

Thou didst betray me to a lingring book:

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Discovering Affliction in The Temple.

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Paul Dyck

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

"Thou didst betray me to a lingring book"
Discovering Affliction in *The Temple*

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Suppose this bee the place which you would faine take a full view of, but can not presently turn vnto it, viz. *Vnlesse thy Law had been my Delights, I should now haue Perished in mine Affliction* Now if you would finde it out by the last word of the sentence, then turne in your Concordance vntill you come to these three Capitalls *AFF.* and thereunder you shall see the word *Affliction* placed by it selfe . . . you shall finde the said sentence . . . to be in *Psal.* 119. verse 92.

– Clement Cotton, *Concordance to All the Bookes of the Old Testament* (1627)

In her article "Titles in George Herbert's 'Little Book,'" Anne Ferry demonstrates Herbert's remarkable decision to name his poems as commonplaces, thus connecting them to both the commonplace book and to the psalms. She argues that such titling allowed Herbert to distance himself from the poems, structuring them not as the performance of the poet, but as the performance of the reader.¹ This article will work out some of the implications of Ferry's argument in a reading of the largest set of poems connected by a commonplace title in *The Temple*: the five poems titled "Affliction." As a set, these poems pose two questions, either stated or implied: Why suffering? and Why five poems with the same title? Though the latter question is trivial and the former most weighty, they have like answers; that the question should not be "why" but rather "how." How does suffering function? How do five poems with one title function? The poems together dramatize suffering, or "grief," as an experience of discovery and of naming, one that lies at the heart of the Christian account of life. This dramatic experience will itself be discovered through a look back at the early editions of *The Temple* and the biblical textual world to which they refer, looking particularly at the biblical concordance and the commonplace book. This will allow a reconsideration of the "Affliction" poems themselves, demonstrating how their placement in **[End Page 28]** *The Temple* enacts a process of grappling with affliction, one that both makes use of and unsettles the familiar habits of gathering

commonplaces. While other printed books order matter so to allow readers control, Herbert's strategically orders his material to baffle.

I begin with a simple bibliographical observation: that the roman numerals we find parenthetically added to the "Affliction" poems' titles and which now have become, in practice, part of the titles themselves, were not present in any early edition of *The Temple*. Rather F.E. Hutchinson added these numerals in his edition of 1941, which numbers poems with shared or repeated titles, hence, the familiar "Love" (III). Hutchinson's system renames the five poems identically titled "Affliction," giving them, parenthetically, five different titles. In the 1633 edition, as in the extant manuscripts and every edition until Hutchinson, though, these poems are not numbered or otherwise differentiated in any way; they simply have the same title. Notably, all five "Affliction" poems occur within fifty-eight poems and within fifty-two pages, so that they are concentrated and yet far enough apart to make it challenging to find and identify them as a group. Herbert has ordered them as a problem that readers must solve: the repeated titles point backwards and forwards in ways that interrupt linear reading. The progress promised by the initial features of the book (a porch, a church door) is here turned to movement back and forth. Because there are many instances of "Affliction" and because they can be read in many different orders, any reader's progress through the text becomes multi-linear and recursive. Has Herbert in fact betrayed the reader to a particular kind of "lingering book" – one that always resists forward movement – and to what end?

As Ferry has pointed out, the title "Affliction," like many of Herbert's titles, broke from the common practices of naming poems for their forms, for specific occasions and places, or for speakers. Instead, as with most of Herbert's titles, "Affliction" names a topic, a commonplace, a theological category...

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
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