George Herbert, *The Country Parson, The Temple*, edited by John N. Wall, Jr. Preface by A.M. Allchin. New York: Paulist Press, 1981. Pp. xxii, 354. \$7.95 (paper)

One reason for writing poems, Herbert said, was to "find him who a sermon flies." Most of his readers for three hundred and fifty years, however, have been faithful Christians on perfectly good terms with sermons, and some (John Donne and John Wesley, for example) wrote sermons themselves. The modern university reader, now accustomed to exclusive possession of Herbert's poetry and unaccustomed to sermons—at least those of his own time—and unsympathetic to them, is the historical oddity. I write as such an oddity, made more mindful of my situation by the publication of this modern spelling edition of *The Temple* and *The Country Parson* under copyright by the Missionary Society of St. Paul in a series called Classics of Western Spirituality, which is welcomed by the magazine *Christian World* (in jacket blurb) as contributing helpfully "to further the spiritual renewal of the Church." A preface by Canon A.M. Allchin commends the poems as "statements that can speak directly to us today They are statements which come from the heart of a life which did indeed partake of the unity and joy which comes to us from God."

The poems are of course not damaged by being offered in a setting of somewhat militant latter-day Christianity (unless a too exclusive attention to the Spirit accounts for the extremely sloppy handling of the text and an errata sheet listing a hundred or so mostly minor misprints). One may well feel, however (that is, I feel), a kind of challenge, to the secular stewardship of Herbert's poetry and some urgent impulses to self-questioning. Herbert himself might have said university critics are honest people, let them interpret (shepherds are honest people, let them sing), but can our interpretations compete in authority and seriousness with the interpretations of these renewers of the Church? Can we share vital issues with him, as they do, or enter genuinely into his sentiments while not matching his beliefs? Do we (despite ourselves) deal with him as aesthetes and antiquarians pleased by his craft and charmed by his old-fashionedness? I take our response, in fact, to be sufficiently whole-hearted, though not well identified. A closet response, perhaps, half-emerged in Helen Vendler's reassertion of Housman's claim that "good religious poetry, whether in Keble or Dante or Job, is likely to be most justly appreciated and most discriminately relished by the undevout."

My proposition, with which I shall be brief, is that there is little practical difference for the human inhabitant whether his world is controlled by the inscrutable, unpredictable God of Herbert's Reformation theology, or by no God at all, and that the nature of the emotions involved in recognizing either situation may be about the same. Thus we are more than vicariously moved by the comings and goings of Herbert's God, more than abstractly interested in the wonders of his Lord of power "killing and quickening, bringing down to hell/And up to heaven in an hour." Our twentieth-century sense of the poignancy of the battered and yearning human spirit, unaccountably wrecked or unaccountably rescued, is acceptably expressed for us when Herbert describes his seventeenth-century sense of the same.

Oh my only light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

And his peculiar genius in using a line ending to leave us gaping at the edge of the infinite produces its amazed response just as authentically in the non-devout modern reader as in his devout opposites, seventeenth-century or modern.

Come, come, my God oh come
But no hearing
(“Denial”)

To thee my sight, my tears ascend:
No end?
(“Longing”)

In fact, no great effort of sympathy or imagination is required of the non-devout in responding to this line-end magic, even when the object of devotion can be glimpsed across the great divide:

Yet I creep
To the throne of grace
(“Discipline”)

Man's remoteness from his bliss is still the point, and the craving for a universe of comfort is as familiar to those who reject Christian assurances as to those who accept them.

One would stop (one had better!) a good deal short of claiming Herbert as a poet of the absurd. But if the first postulate of absurdism and the primary fact of modern awareness is the sense of man out of place in an inconsistent universe and in perplexities about his Ultimate Referent, it is clear that Herbert knows about these things (has absorbed the inescapable Reformation positions) and has been moved by them to expressions to which we in turn can feelingly respond.

John N. Wall's introduction and notes to this volume are scholarly and useful and do not obtrude concerns with spiritual renewal. His inclusion of *The Country Parson* is welcome—though some might question its status as a classic of western spirituality. The imaginary portrait of Herbert on the cover I take to be a pious lapse of taste beyond the editor's power to prevent.

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Ce numéro de l'excellente revue *Moreana*, publiée à Angers avec le concours du C.N.R.S., est consacré entièrement à l'UTOPIE. Ce numéro inclut, entre autres, 14 articles et notes sur le livre et l'influence de Thomas More. Je voudrais faire un