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In the House of God: Divine Authority and the Collectivity of Spiritual Experience in George Herbert's The Temple and Ralph Vaughan Williams' Five Mystical Songs

Nicole M. Hwang
Andrews University, nhwang@andrews.edu

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Andrews University

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Nicole M. Hwang

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Advisor: L. Monique Pittman, Ph.D.

Primary Advisor Signature: _____
Department of English

Abstract

George Herbert's collection of poems, *The Temple* (1633), portrays a reciprocal relationship between the human and divine, suggesting that humans are to house the glory of God and abide in Him. He seeks to portray the soul's internal architecture, with an allusion to the human heart as God's dwelling place. He uses his poetry to explore this relationship to a coexisting God, and through the framework of human-as-temple, the theme of habitation becomes prominent in his work. In "Love (III)" from *The Temple*, Herbert illustrates this, showing that just as God dwells in our hearts, we also receive sustenance and restoration from Him. "Love bade me welcome," from Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), places "Love (III)" in conversation with a musical score. An interdisciplinary analysis of Herbert's poem and Vaughan Williams' song demonstrates how the musical composition enlarges Herbert's dyadic vision of communal spirituality. Through interpolation and scoring choices, Vaughan Williams depicts the individual's participation in a wider holy community, and adapts Herbert's representation of God to invoke the Trinity as a model for Christian society.

Prelude

The seventeenth-century metaphysical poet and English clergyman, George Herbert, authored the collection of poetry entitled *The Temple* (1633). This work is an extended meditation on the believer's experience, divided into three sections: "The Church-Porch," "The Church," and "The Church Militant." Thus, Herbert uses the literal image of a temple to explore the experience of salvation, likening the heart to a church in that they both serve as temples of God. He portrays a reciprocal relationship between the human and divine, suggesting that humans are to house the glory of God and abide in Him. He also seeks to outline the soul's internal architecture, with an allusion to the human heart as God's dwelling place. Architecture, for Herbert, involves the relationship between structure and purpose in an enclosed space, specifically treating the human heart as a space divinely occupied. He uses his poetry to explore this relationship to a coexisting God, and through the framework of human-as-temple, the theme of habitation becomes prominent in his work. However, Herbert also addresses the human incapacity for love, asserting that because of relational brokenness, the human is unable to open the heart to God. Thus, God not only asks humans to accommodate Him, but in turn demonstrates divine hospitality towards them. In "Love (III)" from *The Temple*, Herbert illustrates this, showing that just as God dwells in human hearts, they also receive sustenance and restoration from Him. Herbert brings to *The Temple* his Calvinist orientation as a clergyman from the Church of England. Despite the lack of human freedom exemplified in the Calvinism of the Reformation Church of England, Herbert imagines a role for human agency within his representation of God as the initiator of relationship. He administers this corrective illustration through the dialogue between the two characters in his poem: Love (i.e., God) and the sinful guest; and depicts a dynamic of proposal and rebuttal throughout their conversation, with eventual surrender on the human's part.

Ralph Vaughan Williams, a twentieth-century English composer with an interest in English folk music and folk texts, created a collection of songs (*Five Mystical Songs*, 1911) based exclusively on Herbert's poetry. He uses four poems, "Easter," "Love (III)," "The Call," and "Antiphon (I)," linked by the common theme of God's place in the believer's heart. The first poem, "Easter," is redistributed into two songs, splitting at the line, "I got me flowers," for a total of five songs. These poems imagine human sanctification as a process which occurs via the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The third of the five songs, "Love bade me welcome," a musical setting of Herbert's dialogical poem "Love (III)," places the original poetic work in conversation with a musical score featuring communication and coherence among several distinct parts and voices. This score expands Herbert's conception of communion between the human and the divine to portray a relationship of mutuality between a personified Love and the sinner; and over the course of the poem's development into a song, the individual characters, Love and guest, transmute into multi-vocal, communal bodies. An interdisciplinary analysis of Herbert's poem and Vaughan Williams' song demonstrates how the musical composition enlarges Herbert's dyadic vision of spirituality, evoking both the individual's surrender to God and participation in a holy community. Through interpolation and scoring choices, Vaughan Williams depicts the individual's membership in this community, and as the originator of hospitable relationship, God pursues this human in order to repair the separation brought by sin, with the Trinity as the model for relationship.

While Herbert's poem occurs within a strictly Christian context, Vaughan Williams again redefines the limits of the poem's communion to suggest that this vision of relationship also applies to those outside a religious framework. His articulation of love's extensiveness reinforces the underlying assumption of human salvation: that ultimately, humans hold communion with a holy Other, and that by extending salvation to fallen humans, God has set a divine precedent for including the Other in community.

Methodology: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Herbert frames the narrative of "Love (III)" as a dialogue between two participants, relying on a foundational conception of relationship as a mutual, active discourse between two parties. In his book *I and Thou*, Jewish philosopher Martin Buber outlines the development of human beings into intersubjective creatures with the capacity for relationship:

> The development of the child's soul is connected indissolubly with his craving for the You.... Remember the reach beyond that undifferentiated, not yet formed primal world from which the corporeal individual that was born into the world has emerged completely, but not yet the bodily, the actualized being that has to evolve from it gradually through entering into relationships. Man becomes an I through a You. (79)

Here Buber characterizes the corporeal as primal and undifferentiated, without nuance and detail to give it full reality. With this, he draws a distinction between the corporeal self and "the actualized being," noting that while the body may be born completely in a single event, the whole person must develop over time, through interaction with others.

Seyla Benhabib offers a complement to Martin Buber's theistic understanding of intersubjectivity. In the introduction to her book, *Situating the Self*, she asserts social relationships as pivotal influences in the formation of selfhood and identity: "In fact, all selves are constituted by complex and multiple narrations and perspectives. The perspectives of constitutive others are fundamental to my own self-narration.... Intersubjectivity implies the complex coexistence of self and other in intrapsychic as well as in interpsychic space" (188). Far from existence as self-determined beings, or solely reliant on how others narrate us, Benhabib acknowledges the role of a community in shaping each individual member, as well as the power of an individual over his or her surroundings. By rejecting the determinism inherent in his historical-theological context, and

focusing on the exchange between its two characters, Herbert's poem apprehends a philosophy of relationship anticipating the intersubjectivity described by Buber and Benhabib.

Both the poem and the song display dialogic and metrical qualities, forming a resemblance between the two which suggests grounds for parallel analysis; however, Vaughan Williams' retelling of "Love (III)" does not so much embody a reiteration or paraphrase of the original work as it does a further-advanced version of the poem itself—as it were, the poem as witnessed in a more mature state. In an article spanning both the poem and the song, O. Alan Weltzien, in a brief musical-literary analysis of each of the songs, discusses the musical nature of Herbert's poetry. He suggests that Vaughan Williams' work is not so much a readaptation, but rather the natural flowering, of Herbert's. Vaughan Williams' wife, Ursula Vaughan Williams, makes a similar assertion in her husband's biography: "RVW set a number of poems by Herbert and…there is a special quality, a belonging, a matching of mood to that of the poet's, that reminds the listener that Herbert was also a musician. It is as if the tune was implicit in the poem and RVW heard it" (17). This statement implies a continuity between the works of Herbert and Vaughan Williams, indicating that the logical course for a scholar to pursue involves a cross-disciplinary study of both the music and the text. Roland Barthes' *Image Work Text* clarifies the mechanics of this poem-song continuity, separating the concrete instantiations of an artwork from the abstract existence of the Text:

> The work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books…[it] can be seen (in bookshops, in catalogues, in exam syllabuses), [while] the text is a process of demonstration…the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language…. It follows that the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works). (156-157)

Thus, by envisioning individual art objects as contributing to a Text that no objects inherently contain, the Text of the poem becomes continuous with the Text of the song; and rather than perceiving Herbert's poem and Vaughan Williams' song as two isolated works, through artistic and national inheritance, they become contributors to a single body of meaning.

This vision of the partition of work and text also appears in the writings of Gérard Genette, who offers terminology with which to discuss the limited ability of individual works to contain meaning independently of each other. He writes: "The subject of poetics is *transtextuality*, or the textual transcendence of the text, which I have already defined roughly as 'all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts'" (1). Genette goes on to describe the five types of intertextuality, pointing to an underlying unity between texts which surpasses the boundaries determining where one text ends and another begins. Ralph Vaughan Williams, discussing the creative process in "The Letter and the Spirit," echoes Genette and Barthes, writing: "The human, visible, audible and intelligible media which artists (of all kinds) use, are symbols not of other visible and audible things but of what lies beyond sense and knowledge" (88). Thus, he directs the reader towards an alternate plane of reality, which artists access through various media. These three voices uphold interdisciplinary analysis as a means of gathering meaning from separate works, cutting the borders between different categories of art and allowing symbolic texts of different forms to interact with one another.

Following the theoretical treatment of separate texts as interrelated, scholars have adopted the intertextual method as a tool for investigating and interpreting artworks. Byron Adams recalls Vaughan Williams' statement from "The Letter and the Spirit" when commenting upon the composer's use of text in his work:

> Part of the beauty of a living symbol is its inexhaustible potential for interpretation on multiple levels of meaning. By combining textual and musical symbolism, the

> composer gave his listeners the freedom to find their own meaning for both words and music.... [Vaughan Williams'] views about symbolism in art are utterly consonant with [his] predilection for authors whose work is pervaded by symbols—Whitman, Bunyan, Blake, and Herbert. (111)

Based on the techniques employed in constructing symbolic artworks of various kinds, an intertextual analytical technique that considers aspects of both artworks alongside each other, yields fresh interpretations of these texts. For example, both the poem and the song can be analyzed metrically, and performing analysis of each work with reference to the other reveals thematic connections between the two, as well as the meaning layered into the junction between them. From the specific interaction of "Love (III)" and "Love bade me welcome" emerges a vision of human-divine relationship as mutual and collective, with the interrelationship of the Trinity forming the basis for an earthly community of believers.

Other scholars have conducted detailed studies of Vaughan Williams' song, and even noted the musicality embedded in Herbert's poem. Jonathan Pearson's article, "Five Mystical Songs: An Introduction and CD Review," from the *Journal of the RVW Society*, observes the structure of the song in a two-part conversation, including an antiphonic choir with a woodwind double:

> It is also the longest and most complex, being largely in the form of a dialogue between the poet and Love (i.e. God).... The voices of King's College choir, *senza espressione* as marked in the *Sacrum Convivium*, seem to hang in the air, perfectly balanced with the woodwind doubling the voices. (10)

Stephen Connock notes again in the same journal that "the dialogue of the poem is exquisitely set and the choir sings the evocative chant *O Sacrum Convivium*" ("Such Sweet Art" 13). Turning to the *George Herbert Journal*, Weltzien acknowledges Vaughan Williams' contribution, recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of his song. He notes that "Love bade me welcome" is written "primarily in

the E Dorian mode," and remarks upon the melismatic antiphonal chant, *O Sacrum Convivium*, as indicative of the future heavenly banquet of which all believers will partake (12). However, this brief overview leaves analytical space for others to further pursue the intersection of the two artworks. Despite such passing acknowledgement of the musical features present in "Love bade me welcome," scholars fail to investigate the literary aspects of Herbert's poem—such as meter or imagery—as they appear in the context of Vaughan Williams' composition. Looked at in partnership, these two works offer a complex understanding of the human community, which involves mutuality and interchange not only with those like us, but especially with the Other as embodied in the Trinity.

Analysis: The Human-Divine Dyad in "Love (III)"

The Calvinism prevalent in England during Herbert's time deeply affects his expression of human dependence on God's grace. Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* exerted considerable influence over the spiritual consciousness of the nation during the sixteenth century: "Queen Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity of 1559 required the clergy to make exclusive use in all ministrations of the 1552 Book of Common Prayer" (Collinson 221). With its prescription of service for various times, including morning and evening worship, baptism, marriage, and other occasions, the *Book of Common Prayer* inculcated English citizens with a sense of the human's perpetual reliance on divine grace. This reinforced Calvinism, a branch of Reformed theology, with its focus on Christ's role as mediator in the salvation of souls. Alister E. McGrath conveys a heightened sense of Christ's responsibility in the Calvinist conception of humanity as totally depraved and incapable of choice:

> At the soteriological level, humans lack what is required in order to be saved; they do not *want* to be saved (on account of the debilitation of the mind and will through sin), and they are *incapable* of saving themselves (in that salvation presupposes obedience to God, now impossible on account of sin). True knowledge of God and salvation must both therefore come from outside the human situation. (73-74)

Achsah Guibbory, reflecting upon the work of Herbert's contemporary, John Donne (another member of the Anglican Church), points to the potentially devastating nature of such extreme dependence: "Though it was reassuring that God would do the work, the dark side of the emphasis on God's grace was that you could do nothing to save yourself, that in a sense you were helpless, as all depended on God" (234-35). While Calvinist thinking uplifted God's goodness in reaching to the depths for the salvation of souls, it broke down a sense of human dignity with its implication of worthlessness and humans' need for God to interpose on their selfhood and perform every act for them. Thus, the internalization of a self-degrading theology tends to conflict with understandings of human agency, and the individual responsibility implied in such freedom of choice.

Herbert's and Donne's shared background in the Reformation Church of England gave them both a strong inclination towards Calvinist theology, and they acknowledge the helplessness of sinful human beings to save themselves; however, Herbert's acknowledgment of the relational dimension of God's identity concurrently positions the human on a more favorable ground for positive action and decision. Herbert reverses the metaphor of the temple, with the human as dwelling place for the divine, in "Love (III)." In the first line of this poem, Herbert immediately overturns his foregoing premise of the human dwelling place, instead constructing a divine host in relationship to an errant guest. He begins, "Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back, | Guiltie of dust and sinne" (1-2). The Calvinist conception of God as the initiator of all human-divine relationship appears here in Herbert's work, resonating with the sinful helplessness expressed in Donne's poetry.[1] However, he pushes the dialogue one step further by narrating the speaker's

[1] In John Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14," the speaker addresses God, inviting Him to force the door to his heart. He admits that though he "labor[s] to admit you [God]," these efforts come to "no end," and he remains unable to open his heart without divine intervention (6). The speaker uses the language of imposition and rape to underline God's imposition on human agency: "Take me to you, imprison me" (12), and "Except you enthrall me, [I] never shall be free, | Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me" (13-14). These images of coercion accurately reflect Donne's Calvinism, with its

reaction to Love's challenge in the first line of the poem: "my soul drew back." Thus, Herbert immediately asserts the necessity of a human response to God's calling. In addition, the past-tense form of the word "bid" in line 1 also gives subtle indication of the combative nature of God's grace, which must overcome the barriers against the human heart; for as early as 1330 and as late as 1849, this verb evoked a warlike setting with its meaning, "to offer battle to, to challenge to fight" ("bid, v.1"). Rather than delivering a declarative statement, Herbert's God issues an imperative—a call to action. Thus, while Donne deploys images of war to express the depth of human sin and their need for extreme intervention, Herbert extends this metaphor to illustrate an energetic exchange between two participants.

Herbert frames his images of battle within the overarching context of God's pursuit of the human being, referencing the divine hospitality pictured by the Lord's Supper in his conception of their relationship. In accordance with Herbert's version of human freedom as seen in the theme of battle, the speaker displays both antagonism and evasion, playing the role of a combatant in this dialogue. He defines himself as "unkind, ungrateful," protesting and repelling Love's advances (9); and yet, the characteristics of hospitality remain intact with Herbert's literary conceit of Love acting as a host, "sweetly questioning | If I lacked anything" (5-6). With *The Temple* as a metaphorical framework for "Love (III)," this conversation occurs in the context of divine hospitality. Christ, as the physical manifestation of God's love, institutes the Lord's Supper during the Passover of His crucifixion as an archetype of hospitality: Himself playing the part of host, and his disciples as His guests. From this first communion, as treated in the Gospels and later in 1 Corinthians, stems the Eucharist service as practiced in current Christianity. It features the bread and wine alluded to in the text of Herbert's poem, and in the account given by the synoptic Gospels, Christ points to food and

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focus on the power of God and acknowledgment of sinners' utter incapability to trust their reason or follow their willpower.

drink as symbolic of His flesh and blood. By partaking of this nourishment, the disciples typify the way other believers' acceptance of communion incorporates them into a single body—that is, the metaphorical body of Christ and of the church. Jesus also sets a precedent for dialogical truthfulness by openly discussing His imminent betrayal by a disciple, thus admitting His susceptibility to another's actions; and yet, He makes a point of the necessity of self-giving service, especially in the Gospel of John, which recounts His role as a foot-washing servant. Thus, given its emphasis on mutual care, servanthood, and intersubjectivity, as well as honest communication, the Lord's Supper functions as an ethical imperative to honesty and unreserved love in the intersubjective relationship between host and guest. Cristina Malcolmson notices Herbert's agential human guest, observing the discrepancy between his construction of the human-divine relationship and the contemporary practice of communion in the Church of England. She writes, "In that public ceremony, communicant met minister and God in a kneeling rather than a sitting position.... When the speaker in 'Love (III)' sits and eats, he experiences individually and poetically what the Anglican service could never express publicly: the priesthood of all believers" (177). By imagining an unorthodox version of the Eucharist in which the sinful guest eats at the host's table, Herbert underlines Christ's role as a host who both dines with the guest and offers his own body as the sacrificial meal[2]. The presence of a question in Love's dialogue also implies a request for an answer, encouraging the guilty sinner to interact with Love and articulate his or her own desires. Malcolmson remarks on this tension between authority and mutuality, writing, "Love's personal questions and responses in this dialogue...[enact] the intimate communion between 'mine' and 'thine' desired throughout *The Temple*" (176). This illustration of divine hospitality further disrupts notions of God's absolute supremacy, striving to instead depict His self-proclaimed servanthood in the form of Jesus Christ;

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[2] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the ecclesiastical use of the word "host" signifies: "The bread consecrated in the Eucharist, regarded as the body of Christ sacrificially offered; a consecrated wafer" ("host, n.4.").

and despite the necessity of powerful intervention on God's part, Herbert softens a stark Calvinist portrayal of human incapacity through his acknowledgement of God's attention to human self-expression.

The metaphorical device of divine inn-keeping[3] also helps Herbert to contrast with Donne's wonted deprecation of human agency in responding to Love. A closer examination of the language shows Herbert's belief that while God takes first action by extending an invitation to enter, the sinner concurrently possesses the self-awareness to protest his unworthiness and the right to deny further acquaintance on the grounds of that self-opinion. Herbert's use of the word "guiltie" in line 2 casts a double feeling over the speaker's self-image; while it does mean, in a general sense, "deserving punishment and moral reprobation," in the seventeenth century it had the added meaning of "conscious, cognizant, [or] privy" ("guilty, adj."). The speaker's ability to feel his condition of corruption serves as a testament to the sinner's discernment between good and evil, thus involving the possibility of a personal deliberation between the two. Far from casting the sinner as incapable of recognizing God's voice, Herbert suggests that human beings do distinguish His promptings and invitations, and remain free to withdraw if they so choose. In addition, Herbert suggests in lines 3-4 that the speaker has halted on the threshold of a previous impulse to enter: "But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack | From **my first entrance in**…." This detail that the sinner is on the verge of a second entrance indicates that he had at a previous point begun to avail himself of Love's generosity, but he demonstrates his agency in withdrawing and reconsidering even after having been influenced by divine providence—in short, Love does not compel him, but rather persuades. Thus, even within a Calvinist-influenced imagining of the human-divine dynamic, a manifestation of

[3] Footnote 1b. for "Love (3)" in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. B*, reads: "The first question of tavern waiters to an entering customer would be 'What d'ye lack?' (i.e., want)" (1725).

agential freedom appears in the ability of fallen humans to choose whether to enter mutual relationship with God.

By alluding to a feast at Love's table, Herbert places his poem in the setting of the Eucharist; and though he chooses to focus exclusively on the individual's experience, context clues suggest the silent presence of other communicants. Situated with respect to the Lord's Supper as the original Eucharist, Herbert's poem includes integral details such as Christ's invitation to dine, a reversal of hierarchy, divine service, and the construction of Christ's body as food. These components appear throughout the poem, drawing a fuller portrait of the Last Supper as the dialogue between Love and the guest continues. Indeed, Herbert deploys judicious echoes of the biblical language associated with communion in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25: "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you.... This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Using phrases such as "Love bade me welcome" (1), "Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning, | If I lack'd anything" (5-6), "You must sit down" (5) "I did sit and eat" (6), and "taste my meat" (5), Herbert identifies each element of the Lord's Supper in his poetic reconstruction; and by extension, his work also invokes the presence of the twelve disciples as a free-willed, many-personed body of followers. An expanded conception of freedom and the interdependence of social exchange appears in the work of Albert Bandura[4], who disputes the assumption that individuals possess liberty to act without reference to a social context: "People do not live their lives in individual autonomy. Indeed, many of the outcomes they seek are achievable only through interdependent efforts. Hence, they have to work together to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own" (75). This readjustment in range of ability following the shift from individual to social thinking indicates a spectrum of agency within the domain of human freedom, contingent on a society comprising other

[4] Though Albert Bandura is best known as a psychologist and social cognitive theorist, his writings still aid and enlighten the study of relationship and intersubjectivity in an interdisciplinary context.

individuals. Buber comments on the nature of this communal relationship, emphasizing human dependence on the You:

> The It-world hangs together in space and time. The You-world does not hang together in space and time. The individual You *must* become an It when the event of relation has run its course. The individual It *can* become a You by entering into the event of relation.... Without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human. (84-85)

Though he acknowledges the importance of physical objects to human survival, Buber's insistence on relational existence illuminates the importance of a primary orientation towards others, both human and divine. Thus, while a fallen human may indeed be enslaved to the law of sin[5], from the liturgical context of Herbert's poem emerges a powerful relational dynamic fueled not only by one's dialogue with God but with the support of a community of other disciples.

Analysis: Spiritual Communion in "Love bade me welcome"

The aural responsiveness of musical ensemble mirrors the spoken conversation between human beings, or between humans and God, communicating in its breadth and scope a larger picture of the communion of heaven which Herbert sought to depict in his poetic duet. Through his orchestration and scoring, Vaughan Williams' song enunciates the presence of a community of disciples, precisely rendering the image embedded in Hebert's assessment of the Lord's Supper. Considering the use of dialogue as a mode of persuasion, the poem's structure as an exchange between Love and the beloved sinner not only reinforces a gentler understanding of God's superimposition over humans, but also invites comparison to other genres of dialogue. With "Love bade me welcome," Ralph Vaughan Williams provides material for such comparison, with the varied lines of orchestra, chorus, and solo baritone crossing each other and intertwining to form the unified

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[5] See Romans 8:2.

whole. Individual voices within the orchestra follow, echo, and contrast with one another and with the baritone and chorus. The two characters from Herbert's poem, Love and the guest, have transmuted into multi-vocal entities, represented by the multiple members of the musical ensemble, who carry a broader and more complex narrative than Herbert's dyadic exchange.

"Love bade me welcome," replaces the voices of Love and the guest with the flute and clarinet sections, respectively; and the baritone soloist functions as a narrator for the musical drama acted out between these two instrumental voices. The melody begins with an orchestral introduction in which the clarinets take the first melody. The flutes then seamlessly pick up this melody in their own voice. This exchange takes place twice more before the entrance of the solo baritone, who (as seen in Figure 1) picks up the same pitch of D left by the flute on the word "Love" in measure 9.

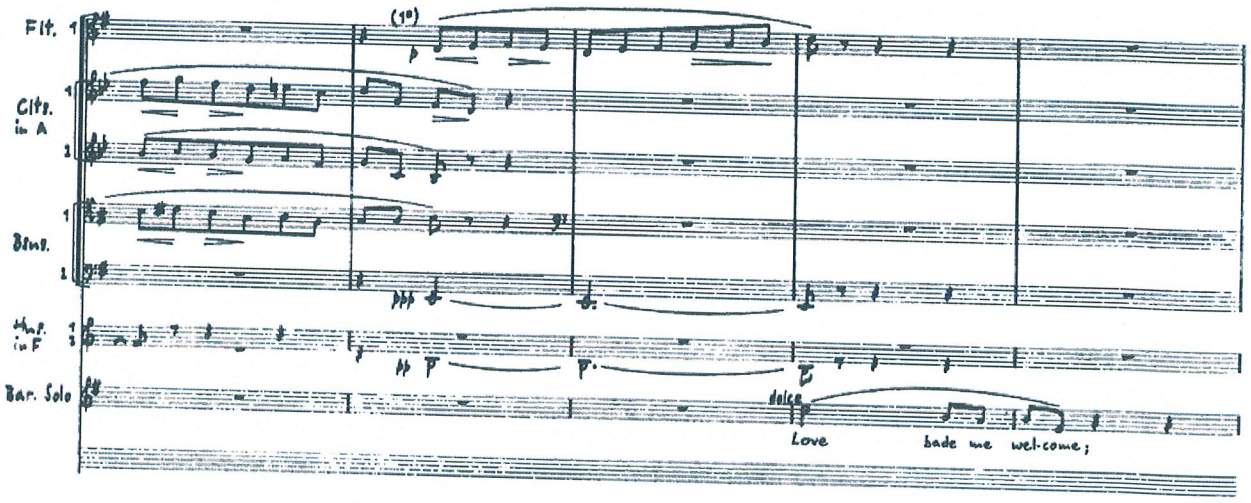

Figure 1: m. 6-10

Here, Vaughan Williams offers the voices of the flutes as a proxy for that of Love, aligning himself with the script of Herbert's poem. Though the poem text suggests a perspective filtered through that of the sinner, the baritone's solo functions largely as a narrative framework for the acting voices of the flute and clarinet. The clarinet associates itself with the feelings of doubt and guilt expressed in the poem, first appearing in m. 18-19, after the baritone's description of the sinner growing slack from his first entrance. The melodic line here falls from a C to a G, rises, then falls back once more,

imitating the sinner's gesture of hesitation. On "sweetly questioning," in m. 20-21, the flute expresses Love's question instantaneously with the negative response projected by the clarinet. While the clarinet speaks over the flute and ends decisively with a minor statement, the flute's subdued melody ends on an inconclusive major third between G and B, rather than resolving down to an E as the line suggests. Another instance of Love's response to the sinner comes in m. 40-42, "Love took my hand, and smiling did reply," when the flute and baritone's twin melodic lines reach a conclusion on the A but dip to a G before returning to the A, as seen in Figure 2.

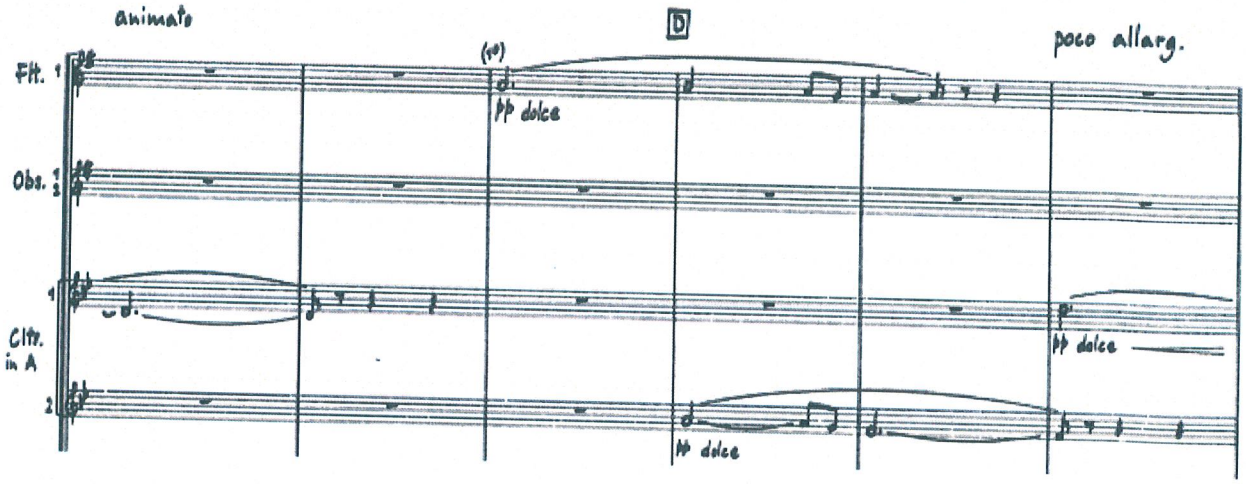

Figure 2: m. 38-43

This disruption of the melody's resolution allows for opposition, rather than conveying an inflexible assertion. The open, questioning nature of the flute's statements throughout the piece evokes not the strict determinism of a dictatorial God, but supports an understanding of His interaction with humanity that shows how humans have the capacity to suppress His voice.

In addition to strengthening Herbert's depiction of divine accommodation, Vaughan Williams introduces the concept of a spiritual community in the polyphonic texturing of his orchestration and chorus. He constructs the sinner's voice not as a monolith of human depravity, but rather as one of many comparable sinners, and after he relents to Love, as part of the kingdom of God. He first hints at the multiplicity of voices which fall under the speaker's self-description in

m. 33-34. The soloist sings, "'I, the unkind, ungrateful?'" with melodic parallels in the oboes, bassoons, and horns.

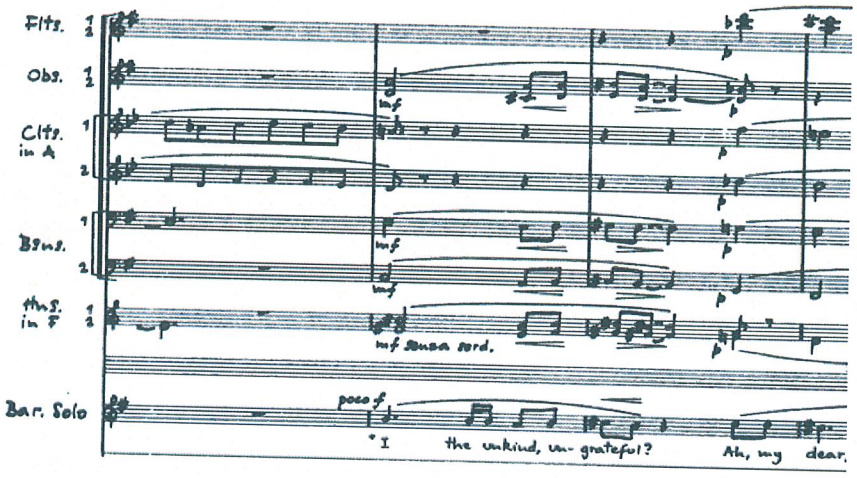

Figure 3: m. 33-34

Vaughan Williams later intensifies this effect in m. 46-48, on "Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them:", with each instrument in the score articulating the baritone's line in harmonic unison, predictive of the vocalized chorus that appears further on. These phrases self-incriminate the speaker as unworthy of Love's hospitality, and the accompanying voices of the orchestral ensemble suggest that the sinner belongs to a community of repentant offenders.

Along with these instantiations of text-painting in his composition, Vaughan Williams embraces the metrical potential in his music to portray the human-divine relationship and fortify the connection between his song and Herbert's poem. Since both artworks feature meter, an intertextual analysis of this aspect of their structures, with reference to one another, shows that Herbert and Vaughan Williams use meter in their respective media to illustrate transgression. For instance, in line 2 of the poem, the word "guiltie" breaks the iambic pentameter established in the first line; instead of making an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, "guiltie" introduces a trochee, reversing the order to place a stressed syllable outside the pattern of iambs. Within the context of the speaker's expressed feelings of unworthiness, the trochee on "guiltie" metrically illustrates the violation of order that the speaker embodies. Similarly, Vaughan Williams writes his musical work in

a ¾ time signature, setting the metrical pattern which regulates and frames his song. This meter also keeps the separate voices together, helping to ensure coherence and harmony. However, when presenting the melody in the clarinets' voice, Vaughan Williams places it after an eighth-note rest to disrupt the regular meter of the song. As the clarinets speak on behalf of the sinner, this metrical aberration represents human frailty, with the clarinets missing every downbeat. This continues for the first four measures, until the flutes, speaking for Love, take the melody from the clarinets and restore emphasis back to the downbeat. To intensify this line of self-representation, Vaughan Williams places the speaker's word "I," from line 9, on the downbeat in m. 33, creating a trochee in the text of the poem. Metaphysically, human beings embody the trochee, because they have broken the image of God they are meant to reflect. Thus, the aural delivery of the phrase, "I the unkinde, ungratefull?" indicts the speaker as the out-of-step offender, echoing his self-proclaimed unfitness. As seen in an intertextual treatment of these works, the conviviality of these two art forms facilitates a reading of metrical deviation, whether poetic or musical, as representative of the sinner's resistance to spiritual fellowship.

As Love inevitably bestows redemption on the guest, Vaughan Williams makes his crowning alteration to Herbert's dialogue by finally transforming the expanded community of sinners into one of union with God, indicating the common Love that saves and unites all believers. The voice of Love finds expression in the clarinet's voice in m. 56, on the phrase, "'who bore the blame?'", since the baritone narrator and the clarinets alone carry the melody during this phrase. As part of the act of Christ's substitution for the sinner, the qualities of Love take on the form of the clarinet, assuming the guilt of the sinner—bearing the blame—by speaking in his voice[6]. Thus far, the clarinet has functioned to reflect the sinner's position; but its appearance in Christ's voice illustrates

[6] The musical blending of two voices reproduces the editorial decision apparent in a facsimile of the 1703 edition of *The Temple*, which softly obscures the distinction between the dual voices of host and guest by its omission of opening and closing quotation marks.

the substitutionary logic of salvation, and embodies the essence of the Eucharist. The phrase immediately following, in m. 58-59, directly echoes the speaker's guilty lamentation in m. 46-47, "Truth, Lord"; but the new text of this reprisal, "My dear, then I will serve," indicates that the sinner's feelings of culpability have been replaced in the act of surrender. As part of the metaphor of Love's feast, the guest's decision to dine with Love marks the beginning of his literal metamorphosis; just as physical food becomes part of the physical body, Love's food remakes and constitutes the spiritual body in a process of transfiguration. The dialogue between Love and the guest in lines 10-15 outlines the restoration of God's image. The speaker proclaims his unworthiness, saying, "I cannot look on thee." However, Love reminds him of God's unreserved acceptance of humans as expressed in Genesis 1:27[7]: "Who made the eyes but I?" The speaker's reaction both acknowledges and contends with Love, protesting human frailty as he replies, "Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them," pointing to his eyes as the physical proof of his unfitness for Love. Herbert deploys the homophonic pair, "eye" and "I," as an expression of Love's intense identification with fallen humans, and as further inducement to redemptive relationship. Buber reflects on the salvational potency of this relationship, writing: "Spirit is…between I and You. It is not the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit…when he enters into this relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit" (89). Buber envisions this primary relationship playing a central role in transforming the way a person leads daily life. The provision of Christ as a surrogate for humanity reveals the transformative power of redemption at the heart of the human-divine relationship, in which fallen human beings surrender themselves to be restored to the image of God.

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[7] Genesis 1:27: "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Vaughan Williams adds another dimension of musical texture and communal symbolism by using his vocalized chorus to interpolate an antiphonal Gregorian chant from vespers for the feast of Corpus Christi. The composer supports the conjunction of a nation's music and its poetry, explaining with what care the responsible artist treats any text that accompanies his artwork: "Nationality in music, it need hardly be said, shows itself most strongly in the musical setting of words. Verbal and musical forms must run exactly parallel if the musical setting is to have any value" (Manning 52). Byron Adams' review of Vaughan Williams' use of biblical texts expands this idea, considering his appropriation of spiritual writings a manifestation of his English nationalism and comparing it to his use of folksongs as a base for composition: "Given his freedom from religious belief or vision of a conventional or institutional kind, and his commitment to the notion of art as social expression, he felt no constraints in selecting and adapting these texts for his own devices, just as he freely selected, arranged, and developed folksongs throughout his career" (108). Vaughan Williams' interest in the formation of an English identity induced him to treat English music as a catalogue of national culture. Like other composers from various musical eras[8], Vaughan Williams used a preexisting musical culture of folksong to bolster his own musical constructions of England. In his discussion of this compositional technique, he compares music to language in its reliance on deep-seated national roots:

> Music, like language, derives ultimately from its basic beginnings. May I give an instance from my own country? About fifty years ago Cecil Sharp made his epoch-making discovery of English folk-song. We young musicians…said to ourselves, 'Here are beautiful melodies of which, until lately, we knew nothing. We must

[8] See the works of Antonín Dvořák, Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergey Prokofiev, Frédéric Chopin, Béla Bartók, and others.

> emulate Grieg and Smetana, and build up, on the basis of these tunes, a corpus of compositions arising out of our own country and character.' (235)

In addition to justifying his use of folksong, Vaughan Williams' statement also helps the audience to understand, on a political level, his use of texts such as the poems of an English poet like George Herbert. This commitment to the formation of a stable national culture also gives rise to Vaughan Williams' interest in music as an expression of the life of a community.

With music as a nation-building tool, Vaughan Williams' secular interest in "art as social expression" translates to the spiritual realm through his art's portrayal of a heavenly community. A key change to E Dorian signals the concluding section of the piece, in which the chorus joins with the melody of "O Sacrum Convivium," celebrating the communion banquet and the participant's reception of Christ and divine grace. Translated from Latin, the text reads: "O holy feast! in which Christ is eaten, and the memory of his suffering is renewed: the mind is filled with thanksgiving, and a sign of future glory is given to us. Alleluia" (Nickol 39). The chorus sings in unison with the flute section, the melodic line carried through at each turn by the baritone soloist; and rather than acting as counterpoint to the flute, the clarinet—the voice of the sinful guest—finally becomes absorbed into a shared melody. With the representation of Love's voice in the flute, the analogy to spiritual experience consists in the holy community's complete immersion in and union with God, and the individual's entire, transformative surrender to Love.

Though this recalls the Eucharistic theme already present in Herbert's image of the host and banquet, "O Sacrum Convivium" furthers Love's characterization by evoking God's trinity as a community after which to model the earthly body of believers. "Love bade me welcome" is structured overall as a verse anthem—a Protestant derivative of the Gregorian antiphon. A typical verse anthem features alternating solo and choral lines, along with instrumental accompaniment, as found in the scoring of "Love bade me welcome." However, Vaughan Williams pushes further back

in the socio-religious history of his chosen genre, to the antiphons preceding the invention of verse anthems.

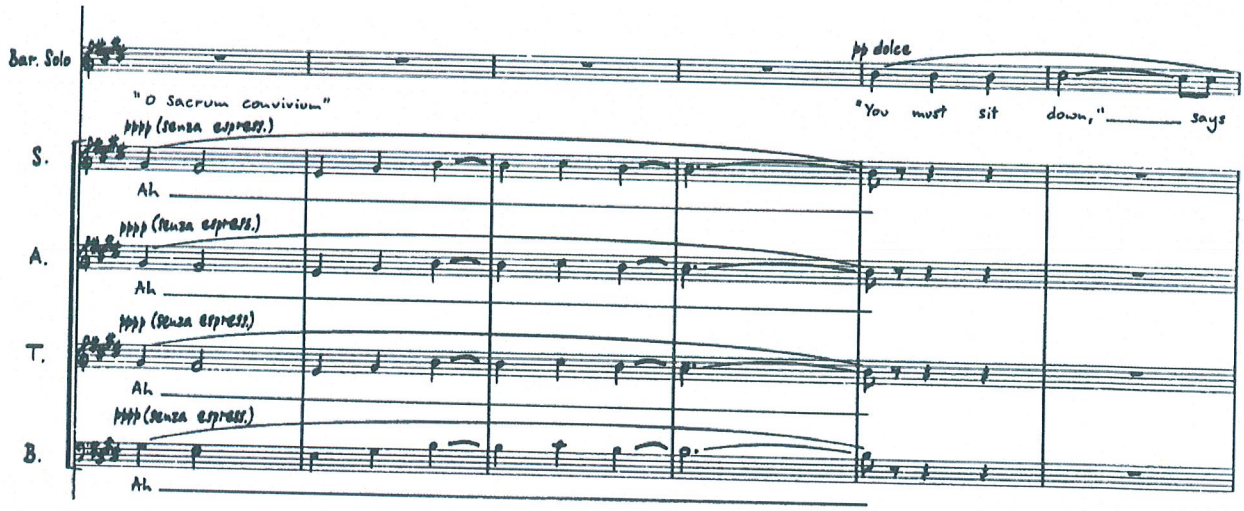

Figure 4: m. 65-70

The antiphon in medieval liturgy, as a subgenre of Gregorian chant, would have involved the use of two choirs who alternated with each other while performing the chant. Following the development of the two voices from the poem, the antiphon as quoted in "Love bade me welcome" reiterates the existence of both entities as communities in themselves—the guest as a community of believers, and Love as the community inherent to the Trinity. As described by McGrath, theologians have also conceptualized the Trinity as a community: "Social approaches to the Trinity insist that God is…to be thought of as a collective reality—a group…bound together by the mutual love, accord, and self-giving of its members" (131). He articulates the position of Jürgen Moltmann, who in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (1980) expresses this vision of relationship:

> The Trinity is to be conceived as 'a community of being,' in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them.... each person of the Trinity, by virtue of their eternal mutual love, lives *in* the other two as a fellowship through a 'process of most perfect and intense empathy.' (Qtd. in McGrath 132)

Adding to this picture of the communal nature of God Themselves, Buber further articulates the relationship between the two groups, Love and guest. He points to the Trinity as the originator of communal relationship by advocating humans' ultimate dependence on a relational center:

> True community… [comes into being] on two accounts: all [members] have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another. The second event has its source in the first.… A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center. (94)

Underlining the necessity of a living center upon which to anchor reciprocal human relationships, Buber refers to this center as "the builder." Thus, he ascribes this entity a degree of authorship over other relationships, in that the church as the body of Christ takes the Trinity as an example of intersubjective relationship.

Coda

Overlying the religious tone of both the poem and the song rests the historical fact of Vaughan Williams' agnosticism. His perceptive and knowledgeable treatment of religious themes in his work becomes more complex and noteworthy because he was not a member of the Church, though in the *Journal of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society*, his wife Ursula attests to her husband's deep spirituality. During that conversation with Stephen Connock, she is reported to have indicated that "while he did not want to have anything to do with the church directly, he was attracted to the underlying vision, to the spirituality which Herbert so warmly embraced" ("Ursula Vaughan Williams on George Herbert" 17). Like so many of his era, he experienced a waning of allegiance to dogma and institution, despite his strong attachment to the past and traditions of the English nation; and yet, analysis of his work does not suggest that only believers may experience intersubjective relationship. To the contrary, Herbert's poem and Vaughan Williams' song both teach us the

importance of the Other in relationship, demonstrating in their dialogue that God, as Wholly Other to humans, invites them into intersubjective relation with Them. This mode of relationship should reappear in the way that human beings inhabit the world and relate to others, regardless of degree of similitude. Benhabib also portrays intersubjectivity as existing across barriers of difference, writing: "I attempt to highlight, emphasize and even radicalize those aspects of a discourse ethic…which are sensitive to differences of identity, needs and modes of reasoning without obliterating these behind some conception of uniform rational moral autonomy" (8). Thus, Benhabib communicates a capaciousness to intersubjective understandings of humanity, which would render relationship meaningless if humans only practiced intersubjectivity with those of similar appearance or opinion.

Through the development of "Love (III)" into "Love bade me welcome," the mutual interchange between the Love-guest dyad evolves into a communion shared by a body of human beings, who look to the Trinity for deliverance from their relational isolation. Vaughan Williams' interpolation of "O Sacrum Convivium" functions to infuse the poem with a further understanding of Herbert's guest and host, as symbolic of communal, intersubjective existence. Vaughan Williams' song highlights that while Herbert's reconstruction of the Lord's Supper acknowledges human freedom and the importance of relationship with God, it's easy to miss the other elements of Love's feast, such as the presence of the disciples and their reliance on Christ as a representative of the triune Godhead. While Herbert acknowledges that God does notice our sins and behavioral failings, ultimately, his characterization of God focuses not on humans' corrupt acts themselves but on our state of relational brokenness. God as represented by Love addresses the guest's inability to make room in his heart for Him—the sinner's incapacity, as it were, to house Love. Thus, given humans' inability, despite our status as "the temple," to open our hearts to God's indwelling presence, God decides to become our host. Though the speaker in this poem bemoans his own unfitness to dwell

in God's house, he eventually realizes that his host has paid his room and board, and he relents and submits to be seated.

Even as the poem and song display intersubjectivity in their poetic and musical structure, they demonstrate the vital significance of this kind of relationship. The intersubjective relations that these works explore, through their use of questions, challenges, and dialogue, make room for connections across lines of difference, which apply to the broader sphere of humans outside Christianity. Agnosticism, as implied in the name, signifies a lack of knowledge, and a willingness to dwell with uncertainty; and the poem-song continuity encourages these questions, seeking to ease them into conclusions. Herbert sets up this tension between the speaker's status as a welcome guest and his feelings of unbidden intrusion, which he ultimately resolves in surrender: "So I did sit and eat." The clarinet and flute, the two choirs of the antiphon, the guest and Love, each describe through metaphor an act of surrender and immersion into the thriving community originated by and rooted in the Trinity. By describing themselves as partakers of the food and drink of Love's house, the speakers in this poem realign themselves with Love and accept their welcome as one of the many guests in the house of God.

"Love bade me welcome" expands the scope of Christian community portrayed in "Love (III)," suggesting that human beings both inside and outside of the church can reclaim an intersubjective existence in the word. By highlighting the contrast between human and divine, both works promote love for the Other as the crowning example of communion. Vaughan Williams, as a purveyor of England's collective culture, expresses the importance of community to the expression of humanity through art, writing:

> Our drama and poetry, like our laws and our constitution, have evolved by accident while we thought we were doing something else, and so it will be with music. The composer must not shut himself up and think about art, he must live with his fellows

> and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community—if we seek for art we shall not find it. (200-201)

Despite his disillusionment with an organized belief system, in *Five Mystical Songs*, Vaughan Williams easily blends his approach to secular community with a profound conceptualization of spiritual kinship. With their joint vision of the community as integral to human existence, both the poem and the musical adaptation invite readers and listeners to engage with and fully inhabit the world, interacting with other humans in redemptive, rehabilitative relationship.

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