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*“Shreds of holiness”: George Herbert, Little Gidding,  
and Cutting Up Texts in Early Modern England  
[with illustrations]*

I must cut two testaments to make one good for my work of  
pasting . . . I must take them to pieces. —John Ferrar (1653)<sup>1</sup>

In “Paradise,” George Herbert offers a sustained reflection on the  
relationship between cutting and spiritual virtue.

I Bless thee, Lord, because I GROW  
Among thy trees, which in a ROW  
To thee both fruit and order OW.

What open force, or hidden CHARM  
Can blast my fruit, or bring me HARM,  
While the inclosure is thine ARM?

Inclose me still for fear I START.  
Be to me rather sharp and TART,  
Then let me want thy hand & ART.

When thou dost greater judgments SPARE,  
And with thy knife but prune and PARE,  
Ev’n fruitfull trees more fruitful ARE.

Such sharpnes shows the sweetest FREND:  
Such cuttings rather heal then REND:  
And such beginnings touch their END.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Letter from John Ferrar to Dr. Basire, Durham, Dean and Chapter Library, MS Hunter, fol. 132. Ferrar writes to request Eastern translations of the New Testament for a proposed polyglot Biblical Harmony in fifty languages.

2. *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge, Eng., 2011), p. 464. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Herbert’s poems come from Wilcox’s edition.

The narrator's happy spiritual condition—by no means a constant in Herbert's poetry—is ascribed to a process of spiritual direction likened at the outset to the regular planting of trees, row by row. Already enclosed, and so protected from harm, the narrator calls for still further encompassing, asking for God to be “sharp,” present, and demanding. In the penultimate stanza, the sustained horticultural metaphor slides from enclosure to pruning, where pruning stands for an unspecified but nonetheless vivid act of discipline by God: the narrator's spiritual state is likened to a cut-back tree which becomes more fruitful as a result of this cutting, rather as *The Compleat Gardeners Practice* (1664) prescribes the cutting back of cowslips to produce growth: “prune them handsomely, and setting of them at a distance atop of a border . . . they will be rooted and come to perfection.”<sup>3</sup> In Herbert's poem, “[s]uch sharpnes,” which might seem destructive, is the action of “the sweetest FRIEND,” and “[s]uch cuttings” heal the narrator and so prepare him for the “greater” Last Judgment.

The narrator's description of a connection between pruning and salvation is enacted on a typographical level by the final words of each three-line stanza: as the first letter is clipped away, “GROW” becomes “ROW” which becomes “OW”; “CHARM” becomes “HARM” and then “ARM.” Thomas Buck's posthumous 1633 printed text deploys capitals to make clear this effect; in Bodleian MS Tanner 307—a presentation copy of what Nicholas Ferrar (but not George Herbert) called *The Temple*, prepared at Little Gidding by Ferrar's nieces, Anna and Mary Collett, aided perhaps by their mother, Susanna Collett, for the purposes of securing a license for printed publication—the final words are larger, but the word is not capitalized. Herbert thus performs a pruning of words, enacting the spirit of the poem at the level of composition. This act of cutting suggests a conception of words, or at least a conception of these words, as units which may be broken to reveal other words within. Reaching the end of line three, we read “OW” as having emerged from “ROW,” and before this from “GROW.” It is not quite true that the more words are cut back, the closer they come to truth. But these words-within suggest not only thematic connections with their container words, but also collectively constitute a little narrative: “FRIEND . . . REND . . . END.” These three-word narratives do not embody or epitomize the larger poem;

3. Stephen Blake, *The Compleat Gardeners Practice* (1664), p. 12.

rather they provide a looser series of connections. That the final end-word in the penultimate stanza refuses the rhyme we have come to expect—"SPARE . . . PARE . . . ARE"—means the poem relies on words as written and visual rather than spoken and performed for its fullest expression of meaning. It may be the case that the process of laying out these words in metal type would have granted the printer, Thomas Buck, a particular intimacy with this sense of words as loose moorings of letters which might be tugged away; copying the words by hand is a less vivid way of experiencing a verse composition that proceeds by reducing words, letter by letter.

The seeming paradox—that cutting heals; that destruction yields growth; that snipping away letters produces meaning—registers a broader preoccupation with cutting and creativity that runs across much of Herbert's poetry, and across early modern literary culture more generally. Poems in *The Temple* invoke a variety of instruments that cut: "piercer"; "sithe"; "hatchet"; "spear"; "pruning-knife." Herbert is careful to distinguish between different kinds of blade, and different kinds of cutting. In "Time," Herbert's narrator renounces any fear of Time, and of death, by looking forward to the afterlife ("Christs coming hath made man thy debter, / Since by thy cutting he grows better"). The poem's wit depends upon the narrator distinguishing between varieties of blade and sharpness. Time's "sithe" is found by some to be too blunt ("where one man would have me grinde it"), while others "too sharp do finde it." To those who fear Time, his "sithe" appears a "hatchet": a threatening axe. But in an argument which pairs this poem with "Paradise," the narrator finds Time's blade to be only "a pruning-knife": that is, an instrument whose cutting leads to the happy prospect of the afterlife, which "convey[s] our souls / Beyond the utmost starres and poles." As a result, and shifting between two different kinds of cutting, Time is no longer an "executioner," but "a gard'ner now, and more."

Why might Herbert have been preoccupied with cutting? Pruning and spiritual welfare was a well-established biblical trope, and Herbert certainly would have been aware of John 15. 1–6, where Jesus is "the true vine," and God "the husbandman": "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." There are two kinds of cutting here: unproductive branches as discarded ("he taketh away"), while promising branches are pruned ("he purgeth it") to yield more

fruit.<sup>4</sup> Such biblical sources inform numerous seventeenth-century sermons, including Daniel Price's *The Spring* (1609), which states: "God our father is the husbandman, Wee are his husbandry, the Soule is the ground, the Seede is the word."<sup>5</sup> The influence of horticultural writing provides another context: there is extensive commentary on the merits and methods of pruning, and on the relationship between cutting and growth; and many literary texts engage with this tradition, from the pruning gardener in *Richard II* to Andrew Marvell's mowers. Such was pruning's importance that one horticultural author "could scarcely resolve with my self how to teach this art of *pruning*: since it would merit an express Discourse to instruct you perfectly."<sup>6</sup> Anatomy and dissection is a third cultural sphere in which cutting was prominent, and metaphorical applications of this kind of cutting were common, as in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), in which melancholy is "*Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically, Opened and Cut Up*."<sup>7</sup>

But while Herbert's poetry is responsive to all these contexts, it also registers a sense of cutting that is both more quotidian, and, for modern scholarship, less visible: the cutting of scissors through paper. As a way of sustaining and amplifying Juliet Fleming's recent call for scholars to recognize and reflect on the fact that early modern readers "cut their books . . . in ways that were free of the modern inhibitions that make such a thing seem scandalous to us,"<sup>8</sup> I want to suggest that Herbert's writing took place within, and found some of its bearings from, a reading culture in which the consumption of texts was regularly accompanied by the cutting up of printed and manuscript pages.

## II

Scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature have analyzed the practice of "Grangerizing"—that is, illustrating a text by

4. Random Cloud explores the connections between biblical passages about grafting and pruning, and George Herbert's use of a metaphor of imping ("if I imp my wing on thine"), in "Easter Wings." See Cloud, "FIAT FLUX," in *Crisis in Editing: Texts of the English Renaissance*, ed. Randall M. Leod (New York, 1994), p. 132.

5. Daniel Price, *The Spring* (1609), sig. B1, in Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison, 1966), p. 58.

6. Nicolas de Bonnefons, *The French Gardiner Instructing How to Cultivate All Sorts of Fruit-trees and Herbs for the Garden* (1658), p. 29.

7. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), title-page.

8. Juliet Fleming, "Afterword," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73 (2010), 550.

inserting prints cut from other books, a practice encouraged by James Granger's *Bibliographical History of England* (1769)—but early modern scholars have not been attentive to earlier, related bibliographical impulses.<sup>9</sup> How might we think about cutting and early modern literature? Scholarship has in the past understood cutting primarily as a metaphor for something like quotation: an act of transcription; a copying out, from source to text. But what if we treat cutting as something literal, an excising enacted not with pen and ink but with scissors, knives, and penknives?<sup>10</sup> What happens to our sense of early modern textual production if we accept Thomas Dekker's description of *The Wonderfull Yere* (1603)—“At the ende of all (like a mery epilogue to a dull play) [are] certaine tales . . . *cut out* in sundry fashions”—as a literal account of his compositional process, and not merely a metaphor? Or John Taylor's report that *Mad verse, sad verse, glad verse and bad verse* (1644) was made of pieces of text “*cut out, and slenderly sticht together*”? Or barber-surgeon Richard Lichfield's admission, in *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (1597), that since “Wheras thou commendst thy Epistle to me as a garment for a foole, and therefore that it should bee long: I (as is thy desire) haue cut it with my scissers.”<sup>11</sup>

There are institutional reasons why cut-up texts are less visible now than they were in early modern England: libraries have, unsurprisingly, preferred to acquire texts in as pristine condition as possible (a preference that has until very recently led to volumes with handwritten annotations being underrepresented in collections, too); information about cutting is rarely noted in records; and catalogues generally do not allow for searches that will locate cut texts.<sup>12</sup> As is so often the case,

9. Luisa Calè, “Dickens Extra-Illustrated: Heads and Scenes in Monthly Parts (The Case of Nicholas Nickleby),” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 40 (2010), 8–32.

10. Fleming, “Afterword,” 545.

11. Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderfull Yere* (1603), title-page (my italics); John Taylor, *Mad verse, sad verse, glad verse and bad verse* (1644), title-page; Richard Lichfield, *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (1597), sig. G2. Andrew Boorde, *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge* (1562), sig. A2v, presents a woodcut of a largely naked Englishman (Boorde himself?) holding tailor's shears, attempting to decide which new fashion to follow. The target here is the fashion-hungry youth cutting his cloth to suit the times, but the image perhaps also nods at the author as snipper of texts.

12. Private correspondence with the curators of British Printed Collections 1501–1800, and Manuscripts Collections, at the British Library. The Folger Shakespeare Library's Hamnet catalogue is a rare exception: thanks to Steven K. Galbraith, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Books at the Folger, for advice on this.

the modern terms and variables around which archival work is organized—from the framing of questions, to the entering of online search terms—work to occlude pre-modern forms of textuality. In some instances, traces of cuts even seem to have been edited out of the Photostat reproductions on which *Early English Books Online* is based: this appears to be the case, for example, for the EEBO facsimile of Thomas Heywood's *The fayre mayde of the Exchange* (1607), which shows none of the title-page excisions that the Huntington Library original retains.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, and allowing for a certain amount of archival serendipity, evidence of cutting texts is not uncommon, both in the instructions books provide for their consumption, and in the tattered remains left by obliging readers. John White's *Briefe and easie almanack for this yeare* (1650) instructs readers to snip out "the whole kalender" for 1650 for use elsewhere: "which being cut out, is fit to be placed into any book of accompts, table book, or other."<sup>14</sup> An enactment of this prescription survives in the Folger: White's 1650 almanac, along with another from 1656, have been excised and glued into a manuscript notebook, which in turn contains within it *A manual for A justice of peace his Vade-mecum* (1641).<sup>15</sup> This composite text illustrates the material complexity of many early modern material texts, which were often produced by combining different forms, both manuscript and print: a complexity obscured through a preoccupation with a modern conception of the book.

There are prescriptions for readers to cut in Thomas Tusser's *A hundreth good pointes of husbandry, lately married unto a hundreth good poynts of huswifery* (1570). Tusser offers patterns for short verses that might be displayed on the walls of the reader's house: "Posies for [that is, to be written on] the hall"; "Posies for the Parler"; and "Posies for thine own bed Chamber." These texts might be copied out, but they might also have been cut out, and pinned or glued to the walls.<sup>16</sup> In a comic dialogue in *The Academy of Pleasure* (1656) that plays upon the relative class pretensions of shopkeeper and scholar, a shopkeeper affects the

13. Huntington 61412. My thanks for Stephen Tabor for this point. That these title-page excisions—possibly attempts to remove manuscripts notes—perhaps came after the early modern period does not alter the point about EEBO's failure to register this text's materiality.

14. John White, *Briefe and easie almanack for this yeare* (1650), title-page.

15. Folger V.a. 395.

16. Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (London, 2001), pp. 29, 43.

behavior of a scholar by saying, “I am of late become a great lover of sacke, and can make shift now and then to cut out a Copie of Verses.”<sup>17</sup> Such an action is being offered as something ridiculous, particularly since to cut a copy is to enact a double transfer and therefore, presumably, to display a double dependency; but the joke depends upon a recognized cultural possibility.

Material enactments of these representations and endorsements include the title-page of a copy of *A sermon preached at the funeral of Mr. John Bigg* (1691), which has been cut down—the opening “A,” and the “MDCXCI” of the colophon are no longer visible—with an ornamental border, cut from another book, added. The final page of the text (“His EPITAPH”) has also been cut out and pasted on the reverse of the title-page, and—to mark the revised end of the volume—a new “FINIS” has been cut from another book and glued in.<sup>18</sup> William Sherman has analyzed a 1560s manuscript copy of the Book of Common Prayer and Psalter which includes illuminated letters cut from late medieval manuscripts, and Stella Panayotova has discussed a fifteenth-century Wycliffite Bible which contains, in the Psalter section, pasted-in historiated initials cut from a copy of Peter Lombard’s *Magna Glossatura* on the psalms (ca. 1160).<sup>19</sup> The manuscript commonplace book of one Thomas Jackson has cut-out printed pages glued on the inside front and back covers: “How the Sunne cometh to be eclipsed”; “The Dominion of the Moon In Mans Body”; “A note of the time forbidding marriage.”<sup>20</sup> A copy of Edward Pond’s *An almanack for the Year of our Lord God 1696* includes not only copious manuscript notes, but also stubs indicating cut-out pages: usually whole pages have been cut out, but sometimes only the top third of a page.<sup>21</sup> More strikingly still, the owner of a 1710 copy of *Parker’s ephemeris* has sewn into the back of his almanac a paper wheel, made from cut up printed pages, that can be rotated to reveal the astrological alignment

17. *The Academy of Pleasure* (1656), sig. D1.

18. *A sermon preached at the funeral of Mr. John Bigg* (1691), Huntington 448742.

19. See William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 87–109; and Stella Panayotova, “Cuttings from an Unknown Copy of the *Magna Glossatura* in a Wycliffite Bible (British Library, Arundel MS. 104),” *British Library Journal* 25 (1999), 85–100.

20. Folger V.a. 391.

21. Edward Pond, *An almanack for the Year of our Lord God 1696* (Cambridge, 1696), Folger V.a. 515. For more stubs and cut pages, see Cardanus Rider, *British Merlin* (1680), Folger A2254.5, and George Wharton, *Calendarium Carolinum* (1664), Folger A2655.

of the present moment, and whether the “Conjunction [is] good . . . indifferent good . . . very Good . . . very bad . . . most excellent . . . bad . . . [or] worst of All.”<sup>22</sup>

Such cutting should not be seen as necessarily scandalous or destructive but rather as a potentially quotidian mode of textual consumption. As Juliet Fleming and Ann Blair have demonstrated, cutting might be undertaken for various reasons, including a desire to avoid laborious handcopying; to cope, by excising and compressing, with that flood of print which Burton called “the vast *Chaos* and confusion of bookes”;<sup>23</sup> to expand or reformat texts; to create space for marginal commentaries; to remove censored material, particularly prayer book references to the Pope, Thomas Becket, indulgences and purgatory in response to legislation under Henry VIII and Edward VI;<sup>24</sup> or to illustrate manuscripts with cut-out printed images to produce presentation volumes, as John Harington used cut-out printed images to create the manuscript from which Richard Field printed *Orlando Furioso* (1591).<sup>25</sup> Cutting might correct errors—as was perhaps the case with at least two copies of *Aphorismes, or, Certain Selected Points of the Doctrine of the Jesuits* (1609), both of which have the colophon’s “LONDON” removed.<sup>26</sup> Cutting might also produce fragments to use to embellish texts: Mary Erler has described “a substantial tradition” in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries of pasting cut-out printed woodcut roundels and images into devotional texts such as psalters and primers. She also notes that the manuscript of London alderman Robert Fabyan’s *Great Chronicle of London* (ca. 1504) is “adorned with . . . pasted-in printed paper cut-outs.” While such examples are

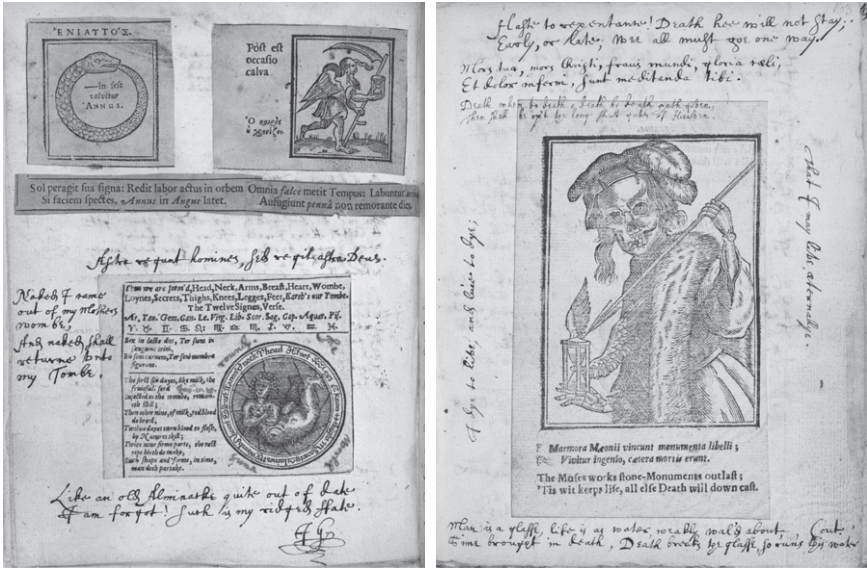
22. George Parker, *Parker’s ephemeris for the year of our Lord 1710* (1710), Folger 182–94q. The cited annotations appear on blanks before and after the printed almanac.

23. Burton, pp. 8–9. For more on dealing with the great number of printed books, see Ann Blair, “Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550–1700,” *Journal of History of Ideas* 64 (2003), 11–28; and, for motives for cutting more generally, Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010), ch. 4, “Compilers, Their Motivations and Methods.”

24. Dunstan Roberts, “The Expurgation of Traditional Prayer Books (c. 1535–1600),” *Reformation* 15 (2010), 23–49. Roberts focuses on instances of prayer book censorship by crossing out with ink or scratching away with a knife, but cutting might be another method of excision.

25. Fleming, “Afterword,” 543–52. As Fleming notes, the Harington case is detailed in Simon Cauchi, “The ‘Setting Forth’ of Harington’s Ariosto,” *Studies in Bibliography* 36 (1983), 137–68.

26. Huntington 53907; British Library T.785(2).



Figures 1 and 2: John Gibson’s commonplace book.  
 © British Library Board (BL Additional MS 37719, ff. 190v, 163).

“relatively scarce” in English books, Erler suggests “it may be misleading to regard those few survivals as idiosyncratic.”<sup>27</sup>

Erler connects inserted cut-outs with the early years of the printed book, “when we might expect a degree of exchange between [the cultures of] manuscript [and] . . . printed book” (202), but similar practices persisted into the seventeenth century. Royalist Sir John Gibson produced a commonplace book while imprisoned in Durham Castle in the 1650s, hoping that the text would serve and aid his son as a “companion some times to looke upon, in this Vale of teares.”<sup>28</sup> The volume features several pages cut from printed volumes, and glued into the pages of the manuscript, to which Gibson has added his own handwritten notes (Figures 1 and 2).

Such ease with cutting was in part a consequence of the purposeful nature of Renaissance reading: a reflection of that early modern pursuit

27. Mary C. Erler, “Pasted-in Embellishments in English Manuscripts and Printed Books, c. 1480–1533,” *The Library*, 6th series, 14 (1992), 186, 201–02, 205–06.

28. British Library Additional Manuscript 37719, fol. 5v. Adam Smyth, “Rend and teare in peeces’: Textual Fragmentation in Seventeenth-Century England,” *The Seventeenth Century* 19 (2004), 36–52.

of commonplaces and aphorisms, and the excising of sententious remarks. As one printed verse miscellany advises: “Like chesse-nuts sweet, take . . . the kernell out.”<sup>29</sup> Since a text was often imagined as an assemblage of pieces, which might be crumbled, or shredded, into its constituent parts, the act of cutting was always at least implicit. This willingness to cut also reflects the fact that the coherent, bound, unannotated, “complete” printed book, with which modern bibliographical culture has been fixated, was not yet the dominant medium for conveying text. The establishment of the book through iconic publications like Jonson’s and Shakespeare’s *Folios* is of course one of the dominant narratives of seventeenth-century literary culture; but through much of the early modern period, that modern assumption that “the work is coterminous with the book” was not yet axiomatic.<sup>30</sup>

## III

Herbert’s interest in cutting might then plausibly be read as a register of this broader early modern culture of reading with blades to hand; but it also expresses more local concerns. Herbert’s links with Nicholas Ferrar’s Little Gidding are well known. Long before T.S. Eliot made Little Gidding famous as the fourth of his *Four Quartets* (1944), Little Gidding established a seventeenth-century reputation as an Anglican religious community, made up of Nicholas Ferrar and his extended family: “like a little college,” Isaak Walton wrote, “and about thirty in number.”<sup>31</sup> Their fame rested in part on a series of what look to modern readers like radical interventions in what is now called the history of the book. Ferrar and his family made at least fifteen Biblical Harmonies. The majority of these books were Gospel Harmonies: that is, lavish folio books constructed by selecting printed texts of the four Gospels; cutting up these printed texts, often on a word-by-word level; reorganizing the text, and distributing, and gluing, the new order under 150 chapters, describing Christ’s life. To this cut-up text, images were often added: images cut out from source texts, and often trimmed and reworked and conflated to produce something that would later be

29. *Wits Recreations* (1640), p. 3n. 6, “To a verse reader.”

30. Fleming, “Afterword,” 548.

31. Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert* (1670), p. 69.

called collage.<sup>32</sup> The point of these complicated textual shufflings was to build a text that revealed but then reconciled “agreements & differences” (as one title-page put it) between gospel accounts, and offered a coherent, harmonized narrative, “Digested into order.”<sup>33</sup>

George Herbert was familiar with the community at Little Gidding and with the cut-up Biblical Harmonies that they produced. John Ferrar’s “Life” of his brother stresses the great friendship between Herbert and Nicholas Ferrar: each styled the other “most entire friend and brother,” and although their relationship was primarily epistolary, “their very souls cleaved together most intimately.”<sup>34</sup> And Herbert was physically close: in 1626, he was installed as canon of Lincoln Cathedral and prebendary of Leighton Ecclesia, and Ferrar supported Herbert in his costly repairs of the church at Leighton Bromswold, just five miles from Little Gidding. On his death Herbert entrusted his poetry with Nicholas Ferrar. As John Ferrar reports: “when M<sup>r</sup> Herbert dy’d, he recommended . . . his Divine Poems, & willed it to be delivered into the hands of his Brother N.F. appointing him to be the Midwife, to bring that piece into the World, If he so thought good of it . . . The w<sup>ch</sup> when N.F. had many & many a time read over, & embraced & kissed again & again, he sayd, he could not sufficiently admire it, as a rich Jewell, & most worthy to be in y<sup>e</sup> hands & hearts of all true

32. Joyce Ransome, “Monotessaron: The Harmonies of Little Gidding,” *The Seventeenth Century* 20 (2005), 22–25, and “George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, and the ‘Pious Works’ of Little Gidding,” *George Herbert Journal*, 31 (2007–2008), 1–19; Paul Dyck, “‘A New Kind of Printing’: Cutting and Pasting a Book for a King at Little Gidding,” *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 9 (2008), 306–33, and “‘So Rare A Use’: Hands and Minds on the Gospels at Little Gidding,” *George Herbert Journal* 27 (2006), 67–81. For the use of images, see George Henderson, “Bible illustration in the Age of Laud,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8 (1982), 173–204.

33. *The Actions & Doctrine & Other Passages touching Our Lord & Sauior Jesus Christ* (1635), BL C.23.e.4, title-page.

34. *Materials for the Life of Nicholas Ferrar*, ed. Lynette R. Muir and John A. White (Leeds, 1996), pp. 92, 93. It is remarkable that no letters between Herbert and Ferrar survive, particularly given the very many letters extant in the Ferrar Papers at Magdalene College, Cambridge. The closest we have is the one document in the Ferrar Papers in Herbert’s hand: a piece of advice, dated October 4 or 5, 1631, directed at Ferrar’s cousin, Arthur Wodenoth, concerning Wodenoth’s dilemma about whether to pursue a career in the church (FP 814). The letter is transcribed in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F.E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1941), pp. 380–81. As Amy Charles noted, this absence may reflect the particular value of these letters: they were perhaps removed from other documents after Herbert and Ferrar’s deaths, and being separate, were entirely lost. See “Herbert and the Ferrars: Spiritual Edification,” in *Like Season’d Timber: New Essays on George Herbert*, ed. Edmund Miller and Robert DiYanni (New York, 1987), p. 12.

Christians, that feared God, & loved the Church of England.”<sup>35</sup> Perhaps most significantly of all for the purposes of Herbert’s interest in cutting, the scissors and knives of Little Gidding constructed a Biblical Harmony for Herbert. The book is now lost, or at least lost for the time being, but records of Herbert’s ownership survive. A letter written by Ferrar’s cousin Arthur Wodenoth on October 13, 1631, after his visit to Herbert, records Herbert’s “esteme of my Cosens Concordance” and his “high prizeing of it & thank full acknowledgmt for it.”<sup>36</sup> Since many of Herbert’s poems were written after 1625, after the founding of Nicholas Ferrar’s community, the bibliographical commitments of Little Gidding provide a reasonably sturdy contextual framework for reading Herbert’s verse.<sup>37</sup>

Stanley Stewart and Paul Dyck have explored some connections between Herbert and Little Gidding. In *A Priest to the Temple*, Herbert prescribes “a diligent Collation of Scripture with Scripture,” and Stewart demonstrated the overlaps between this mode of reading—in which sections were compared, in an often non-linear fashion—and the process of making and reading Harmonies: “For all Truth being consonant to it self, and all being penn’d by one and the self-same Spirit, it cannot be, but that an industrious, and judicious comparing of place with place must be a singular help for the right understanding of the Scriptures.”<sup>38</sup> This way of reading Scripture finds expression in Herbert’s poetry. “The H. Scriptures II” provides a description of active, devotional reading that resonates with the non-linear structures that the Harmonies encourage: “This verse marks that, and both do make a motion / Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie.” Dyck has more recently provided an important exploration of connections between Herbert’s conception of the Bible in *The Country Parson* as a “storehouse” of commonplaces providing precepts for life, and the Harmony-making of Little Gidding.<sup>39</sup>

35. *Materials for the Life*, p. 94.

36. FP 815.

37. The chronology of Herbert’s poetry is only tentatively established. While Herbert’s earliest sonnets date from 1610, and while the poems in MS Jones B62 at Dr. Williams’ Library, London, perhaps date from 1615–1625, the poems in Bodleian MS Tanner 307 (copied at Little Gidding after Herbert’s death) which are not also in MS Jones B62 probably date from 1625–1633. See Wilcox, *Poems*, p. xxxvii.

38. *Priest*, p. 229; Stewart, p. 6.

39. Paul Dyck, “‘So rare a use’: Scissors, Reading, and Devotion at Little Gidding,” *George Herbert Journal*, 27 (2003–2004), 67–81, esp. 75–78.

But it is also worth exploring the rather simpler shared interest between Herbert and Little Gidding in cutting text: in a sense of cutting as productive. Figure 3 shows a page from a Little Gidding Harmony made for King Charles I in 1635, now in the British Library: an imposing volume, almost immovably large and heavy. In the thirteenth of 150 chapters, titled “JOHNS Baptisme, Preaching, Foode, & Rayment,” the text presents a description of John the Baptist’s preaching; his disputes with the Pharisees; and the moment when he predicts (according to Luke) that “one mightier then I commeth, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.” To produce this chapter, the Harmony-makers at Little Gidding selected the Gospel texts that narrate this moment: Matthew 3.1–12; Mark 1.1–8; and Luke 3.1–18. Through meticulous scissor work, these three accounts were cut out and then presented in three formats. In “The Comparison,” the three columns of text were aligned to produce a parallel edition: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In “The Composition,” all the words from the three different Gospel accounts of this description of John the Baptist were interlaced to create a single piece of continuous prose. Figure 4, a closer image of “The Composition,” shows clearly the level of detail involved in the production of this conflated account: the cutting up is sometimes at the level of the individual word.

The superscript “Mr” at the start indicates the ensuing text comes from Mark; the “L,” a couple of lines on, indicates Luke—although there is just one word, “Now,” from Luke, before the text switches to Matthew, for “In those dayes.” The third method of presentation was “The Collection,” which presents a brief overview in large black letter and then, beneath, in a smaller roman font, what was called the supplement: details, repetitions, and elaborations.

In his unfinished biography of Nicholas Ferrar, Nicholas’ brother John offers a description of the mechanics of cutting and pasting that lay behind these Harmonies. Ferrar describes how the Harmonies were assembled in the Concordance room at Little Gidding on large tables, the room hung with passages from Scripture pinned up on the walls: “with their scissors they . . . cut out [of] each Evangelist such and such verses and thus and thus lay them together to make and perfect such and such a head or chapter. Which when they had first roughly done, then with their knives and scissors they neatly fitted each verse so cut out to be pasted down on sheets of paper. And so artificially they performed this new-found-out-way, as it were a new kind of printing,



Figure 3: Gospel Harmony (1635). © British Library Board (BL C.23.e.4, columns 37-38).

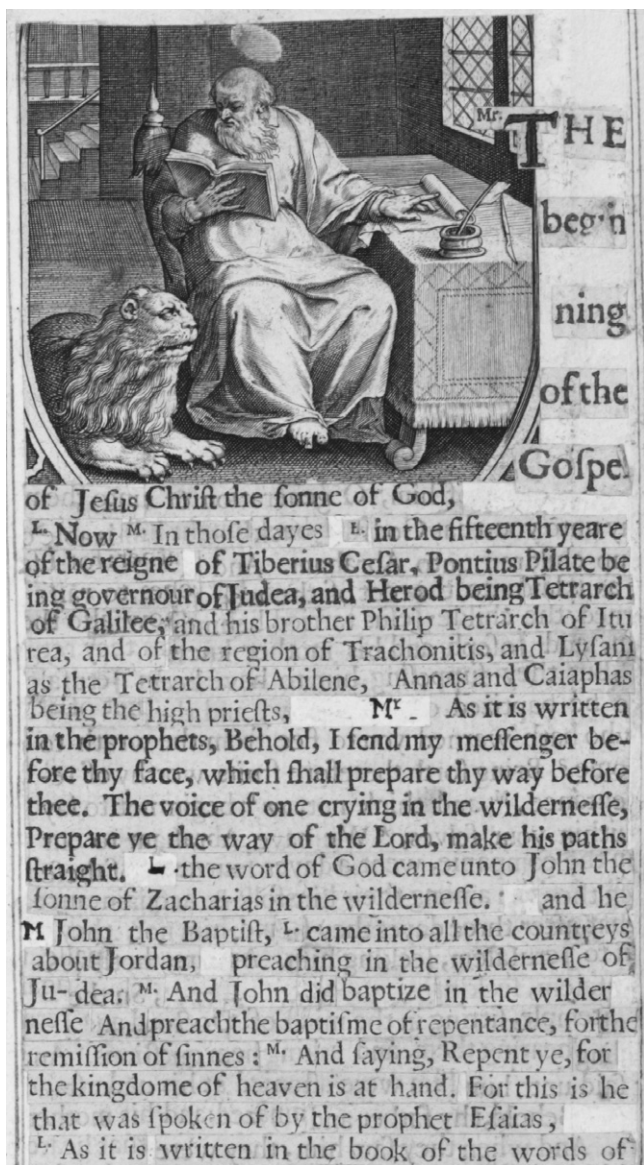


Figure 4: Gospel Harmony (1635).

© British Library Board (BL C.23.e.4, column 38).

for all that saw the books when they were done took them to be printed the ordinary way.”<sup>40</sup> John Ferrar’s description expresses a sense of both the novelty and the technical sophistication of the process of harmony production: “this new-found-out way.” It also catches a sense of mild unease in the first readers of these texts, their sense of being disorientated by these books: “all that saw the books . . . took them to be printed the ordinary way.”

For book historians accustomed to narratives linking print with fixity and the establishment of a stable literary canon, these cut-and-paste Gospels convey the very opposite: a willingness to dismantle and reorder printed Bibles. The Harmonies are a response to the culture and technology of the printing press by skilled amateur book-makers, who converted printed books back into unique texts. To read these Harmonies today is to experience a kind of twin-pull: a sense of the intricacy and completeness of these volumes, but also an awareness of the cutting and pulling part that lies behind the assembling. The Harmonies are poised awkwardly on the border of destruction and creation, and the creativity at work at Little Gidding rests on a prior act of cutting apart. In a similar way, Little Gidding has endured conflicting charges of elevating the image too much, and not elevating the image enough. The Ferrars were charged with being too enamored of images, offering a proto-Catholic version of religion: in the words of a short printed pamphlet from 1641, Little Gidding was “The Arminian Nunnery,” a “late erected Monasticall Place” filled with “a fond and fantasticall *Family of Farrars*.”<sup>41</sup> In the twentieth century, however, when Little Gidding’s loose and often reworked prints at Magdalene College were thought to be part of Pepys’ collection, the catalogue lamented that “some [of the prints] have been deliberately defaced by an iconoclast.”<sup>42</sup>

Herbert prized the Little Gidding Harmony he was sent “most highly as a rich jewel worthy to be worn in the heart of all Christians,”

40. *Materials for the Life*, p. 76.

41. *The Arminian Nunnery* (1641), title-page, p. 9. This text is the product of a tendentious reading of a letter of 1633–1634 sent by Edward Lenton to Sir Thomas Hedley, in which Lenton, sent to investigate what he calls “the Reputed (at least reported) Nunnery at Gidding,” found few signs of crypto-Catholicism. For copies of Lenton’s letter, see FP 939, and BL Harley 4845.

42. *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge*, gen. ed. Robert Latham (Suffolk, 1980), III, 289.

and expressed delight “to see women’s scissors brought to so rare a use as to serve at God’s altar.”<sup>43</sup> If *The Temple* is preoccupied with the unquantifiable and ineffable nature of sin, love, and faith, it is also an exploration of alternative modes of conveying meaning, whether by shaping text into spatialized expressions (“Easter wings”; “The Altar”); scratching text into windows (“The Posie”); or offering “precepts” which are “sprinkled” (“Superliminare”), as holy water might be dispersed by a “Perirrhaterium.” Cutting represents one of these alternative modes.

## IV

What does it mean to imagine literary composition as a process of cutting? If cutting occurred both in the production and reception of printed texts, what difference does this make to our reading? What happens to a word when it is treated as a physical object? What happens to one’s relationship with a piece of text, when it is cut out, held, turned around, and glued back down in a new position? How is our relationship to letters and words and literature different if cut-up text is the medium in which we encounter them? These are large questions with many possible answers, but the following points, which draw on Herbert, Little Gidding, and early modern culture more generally, suggest some opening tendencies for this culture of scissors and knives.

(i) cutting up texts is not destruction.

In a twenty-first century in which the destruction of religious books is a powerful cultural taboo, the act of cutting up printed Gospels seems a surprising pursuit for a religious community. But when members of the Little Gidding community took scissors to printed copies of the Gospel, their cutting was a register of piety: if Protestantism encouraged believers to reflect carefully on every word, scissors and knives helped the Ferrars and Colletts do this. Cutting up Gospels was a way of caring about the Word.

This relatively relaxed attitude to cutting was also encouraged by the practice of commonplacings, in which short excerpts or aphorisms were transcribed into commonplace-books: cutting texts is a literalization of this mode. More generally, the early modern printed book was not

43. *Materials for the Life*, p. 76.

treated with the reverence with which later cultures approached it. The book was not yet the exclusive or perhaps even principal medium for carrying text, and it was a material form that might easily be reworked. Books were sold unbound; several volumes might be bound together at a later date to create new composite wholes; readers might request that blanks be added to receive their handwritten annotations (as was the case with almanacs, for example). Amid this culture, the printed book was a tentative mode of embodying text, a negotiable material form, and cutting pages was not the transgressive act later periods took it to be.

(ii) cutting is a form of writing.

It is tempting to regard cutting and writing as two fundamentally different acts, and to regard the latter as more sophisticated (because more mobile and precise) than the often infantilized former. But every written word, and therefore every written sentence and written text, can only come into being through a process of selection: a process of eliminating or cutting out other possible words, letting them fall to the floor, and of grasping the word intended.<sup>44</sup> Whether writing proceeds through pen, pencil, stylus, knife, scissors, typewriter, word processor, or any other local technology, is of course a significant material difference with consequences for our relationship to language; but on a more fundamental level, all these technologies are involved in the seizing, ordering and deploying of words: a process of snipping out, of writing *qua* cutting. Such a reframing is important because critics have often trivialized cutting as a kind of non-writing: in discussing the contribution of John Ferrar's daughter Virginia to a 1640 Harmony, David Ransome writes, "but the writing is all his [John's]; seemingly she merely pasted in the cuttings."<sup>45</sup> If cutting and pasting is thought of as writing, such clouding judgments spring less readily to mind.

(iii) cutting and the pursuit of slowness.

While previous discussions of cutting from printed and manuscript texts have seen the practice as a time-saving way of dealing with what Ann Blair calls "information overload," to produce Biblical Harmonies by snipping individual words and sometimes letters was a tremendously slow process.<sup>46</sup> In terms of hours of work, the amount of printed books

44. Thanks for Juliet Fleming for discussing this with me.

45. David R. Ransome, "Ferrar, John (c.1588–1657)," ODNB (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60958>.

46. See Blair, "Reading Strategies," and Blair, *Too Much to Know*, ch. 4.

required, and the left-over texts produced, this kind of cutting was the opposite of efficient. Why did members of the Little Gidding community choose this laborious process of cutting up, reordering, and gluing printed text, rather than copying words out by hand? Centuries of monastic manuscript production offered a convenient model for the Ferrars and Colletts to follow, and the careful handwritten title-pages and prefaces to their Harmonies indicate their calligraphy was up to the job. The attraction of cutting was, precisely, its time-consuming nature. The printing press's capacity to quickly produce Bibles and Harmonies was in many ways a great opportunity for Protestantism in terms of dissemination; but the careful, word-by-word reflection that devotional reading encouraged was also surely threatened by this culture of speed. Cutting up text was a way of slowing things down, and therefore a way of thinking patiently about the word.

(iv) cutting and ideology.

Does the act of cutting up text carry particular political or religious significances? Individual, sometimes spectacular, case studies certainly suggest that this was the case. John Gibson's commonplace book, for example, compiled while the Royalist Gibson was a prisoner in Durham Castle in the 1650s, is defiantly Royalist in all ways: a celebration and lament for the King, and a defense of Gibson's own political decisions. The cutting here does become a mechanism for articulating a Royalist position, and in particular for assembling a counter-narrative of mid-seventeenth-century political history. For Gibson, cutting is a revisionist technology. But cutting need not always be Royalist: Parliamentarian and non-political snippings are perfectly possible. Similarly, while the cutting at Little Gidding might seem to register a Protestant idea of reading as active, solitary wrestling with the text, there are numerous European Catholic manuscripts with, for example, cut-out printed pages glued in.<sup>47</sup> It is more useful to think of cutting as a bibliographical practice, a way of reading and writing that could, in particular moments and contexts, speak to and enact particular religious or political positions—the Protestantism of Little Gidding

47. Feike Dietz has recently examined a seventeenth-century illustrated Catholic manuscript based on the popular emblem book *Pia desideria* (1624), showing how fragments from different printed sources were cut out and combined to produce a new text. See "Gedrukte boeken, met de pen gelezen. Sporen van leesinterpretaties in de religieuze manuscriptcultuur," *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, 2 (2010), 152–71.

in 1635; the Royalism of Sir John Gibson in the 1650s—but that in the first instance need not be coded in those ways.

(v) *cutting and inventio*.

Producing a text by cutting up and reordering existing texts places less stress on the creation of new words, and more on the reordering of the already-present. Cutting thus recalls that understanding of invention, or *inventio*, within Renaissance rhetoric, from the Latin *invenire*, meaning to come upon, discover, or find, rather than to invent *ex nihilo*, in a more modern sense. Many of Herbert's poems are preoccupied with the recycling of biblical scripts, and in particular with the degree to which an appropriated script becomes the speaker's own voice. In "Coloss: 3.3," Herbert threads a reworked version of a passage of text taken from St. Paul's letter to the Colossians ("Our life is hid with Christ in God") through his verse.<sup>48</sup>

*Our life is hid with Christ in God.*

**M**y words & thoughts do both express this notion,  
 That *Life* hath with the sun a double motion.  
 The first *Is* straight, and our diurnal friend,  
 The other *Hid*, and doth obliquely bend.  
 One life is wrapped *In* flesh, and tends to earth.  
 The other winds towards *Him*, whose happie birth  
 Taught me to live here so, *That* still one eye  
 Should aim and shoot at that which *Is* on high:  
 Quitting with daily labour all *My* pleasure,  
 To gain at harvest an eternal *Treasure*.

Just as Herbert's narrator describes his life as both a straight, earthly journey, and God-facing travel that "doth obliquely bend," so the diagonal biblical text tracks this second path, from "My" to "Treasure." Stanley Fish's claim that the speaker "loses himself" amid an inherited script, and that the poem consequently charts a process of "self-abnegation," is surely wrong.<sup>49</sup> Herbert's verse asks its readers rather to observe how a biblical passage may simultaneously remain a biblical passage, but also be at the center of an individual's voice. The speaker's voice is composed through a process of taking on a block of existing text.

48. *The Temple* (1633), p. 77.

49. Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, 1972), p. 205; noted in Wilcox, *Poems*, p. 303.

Something related but different happens in “The Forerunners,” Herbert’s celebrated poem on growing old, and the fear that “dulnesse [will] turn me to a clod.” Old age threatens a loss of “sparkling notions,” and the poem sketches a shift from an earlier poetic style of “sweet phrases, lovely metaphors,” towards plainer verse. This loss of “sparkling notions” is not a principled reorientation of style (it is wrong to read the poem as the narrator *rejecting* embellishment), but rather the consequence of waning powers: it is not the narrator who is leaving poetic ornament, but poetic ornament that is departing the narrator (“[b]ut will you leave me thus?”). The spirit of abandonment that in Petrarchan poetry describes the loss in love, and that in much of Herbert’s poetry conveys a too-distant God, here defines the relationship between poet and metaphor. The poem is compelling in part because it contains the embellished language it describes as fled—“Louely enchanting language, sugar-cane, / Hony of roses, whither wilt thou flie?”—and, as a consequence, recalls a capacity that has not yet passed; the verse is poised on the edge of change, and plain style is a prospect, not yet a present medium.

What is left behind after “sparkling notions” have departed the narrator’s brain are, in his heart, five stark words repeated three times in the poem: “Thou art still my God.” This quintet anticipates and contains within itself everything that “lovely metaphors” can ever say: “For, *Thou art still my God*, is all that ye / Perhaps with more embellishment can say.” That “perhaps” admits a note of concession: a sense of the power of embellished language, which implies a narrator less than triumphant, and perhaps not entirely convinced of his thesis. Nonetheless, these clinching lines suggest five lean words containing all other metaphors and phrases. As so often in Herbert’s poetry, the image is of a dense compression of the vast into a small space, like Barabas’ “Infinite riches in a little room.” The italicized “*Thou art still my God*” is not primarily a description of a relationship. Its significance in the poem is as a phrase, a *unit* of five words, a little script or “dittie” that, by being italicized and repeated three times across the poem, moves around the verse and has the quality of a catch-phrase or a slogan. It is a little archive: all that remains, but capacious, despite its brevity. In place of his earlier “sweet phrases,” the narrator has this chunk of text.

The repeated deployment of this phrase is informed by a culture of cutting out lines of text, moving passages around on a page: the kind of process that went on daily in the Concordance Room of Little

Gidding. Because the passage is repeated, we become conscious of this phrase as a mobile block of text, shunted around the space of the poem: we become conscious that words might be treated as a material block, like a strip cut from a Bible, glued down on to blank pages.

The poem thus charts not only a shift in age and poetic style, but also, more fundamentally, a transition in compositional methods. From poetry written in “enchanting language,” the narrator at the end of the poem is composing by moving around a passage of text. Herbert’s poem thus mimics the effect of cutting out, and his verse might be read as an act of homage not only to God, but also to the textual aesthetics associated with Little Gidding.

(vi) cutting and spatialized poems.

Later editions of *Wits Recreations*—a playful verse miscellany containing short poems and riddles, later retitled *Recreation for Ingenious Head-peeces* (“A pleasant grove for their wits to walk in”)—include several examples of what might be called spatialized poems. Among these are verses that are printed in such a way so as to appear as text on a narrow strip of paper, folded and manipulated: thus the verse beginning “This is love and worth commending” (Figure 5), in which the twisting form, its final words returning the reader to the start, enacts the ensnaring, never-ending nature of love.

The poem is presented as the product of scissors and knives: the text is striking because it appears to exist on a narrow, winding strip of paper, snipped dexterously from a regular sheet.<sup>50</sup> Print culture asserts not its stability and permanence, but rather the possibility of blades reworking a page. Readers of mid-seventeenth-century printed miscellanies evidently enjoyed this kind of ludic spatialization. *The Card of Courtship* (1653)—a miscellany of verse conveying “The language of love fitted to the humours of all degrees, sexes, and conditions”—offers a section of what it calls “Emblematical Fantasticks”: poems that make playful use of layout. The lines of “Round about all in a Ring” coil in on themselves, and strips of text in “Ever in a wand’ring Maze” are laid out as a series of misdirected movements (Figure 6).

In part these verses engage with that Renaissance conception of language, informed by neoplatonism and cabalistic concerns, as “material things that belong to the same network of resemblances that

50. *Recreation for Ingenious Head-peeces* (1663), sig. P11v. See also “True love is a pretious pleasure,” which is similarly constructed (sig. Q2).

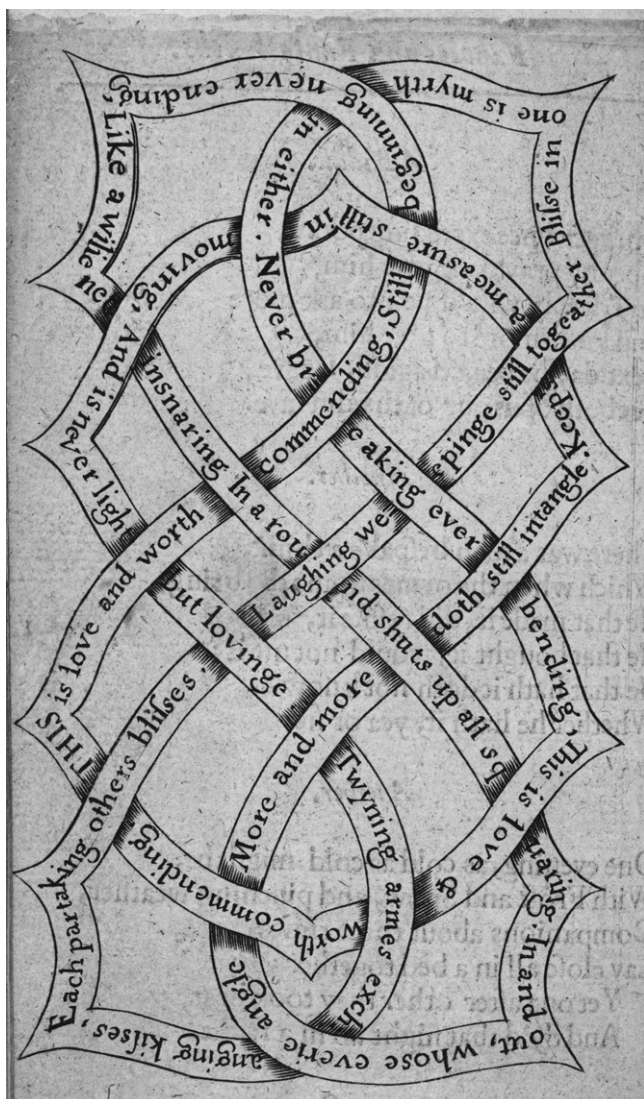


Figure 5: *Recreation for Ingenious Head-peeces* (1663).  
 © British Library Board (BL 11623aa33, sig. S3v).

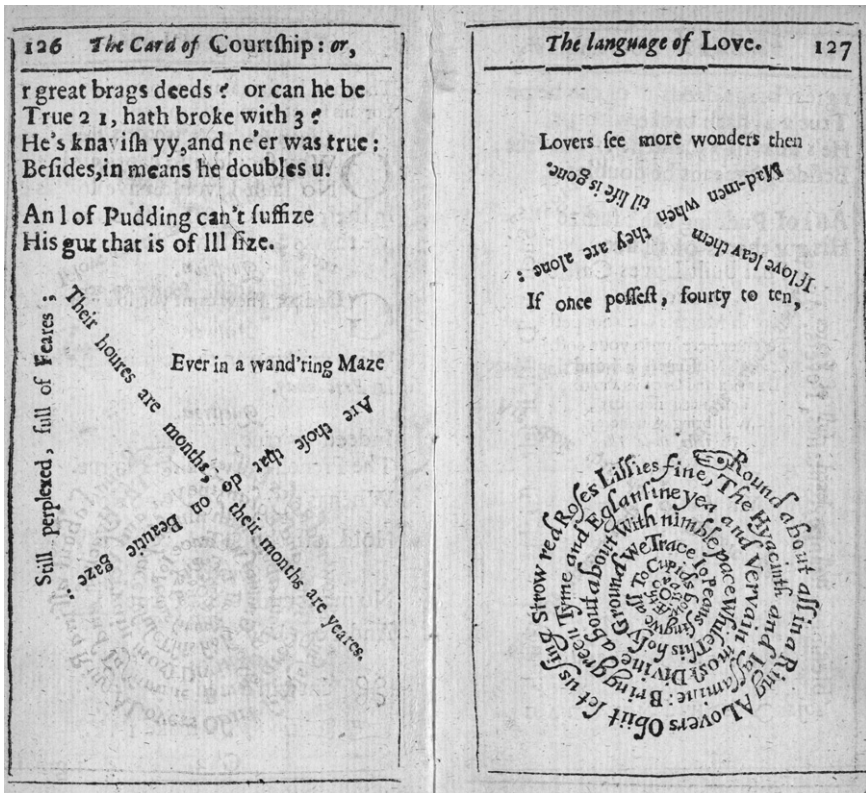


Figure 6: *The Card of Courtship* (1653).  
© British Library Board (BL E.1308(2), pp. 126–27).

endows natural objects with allegorical meaning.”<sup>51</sup> Just as the shape of Egyptian hieroglyphs and Hebrew text had a deep symbolic meaning, so the physical form of English letters yielded a spiritual significance. This is certainly a helpful intellectual framework for reading Herbert’s famous pattern poems, such as “The Altar” and “Easter wings.” But the manner in which these strips of text invite readers to imagine the cutting that produced them also very vividly conjures a culture of scissors and knives.

51. Martin Elsky, “George Herbert’s Hieroglyphic Poems and the Materiality of Language: A New Approach to Renaissance Hieroglyphics,” *ELH* 50 (1983), 258.

(vii) words as things that can be broken apart and remade.

Composing text through cutting makes us aware that phrases and words might not only be made, but also unmade: pulled apart; pared down. Through a process of rearrangement, words might be made to say more than they presently do. Just as Little Gidding's scissors snipped away at the printed Gospel text as a prelude to remaking, so Herbert's poetry imagines embodied words being broken or crumbled into letters, before a process of reassembling reveals a greater truth. In "JESU," the speaker's heart, "deeply carved" with his saviors "sacred name," is shattered "all to pieces" in a moment of affliction. The narrator gathers each piece or "parcel," engraved with a letter of the name—"And first I found the corner, where was J, / After, where ES, and next where U was graved"—until, piecing them together and spelling them out, he finds that they reveal the sentence "I ease you." Text, then, is first materialized, as something "deeply carved," and is then fragmented, then gathered and reread. As a result, a new meaning is revealed which, while new ("I ease you"), was also already contained in the earlier text ("Jesu").

In "The Flower," Herbert's narrator compares God's returning gifts, and his consequent recovering heart, to re-emerging "flowers in spring." "Thy word is all," the speaker concludes, "if we could spell." That Herbertian "spell" is significant: as the *OED* observes, "spell" can mean both to read letter by letter (breaking up text into parts), and to "discover or find out . . . by close study or observation." Something is revealed through a process of breaking apart. God's word becomes comprehensible through a process of breaking up text.

Previous criticism has productively located these poems within the discourse of Holy Communion. As Helen Wilcox notes, this "process of breaking down words" to yield "true meaning has sacramental overtones."<sup>52</sup> As the sacrament by which Christ became present to the participant through the process of consuming bread and wine, the Holy Communion takes its precedent from Christ's Last Supper, and, in particular, from that moment when Christ breaks the bread. Matthew 26.26–28 renders it thus: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

52. Wilcox, *Poems*, p. xlv.

Figure 7 shows the “Collection” to chapter CXXXI of the Harmony made for King Charles I (1635), in which the text from the three Gospel accounts of this moment (Matthew 26.26–28; Mark 14.22–24; Luke 22.19–20) has been cut up and reordered.

The Holy Communion provides one context for reading Herbert’s preoccupation with crumbled, shattered, or atomized language. As Heather Asals suggests, Herbert’s language is “broken eucharistically.”<sup>53</sup> But the culture of cutting-up text which I have outlined—an interest in unmooring or snipping letters from words as a prelude to remaking—is another important context.

(viii) the book not as surface but space.

An investment in a culture of cutting also enables us to rethink the book as a site for meaning. More particularly, to produce a Biblical Harmony through cutting, or to write a devotional poem conceiving of text as something that might be cut and moved around, suggests that the book is less a surface for inscription, as it is usually imagined in the moment of writing, and more a space onto which strips or blocks of texts are placed, glued, or pinned, as pictures are placed on a gallery wall. Conceiving of a book as an architectural space was evidently important to Herbert.<sup>54</sup> The opening poems of *The Temple* are built around the idea of the book as architecture, and of reading as a movement through space, from “The Church Porch,” to “Superliminare,” to “Altar.” The reader who is about to read is asked to “approach” (“Superliminare”). In the words of Random Cloud, Herbert’s metaphor here is “Reading into a Book as Entry into a Building”<sup>55</sup>—a metaphor amplified in later editions, which feature engravings of a church porch, door ajar, and which reverse the order of the two stanzas under “Superliminare” to invite readers to read the stanza printed lower on the page first, then the higher, as one would move through the entrance to the church. We are directed “to take the quatrains in the order we would walk over them.”<sup>56</sup> Herbert also reversed the equivalence, imagining rooms as kinds of book, advising

53. Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert’s Way to God* (Buffalo, 1981), p. 27.

54. See Anne M. Myers, “Restoring ‘The Church-porch’: George Herbert’s Architectural Style,” *English Literary Renaissance*, 40 (2010), 427–57.

55. Random Cloud, “Enter Reader,” in *The Editorial Gaze: Mediating Texts in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Paul Eggert and Margaret Sankey (New York, 1998), p. 4.

56. Cloud, “Enter Reader,” p. 39. As Cloud notes, pp. 23–25, Richard Crashaw’s *Steps to the Temple, Sacred Poems* (1646), a response and homage to Herbert’s collection, features, in later editions, frontispieces depicting figures climbing steps to enter a church or temple.

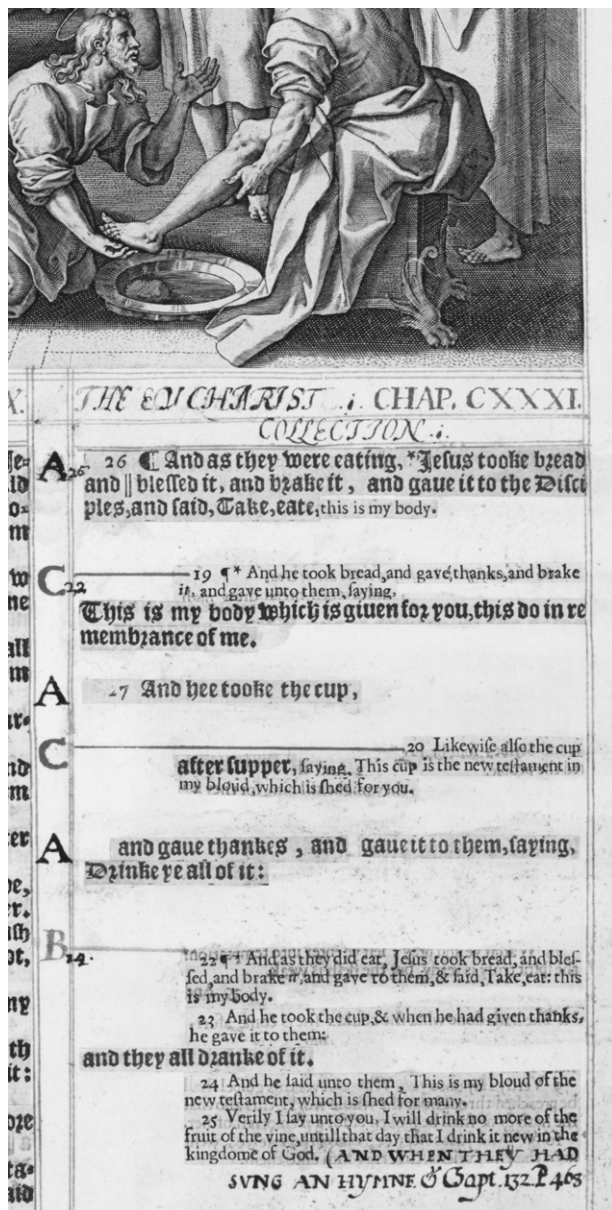


Figure 7: Gospel Harmony (1635)

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country parsons that “the wals [of their house] are not idle, but something is written, or painted there, which may excite the reader to a thought of piety.”<sup>57</sup> In a similar fashion, the workers in the Little Gidding Concordance room hung scriptural texts from the walls; also “in their great parlour” a large “inscription, hung up in a large table, written in a fair legible hand” that warned off troublesome guests—a text that was erected “[c]hiefly upon the invitation of his [Nicholas’] dear friend, Mr. George Herbert.”<sup>58</sup> Lady Anne Clifford ordered her maids to adorn “her Walls, her Bed, her Hangings, and Furniture” with “Sentences, or Sayings of remark” that Clifford “had read or learned out of Authors . . . that she, or they, might remember, and make their descants on them.”<sup>59</sup>

If rooms were imagined as books—Clifford’s chamber has been called a “commonplace-book bedroom”<sup>60</sup>—then Herbert was turning his book into a space, an attitude encouraged by cutting and pasting. In “Good Friday,” Herbert takes the familiar metaphor of the heart as a surface on which to write, and replaces it with a much more complicated description.

Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write  
Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight;  
My heart hath store, write there, where in  
One box doth lie both ink and sinne:

That when sinne spies so many foes,  
Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes,  
All come to lodge there, sinne may say,  
*No room for me, and flie away.*

Sinne being gone, oh fill the place,  
And keep possession with thy grace;  
Lest sinne take courage and return,  
And all the writings blot or burn.

57. George Herbert, *Herbert's Remains, or sundry pieces of that Sweet Singer, Mr. George Herbert, containing A Priest to the Temple, or the country parson, Jacula Prudentum, &c.* (1652), ch. 10.

58. *Materials for the Life*, p. 88.

59. Edward Rainbowe, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Right Honorable Anne, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset, and Montgomery* (1677), pp. 39–40. For writing on walls in early modern England, see Fleming, *Graffiti*, pp. 9–72; for handwritten annotations in books considered as a kind of graffiti, see Jason Scott-Warren, “Reading Graffiti in the Early Modern Book,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73 (2010), 363–81.

60. Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material*, p. 231.

In these lines the heart is the surface on which God might write (“write there”), but it is also immediately turned into a space: a desk, containing a supply of ink, “where in / One box doth lie both ink and sinne.” It is also the location in which that writing can take place: a cabinet or office. The heart is a text, but a text that is also a space, in which, as a result of the crowded presence of God’s “whips,” “nails,” “wounds,” and “woes,” sin finds itself pushed out: “sinne may say, / *No room for me, and flie away.*” The poem’s description of a movement between a writing surface and a writing space is also apparent in Herbert’s “Confession,” in which his heart is revealed to be full of “Closets; and in them many a chest; / And like a master in my trade / In those chests, boxes; and in each box, a till.” The inexorable presence of sin in the narrator’s sense of self is described not as a writing on a surface—a metaphor that we might expect in Shakespeare’s sonnets, or in Philip Sidney’s—but rather as an extraordinarily embodied process of entry: “No scrue, no piercer can / Into a piece of timberwork and winde, / As God’s afflictions into man.”

The status of cutting as a form of textual production has often been low. In a remarkably dismissive analysis of false attributions of Little Gidding bindings, Geoffrey Hobson described the “pious tedium of life at Little Gidding,” and took aim at the cut-and-paste Harmonies: “dreadful monuments of misdirected labour,” and, at best, “an admirable diversion for a rather backward child of eight.”<sup>61</sup> This wrongly dismisses the labor involved in the production of the famous books made at Little Gidding, books which Charles I praised for their “singular composition” and “exquisite workmanship . . . [not] paralleled . . . by any man.”<sup>62</sup> Herbert evidently thought carefully about the relationship between knives and poetry: *The Temple* is in part about the potency of cutting as a mechanism for making meaning. A criticism that seeks to recover the historicized modes of textual production now needs to think much harder about scissors and knives and the things that they can do. Such criticism also needs to consider how writing works when it proceeds through cutting. Such a process of assessment can help to overturn the centuries-long trivialization of the labor of Anna and Mary Collett at Little Gidding—artists hitherto seen as little more than mute enactors of their uncle’s great vision—and, more

61. Geoffrey Hobson, *Bindings in Cambridge Libraries* (Cambridge, Eng., 1929), p. 122.

62. *Materials for the Life*, pp. 77–79.

broadly, to bring to critical prominence a culture of cutting that seems to have been part of the reading and writing experience of early modern England.

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