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## Review Essay: Jeffrey Powers-Beck. *Writing the Flesh: The Herbert Family Dialogue*

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instance, by means of a less confident *standing outside*—with those who might not have wanted, been able, or been allowed to participate in the Christian sanctity and devotion at the heart of these two studies?

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Jeffrey Powers-Beck. *Writing the Flesh: The Herbert Family Dialogue*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. 290 pp. incl. bibliography, 3 appendices, and index. \$54.50 cloth. ISBN 0-8207-0283-5.

Jeffrey Powers-Beck's *Writing the Flesh* is organized around the refreshing proposition that the settlement of one's family affairs has a measurable effect on one's poetry. This idea, delivered with the force of a manifesto, is derived not from Freud but from historicist, materialist, and feminist critiques of cultural and women's histories (although Freud makes a welcome appearance). By observing that "writing sometimes takes family conflict itself as its subject, portraying the domestic scene as a locus of natural and supernatural crisis," Powers-Beck moves the discussion of Herbert's witty religious lyrics from ecclesiastical and political concerns to the more insistent demands of siblings, parents, and near relations, in this instance Herbert's scandalously young stepfather, Sir John Danvers. Herbert was the seventh of ten children and fifth of seven sons, at least three others of whom, Lord Edward of Cherbury, Sir Henry, and Thomas, also left literary remains. Their mother, Magdalen Herbert Danvers, married young and was widowed in 1596 when Herbert was three. When she remarried in 1609, the year Herbert entered Trinity College at age sixteen, Danvers was twenty-one.

The text chiefly scrutinized here is *The Temple*, with particular attention paid to "The Church Porch," "The Family," "Affliction I and V," "Love III," and "The Church Militant." Powers-Beck also translates some of the elegiac Latin written for Magdalen's funeral and occasionally calls upon *The Country Parson*. His methodological forebears are Lawrence Stone's 1977 *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* and Gary Waller's 1993 *Sidney Family Romance*. His impressively deployed critical pretexts include Martz, Patrides, Schoenfeldt, Shuger, Summers, Strier, Vendler, Watson, and many others; biographical details derive from Aubry's 1669 *Brief Lives*, Isaac Walton's 1670 *Life*, and a 1652 biography by Barnabas Oley.

This last account lends the book its title and nominal argument. As Powers explains, "Oley observed that the poet 'writ Flesh and Blood' in

his Latin verses for his mother, but that his English poems were ‘Inspirations prophetical.’” In other words, Oley felt Herbert’s Latin elegies remained earthbound while his devotional lyrics rose heavenward. Oley also frankly states that he finds Herbert’s Latin verses inferior: “The Obsequious *Parentalia*, he made and printed in her memory, which though they be good, very good, yet... they be dull or dead in comparison of his *Temple Poems*.” Quotations from Oley are by way of Patrides.

Herein lies my only cavil with Powers-Beck’s argument. The provocative hypothesis that Herbert honored his mother in deadly Latin and his God in lively English is dismissed before being explored, or even explained, with the comment that “Oley’s preference for the supernatural father over the natural mother is unfortunately misogynistic and short-sighted.” That may be so, but if the idea is substantial enough to supply the book its epigraph and title, then it surely merits a few paragraphs of development before being expelled for misconduct. If nothing else, the notion that Latin lends itself more readily to epideixis than does the King’s English is an intriguing one that Sidney also broaches in his *Defense of Poesie*.

At a few points I worry that this graceful, meticulously researched study suffers from an excess of tact, so that it occasionally defeats its purpose of exploring the volatile familial anxieties inscribed in the lines of *The Temple*. The most compelling of these attach to Herbert’s feelings toward his mother’s second marriage and the redistribution of affections that such arrangements compel. Perhaps because the subject reflects doubtfully upon Lady Danvers, the two chapters devoted to her touch only briefly upon it. Instead they linger on her “Kitchin Book,” an unassuming document used to establish her skills as a “mediator” and vital participant in “patronage and family networks.” Other qualities brought forward include her “generous ambiguity,” that is to say her ideological flexibility, and her diligent promotion of her children’s careers. (For example, as a widowed single parent, she moved her family to Oxford, where her oldest son Edward was in residence, in 1599–1601; later the family repaired to London.) This she did by “petitioning patrons at court, giving gifts, boarding and visiting kin and clients, and arranging marriages.”

The discussion of Danvers himself, in the seventh and final chapter, also diverges from the book’s stated intention, as Powers-Beck refrains from interrogating the motives behind that young nobleman’s marriage to Magdalen Herbert, several of whose ten children were already grown. Not that she lacked any graces: John Donne, a family friend, suggested that Danvers was beguiled by her “witt,” and the match was hardly inexplicable. But it was unusual, and one wonders at the particular combination of Danvers’s motives, especially since his father strongly objected. Instead of pursuing this line the chapter establishes a connection between Danvers

and his stepson by way of “The Church Militant,” the point of convergence being the Virginia Company, a doomed enterprise in which Danvers was heavily invested and whose evangelical mission “The Church Militant” arguably endorses. How Herbert felt towards the dashing usurper of his father’s affections, or how Danvers felt about Herbert, or how Magdalen triangulated their relations, or why Herbert married Danvers’s niece, Jane Danvers, in 1629, when his mother was two years dead, the book forbears to inquire.

The area where Powers-Beck’s argument sparkles is in his discussion of the poetic “dialogue” between Herbert and his older brother, Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who served as English ambassador to France until royalist allegiances sidelined him. This eldest versifying Herbert, a firm believer in the privileges of primogeniture, had to be forced to fulfill his financial obligations to his family by means of arbitration entered into with his mother. They worked out a *quid pro quo* by which, in exchange for settling an annuity upon his youngest brother Thomas, who was born after their father’s death and therefore not written into his will, Edward would pay 30 annuities to each of his brothers, rather than the 40 specified by the will, together with portions of 1000 divided between his three sisters.

In the event, Edward was dilatory in his payments, and Powers-Beck sensitively explores how his neglect contributes to the frustration and resentment registered and repressed in *The Temple*. Even more happily, Powers-Beck establishes dialectical differences between the two brothers’ poems based on their handling of similar themes:

In George Herbert’s poetry, the tormented Son is exalted as hero, the crucifixion sacrifice is considered the center and meaning of history, the speaker’s greatest desire is to ingest the Son’s body and blood.... In contrast, in Edward Herbert’s poetry and philosophy, the character of the son is elided, and the imagery of sacrifice is eschewed. (130)

By skillfully probing the symbolic implications of the brothers’ ideological and economic disparities, Powers-Beck establishes a dialogue between the Platonizing royalist and the Puritanical parson, and develops it through a discussion of paired poems.

The chapter on Edward and George, “Comparing Fruits,” is the strongest, and sets a high standard for the others to meet. For the most part they do. The chapter on “The Church-Porch” is dedicated to the implicit proposition that much of the practical wisdom proffered in that poem is borrowed from the lips of Magdalen Herbert. Interesting documentary is advanced to support the hypothesis, including four of her letters, which are thick with protests, pleas, and reminders. What somewhat

impedes the analysis is a rigorous self-censorship which leaves little more to be concluded of Lady Danvers than that she was a dedicated mother, artful arranger, and convivial entertainer.

Altogether the book takes an ample measure of its subject (two younger brothers, Sir Henry and Thomas “the obscure sailor-poet,” are discussed in separate chapters). Of Herbert’s career in Parliament, which Powers-Beck mentions briefly, more could profitably be said. Likewise, an exploration of Herbert’s feelings toward the Sidney family would be welcome (Philip Sidney’s niece, Lady Mary Wroth, author of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* and *Urania*, was Sir William Herbert’s married lover and bore him two illegitimate children). A detailed chronology or genealogy might also be useful. But these are minor suggestions and altogether the book makes an interesting, original, and deeply scholarly contribution to our understanding of seventeenth-century literary discourse.

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Arthur Marotti, ed. *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. 266 pp.

Arthur Marotti has edited a significant new collection of essays that address a topic relatively ignored by literary scholars, namely the place of Catholic and anti-Catholic discourses in early modern England. Following the lead of revisionist historians such as Peter Lake, Christopher Haigh, Eamon Duffy, and Anthony Milton, for example, Marotti has selected essays that underscore the significance of religion in cultural and political formation during the early modern period. Not surprisingly, the contributors include both historians and literary scholars, whose essays explore the neglected and marginalized history and literature of Catholicism in its conflicted relationship with the discourse of anti-Catholicism. The essays cover the period from the early Elizabethan period through the Restoration era and focus on canonical writers such as Donne, Dekker, Campion, and Milton, but also include unknown or relatively unknown writers such as Richard Carpenter, John Mush, John Good, and Elizabeth Cellier.

In the first essay in the volume, Marotti explores the perplexing relationships between recusant Catholic women and Jesuit missionary priests within the sociopolitical contexts of harsh antirecusancy laws and religious difference. According to Marotti, Protestant iconoclasm and misogyny demonized the Catholic woman as the whore of Babylon, portraying her as the seductress of Protestant men, much like Spenser’s Duessa. Catholic