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Reforming *The Temple*: Recent Criticism of George Herbert

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Heather A. R. Asals. *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp. 145.

Barbara Leah Harman. *Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982. Pp. 225.

Richard Strier. *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. 277.

Diana Benet. *Secretary of Praise: The Poetic Vocation of George Herbert*. Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1984. Pp. 207.

Chana Bloch. *Spelling The Word: George Herbert and the Bible*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985. Pp. 330.

Herbert's prophetic remark in "The Church Militant" that "Religion stands on tip-toe in our land, / Readie to passe to the *American* strand" might be disputable as an historical proposition, but it seems a very good gloss on the westward direction of the critical fortunes of the poet himself. By all counts, George Herbert has become a North American enterprise, even, shocking to say, something of an American success story. Rediscovered in the early 1950s, he has attracted an unusually high percentage of intelligent readers, many of whom have played or are now playing vital roles in the reinterpretation of Renaissance and modern texts. There seems also little indication that critical enthusiasm for his work is slackening. As the Herbert "revival" enters into its fourth decade, Helen

Vendler's opinion that the author of *The Temple* has succeeded Donne as the new Monarch of Wit is certainly an acceptable topic for those who wish to debate the issue.

The rediscovery of Herbert, in contrast to Donne, has been a gradual affair. It divides roughly into three phases, with the five books under review here constituting a third generation of readers. The first, in effect, refined and expanded upon Coleridge's perception, itself an expanding proposition, that Herbert

> is a true poet, but a poet *sui generis*, the merits of whose poems will never be felt without a sympathy with the mind and character of the man. To appreciate this volume, it is not enough that the reader possesses a cultivated judgment, classical taste, or even poetic sensibility, unless he be likewise a *Christian*, and both a zealous and an orthodox, both a devout and a *devotional* Christian. But even this will not quite suffice. He must be an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church, and from habit, conviction, and a constitutional predisposition to ceremoniousness, in piety as in manners, find her forms and ordinances aids of religion, not sources of formality; for religion is the element in which he lives, and the region in which he moves.

The studies of Rosemond Tuve (1952) and Louis Martz (1954), in the first phase, sought to establish the religious region in which Herbert's poetry moved, which they located, respectively, in the medieval liturgical church and Salesian manuals for meditation, while Joseph Summers' less specialized book (1954) seemed the very incarnation of Coleridge's ideal reader. Combining biographical knowledge of the man with a civilized appreciation of the poetry, it underscored, as did Tuve and Martz, the forms and ordinances of religion but without ignoring the Calvinistic implications of Herbert's theology. The second phase coincided with the triumph of New Criticism. The works of Mary Ellen Rickey (1966), Arnold Stein (1968), Coburn Freer (1972), Stanley Fish (1972, 1978), and Helen Vendler (1975) largely eschewed doctrinal and religious questions in favor of analyzing textual complexities and rhetorical strategies. For this group, Herbert became preeminently a poet *sui generis*.

This scheme can hardly pretend to respect the intricacies and merits of the individual studies and the varied readings each sanctions; nor does it even begin to account for two of the more important pressures influencing the re-assessment of Renaissance

literature: the emergence of Protestantism as a hermeneutic and the increasing, and some would say alien, appearance of post-structuralist methodologies. But it can indicate at a glance both the critical burden placed on succeeding Herbert scholars and, in conjunction with these recent interpretative developments, the necessarily heterogeneous make-up of this third generation of readers as each seeks to stake out his or her particular territory. With this group, *The Temple* seems more like the hall in Appleton House, changing shape with the separate entrance of each reader.

Heather Asals' *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God* is written very much in response to the second generation of Herbert critics; their concentration on poetics, she views, denies Herbert's language its ontological status. Her affiliations are strongly with Tuve and Summers, and her ambition—one is tempted to say her mission—is to reforge the link between Herbert's theology and poetry in a way that simultaneously respects the poet's verbal sophistication and reclaims him as an "Anglican" or even "high Anglican." To accomplish this task, she finds historical justification in the early seventeenth century for elevating the pun to the level of holy equivocation:

> What we need to understand before progressing any further, then, is that equivocation seems to have been an acceptable way of predicating the divine in seventeenth-century England: it replaced analogy, and it remained, for a while, anyway, a viable way of predicating the Being that is in God. Once we have accepted that fact, we are relieved and released into total enjoyment of Herbert's poetry, for we understand that it is *he*, the priest in "The Church" (not his reader), who *breaks* the word and letter to expose the many which is one. This, finally, is transcendent language: the *one* word with *many* meanings, the *one* which contains *all*. (p. 12)

Backed by quotations from Ussher and Baxter, Asals proceeds to identify ("decline") in five chapters the different kinds of equivocation operating in Herbert's poetry. The first, "The Chirograph: Liturgy and Theology"—one gets used to the abstractions after awhile—describes how the representation of writing in *The Temple* is continually linked with the blood of the sacrifice, an equation that endows the poem with "ontological significance" and, by extension, makes the whole volume "a meaningful re-enactment of the primordial meaning of Good Friday" (p. 18). The

second, "The Sacramental Voice: Distance Related," recollects a number of arguments from her important essay, "The Voice of George Herbert's 'The Church'" (*ELH* 36 [1969], 511-28). Here, the emphasis is on the "logical relation" that figures in the poetry and in contemporary discussions of the Eucharist, and how poetry, in reintegrating the many into a celebration of the one, performs a function analogous to the sacraments. The third chapter, making the perhaps inevitable voyage to Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, turns on the distinction between use and enjoyment. *The Temple* uses language equivocally in order to lead others to the proper enjoyment of God: "But it is that which while I use / I am with thee" ("The Quidditie"). The fourth chapter, "Wisdom: the Seam and the Wine," outlines the ways in which Wisdom, the second person of the Trinity, is predicated through various Solomonic devices—vanity topoi recollecting Ecclesiastes and allusions to the Song of Songs. The final chapter then concludes with an account of the proper place of worship and how all writing in *The Temple* originates with the Anglican Church: "Beautie in thee takes up her place, / And dates her letters from thy face, / When she doth write" ("The British Church").

Mixed into these chapters—I do not find them forming discrete units of thought except in the most academic way—are some valuable remarks on Puritan and Anglican controversies, some persuasive, local observations about the function of liturgy, and some suggestive comments on Patristical views of the three books attributed to Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Canticles. But this is to praise the book largely for what it accomplishes in passing, not by design. On the whole, *Equivocal Predication* is a work of dark instruction. It was clearly a difficult book to write; the author alludes several times to the special courage needed to write on Herbert, and one feels that these are not self-serving apologies. It is also a difficult book to read. In the preface, Asals warns the reader about the need to have a copy of *The Temple* before him since her method is to move rapidly from poem to poem, but the warning is finally gratuitous. Allusions to Herbert, especially as the book progresses, accrue in vast swirls, often parenthetically embedded in the author's prose, sometimes mysteriously italicized, and frequently without title. Despite the author's wish, stated in the Afterword, for a "calculus of Herbert criticism," and despite her continual emphasis on the importance of logical relation in Herbert's poetry, *Equivocal Predication* belongs, finally, to the genre of learned rhapsody. With its Introduction subtitled "Recognitions" and the Afterword recording the author's mental

journey "to the altar at Bemerton and the remains that lie beneath the Chancel," the book records a deeply committed, intelligent, but highly personal reading of George Herbert.

If Asals' first warning betrays some of the formal difficulties one will encounter, her second, that the reader accept for the time being "Herbert's brand of Christianity as his own," indicates some of the conceptual problems at the heart of this book. Notwithstanding that her request is easier made than obeyed (it begs the question of exactly what is Herbert's brand of Christianity), there is the related problem of how to demonstrate ontologically motivated language achieving a "Real Presence" comparable to high-church eucharistic doctrine. One does not have to believe that all writing inscribes its own absence in order to wonder exactly how "in the final analysis, Herbert's verbal icon *works* as an ontological bridge, re-spelling the universe, and re-integrating the individuating language (which defines things separately) into oneness which is the Being of God" (p. 29, my italics). This is the often repeated proposition to which I find it easier to assent, in a vague Coleridgean way, than to see demonstrated. Despite discussions about logical relation I keep wanting a middle term adequate to describing how an effect is accomplished. Frequently gnomic assertions keep yielding equally gnomic conclusions:

> Condensed meaning, the figure of the end, is the responsibility of the poet instructed by the Wisdom of Canticles to gather honey from roses. Like the Horatian bee who gathers and distils in labour, Herbert's poet must suck and express the extract of the best of time to make a presentable abridgment at the end. "All things are busie; onely I / *Neither bring honey with the bees*, / Nor flowres to make that," Herbert complains in "Employment (I)." The consequences are plain enough: "*I am no link in thy great chain*." The ontological integrity of the universe is dependent on the "Businesse" and "Employment" of poetry and the "sweets compacted" there in Epitome, contracting person, time, and place. (pp. 89-90)

As happens throughout the book, one quotation is used here to gloss another, but I am not always sure how they explicate or "relate" to the opening proposition. One can see the process of association operating here: from the metaphoric "honey from roses," she moves to the Horatian bee, to the flower imagery in

"Employment," etc.; but how does the poem serve as an illustration of "condensed meaning, the figure of the end"? And how can "the ontological integrity of the universe [be] dependent on the 'Business' and 'Employment' of poetry" when the poet in "Employment" is making just the opposite point? The chain is there, he just does not feel part of it.

It is this kind of substitution of metaphoric for analytic discourse that makes this a troubling book. It also strikes me that in attempting to recover a form of historical discourse possibly relevant to Herbert, the author ought to be more conscious of her mediating responsibilities:

> Logically, synecdoche (whether grammatical, temporal, ecclesiastical, and/or sacramental) is a form of *relation* which draws together, into one another and as the other, the part and the whole. As Herbert uses it, synecdoche is sacramental, for it obtains not only a "significant" but an "obsignant" relation between the part and the whole, "sealing and exhibiting unto us the Truth of Gods promise" [Thomas Cestren, *Defence of the Innocencie*, p. 54] in that whole. The "sugred strange delight" both comes into and takes into; and man's "partial" speech is made, thereby, the sacred "traffick" and "commerce" of "The Odour." The words "*My Master*" bear the "sweet content" of the whole of which the words "*My servant*" are a part (by way of *relation*, as "father" and "son"): "For when *My Master*, which alone is sweet, / And ev'n in my unworthinesse pleasing, / *Shall call and meet, My servant*. . . . / That call is but the breathing of the sweet." Synecdoche progresses into the totality of synaesthetic experience ("This broth of smells") when it is understood as a relation, "*not changed in substance, but in use*; as it is in other *Relations*": "What cordials make this curious broth." (p. 75)

Although there are moments of undeniable suggestion in *Equivocal Predication*, Herbert seems, ironically enough, if not hermetically sealed within a private language, at least very much of a figure within a private critical consciousness.

Diana Benet's *Secretary of Praise: The Poetic Vocation of George Herbert* is also about Herbert's way to God, and it, too, is

indebted to Summers and Tuve, especially to the latter's "Herbert and Caritas." Benet attempts a reading of *The Temple* in light of the ways that grace and charity figure in shaping different "sequences," the most important of which, in her view, concentrates on the poet's acceptance of his "vocation." Her book bears some similarity of purpose to Robert Shaw's *The Call of God: The Theme of Vocation in the Poetry of Donne and Herbert* (1981), but she generally avoids the word "calling," presumably because of its more Calvinistic associations. For Benet, as with Lucio in *Measure for Measure*, "grace is grace, despite all controversy":

> grace is available to each member of the Christian community in the same ways that it is accessible to the speaker of the poems. The universal availability of grace is a corollary of heavenly charity: throughout divine history and in the present instant, the innumerable manifestations of God's love aim at all of his people. (p. 32)

Herbert is but one of many, *The Temple* a house for Everyman. Objecting to Helen Vendler's overly private evaluation of Herbert, Benet wishes to communalize the poet's experience, not by identifying broader liturgical patterns in the verse, but by the Bunyanesque tactic of re-naming the speaker as "the Christian."

As Benet seeks to universalize the experience of grace for the reader, so she wishes to particularize its meaning for the poet who also became a priest. In what is the major emphasis of the book, she argues, or seems to argue, a biographical connection between Herbert's apparently perplexing delay in his decision to enter the priesthood, as observed by both Walton and Amy Charles, and the representation of vocational hesitations found in *The Temple*. I say "seems" because it is unclear just how these poems are related to Herbert's life. The opening chapter announces that the vocational sequence has "a direct relevance to Herbert's life" (p. 2). We learn later that "as biographical material, the poems can at best give us some insight into the complexities inherent in the choice of vocation for a man like Herbert. The poet offers his reader a spiritual autobiography designed and depersonalized by the values and demands of his instructive art" (pp. 102-03). We are then told in the final chapter that "the reading of the employment sequence has noted the evident similarities between Herbert and the poem's speaker, but has not blurred, I hope, the distinction between the author and the speaker he created. It is not offered as biography"

p. 196). In the transition from "direct relevance" to "some insight" to "evident similarity," to the disclaimer that the book is not "offered as biography," it seems that the distinction between author and speaker is, if not in fact blurred, continually abused. The poems are valued because they tell us "something" about Herbert, but it is a "something" which bears only "some" relationship to the author. The "something" seems to be a degree of vocational uncertainty reflected by both author and speaker, a coincidence reinforced by the late appearance of "The Priesthood" in *The Temple*. "But since it is impossible to know how closely the experiences of the speaker parallel Herbert's own, these interpretations amount only to a theory" (p. 198).

The general vagueness of critical purpose gives rise to other methodological problems that appear throughout the book. In order to demonstrate the importance of grace and charity in *The Temple* and their general connection to the author's sense of vocation, Benet elects to talk about poems almost exclusively in terms of their relationship to each other: as being either title-linked, or part of a group, or in "sequences." On the basis of the common reference in their titles, for instance, she pairs "Mans medley" with "Josephs coat"; another combination is "The Glimpse" and "The Glance." On a larger scale, she groups seven poems, "Nature," "The Temper (II)," "Mattens," "Man," "Giddinesse," "The Pulley," and "The Priesthood," as depicting the idea of God as creator or artist. And in the most ambitious application of this approach, she isolates a twenty-three poem "sequence" on employment. Although her readings obey the general order in which the poems appear in *The Temple* ("Josephs coat" is represented as fulfilling certain elements missing from "Mans medley"), the poems analyzed as "groups" or "sequences" are not necessarily contiguous in arrangement, as is, say, the *sequence* on the Passion that runs from "The Altar" to "Easter-wings." There exists apparently no practical limit to the number of "sequences" one can discover in *The Temple*, just as there is only an exponential limitation to the number of poems that for some reason can be read in combination. Indeed, poems from one "sequence" are allowed to be part of another. Only the presence of some controlling, or not so controlling, theme, and the edification of the reader over time seem to be important.

Not surprisingly, the view that emerges of *The Temple* is neither sharply etched nor persuasively articulated. Linked poems keep

yielding commonplaces, which cannot be invigorated by the admission of their being commonplaces: "What Herbert suggests about joy and grief is not original, and his preoccupation with them is not unusual" (p. 79), Benet concludes after an eight-page discussion of paired poems. The account of the seven poems on the Creator-artist theme ends in a similar decrescendo: "There is nothing extraordinary (in regard to the Christian tradition) to be gathered from the Creator-artist poems" (p. 96). One waits in vain for a "but" clause that might turn these observations around, but in this portion of the study, the typical Christian, with "disanimated [sic] resignation" (p. 71), keeps staring down the exceptional poet.

As for the twenty-three poem "sequence" on vocation, the discussion is not entirely free of C. S. Lewis' strictures against reading sonnets for their "story": "If you arrange things to make a story, then a story will emerge" (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 1954; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973, p. 328). Admitting that the selection process can be an arbitrary act, Benet nonetheless concludes that if the reader wishes to trace a pattern, he must commit "himself to reading a multifaceted and multi-referential poem in a somewhat restricted way" (pp. 105-06). "*Somewhat* restricted" is the key here, just as "some insight" was the key to the issue involving "biographical relevance." The rules regarding admission into the employment "sequence" are never made very clear. Titles will not do since Herbert designated only two poems on employment in this way. References to employment itself within the text also do not count since Benet chooses to exclude a poem like "The Odour" in spite of its ringing conclusion: "And so this new commerce and sweet / Should all my life employ and busie me." And though one would think that "The Windows," "The Collar," and "The Call" might naturally warrant consideration, if not in fact admission, such is not the case. The stated criterion is, rather, the "recurring concern with practical activity, productivity or usefulness" (p. 104).

What exactly is meant by "practical activity," however, remains elusive. It apparently does not mean the practice of writing poetry ("Jordan [I and II]," "A true Hymn," and "The Forerunners" are outside the fold), even though Herbert apparently considered the practical, didactic, and useful function of his verse as the single reason for preserving it. And though one can see why poems like "Affliction (I" or "Obedience" meet this definition—the first met Walton's long ago—the reason for including "Life" seems to rest solely on a gloss supplied by George Ryley: "It's not of so

much moment *how long*, as *how well* we live. they y^{t} Live usefully, will dye Sweetly; & y^{e} Sooner the Better" (p. 145). With or without Ryley, the use of "usefully" in this limited sense should also be extended at least to "Church-monuments" and "Mortification." And if we accept the more general sense of "useful," suggesting a didactic motive encouraging the reader to live a pious life, it would be hard to think of many poems in *The Temple* that might not, for one reason or another, fit into this category. Even if we allow a definition of "sequence" that the dictionary does not, this group of twenty-three does not form a self-evident gloss on Herbert's vocational movements. As with *Secretary of Praise* as a whole, it provides us with "some insight."

Very different from either of these works, in both method and argument, is Richard Strier's *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry*. Strier's critical allegiances are to the second generation of interpreters, particularly Stein and Fish, but like the first generation, though with a different "British Church" in mind, he wants to ground his readings in intellectual history, in this case Reformist theology with its emphatic belief in justification by faith. Strier's Herbert is very much the Genevan, or more properly, the Lutheran Herbert, the Herbert whom Richard Baxter praised by saying, "*Heart-work* and *Heaven-work* make up his Book" (p. 174). Although the opposition between Rome and Geneva is only an implicit dialectic in his study, there is no question that Strier seeks to combat counter-reformationist views of Herbert that, in his mind, have valued form over content, Caritas over Agape, Augustine over Luther, Hooker over Sibbes, a sacramental version of *The Temple* as a collective voice over a private experiential view of the individual's response to Christ. Strier's, however, is not a balancing gesture; this would devolve into the old (and apparently critically recherché) view of Herbert as a member of the *via media*. As he remarks at the outset:

> Justification by faith alone is an extraordinarily rich and powerful theological doctrine, one that means to transform the religious consciousness. Fully accepted, it cannot exist in isolation or as one among many others. It demands a central and commanding role; all other doctrines and positions must derive their energy from it. (p. xii)

Fully accepted, his Protestant Herbert must also, in effect, assume priority over all others: it must be the "commanding" Herbert, at

least in so far as he and we agree, with Tuve, that "Herbert is a theologian and as he writes remains one" (*Essays by Rosemond Tuve: Spenser, Herbert, Milton*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970], p. 174).

The eight chapters that make up *Love Known* all concentrate on how Herbert assimilated and continued fundamental doctrines of the early reformists. The opening chapter, "Dust and Sin: The Denial of Merit," describes Herbert's recognition that man can do nothing on his own to merit salvation, a recognition of helplessness that leads the poet to characterize God in terms of power and love—"absolute power in the service of absolute love" (p. 5). The chapter also seems designed to discourage, at the outset, any cherished notions of Herbert as the sweet singer of Bemerton. Empson's dark cricket still chirps, especially for those opposing Tuve. If God is power and love, then only variants of "horror" will do in describing the feelings Herbert expresses over man's rejection of God, a "horror" that in turn gives way to making us "feel the special strangeness of a love that is indifferent to the hostility of its object" (p. 17). The second chapter then deepens these perceptions by investigating how "the theological attack on reason," promulgated by Luther, "pervades Herbert's poetry" (p. 31). If there is overlap here with Stanley Fish in *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, the danger is turned to advantage in the third chapter, "Interlude: Theology or Philosophy?" In a *Critical-Inquiry*-style encounter (the sense of the chapter as a "set piece" is signalled by the reference to "interlude") Strier refutes Fish's readings of doctrinally sensitive poems like "The Holdfast" and "Love (III)" by insisting on the need to interpret them in the context of Reformation ideas of grace. Theology, in other words, wins out over philosophy.

Since Strier's aim is to place Herbert at the theological core of the Reformation as originally motivated by Luther and the "early reformers" (the latter is a blanket phrase that reappears throughout the study), he seeks to illuminate this center in part through references to Herbert's contemporaries. In a move that should please moderate and high-church readers of Herbert, Chapter 4 describes how the poet's belief in the irresistibility of grace prevents him from subscribing to what Perry Miller saw "as the subversively rationalistic elements in the marrow of Puritan divinity" (p. 86)—the belief that, through the Covenant God made with man, man can strike a bargain with God. The remainder of the study, then, presses inward. The Herbert who emerges in Chapters 5-8, though still apparently in line with Luther, is sketched in ways that suggest

why he was read approvingly by Baxter and how he might be linked with more radical enthusiasts like George Fox and William Dell. The chapters proceed in a leftward direction, "The New Life: Conversion" (5), "The Heart Alone: Inwardness and Individualism" (6), "The Heart's Privileges: Emotion" (7), before concluding with "The Limits of Experience" (8).

That *Love Known* is of major importance to Herbert studies seems to me indisputable. As the first thorough assessment of him as a Protestant poet, it amplifies, with no loss of precision, the more specialized critiques of Herbert's Catholicism by Ilona Bell, among others, ("Setting Foot into Divinity: George Herbert and the English Reformation," *MLQ* 38 [1977], 219-41), and it supplements, with no less vigor, the broader revisionist views of Barbara Lewalski in *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (1979). But its merits, while illuminated by current critical controversies, are not limited by them. Strier is a rigorous reader of Herbert. His is a discriminating mind, strengthened by an appetite for argument and a drive for completeness. He knows the canon extremely well; he shows an unremitting concern for the text; and he writes lucid and forceful prose. Indeed, if I were to single out one virtue from which the rest spring, it would be the author's clarity of exposition. Even in the most subtle of discussions, there is rarely any doubt about what he is seeing in Herbert. For this reason among others I found particularly acute his readings of "Sepulchre," "Redemption," "Love (III)," "The Holdfast," "Justice (II)," and "The Collar"; and though I read a number of poems differently (more below), I remember being altogether surprised by his description—not the subsequent analysis—of only one poem: "'The Forerunners' is a great poem about feeling unable, through old age, to write great poems" (p. 208). A great poem, yes. But a great poem about feeling unable to write a great poem? If the study has a rhetorical danger, it stems from the author's desire for completeness, "not in the sense of definitive but in the sense of dealing with whole poems in a relatively systematic way" (p. xii). "Relatively systematic" means, whenever a poem is introduced, attending to its argument from the first to the last line. After one hundred pages or so, I became convinced that Marvell's Cromwell, marching indefatigably on, had been reincarnated in Chicago.

That this is the "commanding" Herbert is more open to question. On finishing *Love Known*, I was thoroughly persuaded of its principal claim: "how rich and fruitful a context the main positions and emphases of Reformation theology provide for Herbert's

poetry" (p. 253). Poem after poem yield their doctrinal meaning through Strier's patient analysis. But I am not sure that the book has so much *changed* my reading of "one of the greatest masters of the lyric poem in English" (dust-jacket blurb) as considerably *deepened* the theological portion of Herbert that Summers had initially acknowledged in describing the Calvinist strands of the poet's religion. Because Strier's focus is almost exclusively on argument—theological content—he rarely addresses or, when he does, respects the issue of poetic form so conspicuous in *The Temple*, with the result that Reformation doctrine can assume an exaggerated and, in some instances, even simplifying role in the interpretations that emerge.

To begin with, it might be worth considering a remark that Strier does not—Herbert's sole and rather unspectacular reference to the Reformation in "The Church Militant": "And the late reformation never durst / Compare with ancient times and purer yeares" (ll. 226-27). Of course, it can be argued, with Hutchinson and others, that the poem is an early one and therefore does not necessarily represent Herbert's "mature" thoughts on the purifying significance of the Reformation. It might also be argued that the negligible role assigned to the Reformation is simply in keeping with the satirical and apocalyptic motives of the poem. (Strier himself, however, sufficiently values the anti-Papal sentiment in the poem to use it as a guide to reading "The British Church"; see his "History, Criticism, and Herbert: A Polemical Note," *PLL* 17 [1981], 347-52.) And it might be further argued that Herbert could have felt unzealous about the Reformation while still fully accepting its central doctrine of justification by faith. But at the very least ought not the poem to raise the question of how fully? Or to rephrase the question in terms of the issue as presented in the book: Must "all other doctrines and positions . . . derive their energy from it"? Doctrines perhaps, but what about the vaguely stated "positions"? Does this include formal aids, and are these to be viewed as subordinated to the point of being denied much real significance? Are we to assume that in Herbert "justification by faith" is synonymous with the more militant slogan "justification by faith *alone*"? Strier slides rather casually from one to the other, but the difference was important to Herbert's contemporaries, as Browne's reference in *Religio Medici*, I. 60 suggests: "Insolent zeales that do decry good workes and rely onely upon faith, take not away merit." ("Onely" was added in 1643.) What I am suggesting, of course, is that in following out the logic of

Luther's doctrine, Strier, obviously sympathetic to "radical" thought and helped by modern theologians, has presented some of the "positions" with a greater clarity, vigor, and emphasis on subordination than they might have appeared to Herbert and do appear in his poetry. We should remember, after all, that Herbert did write in "Love-Joy" that the "J and C" figuring Jesus Christ are joy and charity—Caritas not Agape.

The consequences of this precisionist approach are not severe. In almost every other way, one is grateful for Strier's lucidity, but I do find myself resisting a number of readings, especially in the latter portion of the book, where the move "inward" occurs and the pressure on outer forms to collapse is greatest. Getting around the final rhyme of "Deniall," for example, represents a small but sticky challenge. In opposition to "the reigning view . . . that 'the form of the final prayer indicates that its request has already been answered,'" Strier, following Vendler's lead for one of the few times, gives a lengthy explanation of why this account cannot be so:

> The mending envisioned is in the future; the "may" of the penultimate line governs "mend" as well as "chime." What this means is that "my ryme" in the final line *cannot* refer to itself. The poet is asking that God do something to him analogous to what he has done in the poem—but not identical with it. "My ryme" in the final line is metaphorical and existential; it refers to a state of harmony ("chiming") between God's will and the poet's ("They and my minde"). The poet cannot, in this sense, mend his "rhyme" himself. He cannot mend his spiritual state by mending his representation of it. For Herbert truly to have thought he could would make the poem in effect a magical ritual working *ex opere operato*; for Herbert to have pretended to think this would make the poem the "piece of arbitrary wit" that Stein sees. Only by taking "my ryme" *not* to refer to verbal rhyme can the poem be saved from these charges. (pp. 190-91)

This seems a bit desperate. Had Herbert really been worried about the shamanistic suggestions embodied in a reflexive reading of "my ryme," as Strier states, then surely the simple solution would have been for him to have avoided even using "ryme" and to have ended

the poem with something like "verse." He certainly had ample precedent for breaking rhyme in the previous five stanzas: this manuever would also have guaranteed the point Strier is at odds to make—that "the mending envisioned is in the future." But the ambiguity is obviously something Herbert was willing to risk. "My ryme" survives in the Williams manuscript of "Deniall," and the few changes the poet made on his way to final copy indicate that he worked only to strengthen, not to diminish, our sense of coincidence.

Other poems, too, fall prey to relentlessly "precise" readings. Strier's insistence that "The Altar" is "artistically complex *because* it is religiously 'low'" (p. 191) rests on the questionable assertion that the closing reference to "this *Altar*" in "O let thy blessed *Sacrifice* be mine / And sanctifie this *Altar* to be thine" refers "away from the poem and back to the internal 'broken altar' . . . The final line puts human art in its place by decisively turning away from it just as it attains its perfection" (p. 195). As with "Deniall," this distinction is easier to maintain in theory than in practice. Given the hieroglyphic nature of the poem, the only way for the reader to delimit the reference would be literally to close his eyes in the process of reading. He might, however, be tempted to do so if he accepts Rudolf Otto's portentous gloss on Exodus 20:25 as appropriate to the tone of lines 3-4 ("Whose parts are as thy hand did frame, / No workmans tool hath touch'd the same"). "In this rather terrifying context," Strier remarks, "filled, as Rudolf Otto would say, with a numinous dread of pollution, Herbert could hardly be confusing or equating his art with God's" (p. 193). "Confusing" no, equating perhaps. If we play down "numinous dread of pollution" with the familiar gloss from 2 Corinthians 3:3 (God writes, "not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart"), then the links between human and divine acts in this poem need not be completely sundered.

Two other instances will have to suffice to show how the book cannot resist overstatement. "'The Windows,'" remarks Strier, "which follows 'The Church-floore' and presents preachers enabled by God to enact their messages as the true 'stained glass' of the church, could have been written by an iconoclast" (p. 150). If Auden's high-church proposition that the poem suggests how "a stained-glass window could be of more spiritual help than a sermon" is unacceptably simplistic (see Judy Z. Kronenfeld, "Probing the Relation between Poetry and Ideology: Herbert's 'The Windows,'" *JDJ* 2 [1983], 55-80), so, too, is a view that ignores

the complex ways in which "Doctrine and life, colours and light" intermingle in that poem. As for "A true Hymne"—that inevitable battleground for different theologically informed readings of Herbert—I resist the suggestion that the poem "redefines the true or beautiful or proper hymn" (p. 203) in quite the wholesale way indicated. Herbert does use the indefinite article in the title. And the question the second stanza "obviously raises—'to whom does a hymn or psalm that is "truly said" afford the sense of fineness in question'"—receives at best a partial answer if we assume, as Strier does, that the pronoun in line 11 ("He who craves all the minde," etc.) "unquestionably refers to God." If so, it is a God who misreads Luke 10:27 and craves everything but man's heart.

It is not enough to say, in the usual reviewing phrase, that *Love Known* will not escape controversy. It is made of controversy. It takes its stand on "a doctrine born in controversy, and it is precisely in the storm center of controversy that it has reappeared in the history of Western Christianity" (Wayne Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* [New York: Norton, 1972], p. 216). Strier also never ducks a battle. He roughs up more than a few critics, and if one can bet on anything in this profession, he will be roughed up by some in return. But the book will and deserves to command attention. Within limits, the hedgehog's "trick"—to borrow Strier's own example—is a good one.

About Barbara Harman's "trick" I am less sure, or rather, I am more aware of her "trick" as "trick," something of which her habitually self-conscious intellect would presumably approve. This is very much a think-tank Herbert. Written for the worthy few, many of whom receive more than generous acknowledgement, it is heavily freighted with its own theoretical awareness and sense of "affiliation." Moving through it is a bit like being the pilgrim in Dante's *Commedia*. Amid the intimidating clucking of "of courses," "preciselys" (four on p. 120 alone, to be precise), and "not only . . . but also" constructions, one has the jellied sense of travelling one step backward for every two forward in proceeding through its many tiers of distinctions. Which part of the *Commedia* depends, of course, on your critical affiliations. I began in Limbo but never got to Purgatory.

Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry borrows the resonant first part of its title from George Herbert Palmer's preface to his 1905 edition of his namesake (the reflexive apparatus of her study is already at work), in which he remarks: "I could not die in peace, if I did not raise a

costly monument to his beneficent memory." This bit of editorial extravagance might seem ordinary enough, particularly around the turn of the century, were it not for Palmer's method of rearranging the poems in *The Temple* in order to give a portrait of the poet's biography. Writes Harman:

> What Palmer really means, then, when he calls his work a costly monument to Herbert's memory, is not that the book portrays its subject (in a world where there are only portrayals), nor that it stands for him in his absence as an admittedly poor second, but rather that, in all of its rich texture, in all of its materiality, it gives us the "veritable experience" of Herbert's world (p. 109). "All art," Palmer declares, "is personal and anthropomorphic" (p. 102). The book is not a representation of life, it is life unmediated by representation: life itself. (p. 3)

Palmer's complete identification with Herbert's life and world, "originating" with his christening, serves Harman as a springboard toward defining what she views as the dialectical arc of much modern Herbert criticism, a dialectic that initially pits a self-effacing against a "scientific" view of criticism (Palmer and Tuve vs. Empson). Gradually and subtly uncoiling, it is then extended to include, on the one hand, critics who, downplaying the role of the self in Herbert, emphasize the place of cultural tradition in interpreting his poetry (Tuve, Summers, and Lewalski) and, on the other, those who pre-eminently value the poet for his originality, for the way he resists, by redefining, the cultural legacies surrounding him (Empson and Vendler). Although Stanley Fish is acknowledged by the author as her "dear friend and unofficial mentor," his dialectical reading of Herbert is ultimately dismissed as a red herring, and though Harman does not explicitly say so, he presumably joins the ranks of Tuve, Summers, etc.

If this seems a partial reading of the "heritage," we are reminded by the reflective critic in the preface that all criticism—this book included—is limited by the "principles that inform it." The informing principle which appears on p. 36 is Harman's wish, "in certain respects," to mediate

> between the opposing views of its predecessors: like Empson and Vendler I wish to demonstrate the ways in which persons make space for themselves and their works within the context of tradition, but

> like Tuve, Summers, and Lewalski I also believe that doctrines, traditions, and cultural commonplaces are contexts in which literary works must be read. Lewalski suggests, in opposition to Fish, that cultural and doctrinal beliefs are sponsoring of, not threatening to, the self, and once again the truth seems to lie between the two positions: they are neither completely enabling nor fully disabling. The questions we must ask are how, and under what circumstances, and at what expense, and for how long, and in what ways, do persons and cultures negotiate the representation of the self.

Harman's "trick," one put to good use by her "unofficial mentor" in *The Living Temple*, turns the critical controversy back into the text, where it then receives one more, and to me questionable, turn of the screw: for instead of talking about how an author makes "space" for himself, how the poet responds to tradition, which is the issue at the heart of the critical controversy, Harman elects to describe how "persons and cultures negotiate the representation of the self." The "turn" in the argument occurs with the exchange of "persons . . . and their works" (presumably authors) for the less precise and no longer authorially intended "persons and culture," and in that substitution the potentially vigorous dialectic involving the critical controversy loses much of its steam. But the new and apparently expanded one that emerges has its own problems. Except for a few passing references made to Donne, a lengthy digression on *Death's Duell*, a quotation from Browne's *Urne Burial*, and an odd footnote to Vaughan that, offering proof of a significant distinction between the two poets, quotes only one part of Vaughan's "Dedication" when the whole is relevant (and then casually refers the reader to "see" the complete collection of his verse), there is no discussion of "persons" if we mean by that designation contemporaries of Herbert. "Culture," too, presents difficulties. It seems to survive largely on the strength of a few hefty footnotes to Foucault and Said, in some remarks in the final chapter on typology, and in a nod of agreement toward Greenblatt's admittedly vaguely stated proposition of a change governing the formation of identities in the sixteenth century that "is difficult to characterize in our usual ways because it is not only complex but resolutely dialectical" (p. 201). With the dialectic respecting tradition and the individual talent gone, and with a second only appearing in the margins, Harman is left to "negotiate" a narrow,

heavily travelled portion of the Herbert canon with the help of modern theories of representation.

Despite the author's deconstructive bent, what emerges from this shift in strategy is a strangely inert but unmistakably formalistic taxonomy of *The Temple*. Herbert's methods of representing the self are divided into two large categories: "Fictions of Coherence," which is subdivided into three chapters, and "Chronicles of Dissolution," subdivided into two. A shorter, apparently synthesizing, discussion entitled "The Bible as Countertext" concludes the study. In Part One, much of which has already appeared in print, great stress is placed on "fiction"—the individual's desire to constitute himself as a coherent, independent being, a desire that is thwarted by a God who does not permit self-reliance of any sort. "Self-representation," remarks Harman, "is a vexed enterprise in Herbert's poems and we do the poems a disservice if we fail to acknolwledge in them both the appearance of the self and the curtailment of the self's appearance, both the attachment of the self to language and the acknowledgement by the self that the domain of language is not always one over which he has full control" (p. 49). Mining this paradox, Harman works a variety of subtle turns on "Frailtie," "The Holdfast," "Good Friday," "The Reprisal," "Dedication," "The Collar," and "Affliction," all of which fall under the classification of "collapsing" poems. The "collapse" in them, however, is different from Fish's "self-consumption." It does not jettison the speaker or reader toward God but "instructs" each in "the costs of self-representation, asking both speaker and reader to exchange the desire to *witness* the representation of the self for the willingness to *conceive* a regenerate self, acknowledging all the while the enormous difficulty of doing so" (p. 88).

"Chronicles of Dissolution" is even more finely spun. No amount of re-reading, I discovered, allowed me to unravel all the threads surrounding Harman's discussion to Herbert's already much-discussed "Church-monuments" (which is perhaps part of the problem); but the drift seems to be that "dissolving" poems represent alternatives to "collapsing" poems "precisely" because they embody and display the very incoherencies of self that "collapsing" poems seek to suppress (p. 120). Along with "Church-monuments," those receiving lengthy analysis include "Mortification," "The Pilgrimage," "The Temper," and "The Flower." The final chapter of the study then describes how "the alignment of personal with biblical stories offers . . . a solution to

the problem of self-representation with which we have been concerned—though it does not do so without, of course, importing problems of its own" (p. 171). At this point, who would have thought that anything in Herbert would be free of problems? The solution is that typological poems inscribe within the poem the doctrinal meanings toward which collapsing poems only gesture. The problem is that acknowledgement comes at a high cost, one that dispenses altogether with assumptions of originality. "Their storie pennes and sets us down" is the nub in "The Bunch of Grapes" that receives much polishing. "Aaron," likewise, marks the communal presence of the speaker by his absence as person, and so on with "The Altar." The book closes with the following summary observation:

> If collapsing poems make representation possible only by making it subject to recall, and chronicles of dissolution make it possible by dismantling coherent images of the self, typological poems make representation possible by making the speaker's enduring account the story of others rather than the story of the self. (p. 196)

No one would ever accuse Harman of lacking intelligence. Taken in small chunks, *Costly Monuments* can be thought provoking, indeed illuminating. "The Temper" and "The Flower," overworked as those poems have been in recent years, respond particularly well to a hermeneutics of instability, better, I believe, than either "Affliction (1)" or "The Collar," where Harman's theory of writing as self-presentation suppresses the possibility of fully acknowledging Herbert's instructive impulses. But taken in large quantities, the sugar of reflexivity, with all its sticky distinctions, threatens to turn the whole into something like cotton candy, which dissolves at the touch. The conditional phrasing of her conclusion tells much of the story. So do the continual glances backward: "But I have also meant to stress, and I do so here again" (p. 71). The cloud-capped towers of *Costly Monuments* seem always on the verge of crumbling, and at one point the author even seems momentarily confused over the structure she has created, when, in retrospect, she erroneously assigns her discussion of "Artillerie" and "The Flower" to Part One (pp. 170-71). If there is some question about the ways in which the parts interlock, there is no question that the gold of Herbert's poetry is ultimately beaten into an airy thinness, the likes of which Tuve, with her fear of "a grasshopper plague of explainers-of-poems" (Harman, pp. vii, 11), never

dreamed. Turning everything into writing that is rewritten can become very heady indeed; but it can also work to deny, rather than to produce, important distinctions of a different kind. There is something profoundly lacking in a discussion of "Aaron"—to cite only one instance—where the attention of rewriting ends up by describing the final stanza in the perfunctory language of a "Sinnes round": "The self who disappears into Christ, eliminating his own, independent appearance altogether, now appears not as Christ but as Aaron, and his story is virtually identical with the one that began the poem" (p. 186). *Virtually* identical? There is something equally disturbing to my mind about a work so thoroughly and (here at last) unquestioningly institutionalized as *Costly Monuments.* Its language is the high baroque of the late seventies, bound for the shores of academic bliss, shrinking enrollments and all:

> Like Donne's sermon, Herbert's poem ["Church-monuments"] teaches its lessons with remarkable and often terrifying rigor, but its intentions are not narrowly grim ones. Poems about the dissolution of the body are, in Herbert, designed to teach us the lesson Donne's sermon makes abundantly clear: that being present to the Lord has nothing at all to do with being present to oneself in any of the ways practiced by the speakers of collapsing poems. Rather it is a function of one's willingness to give up the body's obstructive and illusory access to presence in favor of the unobstructive access that comes of relinquishing the body, of learning, practicing, and chronicling its dissolution. (p. 129)

For those wishing a different form of instruction, they had better seek out some other teacher.

That person might very well be Chana Bloch. In *Spelling The Word: George Herbert and the Bible*, Bloch is the bee among the spiders. She does not attempt to read Herbert according to the laws of a single engrossing idea. She does not erect a theory of equivocal predication, of vocation, of Protestantism, or of representation, although she is concerned with language, biography, theology, and imitation. Her aims are at once more and less ambitious. They involve locating and interpreting the manifold influence of Scripture on George Herbert's poetry, something no one has ever doubted was there but no one had ever set out systematically to explore. As a bee, she also has a healthy respect

for tradition. She is thoroughly at home with the Bible. Her critical affiliations are primarily, although not exclusively, with the "ancients" of the first generation of Herbert critics. And her own relation with the poet was initially conceived in the meek light of an apprenticeship in which, as a poet and translator, she wished to serve "a master at his trade," an author happily misnamed by her young children as George Sherbert. What she offers, quite simply, is not a theoretical key to unlock every door in *The Temple* but a practical guide toward understanding how much of it came into being in the way that it did.

I can only say that she has succeeded marvelously at her task. At a time when many critics might aspire to be poets, we should be grateful that some poets still care to be critics, especially one who writes with so much wit, clarity, and sense of purpose. To extend and amplify a metaphor to Bloch that she applies to Herbert: Scripture becomes a big stick in her hands, but it is one wielded with the grace of a baton. It serves to measure the full range of the canon. (Among "third generation" critics only Strier's book is comparable in the sheer number of poems scrutinized, but her preference for Herbert as a poet rather than a theologian marks a significant difference between the two books.) It allows her to correct, in convincing fashion, a number of critical errors that, in one way or another, have been generated by ignoring, downplaying, or distorting, Herbert's connection to his Biblical "source." And it helps her to dissolve—to my mind almost entirely successfully—the dialectic reflected in recent criticism that elevates one version of Herbert (private or public) over the other. In Bloch's view, the Bible sustains on a communal level both the didactic poet and the rebellious speaker, the teacher and the student, without any substantial reduction in energy to either conception.

Bloch's Herbert is also profoundly comic, both in the narrow and broad sense of the word. Like Strier, she is not afraid to view some of Herbert's speakers as a little bit ridiculous, but how many recent critics have been willing to risk extending this judgment to "Jordan (II)"? As a poet, too, her Herbert is animated, not burdened, by the task of interpreting Scripture. "Copying" is very much a Renaissance activity involving, as Bloch says, "putting new wine in old bottles." No Romantic specter of "originality" haunts the poet; no "master-text" threatens to displace the "human-text." As much pressure on the author as Harman puts to describe the inhibiting features of doctrine and culture, Bloch applies an equal amount to account for the complex ways that

Herbert, drawing inspiration from his "source," assimilates its particulars into his poetry. And, of course, her Biblically centered author is comic in so far as he recombines in his verse the principal message of Scripture—the story of loss and recovery. If her study seems singularly judicious in responding to the tone of Herbert's poetry, it is so partly because in considering local effects Bloch, like her author, respects the full sweep of Scripture.

Spelling The Word divides into five sections of varying length but all are hefty. The first, "Doctrine and Life," appeared in an abridged version in *"Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne": Essays on George Herbert*, ed. Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), pp. 15-31. Her thesis is more embellished, but its essentials remain the same. As a Protestant, Herbert treats Scripture as revealed truth; he reads it, scrutinizes it, leans on it, and it rewards and supports him in every way. "Writing about Scripture, Herbert sets before us the mind and heart of the Christian who reads and interprets. Precisely where we might expect to find the self humbled and subordinated, we find it instead vigorously at work and conscious of its own motions in bringing the text to life" (p. 28). Instances of how it supports him are succinctly described as Bloch analyzes poems in which Biblical quotations or allusions figure prominently: "The Quip," "The Posie," "Divinitie," "Jordan (I)," and "The Forerunners." Those in which he is an active interpreter include "The Call," "Ephes iv.30," "Coloss iii.3.," and "The Pearl": all show how a poet can personalize Scripture without automatically becoming an egomaniac. The proposition seems to me persuasive, sensible, and refreshing.

Her view of a Herbert liberated rather than constricted by Scripture is then pressed into full service in the remainder of the study. "The Rhetoric of Allusion" is given over to a detailed discussion of how the poet's habit of collating Biblical passages ("This verse marks that, and both do make a motion / Unto a third") informs a variety of lexical, thematic, and dramatic constructions in his verse. It includes an important revision of Tuve's liturgical discussion of "The Sacrifice." Bloch shows exactly where and why the Biblical version of the Passion, dismissed by Tuve, served Herbert as an essential imaginative resource in the creation of this poem. We also get a particularly good glimpse in "Prayer (I)" of how the astonishing series of images in that poem are partly owing to transposed Biblical material, whose effects are "reversed" by the poet; at other times, as with "Exalted Manna" and "souls bloud,"

the images reflect his allegorical practice of reading particular passages in the Old Testament in light of the New. The chapter concludes with a discussion of "Love (III)" (it appeared initially in *ELR* 8 [1978], 329-40). About the erotic implications singled out for discussion in that poem, Bloch remarks, with characteristic economy of phrasing: "I hardly think Herbert would have used the sexual metaphor here without the precedent of the Song of Songs. I would suggest that in this respect the Bible has freed his imagination to more direct expression than he would otherwise have attempted" (p. 129).

Chapter Three, "From Old to New," significantly widens the scope of *Spelling The Word*. By concentrating on how *The Temple* pivots around "the nodal point of history as it is recorded in Scripture" (p. 133), the Incarnation re-experienced by subsequent Christians as Paul's "now," Bloch describes the rich Old-to-New suggestions embodied in the title of *The Temple* itself and the different ways the poems dramatize the speaker's discovery of Christ. There cannot be any vein in Herbert criticism more worked than this, but at every turn Bloch finds new ore. She divides Herbert's "typological" poems into two groups, the first including "Sion," "Aaron," and "The Bunch of Grapes" in which "the New crowns the Old," and a second centering on "Redemption," "The Holdfast," and "The Collar," in which "at the eleventh hour, the New leaves the rags of the Old behind" (p. 144). She does not propose a radical re-reading of these much criticized texts—the ground she shares with Strier is particularly striking at this point; but the only way to convey adequately the vigorous intelligence operating in this portion of her study is to quote the final paragraph of her discussion of "Redemption":

> With this blundering persona, Herbert dramatizes the theological doctrine that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), drawing out in fourteen packed lines Paul's amazed, grateful "while." And he gives Paul's *pro nobis* its full imaginative sweep by deliberately confounding the dramatic time of the poem. While the stage set (manor, resorts, cities, theatres, gardens, parks, courts) points to Herbert's England, the speaker seems, remarkably, to be unaware that there has been a New Dispensation, till he finds himself at Calvary at the very moment of the crucifixion. By

> linking *once* and *now* in a kind of poetic time warp, Herbert is saying that each man must discover the cross for himself if it is to have any meaning for him. The surprise of the final couplet enacts that experience of awakening in which one comes face to face with what he already knows. The discovery seems so abrupt because the narrator is looking elsewhere, but it can be so briefly put because he has already grasped it in the innermost recesses of his mind. (p. 175)

The challenge of the last two chapters, nearly equal in length to the first three, is of a different sort—to recover for the modern reader the potentially less pleasant Herbert: the didactic public poet. Having plucked many of the raisins, it is time to turn to the pudding (p. 201). Chapter Four, "Talking to Man," strikes me as entirely successful, Chapter Five, "Singing to God," slightly less so. In the first of these, Bloch grounds her discussion of the didactic Herbert in the obvious but still overlooked Biblical nooks of Proverbs, the Prophecies, and the parables of Jesus. All of these categories serve to bridge the distance that in many respects separates Herbert from the modern reader. The first helps to account for the compact, sententious utterances found in both "The Church-Porch," where they have been sometimes praised, and "The Church," where they have been generally ignored or dismissed as being damaging to the lyric intent of that portion of *The Temple*. The second contributes to understanding the use of "dramatic" symbols in the poems. Bloch's emphasis on process rather than stasis leads her sensibly away from the excessive claims sometimes placed on emblem poems as an important influence on the pictorial element in Herbert. And the last category—the parables of Jesus—helps to illuminate how the custom of classical decorum into which the poet was born is more honored in the breach than the observance; Herbert's homely diction is an essential ingredient in his didactic pudding, like it or not. Since we do not usually think of the poet as being prophetic except in "The Church Militant" and a few other select poems, I found this portion of her discussion especially valuable.

The final chapter simply goes on too long for me. "Singing to God" defines Herbert's formal debts to the Psalms, a topic that has already received a fair amount of critical recognition. Bloch's contribution is to borrow the generally accepted three-fold division

of the Psalms into hymns, complaints, and thanksgiving, a division with some currency in Herbert's own day, and to apply it to *The Temple*. I am convinced of the relevance of these categories, but the models occasionally work to deny the poems their full energy. This seems particularly true for the complaint. While the Psalmic formula guaranteeing the speaker the certainty of a hearing with God serves adequately to describe the emotional arc in "Affliction (IV)," I wonder whether it would work equally well for other poems of affliction? Bloch is silent on this issue, though the terms of the formula seem to demand being expanded in this direction. Accusing the modern reader of not liking "happy endings" is an easy way out of a critical problem generated in part by the model itself. There are other signs, too, of a slight loss of energy in this chapter. Bloch is less combative here than elsewhere; perhaps because of the material, she is also more restrained in her analyses.

But, and this is a big "but" (however formulaic, I do like "happy endings," and this is a book that certainly deserves one), her discussions of hymns of praise ("Antiphon [II]," "Easter," "Providence," and "Man") are exemplary; they demonstrate how attention to the Psalms can illuminate the special achievements of these lyrics. So, too, are the accounts of "Praise (II)" and Herbert's rendition of the twenty-third psalm as poems of thanksgiving. Although hymns in praise of creation do not occupy center stage in *The Temple*, as they do in *Paradise Lost*, Bloch's witty recognition of how "Providence" gives local habitation to much of the flora and fauna in Psalm 104 drives home, in an unsentimental way, the joy in Herbert overlooked by much recent criticism.

The panoramic view of *The Temple* that emerges from *Spelling The Word* is impressive indeed, and not just because of its rather unfashionable attempt to explore Herbert's "intense commitment to all forms of human discourse" (p. 282). In contrast to the other books reviewed here (with the possible exception of Strier's), Bloch's study is generated out of a single unarguable proposition: the importance of the Bible to Herbert's poetry, a point even the most committed counter-reformationist interpeters of Herbert have readily acknowledged, though, like others, have refused to explore in detail. This alone, of course, no more guarantees a "good" book than does allegiance to any particular school of criticism, but the pitch of the argument, well-handled and responding to something pervasive in Herbert, suggests why, along with Strier's study, it ought to become part of the new canon of essential

Herbert criticism to be confronted, assimilated and/or revised by future scholars.

But *Spelling The Word* has one further attribute. Herbert's revered status within the professional community—a journal named after him, a frequent topic of scholarly meetings, the leading name in an anthology of seventeenth-century poetry, etc.—inevitably encourages a narrowing of critical focus as specialists, relieved of the responsibility of justifying their pursuits in front of a larger community, wrestle with a series of particular problems, sometimes with considerable success. For Bloch, too, Herbert is the generator of a set of critical problems and a poet, but the balance is always tipped in favor of the latter. Enigmatic as his verse can be, he is never simply a critical enigma. In *Spelling The Word*, he speaks to the soul's blood. Even at this late hour in Herbert studies, Bloch manages to write about the poetry as if she is encountering it for the first time, and the result is a book that, like *The Temple*, speaks to the initiated and uninitiated alike.

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