

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

ROBERT HERRICK

By ALASTAIR FOWLER

*Fellow of the Academy*

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ROBERT HERRICK'S reputation has gone through such vicissitudes that it is almost surprising to find him still read. As it is, the discontinuity of tradition has much delayed understanding of his work. Yet Herrick started well: to judge by numbers of early manuscripts, he was better known than Carew or Marvell. Contrary to a common view, *Hesperides* was probably 'much admired' on its first appearance, as Antony Wood says. Subsequently, a hundred or so poems were anthologized in more than a score of collections, but anonymously; so that in the eighteenth century the poet was unknown.<sup>1</sup> If Thomas Warton had completed his *History of English Poetry*, he might well not have given Herrick much more than a passing mention. In 1804 he had literally to be discovered. A complete edition appeared twenty years later, provoking Southey to protest against 'a coarse minded and beastly writer'. (Hale was still muttering about poetical pigsties in 1895.) Anthologists resolved to save Herrick's flowers, even if they had to rewrite them to do so; as Palgrave did when he bowdlerized 'To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time' into 'Counsel to Girls'. Herrick came to be valued for a narrow range of qualities: not much more than musical skill, and charm. 'His work is always a song-writer's,' says Swinburne; 'nothing more, but nothing less, than the work of the greatest song-writer . . . ever born of English race.' Anthologizing favoured *Hesperides* in a way; but held back appreciation of its true qualities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1956), pp. xvii-xxxiv; *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York, 1968), pp. xii, 184; and Patrick's article on Herrick's reputation, in 'Trust to Good Verses': *Herrick Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Roger B. Rollin and J. Max Patrick (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1978), pp. 221-34. E.g. as many as seventy-five Herrick poems were printed in *Recreation For Ingenious Head-peeces* (1650).

<sup>2</sup> See Martin, *Introd.*, p. xx; Swinburne, *Studies in Prose and Poetry* (1894),

Reaction to the Victorian vogue was inescapable. F. R. Leavis set the tone: taking a line oddly reminiscent of Hippolyte Taine's, he scorned the 'triviality of Herrick's talent, which yet produced something not altogether negligible (beside him Carew looks like a major poet)'.<sup>1</sup> Leavis wrote, in fact, as if the tradition of *serio ludere* had never existed. He was too good a critic not to recognize the seriousness: his criticism was that Herrick's game was 'comparatively solemn'. He found no trace of Marvell's 'familiar urbane wit'. In 1936 that meant Metaphysical wit. A few years later, T. S. Eliot took Herrick as a type of the minor poet: he lacked the 'continuous conscious *purpose*' of Herbert.<sup>2</sup> But good readers quietly went on paying more attention to Herrick than to Carew. And over the last two decades critics have grown increasingly discontented with the orthodox censure.<sup>3</sup> All the same, Herrick's reputation remains problematic: suitable enough, surely, for Eliot's anomalous invented category, 'minor classic'. There are misgivings, first, at *Hesperides*' lack of unity. And then those who fall back on Herrick's personality as a centre for the *œuvre* may find him sensual or infantile or scopophilic.<sup>4</sup> These misgivings, I shall argue, spring from misconceptions.

The seemingly haphazard arrangement of *Hesperides* has deceived many into thinking it really casual and unserious. But, like Jonson's *The Forrest* and Herbert's *Lucus*, it is in fact a *silva*, a collection type characterized by apparent spontaneity and random variety.<sup>5</sup> Apparent only: at least as practised by Jonson and Herrick the *silva*, for all its *sprezzatura*, was actually a highly

p. 45. One-sided selections include Palgrave's *Chrysomela* (1877); Rhys's *The Lyric Poems of R. H.* (1897); Swinburne's *Flower Poems by R. H.* (1905); Untermeyer's *The Love Poems of Herrick and Donne* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1948). At one stage *The Golden Treasury* included seven poems by Herrick compared with one by Herbert.

<sup>1</sup> *Revaluation* (1936), p. 36 (earlier *Scrutiny*, 4. 3 (1935), 254-6); cf. Taine's *History of English Literature*, tr. van Laun, vol. i (Edinburgh, 1873), 201: 'With Carew, Suckling, and Herrick, prettiness takes the place of the beautiful.' 'The only objects they can paint, at last, are little graceful things. . . .'

<sup>2</sup> 'What is Minor Poetry?' (1944), in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Musgrove, Martin, Rollin, Deming, Patrick, and the contributors to 'Trust to Good Verses'.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., 'Peeping Tom', *TLS* lx (1961), 898; John Press, *Robert Herrick* (1961); J. B. Broadbent, *Poetic Love* (1964); Gordon Braden, *The Classics and English Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London, 1978), esp. p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> Herrick calls *Hesperides* 'This Sacred Grove': see 'Trust to Good Verses', p. 165. The *silva* form is described (and in a sense invented) by J. C. Scaliger in *Poetice*, iii. c. (Lyons, 1561), p. 150.

wrought form.<sup>1</sup> Herrick has an enormous range of kinds, including all the subgenres of epigram: not only honeyed epigrams like those of the Greek Anthology—exploits of Cupid, flower poems, poems to his ‘fragrant mistresses’—but also the four contrasting Martialesque types: pungent, mordant, ridiculous, and foul.<sup>2</sup> Much depends on the varied deployment, which purged any cloying effect of the sweet: ‘This begets the more delight, / When things meet most opposite’.<sup>3</sup> To a *silva*, therefore, the anthologist with a sweet tooth bestows the kiss of death. Even the scatological ingredient formed an essential part of the epigram tradition, and one not really to our taste now. Herrick’s foul epigrams are relatively few, and not very good: his tender heart is not in them. But it is worth noticing how they fail: namely through being overcompressed to the point of pointlessness.

For *Hesperides* has a special formal purpose: it aims at a primarily epigram *silva*, in which kind after kind is realized within the narrowest compass. The epigrammatic transformation found everywhere during that century takes the form in *Hesperides* of exquisite diminution. Its characteristic brevity is smooth and easy: Nathan Drake, its discoverer, rightly speaks of ‘miniatures’. Even the Anacreontic ode, already a smallish form, is miniaturized, to a minimalist structure of monometer lines: ‘Thus I / Pass by . . .’<sup>4</sup> What one may call Herrick’s microphilia achieves its fullest and strangest expression in the scaled-down epic of Oberon, the Faerie King; but it affects other poems too, and has something to do with the volume’s emotional coherence. This feature can be related to the contemporary fondness for epigrams on minute creatures, reflecting a sense of their marvellous workmanship. Herrick the former goldsmith would understand the implied aesthetic of *multum in parvo* and *parvis componere magna*.<sup>5</sup> But miniaturization was

<sup>1</sup> As also in the model, Statius. Scaliger, following Quintilian, explains that the name *silva* was given to poems expressed spontaneously (*subito excussa calore*), either because of their variety, or the multitude of things crammed into them, or their roughness.

<sup>2</sup> On the types of epigram (*mel, fel, acetum, sal, foetidas*), see Scaliger, *Poetice*, III. cxxvi, p. 171; also Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), pp. 68ff., and Antoinette B. Dauber, ‘Herrick’s Foul Epigrams’, *Genre*, 9. 2 (1976), 87–102.

<sup>3</sup> H 527; M 194.3; according to the usual convention, references are first to poem numbers in Patrick’s edition, then to page and order-on-page numbers in Martin’s edition.

<sup>4</sup> H 475, M 178.2. Cf. H 144, M 51.3, a miniature version on the theme of ‘Drink to me only’. Nathan Drake, ‘On the Life, Writings and Genius of Robert Herrick’, *Literary Hours*, iii (1804), 25–88.

<sup>5</sup> On these traditions, see Kitty W. Scoular, *Natural Magic* (Oxford, 1965),

also a literary idea. In Renaissance literary theory the epigram was a piece, a particle, of a larger kind such as tragedy or epic.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Herrick's 'The Argument of His Book' makes sense as a part of a part of epic—the proposal of subject, in fact. It applies the heroic formula ('I sing') to subjects at first quite lowly:

I Sing of *Brooks*, of *Blossomes*, *Birds*, and *Bowers*:  
Of *April*, *May*, of *June*, and *July*-Flowers.  
I sing of *May*-poles, *Hock*-carts, *Wassails*, *Wakes*,  
Of *Bride*-grooms, *Brides*, and of their *Bridall*-cakes.<sup>2</sup>

In this masterpiece of baroque packing an encyclopedic congeries of things fit together in elusive sequences, associational, verbal, and schematic, that suggest life's flowing complexity of interconnection. The months lead into 'July-flowers' or gilliflowers, such as might deck a 'May-pole'; country festivals lead into nuptial festivities. Further on, natural 'dews' give way gradually ('piece by piece') to spiritual balms and spices; to the large subject of 'Times trans-shifting' (that is, mutability, ageing, calendrical and historical progressions); to metamorphoses ('How *Roses* first came *Red*'); to the heterocosm of faerie; and finally to hell and heaven. A comically ambitious liminal poem, it ostentatiously promises more than an epic could well deliver. But Herrick clearly takes epigram as a serious as well as subject-free form. He is going to write about everything.

*Hesperides* depends for coherence on several sustained and interrelated themes. There is no single theme, such as the classically minded may demand. Yet only the whole book constitutes the work, the statement, the grove. And part of its fascination is the discovery on each reading of new filiations, new paths of connection. The most obvious is mutability: a common theme, of course—not least in Herrick's models, Horace and the pseudo-Anacreon.<sup>3</sup> But his own contemplations on mortality are

pp. 81–94 and 101–2, placing Herrick's fly among its European relations; Colie, *Resources of Kind*, ch. ii, and *Paradoxia Epidemica* (Princeton, 1966), p. 103 n. and ch. ix *pass.* On the faerie poems, see Daniel H. Woodward, 'Herrick's Oberon Poems', *JEGP* lxiv (1965), 270–84.

<sup>1</sup> On the *particella* theory see, e.g., Francesco Robortello, *De epigrammate*, discussed Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, i (Chicago, 1961), 400–1.

<sup>2</sup> H 1, M 5.1. Significantly, Herrick's starting-point, Thomas Bastard's *Chrestoleros* (1598), confines itself to the variety of the topics of epigram, and has no epic flavour.

<sup>3</sup> See Kathryn A. McEuen, *Classical Influence upon the Tribe of Ben* (1939; reprinted New York, 1968). The best guide to Herrick's use of the *Anacreontea* is

so unflinching that a critic has intelligibly written of a 'powerful . . . contribution to the tradition of the *ars moriendi*'.<sup>1</sup> Often this power seems to reside in a single telling word; as in 'Then while time serves, and we are but decaying'; with its 'shocking participle';<sup>2</sup> or in the chill closure of 'To Dianeme':

that Rubie, which you weare,  
Sunk from the tip of your soft eare,  
Will last to be a precious Stone,  
When all your world of Beautie's gone.

Here 'sunk' has nothing to do with 'the deep sea and the sea-change'.<sup>3</sup> It implies the jewel's slow descent through the un-resistingly 'soft' because putrescent ear of Dianeme's corpse. Such a 'love poem' uses methods of formal meditation, and is no less serious than a step-by-step devotional meditation of death—'His Letanie, to the Holy Spirit', say—in *Noble Numbers*.<sup>4</sup> The Hesperidian garden is a Book of Nature whose 'flowers, blossoms and fruites' all teach transience.

A tender sense of life's brevity informs most of the flower poems. In the midst of their beauty, like Dutch flowerpieces or *vanitates*, they insist on *memento mori*. Remorselessly Herrick presses beyond mere Anacreontic sadness to a resolute envisaging, which is all the more effective for its gentleness. The soft movement may be the very thing that brings the inescapability home:

But you are lovely Leaves, where we  
May read how soon things have  
Their end, though ne'r so brave:  
And after they have shown their pride,  
Like you a while: They glide  
Into the Grave.

Transience is brought about in the very slipping of the phrase 'Like you a while' from grammatical connection with 'shown their pride' to connection with 'glide / Into the grave'. The leaves may be those of *Hesperides* itself; but this would not imply that the poem 'survives ironically'.<sup>5</sup> Herrick has thought death through further Braden (p. 244 n. 4 above); although he tends to neglect the deeper significance of 'Anacreon' discovered in the Renaissance.

<sup>1</sup> T. G. S. Cain, "'Times trans-shifting": Herrick in Meditation' in 'Trust to Good Verses', p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Maddison, *Apollo and the Nine* (1960), p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> Sydney Musgrove, *The Universe of Robert Herrick* (Auckland, 1950), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> See Cain, "'Times trans-shifting"', p. 106 *et pass*.

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Deming, *Ceremony and Art: Robert Herrick's Poetry*, *De Proprietatibus Litterarum*, Ser. Pract. 64 (The Hague and Paris, 1974), p. 101.

than that: poetic leaves may be with posterity 'a while' longer than blossoms; but they too 'glide'. His variations on the theme are endless. 'Divination by a Daffodil' comes to rest comfortably—on 'safely buried'. But 'A meditation for His Mistress' turns to death's prematurity, comparing the coy mistress to various flowers emblematic of love and marriage, and lost before fulfilment: even the violet of true love, 'wither'd, ere you can be set / Within the Virgins Coronet'. All creatures, including 'the maker of this song', share the change of mortality. Nevertheless, these poems of death's trans-shifting are not in the end depressing. The feeling is not fear so much as love of nature's transience, and confidence in the arts that transform it. Love is pervasive. Carol Maddison remarks that Herrick's 'To Primroses fill'd with morning-dew' is 'too tender and emotional . . . to be typically Metaphysical';<sup>1</sup> and that is just. His formal achievement lies rather in a mixture of epigram with elegy in which the latter determines the tone. Everywhere he finds ways to make his brief forms expressive.

The plants that give *Hesperides* much of its continuity take various forms. Those that belong to aetiological myths, miniature myths of origin, are deceptively pretty. They need to be seen in the context of their sequence, which is worthy of Martial. So the blushing 'How Roses came red' is quickly followed by 'How Violets came blew': a colour very much like that of love bruises. Or else the identifications may be fully mythological, like Sappho's floral apron. Or the plant may exemplify frailty, as in 'To Primroses'. Or it becomes very personal: the poet's own fingers are twigs, and the loss of one foreshadows the whole tree's decay. In a sense all the horticultural imagery implies a biblical symbolism: the vegetation is the flesh: plants are what die.<sup>2</sup> But there is also a symbolism of art. The flowers are simultaneously those of a genre-linked metaphor going back to the epigram wreaths of the Greek Anthology. On the strength of this, Herrick is able to present his art as a gardener's: his praises plant people, in an ever-springing Hesperidian garden of the dead. So he makes all his slighter encomia on named individuals thematic. Sir Edward Fish is 'one, / For growth in this my rich Plantation'; Anne Soame resembles flower scents; Master Jincks contrasts with rootless 'bastard slips'; and Susanna Herrick grieves her uncle by

<sup>1</sup> Maddison, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> On Herrick's floral imagery, see Karl Wentersdorf, 'Herrick's Floral Imagery', *Studia Neophilologica* xxxvi (1964), 69–81; R. Berman, 'Herrick's Secular Poetry', *MLR* lii (1971), 20–30.

her likeness to 'Garden-glories'.<sup>1</sup> And just as the good are planted, so the evil are fowl weeds to be cast out. *Hesperides* assimilates the Bible's horticultural types of predestination—the stock of Israel, the true vine, the reprobate fruitless branch, the wheat and tares<sup>2</sup>—into its vision of spiritual death and life as gradual processes, like growth or decay.

Time's 'trans-shifting' or transmutation is also answered by a calendrical order. Herrick elaborates the idea of *Hesperides* as a 'Greenie-Kalendar' like the one imagined in 'To Groves', carved with lovers' names: a poetic liturgy of 'Requiems sung / For saints' in love. The volume's many festivals—its 'May-poles, Hock-carts, Wassails'—form a connecting strand, in fact, of calendrical themes: a georgic structure that shows the influence of Ovid, and of Spenser's 'calendar for every year'. But Herrick is no folklorist. His festivals are exalted celebrations of life, precious occasions for rejoicing in one or another aspect. The calendar in its wholeness was a characteristic and natural form for him to adopt. Some of his very best poems are festival, such as 'Corinna's going a Maying', with its May morning call to love. Pleasure in nature here becomes an 'act of worship';<sup>3</sup> if it is paganism, it is of a sort that could be found in Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Herrick's festivals go far beyond mere jollification: they are occasions for deep sounding and summing up. For example, 'The Hock-Cart or Harvest Home' is by no means content with frisking and feasting, with 'fat beef: / With upper storeys, mutton, veal / And bacon'; although like all Herrick's festive odes it is wonderfully full of quantities of objects and events, and continually refers us outside itself to things observed and preserved in crystalline brevities: the 'Hearth, / Glitt'ring with fire', 'the rough sickle, and crookt sythe',<sup>4</sup> devout countrymen stroking the wheat, and others running about 'with their breeches rent'. After all the ceremonies of 'country art', the poem closes sombrely with a reminder of relentless time. The labourers like the patient ox must soon return to the plough for another year: 'And, you must know, your lords word's true, / Feed him ye must, whose food fills you'. This has been misread as crude jollying exhortation, 'man-management'

<sup>1</sup> On the short encomia, see Avon Jack Murphy in 'Trust to Good Verses', pp. 57f., and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 'Stock of Saints' in H 545, M 199.1. These types had their basis in such biblical passages as Romans 11 and John 15.

<sup>3</sup> Mollenkott in 'Trust to Good Verses', p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> True, 'crookt' was becoming gradus diction (*curva falx*, from *Georgics* i. 508). But the distribution of epithets is exact: the sickle is used on rough terrain; whereas the scythe requires flatter ground for its long sweep.

on behalf of Westmorland. But Herrick throughout mingles address to the labourers with address to the earl himself. (Harvest Home was a festival marked by respect for the labourer, and temporary obliteration of rank.) The final injunction thus applies to Westmorland as well as to the labourers. A powerful communal sense is realized, which extends without sentimentalization even to the ox. Yet Herrick is as plain as any poet of his time about the harshness of the curse of labour.

*Hesperides* also imitates a calendar in the liturgical sense. Herrick can promise a kinswoman his 'Book's Canonization': she will be 'a saint . . . in chief, in this poetic liturgy'. He imagines it as an 'eternal calendar' of saints 'marked . . . for faithful witnesses'. Herrick's communion embraces living and dead saints: another link between the present world and the eternal.<sup>1</sup> And, as we might expect, it embraces secular as well as sacred, poetic as well as religious saints — 'thou Saint Ben, shalt be / Writ in my psalter'.<sup>2</sup> Yet Herrick is by no means indiscriminately universalist. There are many hints of a closed list, always just being made up, always allowing one more gracious exception, one more spontaneous inclusion.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile 'thousands quite / Are lost, and theirs, in everlasting night'. These words occur in a confident poem including Herrick himself among the elect: 'The bound (almost) now of my book I see, / But yet no end of those therein or me'. But the very next poem finds him 'by stars malignant crossed', dependent on Perilla's 'regeneration': 'The life I got I quickly lost'. Herrick's private scheme of predestination may seem just a little unorthodox. But the presumptuous role he assumes is not so much mere levity as witty extension of the commonplace doctrine that poets image the Creator. As *vates* or poet-priest Herrick can in a sense confer life: if the book is true poetry, 'those therein' are poetically immortalized.

Harmonizing well with the Hesperidian calendar is the connecting theme of stellification. Herrick will imagine specially admired addressees as stars, 'sent, / T'ensangle this expansive firmament' (that is, *Hesperides* itself).<sup>4</sup> Anciently and in the Renaissance, the idea of stellification had a wide acceptance, not very easy for us to enter into now.<sup>5</sup> And for poets it had a special value, since it expressed their aspirations to the translunary, unchanging world:

<sup>1</sup> H 510, M 188.4; H 449, M 169.3; H 507, M 188.1.

<sup>2</sup> H 604, M 212.7; cf. S. Phillis and S. Iphis in 'To Groves', H 449, M 169.3.

<sup>3</sup> See Murphy in 'Trust to Good Verses', p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> H 516, M 191.1; cf. H 804, M 267.1; H 146, M 52.2; H 685, M 236.7; etc.

<sup>5</sup> See Isabel E. Rathborne, *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York, 1937), Index, s.v. *Stellification*.

*Brave men can't die*; whose Candid Actions are  
 Writ in the Poets Endlesse-Kalendar:  
 Whose *velome*, and whose *volumne* is the Skie,  
 And the pure Starres the praising Poetrie.

(H 444, M 168.1)

The actions escape mutability in the calendar. True, its 'praising Poetrie' is written on perishable vellum. But its *velum* (with one *l*), or ceiling, resembles the sky, where the pure stars endlessly take up again the shining 'Candid Actions'. Stellification even gets into Herrick's title. For the Hesperides were daughters of Hesperus, and identified with the constellation Pleiades; so that the poems (like the mistresses) are not only flowers and trees, but also stars.<sup>1</sup>

Herrick's poetic liturgy quite often consists of ceremony, real or imagined. This connecting strand has had substantial treatment from Robert Deming and others.<sup>2</sup> But problems remain: these pagan or poetical or syncretistic rituals have a strangely mysterious significance. Some revive ancient Roman ceremonies; suggesting an aesthetic ideal found also in Jonson and in Drayton's *Odes*. Others seem more private. Solemn games, if you will; but solemn in a Renaissance sense, and games in the tradition of *iocosa seriosa*.<sup>3</sup> Ceremonial challenged, then, an intellectual excitement now more often reserved for very different activities. It was regarded as a symbolic language, but also as a means of integration; and so had a part in the repetitive procedures of philosophical alchemy. Moreover, ceremony contains strong feelings within a constraint other than the will: its cooling influence would be valuable in the pursuit of 'cleanly-Wantonnesse'. Many of Herrick's ceremonies have a distinctly erotic ambience: 'To Julia in the Temple', for example, or another 'To Julia', proposing a rite of purification before proceeding to the altar.<sup>4</sup> We may think

<sup>1</sup> G. C. Moore Smith noted in *MLR* ix (1914), 373-4, that in the prefatory poem to Prince Charles, Herrick calls his poems 'my *Morne*, and *Evening Stars*', that is, 'daughters of Hesperus' and perhaps 'poems of youth and of old age'. For the association of the Hesperides with the Pleiades, see Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning* (New York, 1963), p. 396. Allen gives no references; but many could be supplied: e.g. Ioannes I. Pontanus, *Urania*, iii, in *Carminum . . . omnium pars prima* (Basel, 1531), p. 125. Pontanus's *De hortis Hesperidum* may have attracted Herrick's interest.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. A. Leigh Deneef, 'This Poetick Liturgie': Robert Herrick's Ceremonial Mode (Durham, NC, 1974). See the valuable review article by Cain in *EC* xxvi (1976), 156-68.

<sup>3</sup> On which see Harry Berger, 'Pico and Neoplatonist Idealism: Philosophy as Escape', *Centennial Rev.* xiii (1969), 72-81, *cit.* Deming, pp. 30-1.

<sup>4</sup> H 445, M 168.2; H 974, M 303.2.

we can guess what sacrifice calls for a 'quorum' of two. Herrick was well read in Neolatin poetry; so that it is not implausible to relate his rituals to that strange Renaissance tradition in which pagan sacrifice was used as a symbol of purification, not only in erotic associations (as in the *Hypnerotomachia*) but also in funerary contexts.<sup>1</sup> One thing is clear: we have no sense of prurient *double entendre*—as if the ceremonial were merely a figleafed way of speaking about sex. One might as well argue that the poetic mistress is introduced just to make church services more attractive. This is not the only instance of such elusiveness. Herrick uses ceremony almost abstractly, as a procedural basis; as if he left the subject to find itself. Ceremony is the process, so to say, of some of his poetry. Elsewhere, in the more public festival poems and epithalamia, it offers the obvious dispositional solution. Altogether, Herrick's presentation of social life is characteristically ceremonial. This does not mean that it is timid. The ceremonies can even end orgiastically, as in the Clipsby Crew nuptial song, after the bedding, where bed is imaged as a swan, and the couple enjoined to 'Drowne / The night . . . in floods of Downe.' The bridegroom like a thunderbolt will throw the sheet about in 'flakes of snow'.

A remarkable group of ceremonies are the death rites. These can be related to the immortalizing poems: 'the ritual is necessary . . . for providing a link between the mortal and immortal worlds'.<sup>2</sup> It serves to substantiate (if that is the word) the ordered world beyond death. Like Keats (whose affinity with him is remarkable), Herrick keeps pressing towards his transmortal world, until we become uncertain on which side of death the fiction lies. Hesperides was indeed identified with Elysium and the Isles of the Blessed; and the flowers, perfumes, and spices that abound in Herrick recall Renaissance dictionary accounts of the Hesperidian paradise.<sup>3</sup> It was a death-rite poem, 'The Funeral Rites of the Rose', that provoked Leavis's dismissal of Herrick:

The Rose was sick, and smiling di'd;  
And (being to be sanctifi'd)  
About the Bed, there sighing stood  
The sweet, and flowrie Sisterhood.

<sup>1</sup> F. Saxl, 'Pagan Sacrifice in the Italian Renaissance', *JWI* ii (1939), 346–67, *cit.* Deming, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Deming, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., DeWitt T. Starnes and Ernest William Talbert, *Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1955), pp. 308–16, on the ending of *Comus*.

Some hung the head, while some did bring  
 (To wash her) water from the Spring.  
 Some laid her forth, while other wept,  
 But all a solemne Fast there kept.  
 The holy Sisters some among  
 The sacred *Dirge* and *Trentall* sung.  
 But ah! what sweets smelt every where,  
 As Heaven had spent all perfumes there.  
 At last, when prayers for the dead,  
 And Rites were all accomplished;  
 They, weeping, spread a Lawnie Looome,  
 And clos'd her up, as in a Tombe. (H 686, M 237.1)

Leavis missed the 'alert bearing' of Marvell's flowers. In defence, Deming finds authority for the ritual in the ancient Roman burial service. The poem attempts no evasion of death's inevitability: its ceremony is timeless, like the poetic art covering or ornamenting the dying beauty. But to speak of 'a mythic extension of life . . . not provided by Christianity' may be a little misleading. The rose emblemizes human frailty; so that 'being to be sanctified' refers to the purification that began with baptism's token death—'some did bring / (To wash her) water from the spring'.<sup>1</sup> The rite symbolizes, in fact, the lifelong sanctification whereby graces are implanted and sinful affections mortified: a process performed by 'holy sisters', or virtues, who prepare moral 'garments of salvation', putting on immortality and incorruption. Properly understood, the poem is incomparably deeper than Marvell's gallant hyperbole.

A controversial article by Sydney Musgrove sees the main preoccupation of *Hesperides* in its use of alchemic ideas and imagery and terms of art. 'Hesperian garden' appears to have been a code term for alchemy.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, I am not sure that alchemy dominates *Hesperides* quite so much as Musgrove believes; even though it provides a missing context for some obscure poems. The role of the blessed art in Herrick's own art is bound to be problematic. At a time when alchemy was a principal language of the unconscious, his concern may not have been with the *opus* itself, so much as its expressiveness as a symbol of spiritual change.

<sup>1</sup> For the rose emblem, see Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica . . . Commentariorum libri lviii . . . Accesserunt . . . Collectanea* (Frankfort, 1613), lv. i, pp. 638f., 'Imbecillitas humana'; Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Padua, 1630), pp. 277f., 'Fugacità'.

<sup>2</sup> Sydney Musgrove, 'Herrick's Alchemical Vocabulary', *AUMLA* xlvii (1976), 243, citing Jonson, *The Alchemist*, II. i. 101. Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* develops the symbol.

But where is the line to be drawn? The same problem arises with Shakespeare and some other poets; but it is particularly acute, one must admit, with Herrick. The decision often turns on keywords that might be terms of alchemic art. Are they artful metaphors? Or philosophic metaphors, concealing secrets of the art? Or both?

The last possibility is characteristic. For verbal texture of an unusually complex sort is sustained throughout, half justifying the dreadful nickname Herrick shares with Jonson, 'poet of surfaces'. The most extraordinary feature is a reuse of old verbal shapes—drawn, in the case of the classical surfaces, from Martial and Horace and the pseudo-Anacreon—in such a way that *verba* acquire the importance of *res*, and Herrick's successorship seems less an imitation of meaning than a metempsychosis through words.<sup>1</sup> Herrick arguably wrote the most classical poetry of his time. Yet the material he uses with greatest frequency comes from wisdom literature, partly classical (Cato, Horace) but more often biblical, from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Song of Solomon. A good case has been made for thinking the pursuit of wisdom to be Herrick's main theme.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the proverbial element bulks largest; and Solomonic allusion is ubiquitous.

For such reasons, *Hesperides* has come to be thought of as a concerted work sustaining lifelong purposes. Many would now see it as a visionary work, in which lyricism is focused—or refocused—on intimations of eternity. The 'silken twist' given as bracelet to Julia may at first be secular; but it turns out to be a miniature version of the silk and gold 'twist' or noose of martyrdom in Herrick's most Herbertian poem, 'Upon Love'.<sup>3</sup> And so throughout the entire heterocosmic garden. It is designed to lead beyond natural things to the Christian world of *Noble Numbers*—although with a transition so gradual that it may escape notice. Characteristically, *Hesperides* is the (mythological) title of the whole volume, the works 'both humane and divine'; while the Christian part's title partly suggests a secular value.

But this view is not without its difficulties. If *Hesperides* is so serious, what about those highly erotic poems, 150 or so of them, addressed to thirteen mistresses? There seems little safety in these

<sup>1</sup> For a brilliant account of Herrick's treatment of source material, see Gordon Braden, *op. cit.* (p. 244 n. 4 above).

<sup>2</sup> See Heather Asals, 'King Solomon in the Land of the Hesperides', *TSL* xviii (1976), 362–80. More debatably, the same author identifies Julia as Divine Wisdom (*ibid.*, p. 374).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Christ's love-twist, in Henry Vaughan's 'Retirement', *The Works*, ed. L. C. Martin (rev. edn., Oxford, 1957), p. 462: 'My love-twist held thee up. . . .'

numbers. Are they reconcilable with Herrick's (admittedly Ovidian) protestation 'Chaste I lived, without a wife'? Or with the significance of the dragon-guarded Hesperides as an emblem of chastity?<sup>1</sup> The contradiction is not glossed over, but if anything pushed at us. More than once Herrick has the effrontery to take the role of sexual counsellor. This problem used to be regarded as a biographical one: critics discussed how many mistresses Herrick really had, as if a man who kept a tame pig was wild enough for anything. Even now it may not be superfluous to insist that no amours at all can be inferred from these undramatic poems. Even psychological inferences such as might be drawn with Donne will not do with Herrick, whose poetry bears a different relation to actual life. Certainly it would be unwise to jump to conclusions about the immaturity of fantasy material in Herrick—'polymorphous perversity', 'displaced gratifications', 'drawn-out foreplay'—as if in such poems we could expect naturalistic images of mature genital sexuality.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, emotional contents count for something. And by that criterion, Herrick is far more mature than Suckling, say, with his reductive cynicism.

Herrick's numerous mistresses had generic precedents in the Greek Anthology, and more recently in Pontanus and Johannes Secundus. Moreover, he wrote not long after a vogue for abstract mistresses such as Chapman's *Mistress Philosophy*, Shakespeare's *Master Mistress*, and Drayton's *Idea*.<sup>3</sup> In that tradition, the beloved might be left suitably nebulous for introspective meditation. Herrick's mistresses, however, have been identified outright by Miss Achsah Guibbory as personifications of the poems themselves.<sup>4</sup> And there is something in this. 'The bad season makes the Poet sad' finds Herrick complaining that he cannot write because of the political climate: 'Dull to my selfe, and almost dead to these / My many fresh and fragrant Mistresses: / Lost to all Musick now. . . .' Presumably the music stands for lyric composition, with which the mistresses are therefore closely associated. Elsewhere, Herrick often portrays the mistresses as art

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Comus*, 393–5 and Alciati's related Embl. xxii, 'Custodiendas virgines'. The emblem is discussed by C. S. Lewis in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. W. Hooper (Cambridge, 1966), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> See Braden, esp. p. 223 ('What is missing in the *Hesperides* is aggressive, genital, in other words, 'adult' sexuality.); and cf. J. B. Broadbent, *TLS* lxxiv (1975), 836, as well as the anonymous 'Peeping Tom', *TLS* lx (1961), 898.

<sup>3</sup> On the Shakespearian instance, see, e.g., Alvin B. Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician* (New Haven and London, 1979), ch. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See her "'No lust theres like to Poetry': Herrick's Passion for Poetry' in 'Trust to Good Verses', pp. 79–87.

objects, or in terms of nature and art mixed, but with the latter predominating. When Julia's 'Lawnie Filmes' and 'airie silks' tempt him, it is no natural impulse: 'I must confesse, mine eye and heart / Dotes less on Nature, then on Art'. All that criticism of Herrick's 'voyeuristic preference of perception to action'<sup>1</sup> is quite beside the point if the love is of poetry and necessarily contemplative. So too 'The Lilly in a Christal', with its hints on exploiting partial nudity, will not seem coldly sensual once it is understood to be about aesthetic pleasure: about the balance, in fact, of difficulty and rhetorical effectiveness.

The names of Herrick's mistresses, it turns out, amplify the connection with poetry in a decisive way.<sup>2</sup> Several are literary mistresses: Corinna is Ovid's mistress, Julia comes in Johannes's elegies, Perilla in Ovid and Pontanus.<sup>3</sup> An overlapping group are still more directly poetic; but as Muses rather than poems or contents of poems. Sappho and Corinna (Corinna of Tanagra, that is) are actually listed in the Greek Anthology among the 'nine lyric Muses'.<sup>4</sup> And Perilla, Ovid's stepdaughter and herself an epigrammatist, can only be meant as Muse of another favourite genre of Herrick's: Ovid imagines her sitting 'amid the Pierian maidens [*sc.* Muses] she loves'.<sup>5</sup> As for Electra, she was one of the Pleiades or stellified Hesperides.<sup>6</sup> Anna Perenna, another Atlantid, personified the year, and may well be Muse of the georgic or calendrical poems.<sup>7</sup> She was also associated with wine, however, like Oenone: these two mistresses would fitly preside

<sup>1</sup> Braden, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> One would hardly guess so from John T. Shawcross's 'The Names of Herrick's Mistresses in *Hesperides*' ('*Trust to Good Verses*', pp. 89–102), which contrives to miss every one of the associations mentioned below.

<sup>3</sup> Corinna: Ovid, *Amores*, I. v. 9 *et passim*; Julia: Johannes Secundus, *Amores*, I, 'Julia Monobiblos'; Perilla: Pontanus, *Parthenopeus*, I. 31, *Carmina*, ed. J. Oeschger (Bari, 1948), p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Greek Anthology, ix. 26 (included in the Planudean Anthology and so perhaps accessible to Herrick). The information was available from other sources, such as Étienne's *Dictionarium historicum*, s.v. *Corinna* 'quae Lyricorum principem Pindarum quinquies vicisse, et epigrammatum 50 libros edidisse fertur'. Cf. also the hint in Propertius II. iii. 21. Sappho is described as a tenth Muse in Greek Anthology, ix. 571.

<sup>5</sup> *Trist.* III. vii. 1–4: 'inter libros Pieridasque suas'. At vii. 29–30, Ovid advises her to write chastely.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Hesiod, *Astron.* I; Ovid, *Fasti*, IV. 31–2; and Christopher Middleton's popular *The Historie of Heaven* (1596), sig. D 1<sup>b</sup>. Anthea, another of Herrick's mistresses, was also a Hesperid; but I have been unable to find a source from which he might plausibly have learnt this.

<sup>7</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, III. 654–8.

over the poems of intoxication.<sup>1</sup> The ceremonial poems belong to Silvia, as priestess.<sup>2</sup> And other mistresses suit *Hesperides* as a grove or *silva*: Silvia again, obviously; but also Myrrha, who was metamorphosed into a tree.<sup>3</sup> In short, all the mistresses correspond to forms or kinds of poetry—lyric, epigrammatic, elegiac, metamorphic, calendrical. Herrick appears to have rethought the Muses individually, not hesitating to find content for them in his own sources of inspiration.

With this orientation in mind, we begin to see that Herrick meditates his own art throughout in a sustained way. This need not be a great surprise: writing about writing was common enough then. But Herrick's introspection is profound, and correspondingly oblique. Even the poems about sack actually treat poetic inspiration, under the metonymy of drunkenness, a frenzy anciently associated with it—and still today not absolutely incompatible.<sup>4</sup> Thus 'His fare-well to Sack' is a palinode to intoxicated or enthusiastic composition. It renounces spontaneity because of temperamental unfitness for it: Nature has made his brain 'uncapable' of being ruled by inspiration: 'What's done by me / Hereafter, shall smell of the Lamp, not thee'. 'The Vision'—based on the liminal poem of the *Anacreontea*—is also about inspiration:

Me thought I saw (as I did dreame in bed)  
 A crawling Vine about *Anacreon's* head:  
 Flusht was his face; his haire with oyle did shine;  
 And as he spake, his mouth ranne ore with wine.  
 Tipled he was; and tipling lispt withall;  
 And lisping reeld, and reeling like to fall.  
 A young *Enchantresse* close by him did stand  
 Tapping his plump thighes with a *mirtle* wand:  
 She smil'd; he kist; and kissing, cull'd her too;  
 And being cup-shot, more he co'd not doe.  
 For which (me thought) in prittie anger she

<sup>1</sup> In Oenone's case the association was etymological. At Anna Perenna's feast, wassailers were supposed to live as many years as they drank cups of wine: see *Fasti*, iii. 523 ff., and Sir J. G. Frazer's note to the Loeb edition, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> For Silvia (Ilia) as a priestess, see *Aen.* i. 273. When Herrick describes Julia as '*Flaminica Dialis*, or *Queen-Priest*' (H 539, M 196.5), does he recall the Empress Julia Domna (ἡ φιλόσοφος), who had been a priestess?

<sup>3</sup> Ovid, *Met.* x. 489 ff. Sandys interprets Myrrha as an example of love melancholy: see *Ovid's Metamorphosis* (1632), p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> On the four kinds of *furor*, see, e.g., Marsilio Ficino in Plato, *Opera* (Venice, 1571), pp. 98.2, 265.2; Cristoforo Landino, *Dante con lespositione di Christoforo Landino* (Venice, 1564), sig. \*\*3<sup>b</sup>; Richard Wills, *De re poetica* (1573), tr. and ed. Alastair Fowler, Luttrell Soc. xvii (Oxford, 1958), 125.

Snatcht off his Crown, and gave the wreath to me:  
 Since when (me thinks) my braines about doe swim,  
 And I am wilde and wanton like to him.

(H 1017, M 313.1)

The impotent predecessor is not simply the pagan poet, subject to tradition and overgone by Herrick. He is also a vision of Herrick's, a *fictio*, Herrick himself. For this introspective subtlety Herrick would think he had precedent in his original, in the *Anacreontea*, since its vision of Anacreon deposed was attributed to Anacreon himself. Biographical speculation is hardly in order; not even Braden's acute suggestion that the poem confesses the incapacity of Anacreontic eroticism, the 'personal helplessness' inseparable from its dream world.<sup>1</sup> Nor is Herrick merely indulging in a wish-fulfilment fantasy of his master's dislodgement.<sup>2</sup> The Anacreontic Muse confers no laurel crown of fame on Herrick, but only a wreath and potential crown of vine.<sup>3</sup> With this she induces a frenzy of inspiration. Yet at the same time she demands performance: potency in matching the *furor* with poetic realization. And she demands this, it seems, with each new attempt. It is a characteristic meditation on creativity, going deeper than would be easy to equal among Herrick's contemporaries. Many imitated Anacreon; but only he writes like this about doing so.

I must not give the impression that poetry is Herrick's only subject; although he writes about it almost as Wallace Stevens does, recurring to it from other ostensible subjects. In the actual presentation of the mistresses, their association with nature is also striking. Douglas Bush calls Julia 'a divinity of nature'. And indeed *Hesperides* is full of wonder at the phenomenal world. Its love affair is, so to say, with nature as well as with art. In his relations with nature Renaissance man could do little more than look; and Herrick shares the scientist's voyeuristic stance. His fondness for transparent clothes is noticeable: he likes beauties 'half-betrayed by tiffanies'. Nudity would be day; but he has more to say about 'Twilight, or that simpering [i.e. glimmering] dawn, / That roses show, when misted o'er with lawn'. True, 'Clothes do but cheat and cousen us' calls for 'naked simplicities'. But it is promptly answered by 'To Dianeme', whose surprise closure

<sup>1</sup> *The Classics and English Renaissance Poetry*, p. 221; the whole section, pp. 207 ff., is relevant.

<sup>2</sup> As Guibbory thinks: see 'Trust to Good Verses', pp. 85-6.

<sup>3</sup> On the composition of the poetic crown (laurel, myrtle, or ivy; not vine) see Robert J. Clements, *Picta poesis*, *Temi e Testi*, vi (Rome, 1960), 42 ff.; also J. B. Trapp in *JWCI* xxi (1958), 227-55.

implies that nakedness is far from simple. It asks to be shown—and in effect surveys—‘fleshly principalities’: the whole map of love, not omitting ‘that hill’ *mons Veneris*: only to reveal that this revelation is partial, and to be followed by another—‘then let me there withall, / By the ascension of thy lawn, see all’. Is Herrick amplifying the subtlety of an art that almost reveals Nature? or the secrecy of a nature that always has more to reveal? A similar ambiguity informs ‘Upon *Julia’s* Clothes’: critics have debated whether the clothes are on or off, in fact or in fantasy, in Stanza 2. Illusionism of receding nakedness also occurs in an epigram on *Julia’s* skin, that veil ‘clear as the heaven . . . Which so betrayes her blood, as we discover / The blush of cherries, when a Lawn’s cast over’.<sup>1</sup> Again in ‘The Lilly in a Cristal’ the lover of divine art not only looks through clothes; but through the ‘subtile skin’ itself. All these passages, sensuous though they are, imply that earthly beauty, whether of nature or of art, dimly foreshadows another beauty more secret. Most explicitly, the *Julia* of ‘The Transfiguration’ is visibly ‘clothed . . . with uncorrupted light’; although this is only a ‘counterfeit’ or fiction of the divine beauty ‘more admir’dly bright’ that she will have in her heavenly throne.<sup>2</sup>

It is for this reason, and not because he is a proto-Romantic, that Herrick so frequently combines eroticism with beauty of nature. The frequency is greater than modern readers easily appreciate. ‘*Julia’s* Petticoat’, an ‘azure robe . . . Like a *Celestiall Canopie*’ is obviously enough the ‘expansion’ or firmament,<sup>3</sup> quite as much as clothing on a woman’s heaving bosom. But the notorious ‘Upon *Julia’s* Clothes’ also directs our attention to nature:

When as in silks my *Julia* goes,  
Then, then (me thinks) how sweetly flowes  
That liquefaction of her clothes.

Next, when I cast mine eyes and see  
That brave Vibration each way free;  
O how that glittering taketh me! (H 779, M 261.2)

The two words it highlights, prominent by length and rhythm, are both scientific terms; ‘liquefaction’ being a term of art for the physical process of melting, and ‘vibration’ referring to the special movement of celestial orbs whereby they gave out light (‘that

<sup>1</sup> H 416, M 158.1.

<sup>2</sup> H 819, M 270.1; see Mollenkott in ‘*Trust to Good Verses*’, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> H 175, M 66.3. See *OED* s.v. *Expansion* 2.

glittering').<sup>1</sup> The lover could be looking at the heavens. Such imagery is not designed to enhance the human beauty but to illustrate its disclosure of a larger beauty.

Yet Herrick is as far as possible from making erotic images merely signs of spiritual things; as Vaughan sometimes does, or Crashaw. If that were his aim, much less detailed realization would serve. It would not be 'Petticoat' but simply 'clothes'. As it is, the detail is so devastatingly wanton in its precision that some have wondered whether Herrick has not tried to eat his cheesecake and have it. But there is no trace of inconsistency. He never leaves a libertine poem uncorrected, but always makes it cleanly; confronts it with Anteros; adds cooling images of temperance; or introduces a scrupulous conditionality—'sho'd it move / To Life Eternal, I co'd love'.<sup>2</sup> Herrick's sharp wit is hardly that of a self-deceiving man. No doubt in his early poems he was 'too coarse'; but this is refined in the poems of age and in the book as a whole. Can it be that we are enviously oversuspicious of the continuity Herrick was able to find between the natural order and the spiritual?

When Herrick relates microcosm and macrocosm, he tends to do so in a different way from that of the Metaphysical poets with their analogies. He prefers to contain the greater element within the lesser as an implicit suggestion. So he is fond of multiple subjects; which is almost to say, no subject—the apotheosis of epigram's punning compression. 'Delight in Disorder' is neither a sartorial nor a literary-critical poem. It scans the figure downward from the 'Lawne' (perhaps a falling whisk) over the stomacher to the 'tempestuous petticoat' (billowing white displayed by the open dress) and so to the shoe. An erotic expectation raised by the opening, 'A Sweet disorder in the dresse / Kindles in clothes a wantonness' is confirmed by the blazon sequence, the fashionably flowing looseness,<sup>3</sup> and the punning implications (that 'erring lace' hints at a love-lace enthralling more than the stomacher). A series of moral or psychological words—'sweet, wanton, distracted, erring, neglectful, winning, tempestuous,

<sup>1</sup> OED s.v. *Vibrate* vb. 7b. So Vaughan's 'Midnight', *Works*, ed. Martin, p. 421: 'What Emanations, / Quick vibrations / And bright stirs are there? / What thin Ejections, / Cold Affections, / And slow motions here?'

<sup>2</sup> H 175, M 66:3.

<sup>3</sup> H 83, M 28.1; cf., e.g., *Maid's Tragedy*, iv. i. 23, 'flowing carriage'. For the fashion Herrick is following, see C. Willett Cunnington in *The Stuart Period 1603-1714* (1957), pp. 141-3; Anne Hollander, 'The Clothed Image', *NLH* ii. 3 (1971), 482-3. No commentator seems to take up the point that including a stomacher implies maturity and modesty.

wild, and bewitching<sup>1</sup>—indicate unruly qualities characterizing these artful clothes. For Herrick writes in a tradition of poems about art that use metaphors of clothes or feminine qualities. The motto is not so much Bateson's 'clothes are the woman' as Buffon's 'le style est l'homme meme'. The poem is so far from sexual *double entendre* as to be almost the reverse—literary *double entendre*. But Leo Spitzer's insistence on an abstract and universal theme does not go nearly far enough: what Herrick desires is not literary art, but creativity itself.<sup>2</sup> He loves the careless style of the cosmos.

'Delight in Disorder' departs from the tradition in its multiplying of paradoxes—'sweet disorder'; 'wild civility'—to an extent unusual even during the paradox epidemic. These evocations of disorder go further than previous *discordia concors* paradoxes, such as Jonson's 'sweet neglect'; or his Horatian periphrasis for waves, 'that orderly disorder which is common in nature'; or the archetype, Cicero's praise of careful negligence.<sup>3</sup> In some ways, Herrick's are more like later versions of the paradox, in Boileau or Pope. I have in mind particularly Boileau's allegory of the Ode as a half-resisting woman:

gently she resists with feign'd remorse,  
That what she grants may seem to be by force:  
Her generous stile at random oft will part,  
And by a brave disorder [*un beau désordre*] shows her Art.<sup>4</sup>

Herrick also loves an unruly art. But his taste for disorder suggests an aesthetic even less orientated to fixed cosmic order, more open to trans-shifting. His idea of creation is like Cardanus's, in which God compounded contraries according to 'lucid whim'.<sup>5</sup> I have not mentioned a third, more elusive paradox, that of the lawn (or

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry and the English Language* (Oxford, 1934), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Spitzer argues that the qualities are of the clothes only, not the woman: see 'Herrick's "Delight in Disorder"', *Essays on English and American Literature* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 132–8.

<sup>3</sup> *The Silent Woman*, I. i. 100, modelled on *Anthol. Latina*, cdlviii, 'Semper munditias, semper Basilissa, decores' (where, however, the paradox is not verbal); *Masque of Blackness*, 29, from Horace, *Epist.* I. xii. 19; Cicero, *Orator ad M. Brutum*, xxiii. 78. But putting Herrick's poem in this context has an enlivening effect. Thus, 'winning' is a term appropriate to oratory, and the 'winning wave' is a wave of rhetoric as much as of silk. If anything, 'wild civility' is a stronger oxymoron; although it is somewhat softened by an obsolete sense of 'wild', namely 'modest': see Alastair Fowler, *Conceitful Thought* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Soame's and Dryden's transl.: see *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley, I (Oxford, 1958), 340.

<sup>5</sup> Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, pp. 303–4.

is it the shoulders?) 'thrown / Into a fine distraction'. This expresses a psychological contradiction: 'refined confusion', perhaps, or 'pure passion'—something much like cleanly wantonness, in fact. Finally, there is the more implicit opposition between the fire suggested when disorder 'kindles' wantonness and the water suggested by 'Ribbands to flow' and 'winning wave'. This imagistic juxtaposition of the extremes fire and water bears some half-felt relation to a very familiar emblem of temperance. It is as if Herrick ostentatiously hides art in the act of tempering desire.

'Delight in Disorder' partly imitates 'Still to be Neat, still to be Dressed'; but its emphasis is far enough from Jonson's (or Clerimont's) preference for natural simplicity as to be an answer poem. Herrick's point, as in 'Art above Nature, to *Julia*' (where 'wild civility' occurs again), concerns the subtle capacity of art. It is art that reconciles opposites in its deliberate ease, its calculated carelessness. Herrick's Heraclitean conception of creativity, which appears in similar paradoxes elsewhere in *Hesperides*, is bold even for an age when a poet could be thought of as *alter deus*. In one poem in *Noble Numbers*, the idea of the divine poet is realized so specifically as to be easily shocking to those with a less exalted view of art than Herrick's. 'Good Friday: *Rex Tragicus*' not only implies that God is a dramatist, but makes Christ a comic actor, Roscius, forced to act a tragic actor.<sup>1</sup>

Herrick is a poet of reconciliations: a builder of subtle bridges, between secular and sacred, human love and divine, grace and nature, country and city. Reconciliations underlie his apparently modern double subjects, both in the poems about art and in those about love. In the latter, the anamorphism takes the form of moral paradox (cleanly wantonness; wise love). They can seem poems of human love; although with passion refined and ardour cooled by serious recollection. Or they can seem more like enticements to divine love. In the Hesperidian vision, this alternative disappears: 'there is one love' only. The more intense human love is, the more it shadows forth the 'active love' of God. (As Owen Felltham says, 'Whatsoever is rare, and passionate, carries the soul to the thought of Eternity'.)<sup>2</sup> If one had to categorize Herrick's philosophy, I suppose it would be as Christian Epicurean.<sup>3</sup> This view of

<sup>1</sup> See the useful discussion by Don Cameron Allen in *Image and Meaning* (rev. edn.; Baltimore, 1968), pp. 138–51. Herrick may have known that Roscius occasionally took a tragic part.

<sup>2</sup> *Resolves*, i. 14; *cit.* Berman, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> On the source of the 'Epicureanism' in Renaissance Neoplatonism, see Anthony Low, *Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (New York, 1978), pp. 210–17.

Herrick's poems may be found difficult because of their lightness. Surely these delicate miniatures must collapse under such a weight of meaning? But this is to forget that in the seventeenth century trivial images could be far from negligible. In the rhopographic tradition, insignificant things were indeed regularly chosen for juxtaposition to divinity.<sup>1</sup> The tradition reaches a height in Herrick, whose gentle version of it makes the low images lead to their divine counterparts through similarities or contrasts that are only implied. The success of this plan can be gauged by his reputation for paganism, while as Maddison observes he is more didactic than Milton.

Herrick's vision of love, if it is rightly understood, can be seen to inform *Hesperides* throughout. In fact it is hard to think of a comparable *silva* quite its equal for lyric consistency; unless possibly *The Temple*, which is much less various. It is the imaginative integrity throughout a large *œuvre* that makes one think greatness not a disproportionate stature to claim for Herrick. In some individual genres he certainly excels his major contemporaries. It is needless to say this of his songs. But his epithalamia are more original and have more inward touch of human experience than Donne's; his estate poems are more morally articulate than Jonson's; even his invitation to dinner is, in the end, the one we wish to accept. And his odes are the first in the language (except for Spenser's) to challenge comparison with those of the ancients. Perhaps all this may be thought to amount to a *prima facie* case for majority. Scholarship has rescued a good deal of Herrick recently: we have more reconstructed work than our predecessors to base an estimate on. Altogether, the time for a revaluation seems due. Even if we formed an unfavourable view, I think we should now at least have to say that Herrick was unsuccessful as a major poet. Beyond doubt he took on some ambitious, perhaps overambitious, projects of transformation. He handled some foul material that he proved unable to purify or illuminate; the dross remains, obscure or disgusting. And such failures cannot easily be set aside. For *Hesperides* demands to be taken as a whole: that is its glory and its shame—and its awkwardness for the critic. In this it resembles other great efforts of lyric perseverance, such as Tennyson's *In Memoriam* or Mallarmé's uncompleted *Grand Œuvre*.

It would be a mistake to claim too much. Herrick's work has defects corresponding to its unusual qualities. True, its finish—the

<sup>1</sup> Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p. 25, and Index, s.v. *Rhopography* and *Rhyppography*.

control of texture and tone, the rhythmic delicacy both for euphony and for mimetic effects, the orchestration of every poetic element—all this is beyond compare. And beyond criticism: I have not felt it necessary here to defend what all admire. With justice Herrick claimed ‘I begin an art’. And he might have made a taller boast. His pursuit of form simultaneously ordered in different ways (‘to make the Texture lye / Each way smooth and civilly’), has in a sense never been overtaken. Yet there is an unfortunate corollary. Eliot remarked that ‘the polished veneer of Jonson reflects only the lazy reader’s fatuity’;<sup>1</sup> but the smoother Herrick reflects on more than the lazy. His poems can be so finished as to exclude communication altogether. Too deep a stream covers the amber: too thick a glass surrounds the grapes: too much crystal entombs the lily: the sense is too much juggled with. But having said this, I should add that few poets repay interpretative and particularly lexical study as Herrick does. When such studies are carried further, then his reputation will surely be further enhanced.

In a time of broken traditions, Herrick seems to speak for continuity and the timelessness of art, constantly changing, ever-renewed. In a century when many poets were shouting, his was a quiet but carrying voice. His inwardness, beyond mere wit or brilliance, is of rare and lasting value. Much will depend on how he is related lineally. Concentrating on the Metaphysical antecedents of modernism, we shall hardly appreciate Herrick’s relevance. But if the view is enlarged to take in a lineage descending from Spenser and Shakespeare to Keats and Wallace Stevens—poets of very broad interests who were nevertheless concerned with the reality of fiction—then a better sense of his value may be arrived at. Herrick considered himself a son of Ben; but he was also a godson, as it were, of Spenser. And it is instructive to compare him to Milton, who also died in 1674. The scale of art contrasts; but its authority is the same, and its capacity to endure.

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Essays* (rev. edn., 1951), p. 148.