Hartford, Herbert, and Charles J. Wells: An Edition of The Temple from the Watkinson Library

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In 1908, a notable edition of George Herbert’s *The Temple: Sacred Poems, and private ejaculations* was donated to the Watkinson Rare Book Library in Hartford, Connecticut (Figure 1). The manuscript dates back to 1641 and was part of a larger donation from the collection of Charles J Wells, a noted book collector who lived in Hartford. In this edition, Herbert’s seminal work appears alongside another collection of poems, *The Synagogue, or, The Shadow of the Temple: Sacred Poems, and Private Ejaculations: An imitation of Mr. George Herbert* by Christopher Harvey (Figure 2). Herbert’s *Temple* was often published with *The Synagogue* during the 17th and 18th centuries. Written as a tribute and an imitation, Harvey mimics the style of Herbert’s *Temple*, while also slightly shifting the subject matter and audience. *The Temple* and *The Synagogue* offer two distinctive glimpses into British religious and literary life in the 16th and 17th centuries, and together the texts present a complex and layered narrative that weaves through several different fields. One can consequently trace the journey of the Watkinson *Temple* over four hundred years, from British printing presses in Cambridge and St. Paul’s, to an auction house in New York, to a private American collection, and finally to an archive in Hartford, Connecticut. In doing so, one can also identify larger developments emerging in publishing, printing, bookbinding, and collecting. One question resounds throughout this journey: what does it mean to own a book? To begin answering this, and in order to fully understand the significance of the Watkinson *Temple*, one must first consider the man who wrote it, and the world in which George Herbert lived.

On April 3, 1593, George Herbert was born in Montgomery, England (Wilcox, xiii). Herbert was from a powerful and well-connected family, related to important figures like the Earl of Pembroke (Waugh, x). The 17th century English writer and Herbert’s first biographer Izaak Walton described Herbert’s lineage as such:

> The father of our George was Richard Herbert, the son of Edward Herbert, knight, the son of Richard Herbert, knight, the son of the famous Sir Richard Herbert of Colebrook, in the county of Monmouth, banneret, who was the youngest brother of that memorable William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, that lived in the reign of our King Edward IV (Herbert, 19-20).

Herbert lived in a time when social hierarchy was still extremely important in England. His impressive lineage and connection to the Earl of Pembroke were crucial to the later advancement of his career. After his father Richard died in 1596 Herbert was raised primarily by his mother, Magdalen Newport (Herbert, 20). Magdalen was a formidable figure within the Herbert family, and her impact of George’s life and career cannot be overstated. Magdalen counted John Donne among her close friends, he once referred to her as “The Lady Magdalen Herbert, of St. Mary Magdalen” (Makepeace, 74). Herbert was one of ten children, seven sons, and Magdalen devoted her life to raising them. One of George’s brothers went to the Navy, one to the Army, another became the Master of the Revels, and George’s eldest brother Edward became Lord Herbert of Cherbury (Makepeace, 75). Magdalen took special care with George, however, whom she regarded as “frail and delicate from childhood” (Makepeace, 75). This distinction led Magdalen to decide that a life in the Church was best for young George. Accordingly, Herbert received an
impressive education starting at a young age. Herbert attended Westminster, where he excelled academically, especially in Latin and Greek. (Herbert, 20). After Westminster Herbert went on to Trinity College Cambridge, where he became a lecturer soon after graduating. Herbert continued to ascend the ladder of academia, becoming Major Fellow and Orator at Trinity (Wilcox, xiv). Herbert ultimately was made Public Orator to Cambridge University, where he caught the attention of King James I himself, who called him “the jewel of the university” (Waugh, x). Partly because of his connection to William, Earl of Pembroke, James began to support Herbert, and for several years the poet spent a considerable amount of time at court, living a life of pleasure funded by the crown. Of this period Walton wrote that George: “enjoyed genteel humour for clothes…neglected his public duties and found no little satisfaction in a life of ostentation and pleasure” (Waugh, xi). This description would likely shock most modern audiences who only know Herbert from reading the pious *Temple*. In 1624 Herbert was elected to Parliament as a representative from Montgomery and was ordained a deacon in the Church of England (Wilcox, xv). He might have become a full-time courtier if not for King James’ death in 1625, as well as his mother’s continuous disapproval of courtly life (Wilcox, xv). Indeed, these two elements proved to be crucial to the eventual creation of *The Temple*.

One biographer bluntly put it best: “It is difficult to conjecture how much George Herbert’s return to the spiritual life was due to the sudden failure of royal patronage, and how much to his own devotion” (Waugh, xi). In either case, Herbert’s move from the court to the church marked a significant shift in the poet’s life and career. Despite the important political and familial pressures pushing Herbert towards the church, in addition to his health, which had begun to flounder, George still struggled with the decision. This period was characterized by Izaak Walton as a time in which Herbert “had many conflicts with himself, whether he should return to the painted pleasures of a court life, or betake himself to a study of divinity and enter into sacred orders, to which his mother had often persuaded him” (Waugh, xii). Eventually the church and his mother triumphed, and Herbert moved to the parish of Leighton Bromswold in 1626, becoming a Prebendary in 1630. While at Leighton Herbert worked to renovate the church, raising funds and organizing construction (Waugh, xii). In 1627 Herbert’s mother Magdalen Newport died. John Donne preached at her funeral, later publishing the sermon with several memorial poems Herbert composed for the occasion (Wilcox, xv). Soon after Herbert was married to Jane Danvers, one of the daughters of a close family friend (Waugh, xiii). In 1630 Herbert was installed as the rector of Bemerton, chosen partly because of his success at Leighton. The same year he also became an ordained priest of the Church of England (Wilcox, xv).

It was at Bemerton that Herbert truly became the devout figure he is known as today. Walton recounts a story told from Herbert’s first days at the parish:

When at his induction he was shut into Bemerton church, being left alone there to toll the bell (as the law requires him,) he staid so much longer than the ordinary time, before he returned to those friends that staid expecting him at the church door, that his friend Mr. Woodnot looked in at the church window, and saw him lie prostrate on the ground before the altar: at which time and place, as he after told Mr. Woodnot, he set some rules for himself, for the future manage of his life; and then and there made a vow, to labor to keep them. (Herbert, 39)
This anecdote immediately brings to mind Herbert’s *The Temple*, and especially “The Altar”, one of the first poems in the work, and the one which is often regarded as a de-facto “key” to understanding *The Temple*: “A broken altar, Lord, thy servant rears;/ Made of a heart, and cemented with tears” (Herbert, 92, 1-2). “The Altar” introduces the main conceit of *The Temple*, which is a literal walk through a physical temple coupled with an allegorical walk through an internal one. “The Altar” is especially significant to *The Temple* because of its form; the piece is one of several hieroglyphic poems from *The Temple*, meaning it physically resembles what it describes. The other famous hieroglyphic poem from *The Temple* is entitled “Easter Wings”. Let us take a closer look at “The Altar”.

In most editions of *The Temple*, “The Altar” is the second piece in the collection, after “The Church Porch”, and before “The Sacrifice”. “The Altar” is most famously a picture poem, but the hieroglyphic component of the piece only reinforces its content. The work begins with four end-stopped lines that introduce the image of the altar. The first two lines are in pentameter, the second and third are tetrameter:

A broken altar, Lord, thy servant rears,
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman’s tool hath touched the same.

Herbert borrows the image of the broken altar from scripture, while also referencing his own experiences as a Prebendary at Leighton, where he repaired a church fallen to disrepair. Here the conceit of the literal and figurative church begins.

Herbert moves on to the “column “of the altar: “A heart alone/ Is such a stone”, “As nothing but/ thy power doth cut”, sets of enjambed lines elaborate on the comparison between the physical and the internal altars. These eight shorter lines lead the reader’s breath and create an easy, meditative rhythm. They are written in iambic tetrameter, with each line broken into two.

Herbert returns to longer, end-stopped lines, and sets a clear intention for the collection:

That, if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
Oh let thy blessed sacrifice be mine,
And sanctify this altar to be thine.

Herbert changes the meter again, moving from tetrameter back out to pentameter. Beginning and ending in pentameter lends an overall sense of completion to the work. Moreover, “The Altar” is a declaration of what Herbert aims to accomplish with *The Temple*. Through the collection, he creates both a literal and an allegorical temple that the reader travels through. “The Altar” therefore sets the scene for *The Temple* to become a place of worship, sacrifice, and most importantly, instruction.

On March 1, 1633 George Herbert died of consumption. He was thirty-nine (Wilcox, xv). The first edition of *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* was published in Cambridge soon after Herbert’s death in 1633 (Wilcox, 37). Before dying, Herbert gave the manuscript to his close friend Nicholas Ferrar. He said to his friend: “read it: and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him
burn it" (Barnes, 90). According to Ferrar’s brother John, Herbert went on to specify that the work ought to be read only by “all true Christians, that feared God, & loved the church of England” (Barnes, 90 n.1). Ferrar must have deemed it worthy, for The Temple was printed soon after Herbert’s death, in September 1633 (Wilcox, xv). It was an immediate success, going on to be published in eleven editions within the seventeenth century alone (Achintein, 430). The first six editions were printed in Cambridge by Roger Daniel (Lynch, 179). A copy of the sixth edition, one of the last printed in Cambridge in 1641, is in the Watkinson Rare Book Library today.

The Temple remains a greatly read and discussed work. Much of the debate surrounding the text pertains to Herbert’s religious persuasions and intentions for the book. There are those who believe the imagery and ritual of The Temple as perfectly Anglican, while others view them as dangerously Catholic. “On one side are the readers who find a high church Herbert in The Temple and who see there a conspicuous debt to Medieval Catholicism…on the other side are those who see a leftward-leaning Protestant Herbert” (Bienz, 73). Judging from Herbert’s previously discussed biography, my inclination is with the first camp. Herbert spent his entire life dedicated to the Monarchy and the Church of England. Although The Temple evokes many Catholic images and rituals, the focus remains internal: “Oh let thy blessed sacrifice be mine. / And sanctify this altar to by thine.” (Herbert, 92, 15-16). The enigmatic nature of The Temple’s message is certainly one of the elements that has contributed most to its popularity and longevity over the years. The Temple had, and still has, a unique ability to be interpreted differently by different audiences. Herbert’s words can be read by Catholics as much as Protestants. With this in mind, let us trace the Watkinson Temple’s route from England to Hartford. First, a stop in Warwickshire, where Christopher Harvey the Rector of a parish in Clifton, has composed a volume of poems inspired by and imitating George Herbert, entitled The Synagogue (Howell, 229).

Christopher Harvey’s The Synagogue was originally published anonymously in 1640. Little is known about Harvey, save his commitment to the Clifton parish, and his deep admiration of Herbert. Some see The Synagogue as an adaptation of The Temple to the changing times: “a child of the Anglican dispersion after the Civil wars” (Culotta, 275-276). Harvey’s adaptation of Herbert can be seen through his choice of the Synagogue over the Temple. Whereas a Synagogue is seen as a place of worship, a temple is a place of worship and sacrifice, a dangerously Catholic idea. Harvey was dedicated to the defense of the Church of England, and often wrote in opposition to Puritan ideals and attacks (Hopler, 165). However, though there are several moments in The Synagogue where Harvey sharpens Herbert’s Anglican vision, there are also many instances of him creating a more inclusive space of worship. The dedication of The Synagogue reads: “I do esteem’t a folly not the least/To imitate examples not the best” (Figure 2). Throughout The Synagogue, Harvey is never ambiguous about his debt to Herbert. Let us look at a poem from The Synagogue that directly responds to Herbert’s “The Altar”.

In “The Communion Table”, Harvey acknowledges Herbert, while also slightly developing ideas from The Temple. The 54-line poem is divided into nine stanzas. In a style characteristic of the work of The Synagogue, Harvey begins in an extremely literal way:

Here stands my banquet ready, — the last course,
And best provision,
That I must feed upon,
Till death my soul and body shall divorce,
And that I am
Called to the marriage supper of the lamb.

Like “The Altar” Harvey begins in pentameter (though unlike Herbert, he stays in it for the duration of the poem). Harvey is also engaging with the space in a similar way; the sets of two shorter lines form one pentameter line just like in the “column” of the altar. The subject matter is inherently more Catholic than Herbert’s altar, which Harvey notes in the next lines:

Some call it th’ altar, some the holy table.
The name I stick not at:
Whether’t be this or that,
I care not much,

Harvey is stating explicitly what Herbert had suggested throughout The Temple: that the use of images and rituals shouldn’t be avoided for fear of it appearing too Catholic, because what is really important is the spiritual experience itself. Harvey ends the work on a similar note, with an appeal for unity:

If others will dissent and vary, who
Can help it? If I may,
As hath been done away
By th’ best, and most; I will myself do so.

Of one accord
The servants shou...
are its publication dates. Herbert’s work is published in 1641, while Harvey’s is published in 1647 (Figures 1, 2). We do not know for certain if they were printed together, or when they were combined. However, judging by the publication dates, one can assume that the edition is one of Stephens’ first, released in 1647 with the sixth edition of *The Temple* and the second of *The Synagogue*.

From Cambridge, the Watkinson edition was purchased and likely changed hands several times before becoming the possession of a well-known book collector named Marshall Clifford Lefferts. Born in New York in 1848, Lefferts was a prominent American business man who was involved in the American Telegraph Company, where he worked with Thomas Edison, and later the Gold and Stock Telegraph company, of which his father was president (*National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*). Lefferts also had an celebrated book collection, one of the most impressive in America. In 1901 the auction house of George H. Richmond hosted a sale of a portion of Lefferts’ collection (*A Check-list of the Library of Mr. Marshall C. Lefferts*). George H Richmond was an auction house eponymously named for its founder. Living from 1849 to 1904, Richmond was a notorious bookseller in New York City who handled important book sales and acquisitions for esteemed book collectors such as Theodore Irwin, J. P Morgan, and Marshall C. Lefferts (*Dictionary of American Antiquarian Bookdealers*, 176). In a time where American was young and flushed with money, many individuals wished to begin collecting as a means of acquiring assets, status, or history. This national desire led to thriving decorative and fine art markets.

In the catalogue from the Lefferts auction the Watkinson *Temple* is listed as “HERBERT, George. *The Temple, etc.* Cambridge 1641. 12mo. Bound by Stikeman, half levant” (*A Check-list, 48*). Judging by this catalogue alone, Lefferts was clearly a Herbert enthusiast and connoisseur. Eight other works by Herbert are included in this sale alone, three editions of *The Temple* (1633, 1635, 1641), two of his *Outlandish Proverbs* (1640 and 1651), two editions of *A Priest to the Temple* (1675, 1671), and one volume entitled *Herbert’s Remains, Or Sundry Pieces of That sweet Singer of the Temple* (1652). Interestingly, the fact that *The Synagogue* is in the 1641 volume is not mentioned in the notes, nor are there any works by Christopher Harvey included in the sale. Though this might lead one to assume that it was the next owner, Wells, who and bound *The Temple* and *The Synagogue* together, since the auction catalogue does mention the binding that the Watkinson *Temple* can be seen in today (done by Stikeman), one has to believe that the two were already together when Marshall Clifford Lefferts bought them, or else he bought and bound the two manuscripts himself. The auction catalogue notes that the Watkinson *Temple* is “Bound by Stikeman, half levant” (*A Check-list, 48*). “Stikeman” refers to Henry Stikeman & Co, an American bookbinding company fashionable in the 19th and 20th centuries (*EC Rare Books*). “Stikeman & Co” is printed in small font in the upper left corner of the front cover of the book. Considering the dates of Stikeman’s popularity and the inclusion of it on the auction catalogue, Lefferts was likely the owner who brought the manuscript to Stikeman. By rebinding the manuscript, Lefferts consequently made it his own, an important element of book connoisseurship: “binding as an act of reclamation…The possibilities for reclamation have a particular resonance for a text as teasingly autobiographical as is *The Temple* by George Herbert” (Lynch, 177). Through the commission of an original bookbinding, Lefferts inserted his own presence and taste into what was at the time a popular book to own. One can tell that the Watkinson *Temple* was rebound due to Stikeman & Co’s stamp inside the cover as well as by comparing it to records of other surviving editions. Kathleen Lynch quotes a description of
a 1641 Cambridge edition of The Temple taken the Folger Library’s text Fine and Historic Bookbindings published in 1992:

There it is described as being sewn on four recessed alum-tawed thongs and bound with carefully mitred corners in citron goatskin over pasteboards. Prior to tooling, the covers and spine were marked with black ink dots to create a stencil-like pattern. Three concentric, rectangular panels on front and back are formed by rows of alternating small flower and toothlike tools. Fleurons jut out at angles from each of the corners and also embellish the central cartouche. The flat spine bears the same cartouche design with three lines of the small flower and tooth tools aligned with the panels on front and back. Ink dots and a six-pointed star decorate the edges of both boards. A fern-tip roll, also following the pattern of ink dots, runs around the turn-ins (Lynch, 180).

Perhaps this is the type of binding the Watkinson Temple was originally found in, perhaps it was never bound and came to Lefferts as a manuscript. Either way, the choice was made to place a nineteenth century binding on a 17th century book. This decision is a significant one, and it symbolizes both a canonization as well as a modernization of Herbert’s classic work. Canonization and respect were shown toward Herbert through the financial commitment of rebinding, especially from a respected artisan like Stikeman &. Co. An effort to modernize The Temple was also shown through the aesthetic choices of the binding itself. The Watkinson Temple is bound in levant, an expensive type of material often called “Moroccan” (Publishers’ Bindings Online). The book is half bound, meaning partly leather—partly paper. The paper used in the Watkinson Temple is where one can truly see a more modern, playful eye at work. Stikeman uses a beautiful marbled paper containing lovely, bright shades of purple, yellow, blue and green (Figure 3). Moreover, using color and more modern binding techniques, Stikeman updates The Temple for a nineteenth and twentieth century audience, creating an art piece that captivates the reader.

Another way that Lefferts made the Watkinson Temple his own was with the addition of a book plate. Adhered on the front cover of the book is an impressive bookplate or “ex libris” card (Figure 4). The card is a print of a woodcut depicting a family crest surrounded by winding leaves and vines, or grotesque motifs. Below the crest is a book, a harp, and the masks of comedy and tragedy. Inscribed on banners around the crest are the words “Nulla Vestigia Retrorsum”, which translates to “No Steps Backward”, and was likely the Lefferts family motto (Peter, 97). The bookplate is signed in its bottom left corner: “E.D. French, 1894”. The bookplate was therefore commissioned around the same time that Lefferts would have brought the manuscript to Stikeman & Co. to be bound. Edwin Davis French was an acclaimed and prolific bookplate engraver (Historic Saranac Lake). French lived from 1851 to 1906 and was a founding member of the American Fine Arts Society. His work was sought after by 19th century bibliophiles, especially the prestigious New York Grolier club. Lefferts likely was a member of the Grolier club, as the auction catalog indicates more than two pages of acquisitions from “Grolier Club” (A Check-List, 45-47). The club could likely have been where French and Lefferts met. Moreover, through controlling the aesthetic experience of the book (with Stikeman & Co. and E.D. French’s help), Marshall Clifford Lefferts made the Watkinson Temple a unique expression of his identity as a bibliophile, art collector, and historical object connoisseur.

Charles Wells purchased the Watkinson Temple from Lefferts collection, likely around the catalogue date of 1901. It was not in his possession for long, as Wells then left a large
bequest to the Watkinson after he died 1908, including the 1641 edition of *The Temple*. It is unlikely that Wells made any major alterations to *The Temple* before leaving it to the Watkinson, as the donation was made only a few years after Wells acquired *The Temple* himself. Wells also bought the Watkinson *Temple* near the end of his life, and the description from the Lefferts auction catalogue lines up with the book’s appearance in the Watkinson today. However, Wells did make one significant addition to the book. There is another bookplate in the Watkinson *Temple*, located on the back cover (Figure 5). The beautiful, large bookplate features Charles J Wells’ portrait framed by classical architecture. Around the portrait are flags and banners reading “The Watkinson Library”, “the Collection of Charles J Wells”, “Art, Music, Bibliography, New England”. Below a space left for the details of the book (Class, Book, Date, Accession No.) is the year 1909, framed by angel’s wings. This was probably the year in which Wells’ donation was fully processed and sorted by the Watkinson. Moreover, the bookplate was likely created by Wells’ family in honor of the donation. The plate is signed in the bottom right corner “W.F. Hopson”. William Fowler Hopson was a Connecticut artist who lived from 1849 to 1935 (*Smithsonian*). Hopson was an illustrator, graver, painter, and etcher who worked in New York and exhibited internationally. Hopson was also a member of the Grolier club, an institution that seems to link all of the 19th century character of this story together. If Hopson’s bookplate is the only true alteration Charles J Wells made to the Watkinson temple, it can still be considered a magnificent one, as it is a declaration of a true and passionate collector and his legacy.

Not much is definitively known about Charles J Wells. The Watkinson archives hold little information on his life. Therefore, it is unclear why he might have purchased the Watkinson *Temple*. Were his interests in the manuscript due to the book itself, and Herbert and Harvey’s religious words? There is a mention of a “Charles J Wells” in attendance at a “General Conference of the Congregational Churches of Connecticut”, in October of 1880 (*Minutes of the General Conference of the Congregational Churches*). If that Charles J Wells is our Charles J Wells, he might have acquired the book because of a religious appreciation of *The Temple* and *The Synagogue*. Or perhaps he enjoyed the book more as an artwork, especially with Lefferts’ additions of the Stikeman binding and the E.D. French bookplate. Maybe he was a 19th century American bookbinding enthusiast. Or perhaps Wells was concerned with the history of the object itself, the manuscript’s incredible ability to endure hundreds of years- as a physical object as well as a piece of literature. So, what did the Watkinson *Temple* mean to Wells, or Lefferts, or any of its countless owners between 1641 and 1909? The biggest clue we have lies in its two moments of marginalia. The book is only marked twice, both times within the poem “The Church Porch”. The first is the lines:

O England full of sinne, but most of sloth!
Spit out thy phlegme, and fill thy breath with glory
Thy Genrey bleats, as if thy native cloth
Transfus’d a sheepishness into thy story. (Figure 6)

These ambitious, ringing lines are as full of humor as they are of advice. The image of England as both an infirm person and a shepherd is ambitious, powerful, yet also strange. Ultimately, Herbert’s words ring with a tenacity that reaches directly for the reader. An interest in these lines seems to indicate a reader with an interest in Herbert’s language and rhetoric, not just his ecclesiastical message. This interest echoes in the other marked passage:

By great deeds show, that thou canst little do;
And do them not: that shall thy wisdome be:
And change thy temperance into bravery. (Figure 7)

Whoever this reader is, they are responding to something quite simple: beautiful words. After all, isn’t that what books are about: words that remains beautiful and true hundreds of years later? The incredible thing about books and language is the ability anyone has to make them their own, through copying them down, binding them in leather, or ornamenting them with a book plate. Through these practices the texts are not only preserved, they are also enriched in the process. George Herbert’s words are able to resound across the centuries thanks to readers like Marshall Clifford Lefferts and Charles J Wells. Books like the Watkinson Temple are complex, fascinating artifacts, and ought to be celebrated as such.
IMAGES

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4
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