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## Building a Pillar of Fame

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## Building a Pillar of Fame

by Robert W. Witt

Robert Herrick, of course, relied on the folklore of the seventeenth century, but the extent to which he incorporated the traditional superstitions and customs and the importance of such material in his work have, perhaps, not been fully realized.<sup>1</sup> With Herrick folklore is not always used as mere ornamentation as is the case with many other writers of the period, but it is the basis of a large number of the poems he has written. John L. Kimmey has suggested that Herrick is first of all "a poet fusing classical and Christian motifs to write poetry that will make him eternally famous."<sup>2</sup> This statement may also suggest some reason for his preoccupation with the folklore of his age. What better way to make one's work eternal than to incorporate the ideas which have been preserved among a people in oral tradition for ages, ideas which are thus deeply rooted and will remain, no doubt, part of the very rhythm of life of a people for ages to come. Herrick, furthermore, does not confine himself to the folklore of Dean Prior, as was formerly thought; he incorporates the folklore which was common in all of England during his day, as Mark Reed has demonstrated.<sup>3</sup>

A study, then, of the extent of Herrick's use of folklore and the wide range of superstitions and customs which he covers in his work is perhaps worthwhile, for this range extends from the recording of tidbits such as the age-old superstition that a tingling of the left ear indicates when someone is speaking ill of you, in "On himself,"<sup>4</sup> to the full account of the May Day festivities in "Corinna's going a May-

<sup>1</sup> The subject has been considered, of course, but the studies are not complete or detailed.

<sup>2</sup> "Robert Herrick's Persona," *SP*, 67 (1970), 221.

<sup>3</sup> See his article "Herrick Among the Maypoles: Dean Prior and the *Hesperides*," *SEL*, 5 (1965), 133-50.

<sup>4</sup> L. C. Martin, ed., *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 329. All quotations from Herrick's poetry will be taken from this edition. Hereafter, page references will be included in the text, in the event of duplicate titles on the same page the number of the poem on the page will also be given.

ing" (p. 67). For convenience the various superstitions and customs can be classified into groups of folklore dealing with (1) birds, insects, and reptiles; (2) animals and fishes; (3) plants; (4) supernatural beings; and (5) holidays.

In seventeenth-century England, as of course in many other ages and many other lands, certain birds were considered to be birds of ill-omen, such as the owl and the raven, while others, such as the dove and the swallow, were considered to be birds of good omen. Herrick alludes to this idea in "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" (p. 53) when he wishes that all "luckie" birds may side with the pair. In several instances he uses the dove as a bird of good omen, as in the last Chorus of "*Connubii Flores, or the well-wishes at Weddings*" (p. 220), where he also ascribes the traditional value to the raven. Birds were, of course, associated with lovers, particularly in the belief that they choose their mates on Valentine's Day, and Herrick records the idea in "To his Valentine, on S. Valentines day" (p. 149), as well as the idea that the direction of the flight of birds is of significance.

The robin was endowed with a great deal of kindness and compassion in the seventeenth century; it would supposedly cover with leaves any dead body that it happened to find.<sup>5</sup> Herrick records this superstition in "To Robin Red-brest" (p. 19), "To the Nightingale, and Robin-Red-brest" (p. 111), and "Upon Mrs. Eliz: Wheeler, under the name of Amarillis" (p. 46). In the latter poem, though, the robin discovers that the body is not dead, only sleeping, and he chirps for joy—an indication of his kindness and compassion.

Herrick records the popular notion that swans sing sweetly just before they die in "His fare-well to Sack" (p. 45), and apparently alludes to it, at least to the idea that swans sing, in two other poems, "To Apollo. A short Hymne" (p. 122) and "The Apparition of his Mistresse calling him to Elizium" (p. 205). In the first of these two poems swans are offered to Apollo if he will inspire the poet to "tune" his words so that they will fall "smoothly musicall. . . ." It would seem that the "singing" swan would be appropriate as an offering. In "The Apparition" he compares Beaumont and Fletcher to swans who sing.

<sup>5</sup> T. F. Thiselton Dyer, *Folk-lore of Shakespeare* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), p. 143.

The nightingale, according to the popular belief, sang while its breast was impaled upon a thorn. Herrick seems to refer to this idea in "Oberons Feast" (p. 119), where one of the delicacies is "The broke-heart of a Nightingale / Ore-come in musicke . . .," and in "To the Nightingale, and Robin-Red-brest" (p. 111) in which he refers to it as "Thou pittifull, and pretty *Philomel*. . ."

Cock crow was, of course, the signal of the approach of dawn and thus the signal that all spirits from another world must depart. Herrick uses the traditional idea in "The Apparition of his Mistresse calling him to Elizium" (p. 205), where he refers to the cock as "Bell-man of the night," and in "The Old Wives Prayer" (p. 177).

The kite was considered an unlucky bird, and the name came to be used as a term of reproach because of the ignoble habits of the bird. The comparison of our griefs to kites in "Crosses" (p. 278) is appropriate. The most ominous and unlucky bird, though, was the owl, and Herrick appropriately refers to this bird in "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" (p. 53) as the "Fatal Owle. . ."

The well-known legend of the phoenix was popular in the seventeenth century, and Herrick makes several references to it throughout his poetry. He records the ability of the phoenix to regenerate itself in "An Ode to Master Endymion Porter, upon his Brothers death" (p. 72) and in "Another New-yeeres Gift, or Song for the Circumcision" (p. 366), and he emphasizes the idea that there is only one phoenix when he refers to it in "The Invitation" (p. 262) as the "bastard *Phenix*. . ." He also refers to the sweet odor of its nest in "Love perfumes all parts" (p. 59) and in "A Nuptiall Song, or Epithalamie, on Sir Clipseby Crew and his Lady" (p. 112).

Herrick does not record much of the folklore concerning the insects and reptiles, but he does incorporate a few of the traditional ideas. The presence of crickets in a house was thought to be a good omen and a prognostication of cheerfulness and plenty. Herrick uses this idea in "A Country life: To his Brother, M. Tho: Herrick" (p. 34), "To Larr" (p. 131), and "Oberons Feast" (p. 119). He also uses some of the superstitions concerning the toad. According to popular belief, the toad was highly venomous and thus had preternatural powers. Herrick alludes to this idea when he uses the toad as the principal ingredient in "A charme, or an allay for Love" (p. 209).

The animal kingdom has been the subject of much superstitious belief, and again Herrick has recorded many of these ideas. Some ani-

mals, as some birds, have been traditionally regarded as ominous. The cat, for instance, has been an animal of ill omen because of its association with witches. Herrick appropriately has a "brace" of cats to attend the witch in "The Hag" (p. 333). There is also a goat in the presence of the witch in this poem, and it, too, is appropriate because the goat was associated with evil spirits, particularly the devil.

Most of the superstitions surrounding horses concerned what happened to them rather than what they did. The fairies and witches, according to popular belief, molested them and often entangled their hair into many knots. Witches would also take a horse and ride it all night, leaving it to be found the next morning bathed in sweat. Herrick records both of these superstitions in "Another Charme for Stables" (p. 284). A common name for a horse during the time was "Cut," which was given either from the horse's being docked or gelded, and it was occasionally applied to a man as a term of contempt. Herrick names the character appropriately in the epigram "Upon Cuts" (p. 144).

The lion and the squirrel were two animals in particular which were regarded in a favorable way. Even though the lion has always been considered ferocious, it was at the time thought to be a generous animal. Supposedly it would not injure a royal prince, and it would always be gentle to those who prostrated themselves before it. Herrick uses this idea to admonish the lady in "To Electra. Love looks for Love" (p. 252).

Herrick was apparently not much interested in the fishlore of his day, for there is very little of it recorded in his work. He, though, perhaps alludes to a popular idea about the pike, or luce, which was considered a tyrant fish, one that preyed on other fish and attacked any other creatures that might venture into its domain.<sup>6</sup> In this context the following statement in Herrick's "His Cavalier" (p. 30) takes on new significance:

This, this a virtuous man can doe,  
Saile against Rocks, and split them too;  
I! and a world of Pikes passe through.

<sup>6</sup> See the interesting story recorded by Issac Walton in *The Compleat Angler*, Everyman Edition (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1965), p. 121.

As the statement about the pikes occurs in conjunction with sailing, it may be that Herrick had in mind the image of a man passing through, or swimming through, a school of the supposedly ferocious tyrant fish.

Herrick's poetry abounds with references to plant life, especially various flowers; and given his interest in folklore, naturally he would be interested in preserving the folk tales and superstitions associated with the plants. He also demonstrates some practical knowledge about the agriculture methods of the day. He states, for example, in "Cruelty" (p. 292) that "some plants prosper best by cuts and blowes . . .," and in "Rest Refreshes" (p. 292) he explains the necessity of allowing land to lie fallow occasionally: "a resting field / Will, after ease, a richer harvest yield. . ."

Different plants, in one way or another, were associated with various occasions. A favorite custom on festive occasions was to roast a wild apple, or crab, before the fire and then put it into ale. Herrick mentions this practice in "His age, dedicated to his peculiar friend, M. John Wickes, under the name of Posthumus" (p. 132). All in all, the beverage consisted of ale, nutmeg, sugar, toast, and the roasted crabs; it was referred to as "Lambs-wool," and it formed the ingredient of the wassail bowl. Herrick records the recipe for it in "Twelve night, or King and Queene" (p. 317).

Ivy, because of its association with Bacchus, had become recognized as the symbol for a tavern or alehouse and hence in general associated with revelling and festive occasions. In "A Christmas Caroll, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall" (p. 364), Herrick presents an "Ivie Wreath" to the "Lord of all this Revelling." He also bequeaths Him holly, which is also, of course, appropriate for the Christmas season.

Both the laurel and the palm were traditionally used to symbolize victory, and the olive branch peace. In this connection Herrick refers to crowns made of laurel in several instances. Palm was not used in crowns, but it was carried before the conquerors in triumphal processions. Herrick illustrates this practice in "To The King, upon his taking of Leicester" (p. 271), and in "The Olive Branch" (p. 73) he bases the poem on the traditional symbol.

Balm was associated with curatives, and Herrick uses it in this context in several poems. In "Upon Love" (p. 274, No. 5) it is used as a comparison for Julia's kiss, which would cure his wound. In a differ-

ent context but with the same meaning it is used in "Upon the Bishop of Lincolne's Imprisonment" (p. 52). Perhaps the most popular usage was with a religious connotation, and Herrick uses it this way numerous times, as in "To Christ" (p. 377).

The rose was also popularly associated with both religion and romantic love. Herrick gives it the traditional significance in a religious context in "To his Saviour, a Child; a Present, by a child" (p. 354). He also explains how the rose came to have a thorn in "The Rose" (p. 396).

In the context of romantic love the rose was used as a symbol for love itself and for the beauty of the beloved. For a poet to compare his lady to a rose was a flattering tribute because the rose held the most honored position among the flowers. Herrick explains in "The Parliament of Roses to Julia" (p. 8) that all of the flowers formed a parliament and "Voted the Rose; the Queen of flowers." And in "The Funerall Rites of the Rose" (p. 237) all of the other flowers come to mourn and keep a "solemn Fast. . ." He also appropriately offers roses to Venus in "A Vow to Venus" (p. 313). The rose could, furthermore, be used in a certain love divination. A lady was supposed to pick a rose on Midsummer's Eve and keep it in a clean sheet of paper until Christmas Day; if the rose was as fresh then as when it was first picked, she was to wear it in her bosom to church, where the man whom she was to marry would come and pluck it out.<sup>7</sup> Herrick obviously refers to some such practice in "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" (p. 53):

Then grieve her not, with saying  
She must no more a Maying:  
Or by Rose-buds devine,  
Who'l be her Valentine.

Several of the plants were particularly associated with death or with funerals. The bay, for example, was used at funerals. It served as an emblem of the resurrection, probably because it revives from a seemingly dead state. That it is associated with resurrection and hence immortality is perhaps what Herrick has in mind in several passages when he indicates that the praise of others will be his crown

<sup>7</sup> Edwin and Mona Radford, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 205.

of bays, as in "To the right Honourable Edward Earle of Dorset" (p. 187), "To his honoured and most Ingenious friend Mr. Charles Cotton" (p. 297), and "An Hymne to the Muses" (p. 261).

The cypress and the yew were, of course, associated with funerals and with churchyards. Herrick follows the tradition by having the lady in "To Perenna, a Mistresse" (p. 89) place a sprig of cypress on his tomb. Also, in "His age, dedicated to his peculiar friend, Mr. John Wickes, under the name of Posthumus" (p. 132) he writes:

The pleasing wife, the house, the ground  
Must all be left, no one plant found  
                                    To follow thee,  
Save only the *Curst-Cipresse* tree.

The yew was so often planted in graveyards that it came to be referred to as the dismal yew. Herrick records the traditional idea about both trees in "To the Yew and Cypresse to grace his Funerall" (p. 111).

The primrose was also a symbol of sadness and death, and Herrick uses it as such in "The Primrose" (p. 208), "To Primroses fill'd with morning-dew" (p. 104), and "To Perilla" (p. 9). The violet was sometimes a symbol of early death; Herrick follows this tradition in several instances, for example in "A Meditation for his Mistresse" (p. 87) and in "Upon Prew his maid" (p. 262). Daffodils could represent short life because of their own brief existence, and Herrick makes them the basis for a reflection on man's "short time to stay" in "To Daffadills" (p. 125) and "Divination by a Daffadill" (p. 38).

The rue and the willow were not necessarily representative of death, but they were both used as signs of sorrow and sadness. Rue was popularly known as Herb Grace because the word *rue* means to regret or be sorry and was, therefore, associated with repentance, the chief sign of grace. Herrick makes it symbolical of regret in "The admonition" (p. 130), when he explains that the diamonds worn by the lady are actually the tears of wooers sent in rue. It was the custom for those saddened by a forsaken love to wear a willow garland.<sup>8</sup> Herrick makes this custom the subject of his poem "To the Willow-tree" (p. 106). The willow, though, was associated with grief and despair in general, not just that of the forsaken lovers. Herrick uses it

<sup>8</sup> Thiselton Dyer, pp. 210, 232.



as such in several instances, and he takes the familiar image from the Psalms (137) of the harp hung upon the willow tree to express grief. This image appears in "To his Friend, on the untuneable Times" (p. 84), "To God, on his sicknesse" (p. 361), and "The Widdowes teares: or, Dirge of Dorcas" (p. 373).

Some of the most interesting folklore about the plants has to do with explanations of how they attained their names or colors. Herrick records several of these legends, and in this area he is more inventive than usual. He explains "Why Flowers change colour" (p. 15), "How Primroses came green" (p. 64), "How Marigolds came yellow" (p. 187), "How Pansies or Hearts-ease came first" (p. 152), and "How the Wall-flower came first, and why so called" (p. 14).

One legend which explained the reason for the red rose held that Aphrodite in pursuit of Adonis trod on a white rose bush; her feet were pierced by the thorns, and her blood dyed the white petals red.<sup>9</sup> Herrick's version of the legend, though, as he writes in "How Roses came red" (p. 241), is somewhat different:

'Tis said, as *Cupid* danc't among  
The *Gods*, he down the Nectar flung;  
Which, on the white *Rose* being shed,  
Made it for ever after red.

This version is, of course, somewhat similar to the original legend, but in another poem with the same title (p. 105) he offers a completely different explanation. He says that roses were at first white, but they disagreed as to whether they were whiter than his Sapho's breast. After they were "vanquisht quite," they blushed for shame and thus became red.

Herrick offers an explanation for the colors of both lilies and violets, also. The legend in "How Lillies came white" (p. 74) is similar to that in his first version about the rose and thus bears some resemblance to the original legend about the rose:

*Cupid* and his Mother lay  
In a cloud; while both did play,  
He with his pretty finger prest  
The rubie niplet of her breast;  
Out of the which, the creame of light,

<sup>9</sup> Radford, p. 205.

Like to a Dew,  
Fell downe on you,  
And made ye white.

His legend about the violet, however, resembles the second version of his rose legend. In "How Violets came blew" (p. 105) he says that Venus and the violets argued about who had the sweetest scent; when Venus lost the argument, she beat the violets and "Her blowes did make ye blew."

Witches, devils, ghosts, and fairies were naturally responsible for a great many of the superstitions prevalent in the seventeenth century, and Herrick records many of the ideas concerning them.

According to popular opinion, witches were old women who were "lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles. . . ." <sup>10</sup> Herrick creates such an impression of the witch in his "The Hagg" (p. 333) although he does not describe her in detail. Both the witch in this poem and the one pictured in "The Hag" (p. 225) are riding through the skies at night on a staff, and the witch in "The Hag" is in company with the devil. This picture is also in keeping with tradition. Witches supposedly met with the devil and performed various obscene rites in order to make a pact with him. Furthermore, when the devil summoned them to meet in an assembly, if any were lame he "delivereth them a staffe, to conveie them thither invisiblie through the aire. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

Witches, of course, possessed extraordinary powers; they were supposedly able, among other things, to raise storms and winds, pull the moon out of the skies, and bring souls out of their graves. <sup>12</sup> In "The Hag" (p. 225) Herrick says that now the witch is abroad "The storme will arise, / And trouble the skies;" and later "The ghost from the Tomb / Affrighted shall come. . . ." In "The Hagg" (p. 333) the witch is attended by a brace of cats

Who scratch at the Moone,  
And threaten at noone  
Of night from Heaven for to rend her.

<sup>10</sup> Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Scot, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Scot, pp. 10, 226-227.

Killing or afflicting the cattle of their enemies was one of the abilities that the witches took special delight in. Herrick records this superstition in "Upon an old Woman" (p. 266).

Because the belief in witchcraft was so widespread, the people of the time devised many charms which would supposedly protect them from the power of witches.<sup>13</sup> Herrick was apparently much interested in these charms, for he records a number of them. Perhaps, as Roger B. Rollin suggests, for Herrick "poetry itself is a kind of charm or 'incantation. . .'"<sup>14</sup> At any rate, he preserved several of the folk charms current in his day.

It was believed that a knife placed under the window sill would keep witches away. Herrick obviously had this superstition in mind when he explained in "Another" (p. 284) that a knife will keep a sleeping child from harm. When one was kneading the dough for baking, he was supposed to cut a cross on the top of it with a knife in order to avert the power of the witch.<sup>15</sup> Herrick makes this superstition the subject of his poem "Charmes" (p. 322). Not only a knife but anything made of iron—particularly a horseshoe—was supposed to drive away witches. In "Another Charme for Stables" (p. 284) Herrick advises to "Hang up Hooks, and Sheers to scare / Hence the Hag. . ."

Items associated with the church, of course, were thought to be effective charms against witches and other evil spirits. Even the consecrated bread apparently was used in such a way.<sup>16</sup> Herrick indicates in "Charmes" (p. 284) that it will keep the witch away from a sleeping child if it is placed underneath his head, and in "Another" (p. 323) that a piece of it carried in one's pocket "Charmes the danger, and the dread." Both the bread and the holy water were used as charms for protection from witches. In "The Spell" (p. 258) Herrick lists an interesting mixture:

Holy Water come and bring;  
Cast in Salt, for seasoning;  
Set the brush for sprinkling;  
Sacred Spittle bring ye hither;

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion in Scot, pp. 266–286.

<sup>14</sup> *Robert Herrick*, Twayne's English Authors Series, ed. Sylvia Bowman (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> Radford, pp. 158, 261.

<sup>16</sup> Scot, p. 282.

Meale and it now mix together;  
And a little Oyle to either. . . .

He also includes in the poem two other well-known means of frightening witches:

Give the Tapers here their light,  
Ring the *Saints-Bell*, to affright  
Far from hence the evil Sp'rite.

Urine was another item believed to be important in different ways as a charm.<sup>17</sup> Herrick uses it as a principal ingredient in "Another to bring in the Witch" (p. 284).

Several charms were used for the threshold which would supposedly keep witches from entering a house. One means was to place a cross of white thorn above the door.<sup>18</sup> This superstition may be the basis for decorating "Each Porch, each doore" with white thorn in "Corinna's going a Maying" (p. 67). Herrick records another charm for the threshold in "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" (p. 53), where he advises the couple to anoint the posts as a charm "Strong against future harme. . . ."

Witches and the devil were closely associated, as noted earlier, and superstitions regarding the devil and all of the various demons were also prevalent. The *Incubi* were one such class of demons, and their primary purpose was supposedly to cause people to commit unlawful sexual acts.<sup>19</sup> In "The parting Verse, or charge to his supposed Wife when he travelled" (p. 174) Herrick indicates that he realizes that his "wife" has the fortitude to say no and thus to resist "Those thy Lust-burning *Incubi*."

Many charms were used to ward off the devil; many of the same charms for the witch would supposedly work as well for the devil or any evil spirit. Holy water and the cross were two principal items used to dispell any malevolent influence. Herrick mentions holy water as a safeguard against "The Fiend" in "To Julia" (p. 324), and the cross in "The Old Wives Prayer" (p. 177) and "On himselfe" (p. 123). He also records two other interesting charms for warding off the devil.

<sup>17</sup> Scot, pp. 269, 272.

<sup>18</sup> Radford, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Scot, pp. 85-86.

One of them involves water but not holy water; he writes in "Another" (p. 322):

In the morning when ye rise  
Wash your hands, and cleanse your eyes.  
Next be sure ye have a care,  
To disperse the water farre.  
For as farre as that doth light,  
So farre keepes the evill Spright.

It was the custom to take the unburned portion of the yule log and lay it up until the next Christmas season, when it was used to ignite the new log. In "Ceremonies for Candlemasse day" (p. 285, No. 2) Herrick explains that the place where this portion of the log is kept will be safe from "The Fiend."<sup>20</sup>

Lighted candles were supposed to help keep away devils and evil spirits. This superstition led to the practice of lighting a candle at a wedding in order to bring good luck to the couple, and at the birth of a child for the same reason. Herrick alludes to both of these customs in "An Epithalamie to Sir Thomas Southwell and his Ladie" (p. 53). It was believed, furthermore, that a candle should be lighted at a death so that the devil could not seize the soul of the dead person.<sup>21</sup> This custom is recorded in Herrick's "The New Charon, Upon the death of Henry Lord Hastings" (p. 416).

Perhaps one of the most common superstitions concerning candles was that they would grow dim or burn with a blue flame if a ghost were near. Herrick refers to this idea in "His Letanie, to the Holy Spirit" (p. 347), in "To Anthea" (p. 20), and in "To his lovely Mistresses" (p. 222).

Ghosts, unlike witches and devils, were supposedly not able to assume any form they might choose but had to appear in the form by which they were known in the material state. In describing himself as a ghost in "To his lovely Mistresses" (p. 222), Herrick implies that he will appear much the same as he does in life except that he will be pale. Whenever ghosts did leave their tombs and walk about on earth, they were supposed to have a particular reason for doing so,

<sup>20</sup> Keeping the Christmas log was believed to be, at least, a safeguard to the house against fire—Robert Chambers, ed., *The Book of Days* (London: W. & R. Chambers, Ltd., 1864), II, 735.

<sup>21</sup> Radford, p. 57.

such as receiving proper burial for their bodies, seeking revenge on murders, doing penance for their own crimes, and so on. In "To Sir John Berkley, Governour of Exeter" (p. 251) Herrick alludes to the idea of ghosts roaming the earth because of their past crimes. He also indicates in several poems that the proper offerings must be made to appease the spirits to keep them from walking abroad: "To the reverend shade of his religious Father" (p. 27), "To Perilla" (p. 9), and "Upon an old man a Residenciarie" (p. 226). Ghosts, though, could walk abroad only at night and had to return to the spirit world at dawn, as noted earlier. Herrick, of course, records this idea in "The Apparit/on of his Mistresse calling him to Elizium" (p. 205).

The "spectre huntsman" was a ghost-like figure who supposedly appeared at night, though invisible, and rode through the air followed by yelping hounds. His ominous presence was thought to be indicative of some disaster in the near future.<sup>22</sup> Herrick apparently knew of this superstition, but in "The Hagg" (p. 333) he makes the figure a witch, a huntress rather than a huntsman:

A hunting she goes;  
A crackt horne she blowes;  
At which the hounds fall a bounding;  
While th' Moone in her sphere  
Peepes trembling for feare,  
And night's afraid of the sounding.

The fairies were supernatural beings around whom considerable folklore had gathered in the seventeenth century. Herrick includes several fairy poems in his collection, and he incorporates a great deal of the traditional ideas about them.<sup>23</sup> To begin with, he consistently assigns the fairy King and Queen the traditional names—Oberon and Mab. He deals with the fairies in five poems in the collection—"The Fairie Temple: or, Oberons Chappell" (p. 90), "Oberons Feast" (p. 119), "Oberons Palace" (p. 165), "The Fairies" (p. 201), and "The Beggar to Mab, the Fairie Queene" (p. 223)—and in all of these, with the exception of "The Fairies," he in every detail emphasizes the diminutive size of the creatures, referring to them as elves in several instances. According to superstitious belief, the fairies were rather re-

<sup>22</sup> Thiselton Dyer, pp. 46–47.

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion of this point in Daniel H. Woodward, "Herrick's Oberon Poems," *JEGP*, 64 (1965), 270–284.

ligious creatures; Herrick indicates as much in "The Fairie Temple." They were also supposedly fond of elaborate banquets and great lovers of music. In "Oberons Feast" the banquet seems indeed elaborate although Herrick says that it is "lesse great then nice . . .," and in "The Beggar to Mab" the speaker implies that Mab has a rich store of provisions. Music is an important part of the banquet in "Oberons Feast": "But all this while his eye is serv'd, / We must not thinke his eare was sterv'd . . .," and there is "many a dapper *Chorister*" in "The Fairie Temple." Also, music is provided in "Oberons Palace." The fairies were supposed to seek romantic settings for their haunts; "Oberons Palace" is a cave which is reached by going through a grove "Tinseld with Twilight," and over a moss-covered bank "Spungie and swelling, and farre more / Soft then the finest Lemes-ter Ore." Both "Oberons Palace" and "The Fairie Temple" are provided with exotic furnishings. The fairies were usually represented as great lovers, as Herrick portrays Oberon in "Oberons Palace." The fairies were also thought to be advocates of cleanliness and neatness. In "The Fairie Temple" Herrick states that "They have their *Ash-pans*, & their *Brooms* / To purge the Chappel and the rooms. . . ." In fact, the fairies would supposedly pinch people black and blue if they were not clean and neat in their housekeeping. Herrick records the superstition in full in "The Fairies."<sup>24</sup>

The customs associated with the various holidays and local gatherings as well as the sports and games with which the people entertained themselves are also very much a part of the folklore of the period. Herrick displays considerable interest in these customs and records many of them in his poetry. Thus he presents a well-rounded picture of the lives of the people in seventeenth-century England.

Christmas was the season of the year which warranted the most celebration and one of the seasons about which many folk customs had become traditional. The Christmas festivities began with the bringing in of the yule log and, as noted, lighting it with the log from the previous year. The log was brought in amid a great deal of celebration; Herrick indicates as much in "Ceremonies for Christmasse" (p. 263), where he records the custom, as well as in "The Ceremonies for Candlemasse day" (p. 285, No. 2).

<sup>24</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 606-614.

Cakes were made in honor of saints' days and holidays, and during this period puddings came to be the most appropriate for the Christmas season. A variety of plum porridge and mince pies were two of the favorites.<sup>25</sup> Herrick refers to the "Christmas pie" on several occasions, and in "Ceremonies for Christmasse" (p. 263) he refers explicitly to the mince pie and plum porridge. In "Christmasse-Eve, another Ceremonie" (p. 263) he indicates that the Christmas pie is an important part of the festivities.

Christmas carols were then, as now, very much a part of the celebration of Christmas. Herrick has recorded this tradition by including in his collection several carols of his own composition, for example "A Christmas Caroll, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall" (p. 364) and "The Star-Song: A Caroll to the King; sung at White-Hall" (p. 367).

The Christmas festivities lasted for twelve days, as Herrick mentions in "A New-yeares gift sent to Sir Simeon Steward" (p. 126), and the twelfth day was a time of renewed celebration. One of the most notable customs connected with this day was the choosing of a "Twelfth-Tide" King and Queen to reign over the merry-making. A large plum cake was made with a bean and a pea in it; whoever got the slice with the bean was King, and whoever the slice with the pea was Queen.<sup>26</sup> Herrick refers to this custom in "A New-yeares gift sent to Sir Simeon Steward," and he records the full ceremony in "Twelwe night, or King and Queene" (p. 317).

Herrick refers also to another custom of the season in "Twelwe night"—the wassail, the traditional drink of the Christmas season. Young women would carry the wassail bowl from door to door presenting the inhabitants with a drink and a song of good cheer; they were supposed to receive a small reward in return.<sup>27</sup> Herrick has preserved this custom in "The Wassaille" (p. 178), which is in the form of verses that might have been sung by the young women on such an occasion. In stanza six of the poem Herrick alludes to another custom which was usually performed on the eve of Twelfth Day: "Then may your Plants be prest with Fruit. . . ." This statement by the wassailers

<sup>25</sup> Christina Hole, *English Custom and Usage* (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1941), p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Hole, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London: Methuen and Co., 1903), p. 286.



apparently refers to the practice of going into the orchards, chanting a verse, and then pouring some of the contents of the wassail bowl on the trees, particularly apple trees.<sup>28</sup> Herrick more specifically records this custom in "Another" (p. 264):<sup>29</sup> "Wassaile the trees, that they may beare / You many a Plum, and many a Peare. . ."

St. Distaff's Day was the next day after Twelfth Day and was so-called because the women were supposed to resume the distaff. It seems, however, that no one worked with very much enthusiasm on this day, preferring rather to combine a small amount of work with a large amount of revelling and merry-making. When the women did begin work, the men, who had worked for only a short time in the fields, "made it their sport to set the flax a-burning; in requital of which prank, the maids soused the men from water-pails."<sup>30</sup> Herrick describes just such activities in "Saint Distaffs day, or the morror after Twelfth day" (p. 315).

Even though the Christmas revellings supposedly end with Twelfth Night, the ecclesiastical Christmas season extends until Candlemas (February 2), at which time all of the Christmas decorations were by order removed from the churches. All decorations should also be removed from the houses by this time, and it was thought to bring bad luck if they were not.<sup>31</sup> Herrick instructs that all decorations be removed in all of his Candlemas poems (pp. 285, 304), and in "Ceremony upon Candlemas Eve" (p. 304) he alludes to the superstition that decorations hanging after this time will bring bad luck.

May Day was a popular festival. The custom on this day was for people to rise shortly after midnight and go into some wooded area to gather branches and flowers with which they decorated the doors and windows of the houses, all of this being done amid a great deal of merry-making. The girls would collect dew and put it on their faces as a beauty charm.<sup>32</sup> Herrick has, of course, illustrated the tra-

<sup>28</sup> Radford, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> This is one of the few instances in which Herrick records a custom peculiar to Devonshire. The practice was common throughout England on the eve of Twelfth Day, but in certain parts of Devonshire it occurred on Christmas Eve. By placing this poem in a series of "Ceremonies for Christmas Eve," Herrick seems to indicate that this was a custom for that day rather than Twelfth Day Eve. See Read, p. 140.

<sup>30</sup> Chambers, I, 68.

<sup>31</sup> Hole, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Hole, p. 69.

ditional customs of this day in "Corinna's going a Maying" (p. 67). The May Pole was also part of the celebration; it was set up and decorated, and then people danced around it. Herrick records this part of the festival in "The May-pole" (p. 239).

Whitsuntide, the religious festival to commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost, was also a time of celebration. Herrick refers to it in "Ceremonies for Candlemasse Eve" (p. 285), and in "The Country life, to the honoured M. End. Porter, Groome of the Bed-Chamber to his Maj." (p. 229) he refers to the "whitsum-ale," a special ale prepared for the occasion which would be sold by the Churchwardens in an effort to raise funds for church repairs.<sup>33</sup>

Several festivals or celebrations were not, so to speak, national holidays but were observed in local areas at the appropriate time. The Church Wake, the anniversary of the dedication of the church, was one such occasion. Herrick describes one of these festivals in "The Wake" (p. 255). It is a time of feasting and celebration, and there are "Morris-dancers" as a part of the entertainment. The Morris Dance was a popular entertainment of the time which was used on many occasions of festivity.

The Lord Mayor's Day was the day after the new Lord Mayor had taken his oath. In the seventeenth century it was a time of considerable festivity. It consisted of the Lord Mayor's Show and an elaborate procession through the town, which would attract large crowds of people. Herrick refers to the occasion and indicates the presence of a large crowd in "Way in a crowd" (p. 200).

Harvest Home was the celebration held at the time of harvest. The last load of grain to be brought in from the fields was decorated with flowers, and people danced about the cart which carried it through the streets. The festivities also included a harvest supper during which the servants and their masters ate at the same table and then mingled together freely through the remainder of the evening.<sup>34</sup> Herrick includes all of these aspects of the celebration in his "The Hock-cart, or Harvest home: To the Right Honourable, Mildman, Earle of Westmorland" (p. 101).

Sheep shearing, even, was a time for celebration among the rural people. A feast was held before the work began during which there

<sup>33</sup> Thiselton Dyer, p. 293.

<sup>34</sup> Strutt, pp. 287-288.

was apparently a great deal of merry-making. Herrick refers to these festivities in "To Phillis to love, and live with him" (p. 192), where he puts it on a par with a wake, and in "A Pastorall upon the birth of Prince Charles, Presented to the King, and Set by Mr. Nic: Laniere" (p. 85).

Weddings naturally were occasions of celebration, and numerous customs were observed at such times. Herrick has utilized some of these customs in his poems about marriage. The exchanging of rings was practiced as part of the betrothal ceremony; a particular ring called a gimmel, or joint, ring was considered most appropriate. Such a ring was made of two or three pieces which could be fastened together to form a design or taken apart and worn separately. Usually the ring was taken apart and each partner was given one piece; and, at times, a piece was given to the witness.<sup>35</sup> In "The Jimmall Ring, or True-love-knot" (p. 173) Herrick indicates that the ring is composed of three parts and that it is exchanged between lovers.

In "A Nuptiall Song, or Epithalamie, on Sir Clipseby Crew and his Lady" (p. 112) Herrick has the bridegroom on his porch to greet the bride; as she approaches, she is showered with roses and sprinkled with wheat, while some of the well-wishers observe that "Blest is the Bride, on whom the Sun doth shine. . . ." As the married couple prepare for bed, the young men and bridesmaids take the garters and laces from them; the bridesmaids undress the bride and then sew her up in a sheet. All of these customs were traditionally practiced by the English and were very much a part of the celebration of the wedding.<sup>36</sup> All of the young men present at the wedding were customarily allowed to kiss the bride as soon as the ceremony was finished. In "The Tythe. To the Bride" (p. 208) Herrick says that even the "Parson" gets to kiss the bride. Torches were also used, as noted earlier, at the wedding celebrations; Herrick refers to the torches which are present at the festivities on numerous occasions.

English people of the seventeenth century entertained themselves with numerous sports and games; some of these were associated with particular holidays, but most were enjoyed any time there was cause for celebration or entertainment. Herrick records several of these pastimes. In "A New-yeares gift sent to Sir Simeon Steward" (p. 126)

<sup>35</sup> Thiselton Dyer, p. 326.

<sup>36</sup> Reed, p. 144.

he mentions three sports as being part of the Christmas festivities, "Fox-i'th'hole,"<sup>37</sup> "Blind-man-buffe," and "shooe the Mare." Among the other popular games and sports which he records are "Barley Break: or, Last in Hell" (p. 33); "Cherry-pit" (p. 19); "Crosse and Pile" (p. 189); "Draw Gloves" (p. 99); "Laugh and lie downe" (p. 111); "Stool-ball" (p. 238); "The Quintell," or Quintain (p. 306). He also refers to Push Pin in "Love's play at Push-pin" (p. 17); Nine Holes in "Upon Raspe Epig." (p. 154); and Post and Pair in "Upon Tuck, Epigr." (p. 238).

From this survey it should be apparent that folklore is indeed an important consideration in the poetry of Robert Herrick. He has, in fact, covered almost every area of life in the seventeenth century by recording the customs, traditions, and superstitions which had been kept alive from generation to generation; many of which are still alive today. In numerous poems his purpose seems to be an effort to preserve these ideas. Perhaps it is an effort on his part to identify with that which is eternal, at least in a worldly sense, and thus to make his poetry "eternally famous." Herrick is, of course, more than a poet of folklore, but the use of folklore has certainly contributed to the establishment of his "Pillar of Fame."

<sup>37</sup> Apparently no clear explanation of this game exists. Robert Nares states that it is an old Christmas game but offers no description of it—*Glossary* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1966), p. 332. The *OED* explains it as merely "a kinde of playe wherein boyes lift up one leg and hop on the other. . . ." Hunt the Fox, which may be the same game, consisted of one boy "being permitted to go to a certain distance from his comrades before they pursue him, their object is to take him if possible before he can return home"—Strutt, p. 301. The other games mentioned in this section are described in Strutt and Thiselton Dyer.