

THREE PRINCIPLES IN THE POETIC CREED OF
GEORGE HERBERT

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH AND THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF THE KANSAS STATE
TEACHERS COLLEGE OF EMPORIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

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August, 1968

Thesis
1968
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To my wife, Kay

PREFACE

Early biographies and studies of the life and poetry of George Herbert tend to treat the piety of the man more than the merits of the poet. On the other hand, contemporary criticism, while not completely negating the man, focuses more upon the technical aspects of Herbert's poetry. Therefore, the present study represents a middle-of-the-road approach, for, while the life of the man as well as the stylistic devices will be touched upon, the focus of this study will be on three broad governing principles found in Herbert's poetry that constitute his poetic credo. The present study makes no attempt to include all aspects of Herbert's life or an exhaustive investigation of his stylistic devices. Rather, it contends that his varied stylistic devices fall under one of the three governing principles, religious, simple, and orderly in nature.

Thus, to show that Herbert does have a poetic credo which he practices in his poetry, the study includes the following various chapters. Chapter I is a study of what Herbert has to say about the place of religion in poetry in certain poems and The Country Parson. Since the entire body of Herbert's poetry is obviously religious in nature, no detailed attempt is made to demonstrate how he follows this first point of his credo. Chapter II contains an explanation of Herbert's stated concept of the function of simple

language as the proper expression for poetry. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the influences that helped to form Herbert's concept of simplicity. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate how Herbert's belief in simple language leads to a specialized use of the vernacular. Chapter III is a study of Herbert's concept of order. Included in this chapter is an explanation of what Herbert says about order in certain poems and The Country Parson. Also, there is an explanation of the influences that caused him to believe in order. The final portion of the third chapter demonstrates how his concept of order is eventually realized in his poetry by the blending of form and content. Chapter IV concludes and summarizes the findings of the previous three chapters.

Special thanks goes to Dr. Charles E. Walton for first arousing this author's interest in the poetry of George Herbert. This author also appreciates the assistance he received from Dr. Walton concerning the nature of this thesis, as well as his helpful suggestions in locating source material and composing the paper. Thanks is also due Mr. Richard L. Roehen for his valuable assistance as second reader. A final note of thanks is especially due my wife, Kay, not only for her typing of this thesis, but also for her constant encouragement.

August, 1968
Emporia, Kansas

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CHAPTER I

THE RELIGIOUS MOTIF EXPRESSED IN HERBERT'S POETRY

. . . afford us with so much wit,
That as the world serves us we may serve thee,
And both thy servants be.
-- "Man"

The fascination that arises from the poetry of George Herbert is attributable to his life and his character, as well as to the quality of the work itself.¹ In fact, his poetic genius may have been overlooked had it not been for the interesting details of his religious life.² Scholars have agreed that, since there is such perfect harmony between Herbert's life and his works, one is incomplete without the other.³ Pickering, one of the early editors of Herbert's works, says, "George Herbert is a true poet, but a poet, the merits of whose poems will never be felt without a sympathy with the mind and character of the man."⁴ Unfortunately, numerous past studies and biographies have tended

¹Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (eds.), Cambridge History of English Literature, VII, 26.

²T. S. Eliot, "George Herbert," Spectator, CXLVIII (March 12, 1932), 361.

³"George Herbert," Spectator, LXXII (February 10, 1894), 199.

⁴William Pickering (ed.), The First Volume of the Works of George Herbert, I, 379.

to overemphasize Herbert's so-called saintly traits, resulting in an almost legendary picture of "pious Mr. Herbert." Such statements as, ". . . [Herbert] never mentioned the name of Jesus Christ, but with the addition, My God!", have done much to stereotype Herbert's image.⁵ This process began in the seventeenth century when people read Herbert's verse, not for its style, but for its inherent piety considered to be the result of his "holy and exemplary life." Thus, Herbert's popularity was based upon a knowledge of his religious life, not of his poetical merits.⁶ This public appeal, grounded upon the saintly image, was further enhanced by Barnabas Oley and Izaak Walton, Herbert's biographers. Such statements in Walton's Lives as, ". . . [Herbert] may and ought to be a pattern of vertue to all posterity;"⁷ and "Thus he liv'd, and thus he dy'd like a Saint, unspotted of the World, full of Alms-deeds, full of Humility, and all the examples of a vertuous life. . . ,"⁸ have overemphasized the subject of Herbert's

⁵Thomas Fuller, The Worthies of England, p. 696.

⁶Arthur H. Nethercot, "The Reputation of the Metaphysical Poets during the Seventeenth Century," JEGP, XXIII (1924), 184.

⁷Izaak Walton, The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Robert Sanderson, p. 269.

⁸Ibid., p. 319.

piety and neglected his abilities as a poet. Even today, modern scholarship tends to follow this seventeenth-century trend, with scholars devoting more time to the study of Herbert the man than to Herbert the poet.⁹ However, as important as his religion is, for one to think of Herbert only as a religious man is to misunderstand the literary legacy which he left.¹⁰ In brief, Herbert is more than a pious writer of religious verse; he is a skilled poet, as well.¹¹

Thus, the damage which Herbert's biographers have done to him is to call too much attention to his religious life. However, since an understanding of Herbert the poet is so closely related to Herbert the priest, one can appreciate how Oley and Walton became overly involved in the later aspect of the man's career. But even without this emphasis from his biographers, Herbert's religious beliefs and experiences are clearly evident in his writing. However, of even more importance to the student of Herbert is that attitude expressed in his works about the place of religion in poetry; for, even though Herbert fails to write a literary treatise in which he defines his philosophy of

⁹Margaret Bottrall, George Herbert, p. 143.

¹⁰T. S. Eliot, Writers and Their Works, p. 14.

¹¹L. C. Knights, "George Herbert," Scrutiny, XII (1944-45), 171.

composition, one is able, by carefully examining his poetry as well as his prose, to isolate certain broad principles that govern Herbert's verse. The particular works from which one may extract these significant statements of his governing principles are his two "Sonnets to His Mother," "Jordan I," "Jordan II," "Praise," "The Quidditie," "The Elixer," "Employment," "Dulness," "The Forerunners," "The Convert," "Life," "The Flower," a letter to his mother, some of his Latin verse, and his prose masterpiece, The Country Parson.¹²

An analysis of these works reveals three broad governing principles in Herbert's poetry, as follows: (1) his poetry is religious and personal; (2) his poetry is expressed in simple language; (3) his poetry is well ordered in content. It will be clear that these three principles represent, in essence, Herbert's entire poetic credo.

Although the religious aspect of Herbert's poetic credo has been most often examined, it is necessary that one be aware of what Herbert has to say about the place of religion in poetry. For Herbert, poetry is his means of expressing and working out the plan of his religious life.¹³ Thus, his volume entitled The Temple achieves its unity because it is, in reality, a history of Herbert's religious

¹²George Herbert Palmer (ed.), The English Works of George Herbert, II, 75. All subsequent quotations from Herbert's English poetry, as well as prose, will be taken from this edition, and referred to as The Works.

¹³Knights, op. cit., p. 179.

experience, sometimes peaceful, sometimes turbulent, but always involving a greater element of conflict than Oley or Walton point out.¹⁴ Since Herbert's poetry was published posthumously, the first insight into the religious nature of his verse comes in a work that first appeared when he lay on his deathbed. Just before he died, he handed to a friend a manuscript of his poetry and requested the following favors:

Sir, I pray deliver this little book to my dear brother Ferrar, and tell him he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master; in whose service I have now found perfect freedom; desire him to read it; and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him burn it; for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies.¹⁵

Herein, one sees that Herbert's writing is a private act of devotion.¹⁶

Herbert expressed an initial interest in religious poetry when he was a student at Cambridge.¹⁷ Not only did he reveal strong poetical tendencies early in his life, but he also formulated at least one of three governing principles that pervade his verse, namely, to write, not only

¹⁴Ward and Waller, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁵Walton, op. cit., p. 275.

¹⁶T. O. Beachcraft, "Nicholas Ferrar and George Herbert," The Criterion, XII (October, 1932), 40.

¹⁷Ward and Waller, op. cit., p. 27.

for the glory of God, but in opposition to the traditional subjects of contemporary love-poets. Herbert's opposition to love-poetry, which is at the core of the religious aspect of his poetic credo, is based upon his belief that love between men and women is not a fit subject, since it is sensual and, therefore, ephemeral.¹⁸ To Herbert, all poetry is an extension of God's creation; therefore, he feels that it should always be used to express elevated subjects--e.g., the love between God and man.¹⁹ Since Herbert objects primarily to the subjects chosen by contemporary love-poets, he uses the love of God, rather than of woman, as his major theme. However, he still employs some of the devices utilized by contemporary secular poets.²⁰ For instance, he borrows from these love-poets the themes of heart-searching, self-accusation, intellectuality, and enthusiasm, and reproduces some of their forms. On the other hand, he greatly modifies the fashionable ornate language of his contemporaries.²¹ Because of his borrowings, his verse is almost a parody of contemporary love-poetry, although parody is not

¹⁸Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 279.

¹⁹Joseph H. Summers, George Herbert, p. 79.

²⁰A. McHarg Hayes, "Counterpoint in Herbert," SP, XXXV (1938), 45.

²¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 279.

his primary concern.²²

Herbert's first definite statement of poetic purpose appeared in 1610, when he sent his mother a letter, along with two sonnets, in which he states his objection to love-poetry and dedicates his poetic endeavors to God.²³ This important letter reads as follows:

. . . I fear the heat of my late Ague hath dried up those springs by which Scholars say the Muses use to take up their habitations. However, I need not their help to reprove the vanity of those many Love-poems that are daily writ and consecrated to Venus; nor to bewail that so few are writ that look towards God and Heaven. For my own part, my meaning, dear mother, is in these Sonnets to declare my resolution to be that my poor Abilities in Poetry shall be all and ever consecrated to God's glory.²⁴

Thus, it is clear that the youthful Herbert rejects the aid of the classical muse who provides inspiration for love poetry; he is clearly grieved because few poems are being written that pertain to religious subjects; and, finally, he offers his poetic abilities to the service of God. In "The Dedication," he reaffirms his avowed service to God: "Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee. / Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came / And must return."²⁵

The basic question that Herbert poses in his first sonnet

²²Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, p. 186.

²³George Williamson, Six Metaphysical Poets, p. 94.

²⁴Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 78.

²⁵Ibid., p. x.

entitled "Sonnet to His Mother" concerns the reasons sonneteers write only about human rather than about divine love:

- G. My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee
 Wherewith whole shoals of Martyrs once did burn,
 Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
 Wear Venus' livery, only serve her turn?
 Why are not Sonnets made of thee, and layes
 Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
 Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
 As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove
 Outstrip their Cupid easily in flight?
 Or, since thy ways are deep and still the same,
 Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?
 Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
 Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose
 Than that which one day Worms may chance refuse?²⁶

In his second "Sonnet to His Mother," he expresses the opinion that true love-poetry should always be addressed to God, Who is a far superior poetic subject than woman:²⁷ "Why should I Women's eyes for Chrystal take? / . . . When Lord, in thee / The beauty lies in the discovery."²⁸ Thus, Herbert's dedication of his poetry (and himself) to God, and his consistent choice of religion as a fit poetic subject are as meaningful as the dedication of his life to the priesthood.

These sonnets and the letter, however, are not the only works in which he reveals his concept of religion in terms of his poetic credo. For example, in a Latin poem,

²⁶Ibid., p. 79.

²⁷Ibid., p. 80.

²⁸Ibid., p. 81.

entitled "To His Excellency Our Father and Lord in Christ," he says that ". . . these compositions / Belong to [God] alone."²⁹ In another Latin poem, "To God," he explains that God is a poet's inspiration:

. . . O sweetest
 Spirit, you who fill up minds
 With holy groans pouring
 From you, the Dove, the writing
 That I do, the pleasure that I give,
 If I give it, is all from you.³⁰

He also discusses his concept of the place of religion in poetry in numerous other poems. For example, in "Love I" and "Love II," he contends that man is misguided in his understanding of true love, which is, in reality, the love of God.³¹ His belief in the dedication of man's talents to God is, again, restated in "Love II," wherein he explains, ". . . All [the brain's] invention on thine Altar lay, / And there in hymnes send back thy fire again."³² Furthermore, his poem, "Jordan I," contains one of his best arguments against secular love-poetry in favor of religious love-poetry. Here, in the first stanza, he wonders why poetry must always deal with trivial fiction rather than with

²⁹Mark McCloskey and Paul R. Murphy (trans.), The Latin Poetry of George Herbert, p. 5.

³⁰Ibid., p. 61.

³¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 82.

³²Ibid., p. 85.

truth:³³

Who says that fictions onely and false hair
 Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?
 Is all good structure in a winding stair?
 May no lines passe except they do their dutie
 Not to a true, but painted chair?³⁴

In "The Quidditie," although his verse is relatively insignificant, he utilizes it, nonetheless, to reflect the essence of his life as well as his relationship with God, and, thus, it deserves serious consideration:³⁵ "My God, a verse is not a crown / . . . But it is that which while I use / I am with thee; and Most, take all."³⁶ The last line of this poem implies that Herbert wants God to take complete control over him and his verse.³⁷ Thus, in viewing Herbert's statements, one comprehends the poet's concept of the prominent place of religion in all poetry. In fact, the entire scope of Herbert's The Temple illustrates the importance of this governing poetic principle.

A final point to be weighed in considering the religious element in Herbert's poetry concerns the joys and

³³H. R. Swardson, Poetry and the Fountain of Light, p. 70.

³⁴Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 87.

³⁵Ibid., p. 96.

³⁶Ibid., p. 97.

³⁷F. P. Wilson, "Notes on Herbert's 'The Quidditie,'" RES, XIX (October, 1943), 399.

conflicts which he expresses in his verse, because they are not related to the troubled world of his day, but, rather, to his personal religious struggles. Nor does Herbert show an extreme interest in the church as an institution, except as he himself relates to it. In essence, then, in his poetry he bares his spiritual heart.³⁸ His primary goal as a poet is the accurate portrayal of himself as he struggles to achieve a personal holiness.³⁹ For example, in The Country Parson, he comments about the importance of a personalized religion: ". . . for their obligation to God and their own soul is above any temporal tie. Do well and right and let the world sinke."⁴⁰ Again, one notes in The Country Parson: "For in preaching to others he forgets not himself, but is first a Sermon to himself and then to others"⁴¹ Thus, while Herbert's devotion to the priesthood shows that he is interested in the salvation of others, he also recognizes that his first responsibility is to himself. However, a mere telling of his religious experience is not enough for him. He feels, as well, that he must analyze the cause, the

³⁸Elbert N. S. Thompson, "The Temple and The Christian Year," PMLA, LIV (December, 1939), 1019.

³⁹Knights, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴⁰Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 293.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 265.

effect, and the solution related to these spiritual experiences, so as to make this introspective, self-analytical verse a potential vehicle for his reader's instruction.⁴² However, he is more interested in delivering his own soul from sin than in writing for a public, as revealed in the fact that none of his verse was published until after his death. Only after he feels that he has made himself worthy of divine love does he remark,⁴³ "...if [I] can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made publick."⁴⁴ In brief, the religious nature of Herbert's poetry is the poetic principle that he most closely follows, for all of his English poetry is religious in nature. In Herbert's case, then, the religious nature of his poetry becomes a trademark of his style.

⁴²Summers, op. cit., p. 102.

⁴³Douglas L. Peterson, The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne, p. 176.

⁴⁴Walton, op. cit., p. 275.

CHAPTER II

HERBERT'S SIMPLICITY: HIS USE OF THE VERNACULAR

Nor let them punish me with losse of ryme,
Who plainly say, My God, My King.
-- "Jordan I"

The religious element in Herbert's poetry exerts a far-reaching influence upon his concepts of style. One salient influence is his simplicity of language, which Herbert yokes to the proper method of worshiping God, simply and sincerely. According to him, without the simplicity of a religious life, which would be reflected artistically in simplicity of expression, man could not experience a close communion with his God.⁴⁵ Thus, Herbert's concept of simplicity, especially as it is manifest in the language of his verse, is always directly related to his religion.⁴⁶ Hayes goes so far as to say that Herbert's art is clearly grounded in a religious concept of simplicity.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Mahood identifies Herbert's principle of simplicity as the result of the man's wholehearted faith in his God and his religion.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Martz, op. cit., p. 284.

⁴⁶Swardson, op. cit., p. 69.

⁴⁷Hayes, op. cit., p. 46.

⁴⁸M. M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism, p. 26.

Alvarez describes the simplicity of Herbert's language as "a spiritual quality that is the measure of his greatness as a religious poet."⁴⁹

There are two basic reasons for Herbert's desiring to achieve a level of simple language in his poetry. The first is a purely religious one, for Herbert feels that ornamental language obscures the intended expression, that it lacks sincerity, and, thereby, limits the poet's ability to express religious experiences. Secondly, he advocates a simple language as a means to oppose the ornamental language of the love-poets. In both cases, he believes that the inadequate expression that is the result of ornamental language decreases the glory that God deserves.⁵⁰ One can see, for example, in The Country Parson Herbert's concept of the parson's plain style of speaking, a style which Herbert also advocates in versifying. For instance, he shows that when the parson is teaching catechism, he should use a simple, understandable diction that may be comprehended by rural people.⁵¹ According to Walton's account, after Herbert had delivered his first sermon in an elaborate, ornamental style, he made the following comment:

⁴⁹A. Alvarez, The School of Donne, p. 76.

⁵⁰Joseph E. Duncan, The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry, p. 25.

⁵¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 218.

Since Almighty God does not intend to lead men to heaven by hard Questions, he would not therefore fill their heads with unnecessary Notions; but that for their sakes, his language and his expression should be more plain and practical in his future Sermons.⁵²

Furthermore, in The Country Parson, Herbert says, "When [the parson] preacheth, he procures attention by all possible art, . . . by earnestness of speech . . ." ⁵³ Concerning the nature of the parson's sermons, he notes that they are not ". . . witty, or learned, or eloquent, but Holy."⁵⁴ He knows, as well, that the parson is assured of communicating his sincere beliefs to the listeners,

. . . by dipping and seasoning all our words and sentences in our hearts before they come into our mouths, truly affecting and cordially expressing all that we say . . . the auditors may plainly perceive that every word is hart-deep.⁵⁵

Also, he observes, "The Parson's method in handling of a text consists of two parts: first, a plain and evident declaration of the meaning of the text; and secondly, some choyce Observations drawn out of the whole test. . ." ⁵⁶ Finally, to insure that the "thick and heavy" country people understand the sermon, he sees that the parson uses "stories and

⁵²Walton, op. cit., p. 295.

⁵³Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 223.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 224.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 225.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 226.

sayings they will remember."⁵⁷ Thus, one realizes that the key to Herbert's success as a minister rests upon his ability to use this kind of language in a homely, familiar way which country people can understand.⁵⁸

An examination of certain poems reveals that the importance of simplicity, which Herbert has learned as a parson, carries over into his poetic endeavors.⁵⁹ The most concise statement of Herbert's concept of poetic simplicity may be found in the two "Jordan" poems, which have often been termed Herbert's literary manifesto.⁶⁰ These poems have also been called the critical expressions of Herbert's desire to achieve a simplicity and sincerity of expression that would transcend the ornamental language of the love-poets.⁶¹ In addition, the title of these two poems holds a Biblical significance, since the Jordan River was used for baptismal or spiritual cleansing, which image parallels Herbert's attempt to cleanse his subject matter of sensual love and the excessive, ornamental language of the love-poets.⁶²

⁵⁷Loc. cit.

⁵⁸Williamson, op. cit., p. 106.

⁵⁹Bottrall, op. cit., p. 74.

⁶⁰Knights, op. cit., p. 177.

⁶¹Swardson, op. cit., p. 69.

⁶²Ibid., p. 70.

A closer examination of "Jordan I" and "Jordan II" illustrates the exact nature of Herbert's concept of the plain style, resulting in a simple language. For example, the second stanza of "Jordan I" expresses Herbert's estimation of elaborate language:

Is it no verse except enchanted groves
 And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?
 Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?
 Must all be vail'd, while he that reades divines,
 Catching the sense at two removes?⁶³

Aside from his obvious attack on the methods used by the love-poets, Herbert is alluding to the obscurity of elaborate language in the words, "enchanted groves," "shadow," and "vail'd." The result of such obscure language is that the confused reader "divines, / Catching the sense at two removes."⁶⁴ In brief, Herbert feels that anything but plain language will lead to confusion, so he adopts the plain style, because it avoids decorative "fictions."⁶⁵ In the last stanza of "Jordan I," he not only negates ornament, but applauds plainness, which he defines as the result of a poet's honesty:⁶⁶

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing,

⁶³Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 89.

⁶⁴Loc. cit.

⁶⁵Peterson, op. cit., p. 288.

⁶⁶J. B. Leishman, The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, p. 101.

Riddle who list for me, and pull for prime
 I envie no man's nightingale or spring;
 Nor let them punish me with losse of ryme.
 Who plainly say, My God, My King.⁶⁷

The plainness which Herbert advocates does not infer a weak meaning, however. Rather, he feels that plainness of expression should be used as a tool for the expression of sincerity and conciseness. By alluding to honest shepherds, who are simple people, he implies that plain expression is a result of sincerity.⁶⁸ The "nightingale" that Herbert does not envy is his reference to sweet or elaborate expression used by the love-poets.⁶⁹ He contends, also, that he can be plain in expression without losing rhyme, an integral part of his style.⁷⁰ The last line of "Jordan I," ". . . My God, My King," clinches his argument that plainness of expression is the proper tool for devotional poetry, which he always sees as the most sincere expression of man's love for God.⁷¹

"Jordan II" further reveals Herbert's progression toward a greater simplicity of style:⁷²

When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention,

⁶⁷Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 89.

⁶⁸Mary Ellen Rickey, Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert, p. 173.

⁶⁹Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 88.

⁷⁰Williamson, op. cit., p. 105.

⁷¹Bottrall, op. cit., p. 123.

⁷²Leishman, op. cit., p. 140.

Such was their lustre, they did so excell, ^{from his}
 That I sought out quaint words and trim invention;
 My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell, ^{ing a}
 Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
 Decking the sense as if it were to sell.

Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,
 Off'ring their service, if I were not sped.
 I often blotted what I had begunne;
 This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
 Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head.

As flames do work and winde when they ascend,
 So did I weave my self into the sense.
 But while I bustled, I might heare a friend
 Whisper, How wide is all this long pretence!
 There is in love a sweetness readie penn'd;
 Copie out onely that, and save expense.⁷³

In the first two stanzas, he tries to employ the conventional, elaborate methods of the love-poets. However, in his poetic enthusiasm, he realizes that he blots out the sense of what he is trying to say, because his language and metaphors are too forced. Since he is attempting to write religious verse, which should be, like the person's sermon, plain, direct, and sincere, he realizes that the ornamental, unnatural language of the love-poets is unsuited to his purpose.⁷⁴ Thus, in his last line, he comes to the realization that all that God desires of him is his love, which can be expressed, not in the pretentious language of the love-poets, but naturally and from the heart. In effect,

⁷³Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 91-93.

⁷⁴Hayes, op. cit., p. 46.

then, his last stanza is a plea for the weeding out from his poetic expression all but the essentials, the result being a plain style.⁷⁵ Thus, by a combination of ideas taken from The Country Parson, "Jordan I" and "Jordan II," one sees that Herbert has definite views concerning the proper language of poetry. Apparently, the knowledge he gains as a person concerning the language most suited to his sermons also forms the basis for this concept of the necessary simplicity of written expression.⁷⁶

The degree to which Herbert follows his precept of simple language may be seen, not only in Herbert's poetry, but also in the comments of numerous scholars on Herbert's work. For instance, Coleridge describes Herbert's language as ". . . pure, manly, and unaffected," in itself, a supreme compliment coming from a man who, at one time, was amused by Herbert's verse.⁷⁷ Alvarez admires Herbert's language for its "elaborate simplicity."⁷⁸ He further notes that Herbert uses simple, lucid language without stripping it bare.⁷⁹ Bush states that Herbert manages to express the highest

⁷⁵Williamson, op. cit., p. 105.

⁷⁶Summers, op. cit., p. 99.

⁷⁷Roberta F. Brinkley (ed.), Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 534.

⁷⁸Alvarez, op. cit., p. 70.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 76.

truth in the simplest of terms.⁸⁰ Similarly, Rickey says that Herbert uses the words of daily language to express profound issues and to probe the secrets of his own soul.⁸¹ To Eliot, Herbert is the ". . . master of the simple everyday word in the right place. . . ."⁸² Palmer telescopes all that the above-mentioned scholars say by claiming that, except for certain words, Herbert's language does not belong to any certain age.⁸³ Alvarez complements Palmer's assertion, explaining that the disciplined abilities of Herbert result in a language that is also usable for all other poets who wish to write within the framework of religious poetry.⁸⁴ According to Martz, Herbert's simplicity of language may be the key to The Temple, and "The Elixer" is clearly the zenith of Herbert's mastery of plain style.⁸⁵ The following are two representative stanzas from "The Elixer":

Teach me, my God and King,
 In all things thee to see;
 And what I do in any thing,
 To do it as for thee.

⁸⁰Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, p. 145.

⁸¹Mary Ellen Rickey, Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert, p. 166.

⁸²T. S. Eliot, Writers and Their Works, p. 28.

⁸³Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 149.

⁸⁴Alvarez, op. cit., p. 71.

⁸⁵Martz, op. cit., p. 257.

Not rudely, as a beast,
 To runne into an action;
 But still to make thee prepossesst,
 And give it his perfection.⁸⁶

One notes, herein, not only the simplicity of language and image, but also Herbert's prevailing religious theme.

In effect, then, Herbert's poetry fits the following characteristics of the plain style: (1) his statements are skin to folk aphorisms; (2) his diction is predominately Anglo-Saxon; (3) he employs the popular or spoken style of language; (4) he avoids poetic diction.⁸⁷ Thus, Herbert's poetry meets these requirements for plain style, especially in his use of language. His simplicity of word choice leads him to an unusual treatment of his relationship to God, best described as "conversational." The colloquy that takes place between Herbert and God is the result of the religious, personal, and simple approach that characterizes so much of Herbert's poetry. While he is not the first poet to write about God, he has more to say about finding and knowing God on a personal basis.⁸⁸ In fact, he is given credit for introducing a new approach to the composition of a religious poem in which the poet and God speak directly to each other.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 99.

⁸⁷Alvarez, op. cit., p. 349.

⁸⁸Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets, p. 194.

⁸⁹Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 93.

On meeting God face-to-face, Herbert first searches his own heart and soul, then utters to God the joy, love, fear, and doubt that he feels. In reality, the conversation thus produced is a type of love-song between God and Herbert in which Herbert is the singer and God the listener.⁹⁰ Possibly, because of Herbert's desire to know God as intimately as is possible, he is the first English poet to speak directly to his Creator in the poetic medium.⁹¹ By so conversing to his God in poetry, Herbert reveals the intimacy that can be achieved between God and man.⁹² Perhaps, it is the awareness and stress that Herbert places upon this personal relationship that sets him apart from other writers of English religious verse. Also, his poetry is more autobiographical than that of other religious poets. In fact, of the poems that comprise The Temple, about one-half are addressed to God, showing Herbert expressing some aspect of his religious life. In a number of these poems, God replies to Herbert.⁹³ Furthermore, all but twenty-three of Herbert's poems are couched in first person.⁹⁴

⁹⁰George Herbert Palmer, "George Herbert as a Religious Poet," Atlantic Monthly, XCV (February, 1905), 194.

⁹¹White, op. cit., p. 184.

⁹²Ibid., p. 180.

⁹³Alicia Ostriker, "Song and Speech in the Metrics of George Herbert," PMLA, LXXX (March, 1965), 65.

⁹⁴Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 109.

Herbert is aware of God's presence, not only in the "in dwelling" of his soul, but in the divine essence of God reflected in all of the world about him.⁹⁵ Since, for him, God's presence is apparent in all things, Herbert daily realizes God's love, and he expresses this love in a kind of everyday language. Thus, Herbert's poetry exemplifies, in vernacular terms, a communion between the human and the Divine.⁹⁶ The Temple, then, is the record of Herbert's discussions with God concerning religious life.⁹⁷

To understand Herbert's conversational approach to his God is to understand his unique concept of God. Herbert's God is a poet's God, a highly personalized individual.⁹⁸ Because of the personalized, intimate way in which Herbert regards God, he is able to talk to Him with the confidence and familiarity of a close friend.⁹⁹ Exploiting this idea of divine friendship even further, one discovers that it is conceived of on the Platonic level.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Bottrall, op. cit., p. 139.

⁹⁶ R. E. Hughes, "George Herbert's Rhetorical World," Criticism, III (1961), 88.

⁹⁷ Herbert J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century, p. 206.

⁹⁸ Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 326.

⁹⁹ Leishman, op. cit., p. 136.

¹⁰⁰ Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 74.

Another significant analogy is present in the poem, "Even-Song," in which Herbert depends upon God as a child depends upon his parents to comfort him in the dark. Similarly, in "Sinne," Herbert's God resembles a father who seeks the love of his children.¹⁰¹ It is, perhaps, this trustful, child-like approach to God that makes Herbert's vernacular seem natural, for a parent speaks to his child in much the same way that God comforts, scolds, encourages, and corrects Herbert.¹⁰² Without being derogatory, Herbert views his fatherly-God as an independent person who has foresight, skill, love, hatred, and grief. In short, God is a person in many ways so like Herbert himself that He is capable of being talked to as one talks to a friend.¹⁰³ However, Herbert is equally aware of God as an omniscient, omnipresent Being. Thus, his concept of God is paradoxical.¹⁰⁴

An essential part of Herbert's religion is the necessity of feeling directly the presence of God. Therefore, his constant desire, as expressed in his poetry, is to love and be loved by God. As a result, he is drawn closer to God, until he feels that he can talk to Him directly.¹⁰⁵ This

¹⁰¹Mahood, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁰²Bottrall, op. cit., p. 92.

¹⁰³Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 101.

¹⁰⁴Bottrall, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁰⁵Joan Bennett, Four Metaphysical Poets, p. 56.

freedom of communication enables Herbert to do what few have done before. He puts into God's mouth words that man might use in daily conversations. By having God speak, Herbert creates a vernacular God Who also speaks in a simple form of of the language.¹⁰⁶

When he writes prose or poetry, Herbert never forgets the natural idioms and cadences of spoken English. His phrases are concise and to the point.¹⁰⁷ As a part of his reaction to the style of the love-poets, Herbert strips his language of ornamentation. In rhythm and accent, his language suggests the tone of an impassioned conversation.¹⁰⁸ He bases his somewhat Senecan ideas of composition upon the grounds that simplicity is best suited to his poetry, because the truths of God are essentially bare and simple. He feels that fine language can only detract from the fervor of his religious expression,¹⁰⁹ often in the form of a dialogue between Herbert and God in which both express themselves in simple, natural language.¹¹⁰ In some poems, Herbert constructs compact monologues in which he addresses Christ

¹⁰⁶White, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁰⁷Bottrall, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁰⁸Leishman, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁰⁹Swardson, op. cit., p. 73.

¹¹⁰Bottrall, op. cit., p. 106.

in terms that emulate everyday conversation.¹¹¹ For example, in "Sinne," he effectively uses the monologue:

But God more care of us hath had:
 If apperations made us e, d,
 By sight of sinne we should grow mad.
 Yet as in sleep we see fowl death and live;
 So devils are our sinnes in perspective.¹¹²

Not only is "Sinne" an example of Herbert's use of monologue, but it is also a good illustration of his simple diction.

Another illustration of the vernacular quality of Herbert's poetry occurs in the poem, "The Sonne," in which he writes:

"Let forrain nations of their language boast, / What fine varietie each tongue affords, / I like our language as our men and coast."¹¹³ The last line is particularly characteristic of Herbert's concise, near prose statement.

To make his poems conversational, Herbert goes to great lengths to create the illusion that the reader is merely overhearing a friendly conversation.¹¹⁴ In fact, his vernacular language has often been compared to the casual conversation which one might overhear between two friends.¹¹⁵ Apparently, Herbert feels that his poetry will be more convincing if he conveys the impression that the reader is

¹¹¹Thompson, op. cit., p. 1024.

¹¹²Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 229.

¹¹³Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 161.

¹¹⁴Martz, op. cit., p. 258.

¹¹⁵Bennett, op. cit., p. 61.

overhearing a conversation that contains natural language rather than poetic diction. A natural kind of language will, in turn, give a sense of immediacy to the action.¹¹⁶ Thus, one of Herbert's intentions is to write as though he were completely unaware of an audience. In so doing, he is able to use language as it is spoken. As Baxter observes, "Herbert speaks to God like one that really believeth a God, and whose business in the world is most with God."¹¹⁷ Similarly, Rickey explains, "One who knows God very well can speak of Him in familiar terms."¹¹⁸

Possibly, Herbert's most artistic device to enhance the conversational quality of his poetry is the method in which he manages the rhythm and diction in such a way that the metrical form of his verse parallels the natural emphasis of the speaking voice.¹¹⁹ For instance, by making his meter irregular, he suggests a spontaneous quality of speech, thereby avoiding a formal poetic pattern.¹²⁰ An example of Herbert's substitution occurs in the following lines from his poem, "Christmas": "His beams shall cheer my breast,

¹¹⁶Ostriker, op. cit., p. 65.

¹¹⁷Bush, op. cit., p. 143.

¹¹⁸Mary Ellen Rickey, Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert, p. 169.

¹¹⁹Alvarez, op. cit., p. 149.

¹²⁰Ostriker, op. cit., p. 66.

and both so twine / Till ev'n his beams sing, | and my
 musick shine."¹²¹ These lines are typical of Herbert's substitution method, because, here, he substitutes a trochaic foot for an iambic foot [sing, and] which he most often uses since it approximates spoken language. In addition, he accentuates the substitution by a caesura, between [sing, | and] which, in this case, parts the inverted foot. In

"Mattens," on the other hand, he uses the caesura to introduce the substitution:¹²² "My God, | what is a heart?"¹²³

The overall affect of this device is to increase the suggestion of a conversation in which the inherent meter varies with the intensity of what is being spoken.¹²⁴ A related metrical device may be observed in "Redemption":

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,
 Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
 And make a suit unto him to afford
 A new small-rented lease and cancell th' old.¹²⁵

Only the unaccented syllables have been scanned, here, to show that Herbert purposely, by the predominant quietness of these lines, creates an impression of a casual, relaxed

¹²¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 169.

¹²²Ostriker, op. cit., p. 66.

¹²³Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 285.

¹²⁴Ostriker, op. cit., p. 66.

¹²⁵Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 237.

conversation.¹²⁶ The following excerpt is taken from another section of "Redemption":

In heaven at his manour I him sought.
 They told me there that he was lately gone
 About some land which he had dearly bought,
 Long since on earth to take possession.¹²⁷

One notes, here, the effective use of enjambment in the two middle lines. By causing one line to overflow into the next with no end punctuation, Herbert suggests a forward motion of thought, which, in conversation, is not restricted by a formal line unit. A tabulation of Herbert's use of enjambment shows that he employs it in one-sixth of the lines in seventy percent of his poems, and in one-fourth of thirty percent of his poems.¹²⁸ Thus, enjambment is also an important technical device that enables Herbert to use the vernacular as his medium of poetic expression.

To enhance even more the conversational quality of his poems, Herbert gives to them an atmosphere of the dramatic by his implied or actual speakers, tension, questions, and exclamations.¹²⁹ The following lines from "The Collar" illustrate how well Herbert uses the dramatic techniques mentioned above to enforce the conversational quality of his

¹²⁶Ostriker, op. cit., p. 67.

¹²⁷Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 237.

¹²⁸Ostriker, op. cit., p. 67.

¹²⁹Bottrall, op. cit., p. 107.

poetry:

I struck the board, and cry'd, No more!
 I will abroad.
 What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?
 My lines and life are free, free as the roe,
 Loose as the winde, as large as store.
 Shall I be still in suit?

* * * * *

But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
 At every word,
 Me thoughts I heard one calling, Childe!
 And I reply'd, My Lord.¹³⁰

Thus, Herbert employs the language simply, endowing his poems with a vernacular, conversational quality. However, this outward simplicity is not the result of Herbert's dealing with simple issues, but the result of his complex, skillful metrical arrangement. Thus, Herbert's use of a simple, conversational diction is another of his trademarks of style.

¹³⁰Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 211-213.

CHAPTER III

HERBERT'S CONCEPT OF ORDER: THE MERGING OF FORM AND CONTENT

Then Order plaies the soul;
And giving all things their set forms and houres,
Makes of wilde woods sweet walks and bowers.
-- "The Familie"

The final aspect of Herbert's threefold basic poetic principles occurs in his sense of order. Again, as in the case of the place of religion and simplicity in poetry, Herbert's concept of a sense of order is demonstrated throughout his poetry and in The Country Parson. For instance, one's attention is turned toward The Country Parson wherein Herbert has much to say about the order in his life. In "The Parson's Life," he notes that "The Countrey Parson is exceeding exact in his Life, being holy, just, prudent, temperate, bold, grave in all his wayes." Also, he observes that "The Parson . . . orders his Life in such a fashion that when death takes him, . . . he may say as He did, I sate daily with you teaching in the Temple."¹³¹ In "The Parson on Sundays," he outlines a perfectly ordered day that begins and ends with a prayer and is full of work in between prayers.¹³² In "The Parson in his House," one learns that

¹³¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 213-214.

¹³²Ibid., pp. 228-230.

"The Parson is very exact in the governing of his house, making it a copy and modell for his Parish."¹³³ Herbert's sense of order is especially noticable in the following account from "The Parson's Church":

The Countrey Parson hath a speciall care of his Church, that all things there be decent and befitting his Name by which it is called. Therefore, first he takes order that all things be in good repair: as walls plaistered, windows glazed, floore paved, seats whole, firm, and uniform; especially that the Pulpit and Desk, and Communion Table and Font, be as they ought for those great duties that are performed in them.¹³⁴

Herbert bases his concept of order upon ". . . The Apostle's great and admirable Rules in things of this nature: The first whereof is, 'Let all things be done decently and in order . . . I Cor. 14.'¹³⁵ The careful order that Herbert advocates for the church or temple is especially meaningful in view of the symbolic significance of his volume of poetry entitled The Temple, symbolizing, among other things, man's heart, the priesthood, the Old and New Testament building, and poetry as man's ultimate offering to God.¹³⁶

Other prominent examples of order in The Country Parson occur in "The Parson in Circuit," when the parson

¹³³Ibid., p. 235.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 247.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 248.

¹³⁶Sister Sarah William Hanley, "The Unity of George Herbert's Temple," DA, XXVI (1966), 180-A.

" . . . questions what order is kept in the house."¹³⁷ Similarly, in "The Parson in Journey," the parson discovers ". . . what disorders there are either in Apparell, or Diet, or too open a Buttery, or reading vain books, or swearing, or breeding up children to no Calling, but in idleness or the like."¹³⁸ Finally, in "The Parson in Liberty," Herbert sets down the order of daily worship, pointing out

. . . that all Christians should pray twice a day, every day of the week, and four times on Sunday, if they be well. This is so necessary and essentiall to a Christian that he cannot without this maintain himself in a Christian state.¹³⁹

Thus, Herbert feels that all works should be done in an orderly manner; hence, he is convinced that the proper way in which to worship God is for man to lead an ordered life; and the ultimate way of revealing God's glory is outlined in the form of an ordered creation, such as a church or a poem. Or, as Herbert's theme of "The Elixer" suggests, man should do all things for God.¹⁴⁰

In a number of other poems, Herbert comments significantly about order or neatness. For example, in "The Familie," he says that one of the characteristics of the true members of God's household is order:

¹³⁷ Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 251.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 257.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 297.

¹⁴⁰ Summers, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

But, Lord, the house and familie are thine,
 Though some of them repine.
 Turn out these wranglers which defile thy seat,
 For where thou dwellest all is neat.

First Peace and Silence all disputes controll,
 Then Order plaies the soul;
 And giving all things their set forms and houres,
 Makes of wilde woods sweet walks and bowres.¹⁴¹

In "The Church-Porch," he offers advice concerning an ordered life similar to his views expressed in The Country Parson:

Summe up at night what thou hast done by day;
 And in the morning, what thou hast to do.
 Dresse and undresse thy soul: mark the decay
 And growth of it; if with thy watch, that too
 Be down, then winde up both. Since we shall be
 Most surely judg'd, make thy accounts agree.¹⁴²

Although he never directly alludes to it, order is one of the pleas that he makes in the "Jordan" poems.¹⁴³ By mentioning such matters as "a winding stair," "thoughts that began to burnish, sprout, and swell," and "thousands of notions in my brain did runne,"¹⁴⁴ he shows how chaotic a poem can be without a sense of order.

This sense of order that Herbert believes is essential to life and verse did not come about by accident. In fact, in its reaches, one becomes more acutely aware that Herbert

¹⁴¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 168.

¹⁴²Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 67.

¹⁴³Ostriker, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁴⁴Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 89-93.

and his poetry are inseparable. For example, there were two basic influences in Herbert's life, because as a child, the primary formula that his mother advocated for happiness in the home involved discipline, harmony, and order.¹⁴⁵ The sense of order that was instilled into Herbert's home life continued into his school life. At Westminster School, he followed a strictly ordered plan of study that was to produce serious scholars. He was required, also, to follow a schedule for sleeping, eating, praying, schooling, and playing.¹⁴⁶ Later, Herbert knew the same type of regimented life at Cambridge, where the strict discipline was intended to produce students of "piety and good letters."¹⁴⁷ Finally, in some ways, Herbert's entire life seemed to have been pre-ordained, for since the time of boyhood, he had been destined for the priesthood.¹⁴⁸ However, this sense of predestination did not come from God, but, rather, it came from his mother, who first turned his mind toward religion, and it was his mother who literally forced him into the priesthood.¹⁴⁹ Thus, as one observes, Herbert achieved a sense of order in

¹⁴⁵ Marchette Chute, Two Gentle Men, p. 26.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ Bottrall, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ Carl Holliday, "George Herbert," Sewanee Review, XVIII (July, 1910), 270.

his early years that never left him.

The second and possibly even more significant influence upon Herbert's concept of order occurs in his belief in the Chain of Being, leading him to a desire for order and harmony in both the spiritual and physical aspects of his life.¹⁵⁰ Herbert believes that all elements of the universe fit harmoniously into a patterned, united whole. He especially favors the idea inherent in the Chain of Being which suggests that the Creator could harmonize man and nature.¹⁵¹ Thus, his poetry is replete with examples of his awareness of God's all-encompassing presence. In fact, to Herbert, life itself is an outward symbol of God.¹⁵² Since God's presence pervades the universe, Herbert views all that happens as a part of God's universal plan. Naturally, then, he considers all aspects of a Christian's life to be a part of a divine scheme.¹⁵³ Herbert, also, believes that, since man is the link between the world and God, man should remove any obstructions that would keep him from a direct communion with his God.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, since he views himself and his

¹⁵⁰Bush, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁵¹Bottrall, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁵²Mahood, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁵³Bottrall, op. cit., p. 136.

¹⁵⁴John P. Masterson, "George Harvey and George Herbert with a Critical Edition of Harvey's The Synagogue," DA, XXI (1961), 225.

life as a microcosm within the vast, ordered macrocosm, he is convinced that his life has to be as well-ordered as is God's universe. If his life were well-ordered, nothing could separate him from his Creator.¹⁵⁵

As one might anticipate, Herbert's literature clearly reflects this faith in the Chain of Being. For example, in "The Parson's Consideration of Providence," he explains his concept of the ordered universe, as follows:

And it is observable that if anything could presume of an inevitable course and constancy in their operations, certainly it should be either the sun in heaven or the fire on earth, by reason of their fierce, strong, and violent natures; yet when God pleased, the sun stood still, the fire burned not. By God's governing power he preserves and orders the references of things one to the other, so that though the corn do grow and be preserved in that act by his sustaining power, yet if he suite not other things to the growth, as seasons and weather and other accidents by his governing power, the fairest harvests come to nothing. And it is observable, that God delights to have men feel and acknowledge and reverence his power, and therefore he often overturnes things when they are thought past danger; that is his time of interposing: As when a Merchant hath a ship come home after many a storme which it hath escaped, he destroyes it sometimes in the very Haven; or if the goods be housed, a fire hath broken forth and suddenly consumed them. Now this he doth that men should perpetuate and not break off their acts of dependance, how faire soever the opportunities present themselves.¹⁵⁶

Obviously, the points which Herbert emphasizes, here, show that God controls the universe and that He wants man to

¹⁵⁵Summers, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁵⁶Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 294-295.

remain dependent upon Him, thereby maintaining a sense of divine order and harmony intended. Since Herbert sees God as a loving Being Who chooses man to be the prime recipient of His love, the poet finds it difficult to understand the ingratitude often displayed by man. When man rejects God, he creates discord in the universe. Thus, Herbert believes that Christ took it upon Himself to restore order by dying on the cross, thereby renewing world harmony.¹⁵⁷

In Herbert's poetry as well, one finds an emphasis upon the Chain of Being. For example, in a Latin poem, "On the Sundial," Herbert observes, "This machine shows / Earth and heaven linked."¹⁵⁸ In "Employment I," he is distressed when he is out of step with the Chain of Being:¹⁵⁹

Let me not languish then, and spend
 A life as barren to thy praise
 As is the dust to which that life doth tend,
 But with delays.

All things are busie; onely I
 Neither bring hony with the bees,
 Nor flowers to make that, nor the husbandrie
 To water these.

I am no link of thy great chain,
 But all my companie is a weed.
 Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain
 To my poore reed.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Bottrall, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

¹⁵⁸ McCloskey, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁵⁹ Mahood, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁶⁰ Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 349.

Thus, he is dismayed to discover that he is not fitting into God's scheme for the universe. What he desires is a sense of order that will occur to him only if his life can be as busy and as useful as the bee's.¹⁶¹ Similarly, in "Employment II," he feels a sense of uselessness, because he fulfills no assigned purpose.¹⁶² Thus, he becomes envious and wishes, "Oh that I were an Orange-tree, / That busie plant!"¹⁶³ In both poems, he shows an awareness that the world is merely a place of preparation for the next, but he still desires to lead a full life and serve his purpose, thereby functioning as part of the chain.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, he is willing to accept the limitations of the finite world if he feels that he is fulfilling his mission on earth.¹⁶⁵ He expresses this feeling of satisfaction in "Content":

This soul doth span the world, and hang content
 From either pole unto the centre;
 Where in each room of the well-furnisht tent
 He lies warm and without adventure.¹⁶⁶

Only when Herbert feels in harmony with God and the universe

¹⁶¹Chute, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁶²Bottrall, op. cit., p. 178.

¹⁶³Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 105.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁶⁵Marjorie Hope Nicholson, The Breaking of the Circle, p. 156.

¹⁶⁶Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 355.

does he have a sense of peace.¹⁶⁷

Perhaps, the poem, "Providence," is one of his most direct statements about the Chain of Being.¹⁶⁸ Here, he expounds upon the important position of man on the chain, especially in the second and fourth stanzas:

Of all the creatures both in sea and land
 Onely to Man thou hast made know thy wayes,
 And put the penne alone into his hand,
 And made him Secreterie of thy praise.

* * * * *

Man is the world's high Priest. He doth present
 The sacrifice for all; while they below
 Unto the service mutter an assent,
 Such as springs use that fall and windes that blow.¹⁶⁹

Herbert is aware that man, because he is created in God's image, is the highest earthly link in the chain, and, thereby, is superior to the rest of creation. However, since he also realizes that man is still far below God, he yields to His universal scheme:

We all acknowledge both thy power and love
 To be exact, transcendent, and divine;
 Who dost so strongly and so sweetly move,
 While all things have their will, yet none but thine.¹⁷⁰

Because God has created all of the links in the chain, it is only natural, according to Herbert, that His presence is

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 326.

¹⁶⁸Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p. 61.

¹⁶⁹Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 79.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 81.

manifest throughout the entire universe:

Thou art in small things great, not small in any,
 Thy even praise can neither rise nor fall.
 Thou art in all things one, in each thing many,
 For thou art infinite in one and all.¹⁷¹

One aspect of God's scheme that amazes Herbert is that of the universal continuity. This continuity is possible because of the balance in nature which assures that all levels on the chain are provided for:

Each creature hath a wisdom for his good.
 The pigeons feed their tender off-spring, crying,
 When they are callow; but withdraw their food
 When they are fledge, that need may teach them flying.

Bees work for man; and yet they never bruise
 Their master's flower, but leave it, having done,
 As fair as ever and as fit to use;
 So both the flower doth stay, and honey run.

Sheep eat the grasse and dung the ground for more,
 Trees, after bearing, drop their leaves for soil,
 Springs vent their streams, and by expense get store,
 Clouds cool by heat, and baths by cooling boil.¹⁷³

Plentitude is another aspect of the universe that causes Herbert to marvel. For not only does God make each link dependent upon the ones above and below it, He also provides abundantly for each link:

And as thy house is full, so I adore
 Thy curious art in marshalling thy goods.
 The hills with health abound; the vales with store;
 The South with marble; North with fures and woods.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 85.

* * * * *

All countreys have enough to serve their need.
 If they seek fine things, thou dost make them run
 For their offence; and then dost turn their speed
 To be commerce and trade from sunne to sunne.¹⁷⁴

Finally, in almost utopian terms, Herbert describes the perfect peace and harmony that can exist when each link is in its proper position:

Thy creatures leap not, but expresse a feast
 Where all the guests sit close, and nothing wants.
 Frogs marry fish and flesh; bats, bird and beast;
 Sponges non-sense and sense; mines, th' earth and
 plants.¹⁷⁵

Thus, in "Providence," Herbert gives a concise picture of the Chain of Being. The world is perfectly ordered with each link in the chain being connected to the links immediately above and below it. At the pinnacle of the earthly part of the chain is man. At the very peak of the chain is God, Who has complete control over His creation.¹⁷⁶ Again, Herbert shows special awareness of the continuity and plentitude that abound in the universe.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, one concludes that Herbert was unquestionably aware of and influenced by the Great Chain of Being.

Because of his ordered life and his belief in the Chain

¹⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 89-91.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁷⁷Lovejoy, op. cit., p. 61.

he feels that the ultimate sense of order that he wants may be expressed in his poetry only if he completely merges form and content.¹⁸³ This merging would make each aspect of his poetry as functional and useful as each link in the chain. An examination of Herbert's poetry reveals that he succeeds in blending form and content.

Because a sense of order is so integral to Herbert's thinking, he wrote The Temple so as to reflect the order of his life and the universe. Not only does each poem in this collection possess a definite symmetry, but the whole of The Temple is a reflection of Herbert's systematic approach.¹⁸⁴ For instance, the symbolic meaning in the word, temple, is twofold: first, it is an outward hieroglyph for the human body; secondly, it is a symbol of the divine body of Christ. A synthesis of the two meanings shows that The Temple is a symbol of all types of order in the universe, human and divine.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the pervading theme of The Temple is harmony, as Herbert, the country parson, merges with Herbert, the poet, to formulate one of the most complete poetic pictures of order in the seventeenth century.¹⁸⁶ Proof of order in The Temple may be seen in the sequence of its poems, which may be read as separate units, but which have a richer

¹⁸³Hayes, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁸⁴Bush, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁸⁵Summers, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁸⁶Bush, op. cit., p. 143.

meaning if they are read sequentially so as to enhance one's understanding of the larger theme.¹⁸⁷

Even though the overall theme of The Temple is that of harmony and order, one must examine the individual poems to comprehend the skillful manner in which Herbert blends form and content in his determined effort to reflect a sense of order. While many of the poems show the turmoil within the author, regardless of what the form of the poem may be, Herbert brings each poem out of chaos into a specific conclusion, thereby restoring a semblance of order.¹⁸⁸ For instance, "The Pulley" illustrates how Herbert blends form and content to restore a sense of order:

When God at first made man,
Having a glasse of blessings standing by,
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can.
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way,
Then beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure
Rest in the bottome lay.

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewell also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature.
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,

¹⁸⁷ Fredson Bowers, "Herbert's Sequential Imagery: 'The Temper,'" MP, LIX (February, 1962), 202.

¹⁸⁸ Bottrall, op. cit., p. 140.

But keep them with repining restlesnesse.
 Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,
 If goodnesse leade him not, wearinesse
 May tosse him to my breast.¹⁸⁹

The theme of this poem states that God gives man all wordly gifts except rest.¹⁹⁰ Rest is withheld, because He fears that man will admire the other gifts instead of the Giver. Hence, man has a restless nature, which Herbert thus rationalizes as a part of God's universal pattern.¹⁹¹ Herbert causes the form of this poem to suggest its content by having, in each stanza, one short line, followed by three longer lines, yet concluding with a final short line. This pattern suggests the back-and-forth movement of a pulley that represents man's moving to and away from God.¹⁹² A sense of fatigue is resolved in the last line wherein Herbert shows his faith and trust in the hope that God will ultimately pull man to His breast, assuring him an eternity of rest and security.¹⁹³

In "Deniell," Herbert uses rhyme scheme to suggest a severed relationship between God and the poet:¹⁹⁴

When my devotions could not pierce

¹⁸⁹Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 149.

¹⁹⁰S. G. Tallentyre, "The Parson-Poets," North American Review, CLIX (1912), 90.

¹⁹¹Hayes, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁹²Loc. cit.

¹⁹³Mahood, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁹⁴Bennett, op. cit., p. 62.

Loose as the winde, as large as store.
 Shall I be still in suit?
 Have I no harvest but a thorn
 To let me bloud, and not restore
 What I have lost with cordiall fruit?
 Sure there was wine
 Before my sighs did drie it. There was corn
 Before my tears did drown it.
 Is the yeare onely lost to me?
 Have I no bayes to crown it?
 No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
 All wasted?
 Not so, my heart! But there is fruit,
 And thou hast hands.
 Recover all thy sigh-blown age
 On double pleasures. Leave thy cold dispute
 Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,
 Thy rope of sands,
 Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
 Good ceble, to enforce and draw,
 And be thy law,
 While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
 Away! Take heed!
 I will abroad.
 Call in thy death's head there. Tie up thy fears.
 He that forbears
 To suit and serve his need
 Deserves his load.
 But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
 At every word,
 Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!
 And I reply'd, My Lord.²⁰⁰

This poem has been described as Herbert's "formalized picture of chaos."²⁰¹ Unlike the perfectly pious man that Walton pictures in his Lives, the image of Herbert in "The Collar" depicts the intense struggle that the man experienced between religious and worldly desires.²⁰² Because of self-

²⁰⁰Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 211-213.

²⁰¹Summers, op. cit., p. 90.

²⁰²Mary Butts, "The Hersey Game," Spectator, CLVIII (March 12, 1937), 466.

doubt and a feeling of unworthiness, in addition to a captive sense, Herbert contemplates returning to secular life.²⁰³

One notes, herein, that the threat is almost child-like, a quality that is often a characteristic of his relationship with God.²⁰⁴ In addition to the subject of the poem, one also observes that the expressed rebellion and disorder are credible, although obviously artistically controlled and ordered.²⁰⁵ The fact that Herbert uses the past tense throughout the poem shows that the experience under scrutiny has already occurred, so that, now, it serves as a motive for a necessary restoration of order.²⁰⁶ Thus, the poem is an imaginative recreation of a past experience.²⁰⁷ Herbert's customary blending of form and content is manifest, also, in his choice of title, which is an example of the kind of order to be found in the seemingly disordered poem.²⁰⁸ In fact, Herbert's title has a multiple meaning. First, it stands for the yoke that all Christians must bear. Secondly, it represents a particular feeling of restraint that Herbert

²⁰³Leishman, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁰⁴William Blackburn, "Lady Magdalen Herbert and Her Son George," South Atlantic Quarterly, L (July, 1951), 388.

²⁰⁵Bush, op. cit., p. 146.

²⁰⁶Summers, op. cit., p. 92.

²⁰⁷Hughes, op. cit., p. 89.

²⁰⁸Rosemary Freeman, "George Herbert and the Emblem Books," RES, XVII (April, 1941), 164.

feels. Thirdly, it may be a choler pun, dramatizing the irritated man's sense of rebellion. Finally, it may be the basis for another pun in the collar-caller combination, suggesting the voice that calls to him at the conclusion of the poem. Thus, Herbert's title shows his ability to invest a word with meaning to enhance his concept of the blending of form and content.²⁰⁹

To comprehend the artistic way in which Herbert fuses form and content in "The Collar," one must examine his poetic technique. To begin with, his unparagraphed arrangement of the poem is unique with Herbert. However, the fact that the poem is not divided into formal stanzas also suggests an unrestrained mood of rebellion.²¹⁰ This lack of order is further increased by his use of the irregular line length and accompanying lack of set rhyme pattern.²¹¹ Although there is no formal rhyme scheme, no line is, however, left unrhymed. Furthermore, one notes that the number of feet per line ranges from two to five. In essence, then, the first four quatrains reflect a sense of total disorder. However, this sense of disorder is so carefully worked out that Herbert still is perfectly in control of his seemingly

²⁰⁹Mary Ellen Rickey, Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert, pp. 99-101.

²¹⁰Bottrall, op. cit., p. 106.

²¹¹Ostriker, op. cit., p. 67.

disordered subject.²¹² The poem reaches its dramatic conclusion in the last four lines in which there is an implied speaker who calls to Herbert, consoling him and, at this point, the sense of rebellion vanishes.²¹³ This sudden and dramatic turn of events is enhanced by Herbert's incorporation of formal order into his last four lines. The pattern of rhyme and line length exhibited in the last four lines (10a, 4b, 8a, 6b) does not occur elsewhere in the poem. Thus, by a perfect fusion of form and content, Herbert creates a sense of disorder that, paradoxically, is controlled and ordered at all times.²¹⁴

In many other poems, as well, Herbert skillfully merges form with content. For instance, "Aaron" has five stanzas of five lines each, representing the five letters in Aaron. The form of the first two stanzas is parallel so as to fit the two a's:²¹⁵

Holiness on the head,
Light and perfections on the breast,
Harmonious bells below, raising the dead
To leede them unto life and rest;
Thus are true Aarons drest.

Profanenesse in my head,
Defects and darknesse in my breast,

²¹²Summers, op. cit., p. 92.

²¹³Martz, op. cit., p. 270.

²¹⁴Summers, op. cit., p. 92.

²¹⁵Hayes, op. cit., p. 44.

A noise of passions ringing me for dead
 Unto a place where is no rest;
 Poore priest thus am I drest.²¹⁶

Also, these parallel stanzas suggest the perfection of Aaron contrasted with the imperfection of Herbert.²¹⁷ In "Church Monuments," the poet parallels the decay of man's body and church monuments in the "dissolution" of his sentences.²¹⁸

For instance:

My bodie to this school, that it may learn
 To spell his elements, and finde his birth
 Written in dustie hearldrie and lines
 Which dissolution sure doth best discern,
 Comparing dust with dust, and earth with earth. . . .²¹⁹

By the repetition of the word, dust, and his a-b-c rhyme scheme, Herbert pushes into the foreground of thought the idea of the inevitability of man's impending death. On the other hand, to fuse form and content, he uses line lengths in "Discipline":²²⁰

Throw away thy rod,
 Throw away thy wrath.
 O my God,
 Take the gentle path.

For my heart's desire
 Unto thine is bent.
 I aspire
 To a full consent.

²¹⁶Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 11.

²¹⁷Hayes, op. cit., p. 44.

²¹⁸Bush, op. cit., p. 145.

²¹⁹Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 201.

²²⁰Martz, op. cit., p. 141.

Not a word or look
 I affect to own,
 But by book,
 And thy book alone.

Though I fail, I weep.
 Though I halt in pace,
 Yet I creep
 To the throne of grace.²²¹

In his apostrophe to God, Herbert is aware of God's power; therefore, his use of extremely short lines shows how insignificant he is when compared to God. His shortest lines are those which are packed with the most emotion, and also those that Herbert can control because of his awareness of God's power.²²² Again, form and content merge in the rather didactic poem, "Church-Porch," which deals with the subject of human religious errors, revealing how these mistakes may be overcome. The total number of stanzas in this poem is seventy-seven, a perfect number, suggesting at once that man can achieve a degree of perfectability in his religious life.²²³ While Herbert's use of this perfect number is a rather simple poetic device, it quickly conveys, nevertheless, the religious idea with which Herbert is concerned. Furthermore, his merging of form and content in "Sinnes Round" depends upon his use of another simple but effective device:

²²¹Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 297.

²²²Jacob H. Adler, "Form and Meaning in Herbert's 'Discipline,'" N&Q, CCIII (June, 1958), 240.

²²³Martz, op. cit., p. 291.

Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am
 That my offences course it in a ring.
 My thoughts are working like a busie flame
 Untill their cockartice they hatch and bring.
 And when they once have perfected their draughts,
 My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.

My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,
 Which spit forth like the Sicilian hill.
 They vent the weres and passe them with their faults,
 And by their breathing ventilate the ill.
 But words suffice not where are lewd intentions;
 My hands do joyn to finish the inventions.

My hands do joyn to finish the inventions.
 And so my sinnes ascend three stories high,
 As Babel grew before there were dissentions.
 Yet ill deeds loyter not, for they supplie
 New thoughts of sinning. Wherefore, to my shame,
 Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am.²²⁴

By having the last line in each stanza doubly serve him as the first line in the next stanza, Herbert reveals the repetitive quality of sin. He clinches this idea by ending the poem with the same line that begins it, thereby completing a vicious circle.²²⁵ Once again, Herbert conveys the idea by making form and content serve him. He uses a similar device, also, in "Trinitie Sunday":

Lord, who hast form'd me out of mud,
 And hast redeem'd me through thy bloud,
 And sanctifi'd me to do good,

Purge all my sinnes done heretofore;
 For I confesse my heavie score,
 And I will strive to sinne no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,

²²⁴Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 143-145.

²²⁵Hayes, op. cit., p. 44.

With faith, my hope, with charitie,
That I may runne, rise, rest with thee.²²⁶

Obviously, "three" is the key to this poem. Each stanza represents one of the three aspects of life--i.e., creation, redemption, or sanctification. These three, in turn, symbolize God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.²²⁷ In conclusion, the three stanzas of three lines each also represent the Trinity.²²⁸ Furthermore, the three symbolizes the basic Christian virtues of love, hope, and charity.²²⁹ So again, within a simple framework, Herbert has managed to include multiple meanings so that form will contribute to content.

When one observes how form and content merge in Herbert's poetry, he must also consider the tradition of the so-called "patterned" poems. Patterned verse, by definition, is that in which stanzaic form supplies a visual image of the subject of the poem.²³⁰ Possibly far more than any other aspect of his verse, Herbert has been criticized by many, but not all, scholars for his patterned poems. However,

²²⁶Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 161.

²²⁷Irat-Hussain, The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century, p. 138.

²²⁸Hayes, op. cit., p. 44.

²²⁹Odette de Mourgues, Metaphysical Baroque and Précieux Poetry, p. 51.

²³⁰Rosemary Freeman, English Emblem Books, p. 169.

when one considers that Herbert lived in a highly experimental age and that he was an experimental poet (of the poems in The Temple, one hundred and eleven different stanza patterns),²³¹ one should not be surprised or offended by this particular quirk of Herbert's imagination. While the patterned poems certainly do show Herbert's delight in ingenuity, they also capture an essence of poetic sensibility.²³² But even more important, the patterned verse further emphasizes Herbert's habitual attempt to blend form and content.²³³ Thus, each poem is not, as some critics have said, a game, but Herbert's attempt to speak truth.²³⁴ Furthermore, the strange patterns serve to frame the idea with which Herbert is working and represent another aspect of this meticulous artist.²³⁵ His "Easter Wings" is one of the chief illustrations of his patterned poems. For example, one observes the second stanza of "Easter Wings":

My tender age in sorrow did beginne;
 And still with sicknesses and shame
 Thou didst so punish sinne,
 That I became

²³¹Hayes, op. cit., p. 43.

²³²Louis H. Leiter, "George Herbert's 'Anagram,'" College English, XXVI (April, 1965), 543.

²³³S. L. Bethell, The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century, p. 26.

²³⁴Chute, op. cit., p. 111.

²³⁵Ostriker, op. cit., p. 65.

Most thine.
 With thee
 Let me combine
 And feel this day thy victorie;
 For if I imp my wing on thine,
 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.²³⁶

The pattern of this poem is obviously that of the shape of the wings. The shorter lines represent Herbert's diminishing sense of security, while the longer lines show the return of his confidence in God, Who died to save man.²³⁷ Also, the rise and fall of the lines visually represent the rise and fall of the lark's song and its flight, in turn, stating the poem's subject--man's fall and ultimate resurrection.²³⁸

Although "Easter Wings" and "The Altar" are Herbert's only two completely hieroglyphic poems, they are unique only in that they are more visual manifestations than usual of Herbert's constant attempt to make form and content inseparable. In essence, therefore, all of his other poems are at least semi-hieroglyphics.²³⁹ When one is aware of how completely Herbert blends form and content, he agrees with Palmer who calls Herbert ". . . a conscious artist who shapes his poetry by a definite plan that involves the nature of

²³⁶Palmer (ed.), The Works, II, 337.

²³⁷Holliday, op. cit., p. 277.

²³⁸Bennett, op. cit., p. 63.

²³⁹Mary Ellen Rickey, "Herbert's Technical Development," JEGP, LXII (October, 1963), 749.

the subject."²⁴⁰ Thus, the merging of form and content is the third principle of Herbert's poetic credo.

²⁴⁰Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 167.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

One discovers that Herbert exhibits three broad governing principles that form his poetic credo, and that the poems themselves testify to Herbert's ability to practice what he believed. For instance, no seventeenth-century poet produced a body of poetry so completely religious in nature. Thus, Herbert realizes a desire, in the "Jordan" poems and the two "Sonnets to His Mother," to devote his poetry to the service of God. While his poetry is predominately religious autobiography, Herbert confessed as he lay dying that possibly his verse could benefit others in their own religious struggles. However, he is primarily a private, rather than a public poet. Accordingly, his thoughts are always upon God and himself. In essence, he dedicates himself and his poetic services entirely to God. Thus, his poetry is exclusively religious. Possibly, the best explanation of the religious element in Herbert's verse lies in the fact that he saw the real value of poetry as the most concise medium for an expression of his personal relationships with God.²⁴¹ For this reason, he always adheres to the belief that a poet should deal with religious issues.

²⁴¹Summers, op. cit., p. 78.

The second point in Herbert's credo, that of simplicity, is the one that gave him the most trouble. Even though the language that he employs is basically simple, even vernacular, Herbert's ideas are complex, rather than simple. However, in his poems and in The Country Parson, Herbert admits only that he believes in simple language, not in simple ideas. In fact, he ventures the opinion in the "Church-Porch" that his verse may be "wittie." In other words, even though his language is simple, it is also conceited.²⁴² That achieving his goal of plainness did not come easily to Herbert is seen in one of his last poems, "The Forerunners," in which he bids farewell to "enticing phrases," construed as the ornamental language that he earlier opposed.²⁴³ However, even a cursory reading of Herbert's poetry reveals that he does abstain from using ornamental language and that his language is basically simple. There must be, therefore, some explanation for the accusation of Herbert's critics that he is obscure. First, Herbert uses apparently common words that, however, had different connotations in the seventeenth century. For instance, complexion was then defined as disposition, move meant propose, neat was subtle, and still was always. Thus,

²⁴²Mary Ellen Riekey, Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert, p. 174.

²⁴³Williamson, op. cit., p. 105.

common words understood by modern definitions might produce misunderstandings on the part of modern readers.²⁴⁴ A second possible explanation for Herbert's seeming obscurity, lies in his use of puns and conceits, causing his words to carry more than one meaning.²⁴⁵ Unlike other metaphysical poets who sustain one meaning in accumulating related images, Herbert sustains his multiple meaning by superimposing one level of meaning upon another. By so doing, he sustains more than one metaphor throughout his poems.²⁴⁶ Thus, while the seventeenth-century reader of Herbert's verse admired his simple yet pregnant language, the modern reader is often confused.²⁴⁷ One concludes that Herbert did adhere to his credo of using a simple language, although contemporary readers have considered his language by current definitions. The result is that Herbert often seems complex and obscure. Possibly, the best explanation for the simplicity of Herbert's language lies in the fact that most readers understand at least one level of meaning of his poetry. However, to receive the fullest implication of Herbert's verse, a reader must have a working knowledge of seventeenth-century puns,

²⁴⁴Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 149-150.

²⁴⁵Ibid., p. 157.

²⁴⁶Mary Ellen Rickey, Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert, p. 71.

²⁴⁷Palmer (ed.), The Works, I, 157.

concepts, and definitions.²⁴⁸

The final point of Herbert's poetic credo, that involving a sense of order, is as closely followed by him as is the religious aspect of his creed. Again, an examination of his poetry reveals that this concept of order leads to his skillfull merging of form and content. For instance, in "The Forerunners," he favors the merging of form and content when he says, "Let a bleak paleness chalk the doore, / So all within be livelier then before."²⁴⁹ One may conclude that Herbert's uncessing attempt to experiment is merely the result of his desire to find the best way in which to merge form and content in each of his poems. Finally, one may infer that Herbert's disciplined life as well as The Great Chain of Being influenced his belief in a sense of order. This order, which implies total unity, is best exhibited by the merging of form and content in his poetry.

Therefore, Herbert makes it clear that he has a three-fold poetic credo. Each point becomes, then, a mark of his own style. Possibly, the ultimate praise that can be accorded him comes from Bottrill, one of his most ardent critics: "He forged for himself a style that was unmistakable and inimitable; and a poet, after all, is not

²⁴⁸Bell and Daldy (eds.), British Poets: Herbert and Vaughan, p. xxvi.

²⁴⁹Palmer (ed.), The Works, III, 319.

obliged to invent anything else."²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰Bottrall, op. cit., p. 99.

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