

The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick. Robert Herrick.

Ed. Ruth Connolly and Tom Cain. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. lxxxv + 504 pp. \$150 (vol. 1); xix + 806 pp. \$150 (vol. 2).

What kind of poet was Robert Herrick? In seeking an answer to such a question, our view is shaped — without, perhaps, our even knowing it — by the format in which we encounter his works. Our sense of Herrick as both poet and man has been forcefully defined by the literary monument that is *Hesperides*, his 1648 collected poems that put the huge majority of his works into both print and the public domain for the first time. It is an achievement substantial enough to define a reputation, of course. Following the generic lead provided by early modern epigrammatists, and the organizational principles of the manuscript miscellany collection (as Cain and Connolly insist here), Herrick's book gives us a poetic life in its frayed entirety, a various, centrifugal personality that is nonetheless rendered knowable in being shown solely, emphatically, here, and not scattered across a range of elsewhere. The Herrick who emerges from the volume has long been known to literary history as one of the four fully fledged Cavalier poets. He has been celebrated for his tolerant, worldly aesthetic, his evocation of a good life rooted in friendship, and the temperate enjoyment of earthly pleasures; more recently, *Hesperides* has been read in the fraught political context of the years surrounding its publication, and

Herrick's Royalism has received as much critical attention as his articulation of a less overtly political Cavalier worldview.

Despite its huge importance for our critical understandings of Herrick, the undeniable and unavoidable singularity of *Hesperides* is nevertheless a lie — or, at least, a fiction. The volume abounds in apparently confessional or autobiographical moments that require some degree of readerly skepticism, as Cain and Connolly show in the exemplary “Life” with which this edition opens. Beyond this, though, the monumentality of *Hesperides* obscures — perhaps as it is meant to do — the years, events, and processes that made it possible. So Herrick is read overwhelmingly as a participant in a mature Cavalier poetic project, or as a poet whose oeuvre is shaped particularly by the political and cultural crises of the mid-seventeenth century. In an important recent article, John Creaser argued that the date of publication for *Hesperides* had led to serious critical misapprehensions regarding the meaning and significance of Herrick's work (“‘Times Trans-Shifting’: Chronology and the Mis-Shaping of Herrick,” *English Literary Renaissance* 39 [2009]: 163–96). Now, Cain and Connolly are able to extend and modify Creaser's approach, and to show us a Herrick wriggling free of the distorting effects both of his own self-fashioning and of its later reception.

The edition achieves this result through a range of means. The thorough research underpinning the fifty-page “Life” gives us the fullest and richest biography we yet have of the man who was, after all, not far short of sixty when he published *Hesperides* and who did not die until 1674. The detailed inquiry to which the editors have subjected family papers, public records, and other sources enable them to fill out the picture of the poet's earlier years to great effect. An account of his origins in the mercantile milieu of his father and uncle, his years at Cambridge and around court, and his subsequent involvement in the ill-fated Île-de-Ré expedition of 1627, all serve to complement the more familiar image of the Devonshire clergyman he was later to become. If the narrative is to some degree sketchier once we reach the 1650s and afterward, this is not the editors' fault — Herrick's almost complete silence as a poet after 1649, and the uneventful way in which he appears to have discharged his parish duties once restored to Dean Prior, leave them with little of great biographical consequence to report. But in paying attention here to the question of Herrick's reputation as a writer both in his later years and after his death, the edition establishes that *Hesperides* did not — as some have surmised — sink without trace, or merely languish among its bookseller's unsold stock. Even if his own later years were quiet, his work had begun to take on a more vivid life of its own.

This biographical research is far from the only way in which the edition reshapes our sense of Herrick as a writer of his age. In fact, the strongest body of evidence to support or compel such a reshaping is to be found in the exhaustive work that the editors have done on the manuscript circulation of sixty poems and songs in miscellanies and other forms during Herrick's lifetime. The “transmissional histories and historical collations” provided for each poem complement the presentation of copytext derived from an informed analysis and interpretation of the evidence for the specific scope and nature of scribal transmission from the 1620s onward. Thus the second volume of the edition

offers us a view of Herrick as a writer in manuscript circulation that is unlikely ever to be bettered. Indeed, we learn much here not just about Herrick's work, but about the seventeenth-century verse miscellanies and collections in which his works are to be found — the editors' labor has thus done a general service for anyone interested in early modern manuscript culture more broadly.

As well as showing us a Herrick circulating in the scribal culture of the 1620s and 1630s, the edition also draws attention to Herrick the lyricist — specifically, to the circulation and publication of his work within the musical culture of the period. His collaborations with composers are acknowledged in *Hesperides*, but the true extent to which his words and their settings were shared and made public has escaped full scholarly notice until now. While other works circulated in manuscript in the early decades of the century, Herrick's songs were better known rather later, after — and apart from — the publication of his great volume.

An edition of Herrick that merely sought to draw attention away from *Hesperides*, however, would be seriously perverse. The book is at the heart of this one, despite the comprehensive effort expended on other elements in the overall picture. Cain and Connolly provide a full original spelling text in volume 1 and a thorough commentary in volume 2, allowing readers possessed of sufficient lap or desk space to read the two side by side. They have undertaken substantial work on the printing of the book, and give an authoritative account of its publication. Their notes are the fullest and most helpful annotations on which readers of Herrick have ever been able to draw. Indeed, across these two volumes, the editors have managed both to better their predecessors' achievements as readers of Herrick's printed book, while also permitting us to see a full and detailed picture of his work as it circulated through other media and forms. The result is a singular edition that rivals *Hesperides* itself in its undaunting monumentality.

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