of the brain, then, imagination must have devotional utility, too, as we shall see in Herbert’s *The Temple*.

²⁶ Wright, pp. 208-9.

²⁷ For a dissenting voice, see Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969).

The Mediatory Imagination in *The Temple*

George Herbert, as highly educated Orator at Cambridge, must have been well acquainted with early modern theories of the imagination. Indeed, according to scholars such as Charles Whitney, Greg Miller, Christopher Hodgkins, William Sessions, and Kenneth Hovey, Herbert betrays his familiarity with matters of natural philosophy or science in a number of his *Temple* poems.²⁸ Moreover, Herbert was, by all accounts, a friend of Francis Bacon, writing a number of poems in honour of the author, such as ‘*Ad Autorem Instaurationis Magnae*’ and ‘*In obitum incomparabilis Francisci Vicecomitis Sancti Albani, Baronis Verulamij*’. Herbert was clearly conversant enough with Bacon’s theories to represent them generally in his commendatory poem. Herbert must have been quite familiar with *The Advancement of Learning*, for according to Thomas Tenison’s introduction to *Baconiana, Or Certain Genuine Remains of Sr. Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, and Viscount of St. Albans*, Herbert was involved in the translation of the text: Bacon ‘caus’d that part of it which he had written in *English*, to be translated into the *Latine* Tongue, by Mr. *Herbert*, and some others who were esteemed Masters in the *Roman* Eloquence’.²⁹ Yet the friendship of Herbert and Bacon continues to confound many scholars, for what might their relationship imply about *The Temple*’s negotiation with natural philosophy, rationality, intellectual pursuits, and the model of scientific experimentation Bacon espoused? Did Herbert reject, embrace, distrust, fear, ignore the theories and methodologies of his friend? Angela Balla’s ‘*Baconian Investigation and Spiritual Standing in Herbert’s The Temple*’ provides a thorough history of the scholarly arguments about Herbert’s negotiations with Bacon’s science, and her article also brilliantly demonstrates how Herbert engaged with Bacon’s

²⁸ Charles Whitney, ‘Bacon and Herbert as Moderns’, in *Like Season’d Timber: New Essays on George Herbert*, ed. by Edmund Miller and Robert DiYanni (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 231-39; Greg Miller, *George Herbert’s “Holy Patterns”: Reforming Individuals in Community* (New York: Continuum, 2007), especially chapters 5 and 6; Christopher Hodgkins, “‘Yet I love thee’: The “Wayes of Learning” and “Groveling Wit” in Herbert’s “The Pearl””, *George Herbert Journal* 27 (2003-4), 22-31; Robert Ellrodt, ‘Scientific Curiosity and Metaphysical Poetry in the Seventeenth Century’, *Modern Philology* 61.3 (1964), 180-97; William A. Sessions, ‘Bacon and Herbert and an Image of Chalk’, in *“Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne”: Essays on George Herbert*, ed. by Claude J. Summer and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), pp. 165-78; and Kenneth Alan Hovey, “‘Diuinitie, and Poesie, Met’”: The Baconian Context of George Herbert’s “Divinity””, *English Language Notes* 22.3 (1985), 30-9.

²⁹ Thomas Tenison, *Baconiana, Or Certain Remains of Sr. Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, and Viscount of St. Albans* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1679), p. 24.

method in *The Temple*.³⁰ This all goes to show that Herbert must have been acquainted with theories of the nature of the brain and of the imagination, and most likely not only in the works of Bacon, for Herbert's knowledge of the nature of the imagination does not depend upon solely the works of his friend. After all, Bacon was not writing in a vacuum, and the well-read Herbert likely would have known and understood the taken-for-granted structure of the brain and its faculties.

At first glance, however, Herbert appears to have little use for the potentially corrupt imagination. In 'The Church Porch', he calls fancies 'poisonous,' making a 'thin web'.³¹ In 'Love (I)' and 'The Pilgrimage', fancy creates dangerous 'beauty' (9), and a distracting 'meadow strowed / With many a flower' (7-8). He is particularly scathing in *A Priest to the Temple* where, in chapter 9, on 'The country parson considering that virginity is a higher state than matrimony and that the ministry requires the best and highest things is rather unmarried than married', he advises: '*He keepeth his watch and ward night and day against the proper and peculiar temptations of his state of life, which are principally these two, spiritual pride and impurity of heart: against these ghostly enemies he girdeth up his loins, keeps the imagination from roving, puts on the whole armour of God*' (212-13). The latter quotation from *The Country Parson*, however, demonstrates that I am not simply pursuing, to borrow Christopher Looby's phrase, 'the perverse pleasure of the difficult',³² when I attempt to find and recuperate the faculty of imagination in Herbert's poetry. Herbert does not completely reject the imagination in *The Country Parson*; rather, he adjures preachers to '[keep] the imagination from roving'. If the imagination can be directed and restrained, perhaps its nature can be used for good. Moreover, I can cite Susanne Woods, who acknowledges Herbert's control over the clear and complicated: 'Herbert's mastery of the techniques of line and stanza-making has at last been recognized for the breathtaking sophistication that frequently underlies whatever is apparently simple or obvious in *The Temple*'.³³ Surely it is not beyond the skills of a poet of Herbert's complexity and subtlety to use and test the imagination in a variety of intricate (and perhaps even contradictory) ways in *The Temple*, and particularly in a poem such as 'The Windows'.

³⁰ Angela Balla, 'Baconian Investigation and Spiritual Standing in Herbert's *The Temple*', *George Herbert Journal* 34 (2010-11), 55-77.

³¹ George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by John Tobin (London: Penguin, 2004), 1. 224. All further references to this source appear in text.

³² Christopher Looby, 'Sexuality, History, Difficulty, Pleasure', *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1 (2013), 253-58 (p. 253).

³³ Susanne Woods, 'The "Unhewn Stones" of Herbert's Verse', *George Herbert Journal* 4 (1981), 30-46 (p. 30).

‘The Windows’ has long been cited in the scholarly debate over the value Herbert places on images in liturgical worship, with scholars arguing vociferously that Herbert either promotes or rejects all externals as devotional tools.³⁴ Clifford Davidson and others argue: “‘The Windows’ is a crucial poem in *The Temple*’ because it outlines some of Herbert’s thoughts on externals in worship.³⁵ I certainly agree with these critics, but more importantly for my argument, ‘The Windows’ reveals Herbert’s regard for the imagination and its bridging of the outer and inner life of a Christian. ‘The Windows’ suggests that, even though Herbert seemingly employs ‘imagination’ or ‘fantasy’ only disparagingly in *The Temple*, he still engages with the faculty of imagination in his poems. Indeed, I posit that the poem bears multiple resemblances to the layout of the brain as it was described by such theorists as Robert Burton, Francis Bacon, et al. In its form and content, ‘The Windows’ draws upon early modern understandings of the faculty of the imagination, paying close attention to the imagination’s physical location and mediatory function in the brain and its resultant metaphorical significance.

The metaphors in ‘The Windows’ demand that readers employ the combinatory powers of their imaginations as Bacon, Burton, Wright, and other theorists describe them:

Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?
 He is a brittle, crazy glass:
 Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
 This glorious and transcendent place,
 To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glass thy story,
 Making thy life to shine within
 Thy holy Preacher’s; then the light and glory
 More rev’rend grows, and more doth win:
 Which else shows wat’rish, bleak, and thin.

³⁴ Richard Strier, *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert’s Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 150; Judy Z. Kronenfeld, ‘Probing the Relation between Poetry and Ideology: Herbert’s “The Windows”’, *John Donne Journal* 2 (1983), 55-80; Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Clifford Davidson, ‘George Herbert and Stained Glass Windows’, *George Herbert Journal* 12 (1988), 29-39; Eugene R. Cunnar, “‘*Ut Pictura Poesis*: An Opening in “The Windows””, in *Like Season’d Timber: New Essays on George Herbert*, ed. by Edmund Miller and Robert DiYanni (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 101-38.

³⁵ Davidson, p. 36.

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

Readers must create mental images of church windows (glass, position in the church, staining, reflection, transparency) and combine those images and the memories and sensory data that accompany them to their images and experiences of preachers and of God. What mental faculty other than the imagination has such abilities? Herbert's metaphors demand that his readers merge tenor and vehicle – preachers and windows – in order to generate a synthesis, an understanding of God's interaction with preachers and the preacher's responsibility in the Church. The imagination, the recombinant faculty in the brain, is responsible and able, because of its location in the centre of the brain between the common sense and memory, to make such mixtures and novel understandings. Herbert does not overtly command that a preacher must lead by godly example because his readers' imaginations are essential to their involvement in the poem. Placing moral and theological strictures within poetry pulls his readers into his meditation, so that Herbert's readers participate actively in his poetry by using their imaginations to reproduce the metaphors Herbert crafts. The poem is a process that must be completed in the imagination, causing readers to engage dynamically with, and even form, the poem in the middle of their minds. Of course, such a dynamic engagement can only be initiated by God's providence, as Thomas Wright argues.

Yet 'The Windows' does more than use imagination generally as the facilitator of metaphor. Herbert uses the poem to describe and stimulate the imagination, paying special attention to imagination's position, its combining powers, and its role as a border between inner and outer. Throughout the poem, Herbert performs or gives examples of imaginative blending, such as in the enjambment between lines 3 and 4, 7 and 8, 11 and 12, and 12 and 13. Lines and ideas mingle in the poem, that mingling a function of the imagination. The poem also emphasizes the sense of sight rather than of sound: 'But speech alone / Doth vanish like a flaring thing, / And in the ear, not conscience ring' (13-15). Judy Kronenfeld warns that Herbert is not emphasizing sight in order to encourage the use of images in liturgical worship. Instead, she asserts, Herbert finds right speech meaningless unless it is accompanied by right actions.³⁶ Still, sight is more commonly associated with the imagination, the creator of images, and so

³⁶ Kronenfeld, pp. 72-3.

Herbert encourages his readers to consider the poem with their imaginations and thereby also to understand the connection between the holy preacher, God, and the reader imaginatively.

The most prominent metaphor in the poem, the glass on which God ‘anneals’ his ‘story’ (6), contains connotations of a border between inner and outer. Just as imagination allows communication between the senses and the memory, but also mediates that communication, so glass windows allow visual traffic between the inside of a church building and the outside, but are also a barrier between inner and outer. Imagination, then, is the glass that is not dangerously unscriptural if God imprints his story on it. Glass seems an unlikely metaphor for the imagination, however, because it is inherently passive. It does not ‘work’ as the imagination ‘works’. The action in the case of the poem is the annealing, for on its own, the imagination is not enough to highlight the devotional and didactic life of the preacher. The glass, the imagination, the preacher: all must *be* annealed by God’s hand. Without that annealing, God’s light shining forth from the preacher is only ‘wat’rish, bleak, and thin’ (10). Furthermore, the pun in the centre of the middle stanza accentuates Herbert’s preoccupation with bordering and mingling. When Herbert calls the light of the preacher ‘More rev’rend’ (9), he unites the two meanings of ‘reverend’ as a noun and an adjective, combining the two meanings to create a new image, the ‘rev’rend’ light in the ‘reverend’, the preacher. The pun is especially compact evidence of the combining force of imagination, for one word contains many different meanings and images, all blended into one.

Herbert then uses the words ‘combine’ and ‘mingle’ in line 12, reminding the reader that the poem’s metaphors combine images, and the poem’s form mingles words and lines. For instance, in line 11, he links ‘doctrine and life, colours and light, in one’, a line that not only unites the two words ‘doctrine’, ‘life’, and ‘colours’, ‘light’ within each phrase, but also combines the phrases themselves by means of isocolon. The added ‘in one’ emphasizes the unity between the two phrases. Surely here is Bacon’s Janus face of the imagination, revealing doctrine, life, colour, and light, all combining into ‘truth’ and ‘good.’ Indeed, ‘All four nouns form one whole when they combine and mingle, when form and content are brought together in the preacher’s speech’, Sigrid Renaux comments.³⁷ That mingling is only possible by God’s grace and the working of the imagination, two forces that are certainly not opposed.

³⁷ Sigrid Renaux, ‘George Herbert’s “The Windows” Illuminated: A Critical Approach’, *The George Herbert Journal* 9 (1985), 26-32 (p. 28).

That window, then, when annealed by God, allows doctrine, life, colours, and light to ‘combine’ and ‘mingle,’ the two words in line 12 that drive home the necessity and importance of the imagination. If the window is the site of combination and mingling, and the window is the preacher, it must be that Herbert himself, preacher at Saint Andrews, is as well that site of combining. If he is the preacher – the glass – then Herbert’s own body, life, and actions are the window that is imagination. Yet the metaphor extends even further, for the window/imagination/preacher appears in ‘thy temple’ (3), surely a reference both to the preacher’s body and to Herbert’s *Temple*. Therefore, while I agree with Kronenfeld that ‘speech alone / Doth vanish as a flaring thing’ shows Herbert’s emphasis on right actions as well as right words, I posit that the lines also emphasize the importance of *The Temple* – a collection of poems, physical artefacts of ink on paper – as a memorial to and outpouring of the imagination. His parishioners might forget his sermons, Herbert seems to be suggesting, but his and their imaginations (revealed in and evoked by *The Temple*) cannot be so easily dismissed or forgotten. The imagination is central to the brain, and his poems both arise out of that imagination and will stay in the imaginations of his readers, caught in imagination’s ‘gates,’ to use Wright’s terminology. The combinatory imagination, therefore, is represented in an astonishing layering of elements in Herbert’s complex poem: in the window, the preacher, Herbert himself, his poetry, and his readers. Indeed, ‘The Windows’ even suggests that imaginative poetry may be a more effective devotional genre than sermons.

Thus when he describes imagination in and by his poem, Herbert does not dismiss or mock it, but instead, calls it a gift of God, given by ‘grace’, as he writes in line 5. *The Temple* is, after all, ‘thy temple’ (3). Reading ‘The Windows’ – and indeed *The Temple* – as representative of the faculty of imagination does not negate or contradict Herbert’s emphasis in the poem on free grace.³⁸ Without Christ filling the imagination and shining through it, the imagination (like uncoloured windows) is useless for meditation and for ‘The Church’, both the physical building and congregation and also the second section of *The Temple*. But, when the faculty of imagination as Burton describes it in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, central both in the brain and to metaphor, is invoked and transformed in ‘The Windows’, then like the annealed glass that is the preacher, imagination has a ‘glorious and transcendent place’ (4).

In his highly influential *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, Stanley Fish proposes that ‘to read many of Herbert’s poems is to experience the dissolution of the lines of demarcation we

³⁸ Robert L. Entzminger, ‘Doctrine and Life: George Herbert and the Augustinian Rhetoric of Example’, *George Herbert Journal* 13 (1989), 37-47 (p. 42).

are accustomed to think of as real'.³⁹ He also argues, 'The problem posed in so many of Herbert's poems – what can I do if you have done everything – is finally solved by *dissolving* the distinction (between thine and mine) that occasioned it'.⁴⁰ Although Fish does not name it, the site of dissolution and mingling of God and humankind must be the imagination, particularly as Herbert invokes it in 'The Windows'. God's providence, after all, turns the physical into the spiritual in the faculty of the imagination. The form of Herbert's poetry, related to the physical structure of the human brain, reflects and occasions the merging of the human and the divine.

'The Windows' is hardly the only poem in which Herbert grapples with common early modern understandings of the faculty of imagination and its combinatory role. Another such poem is 'Trinity Sunday', immediately following 'The Windows'. Herbert, unsurprisingly considering the title, focuses on threes. The poem has three stanzas, and within those stanzas, especially in the last, he crafts lists of threes: 'my heart, mouth, hands' (7), 'With faith, with hope, with charity' (8), and 'run, rise, rest' (9). Each stanza corresponds to a person of the Trinity, but the framing and middle of the poem make it especially significant to the implications of the location of imagination. Strikingly, Herbert pays particular attention to the interaction in the middle of the poem, considering it a place of combination and mingling. The poem begins with 'Lord' (1), and ends with 'thee' (9), addressed to God. An invocation of God, therefore, encircles the poem. In the centre of the middle stanza, Herbert emphasizes the speaker, describing and promising the speaker's actions. The speaker tells God, 'For I confess my heavy score, / And I will strive to sin no more' (5-6). The poem, then, places the speaker in the centre of the poem and God at the outside. The centre also invokes ideas of the imagination and its ability to merge and mingle so that, by means of the poem's layout, Herbert is asking that the speaker's sinful self be combined with the blessing and perfection of God. In the imaginative middle of the poem, the speaker asks for his nature to be mingled with God's so that he may be united – merged – with him. In the last stanza, he asks that God may 'enrich' (7) him so 'That I may run, rise, rest with thee' (9). 'Run, rise, and rest' are all actions of the sun, and by invoking images of the sun in the minds of his readers, Herbert is making a common early modern pun on sun/Son. When the speaker asks that he may 'run, rise, rest with thee', Herbert is combining the two meanings of sun/Son in order to request another combination: his nature with Christ's. Like 'The Windows', then, 'Trinity Sunday' depends upon the

³⁹ Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), p. 164.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

physical location of the faculty of the imagination and its corresponding combinatory and mediatory role.

Herbert emphasizes the mingling of man and God in the middle of other poems as well. At the beginning of 'The Church' in *The Temple*, Herbert clearly creates a distinct beginning, middle, and end section in 'The Altar', and in the middle, he writes,

A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow'r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy name. (5-12)

Herbert layers meaning upon meaning into 'this frame', which can and does refer to the altar, his heart, his book of poetry, and the poem itself. I would extend the argument to claim that the combining of each part of his hard heart must occur – must 'meet' – in the middle of 'The Altar' because that is the place of the imagination, which is particularly suited to combine heart parts. As well, the imagination facilitates the mingling of the different meanings of 'this frame' itself; it allows the very layering that makes the poem so incredibly complex. Herbert consciously assigns a purpose to the imagination, to the meeting he arranges in the poem: 'To praise thy name'. Of course, the imagination cannot facilitate such a meeting on its own; rather, the heart is a stone that is cut by God's power. Only then can the stones meet together in the frame of the brain, body, poem, and *Temple* to praise God, because God has allowed such a meeting. Repeatedly, Herbert emphasizes that the imagination, especially considering its power (which originates from God), must praise God's name, be combined with godliness, and be controlled by God.

As much as he uses imagination and its implications in *The Temple*, Herbert, like his contemporaries, also highlights the potential spiritual dangers of the imagination. For example, in 'Paradise', Herbert ends each line of the four-stanza poem with a word that loses a letter in each successive line. The three lines in stanza one thereby end with 'GROW' (1) – 'ROW' (2) – 'OW' (3) and in stanza two, with 'CHARM' (4) – 'HARM' (5) – 'ARM' (6). In each stanza, the word ending the middle line has negative connotations: 'ROW' (2), 'HARM' (5), 'TART' (8), 'PARE' (11), and 'REND' (14). The centres of each stanza, therefore, are potentially dangerous, and are only redeemed

by the words that precede and follow them. The speaker of the poem, who takes on the persona of a tree in the Garden of Eden, asks to be pruned in order to be useful and praiseworthy to God, and the centre words – like the imagination – must be similarly pruned and restrained in order to be useful both to God and to the reader. Even though a poem such as ‘Paradise’ is very witty, Herbert redeems it by mingling it (using the faculty of the imagination) with God’s Word and with the wit of God himself. Herbert combines his wit with the revealed nature of God in order to redeem himself, his reader, and his poetry.

Herbert also raises the danger of having an unrestrained imagination in ‘Sin’s Round’, which focuses on the restless movement of thoughts. Tellingly, the poem does not have a beginning, middle, and end because it begins as it ends, with ‘Sorry I am, my God, sorry I am’, which is both lines 1 and 18. The poem, then, could be read as a ‘round’, for the end is the beginning, and the beginning the end. In the poem, the speaker describes his thoughts as ‘a busy flame’ (3) which cause his words to ‘take fire from [his] inflamed thoughts’ (7), and then his hands ‘do join to finish the inventions’ (13). In ‘Sin’s Round’, the imagination is not operating as a mediator or distinguished ambassador; rather it spins restlessly. Tellingly, what the imagination is missing in the poem is not memory or common sense, but God. The speaker invokes only his own guilt, not God’s mercy, grace, or forgiveness. The poem’s pronouns are revealing: the first and last lines contain two ‘I’s, and the second and third stanza begin with ‘My’, bringing the total of ‘my’s in the sixteen line poem to eleven. Even God is the property of the speaker, for he is named ‘my God’ in the first and last lines. The speaker’s imagination is therefore not even acknowledging that it must be combined with God so that the physical can be transformed into the spiritual, and is therefore troubled and ‘Sorry’.

Because of the potential danger of an imagination separated from God, Herbert emphasizes in other poems the need for the imagination to be combined, and to combine itself with godliness, a combinatory power granted by the imagination’s location in the brain. For example, in the well-known ‘Easter Wings’, the centre lines of the stanzas signal a change from the sinfulness of humankind and of the speaker to a renewed strength because of God’s salvation. In the first stanza, the speaker describes the sinfulness and degeneracy of man, which continues to deteriorate,

Till he became
Most poor:
With thee
O let me rise

As larks, harmoniously. (4-8)

In the centre of the stanza, the speaker has to be combined ‘with thee’ – with God – in order to be able to rise from his Fallen state. In the second stanza, the speaker describes his punishment from God for sin, which was to such an extent, the speaker writes,

That I became
Most thin.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory. (14-8)

As in the first stanza, the speaker must merge with God, but this time he actually uses the word ‘combine’ so that his readers will not mistake his meaning. Although the imagination can combine ideas and images, if it does not ally itself to God, it will torment a person and will remain ‘most poor’ and ‘most thin’, as it does in ‘Sin’s Round’.

‘Easter Wings’ seems to draw upon the sentiments that Thomas Wright expresses about providence, imagination, materiality, and the spiritual. As cited above, Wright posits that the imagination creates ‘forms of fancies’ that are ‘material’ and therefore incompatible with ‘the understanding, which is spiritual’. The material, represented in the first half of the stanzas of ‘Easter Wings’, leads the speaker away from God, and therefore God’s providence is necessary to combine the speaker with the divine. ‘With thee’, therefore, speaks to God’s vital intervention in the imagination. Imagination can combine, and can even combine the human speaker (or reader) with God, but the imagination needs providential intervention, as ‘Easter Wings’ emphasizes.

But is every middle a representation of the imagination? Surely other middles exist: Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity springs to mind, for instance. Perhaps looking for the significance of middles is similar to examining poetry for numerology, a process Isabel Rivers calls ‘fraught with difficulties, one being that the critics may read meanings into the numbers they arrive at’.⁴¹ And yet every middle must be a liminal space, a space ‘in between’ two or more things; such is the very definition of middles. Further, if a middle, liminal space is to have any interaction with the objects, persons, or things around it, it must act as a mediator or combiner. The mental capacity to mediate

⁴¹ Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 174.

and combine, according to early modern English theorists, belongs solely to the imagination, and therefore every middle does indeed depend upon the imagination and its central location in the brain. Of course, not every middle represents the imagination alone, and some middles in early modern literature are more or less self-conscious about their link to the imagination.

Herbert's middles, I propose, more likely fall into the former category: many of the middles of his poems seem clearly representative of the imagination. Looking for the location of the imagination should not preclude or overshadow an understanding of how the imagination works. Yet to Herbert and his contemporaries, the two were inextricably linked, for the imagination's function relied on its location. Humphrey Ridley was still decades away from 'discovering' that no distinct sensory organs existed in the brain. At the time Herbert was writing, the imagination was still a middle organ, and its nature and characteristics as a combinatory faculty relied on *where* it was. Of course, the imagination can still 'combine' and 'mingle' even if it is not invoked in the centre of a poem, stanza, or line. For instance, readers may not realize how the window, preacher, Herbert, poetry, and the reader 'mingle' until the very end of 'The Windows'. The final victory created by 'combining' likewise appears only in the last line of 'Easter Wings'.

Herbert's invocation and utilization of the imagination in his devotional poetry raises further questions, however, for the imagination is part of the sensible soul, common to both humans *and animals*. Robert Burton, for example, writes, 'In men it [the faculty of the imagination] is subject and governed by reason, or at least should be; but in brutes it hath no superior, and is *ratio brutorum*, all the reason they have'.⁴² Does Herbert's poetry, then, with its imaginative middles, appeal also to beasts and their *ratio brutorum*? Indeed, according to some scholarship on the Renaissance imagination, it was almost solely thought of as dangerous and to be avoided. In addition to Stephen Greenblatt (quoted above), Elizabeth Heale writes that imagination 'was considered easily corrupted by both the senses and the humours, leading to the misregulation of the body's humoral economy and the overthrow of reason', adding, 'Verse was often blamed for corrupting the imagination, especially of youth, with its vivid and seductive images and fictions'.⁴³ Both Greenblatt and Heale are well justified in their arguments, for as we have seen, the position of the imagination gives it power to harm and mislead. Yet if George Herbert – poet, theologian, learned graduate – conspicuously uses

⁴² Burton, p. 1.1.2.7.160.

⁴³ Elizabeth Heale, *Autobiography and Authorship in Renaissance Verse* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 130.

theories of the imagination in *The Temple*, then the imagination must have been somehow acceptable and useful in devotional poetry. And in its combination with God's providence, of course, the imagination does not appeal to animals as it does to humans.

Surely 'The Windows', 'Trinity Sunday', 'The Altar', 'Paradise', 'Sin's Round', and 'Easter Wings' have all struck a similar note to Wright's argument about music, imagination, and providence. They all use and invoke the imagination, but they particularly emphasize that the imagination must be combined with and by God in order for it to be devotionally productive. In the middles of 'Easter Wings', the 'With thee' appeals to God to intercede in the mediatory, combining nature of the imagination. Without 'thee', nothing could be combined, and the poem could not rise. But when God 'dost anneal in glass [his] story', then the imagination can be devotional rather than distracting or 'poisonous', the word Herbert uses for imagination in 'The Church Porch'. When Herbert, in *The Country Parson*, demands that parsons '[keep] the imagination from roving', he has provided examples of just such control in *The Temple*. The imagination mediates between sense and memory, but also between the physical and the spiritual when inspired by God. In fact, Herbert uses the 'dangerous imagination' to instill moral and theological 'lessons' in his readers. True, he also warns against the perils of the imagination, but he does so by using the central location of the imagination, by placing both warnings and encouragements in the middle of poems in *The Temple*. Attending to the middle then, although difficult and at times speculative, recuperates the imagination as a mediatory faculty with immense devotional potential and even necessity.