

# The soul as a myth and the truest agent of a myth-maker: An indispensable study of George Herbert's poetry *The Temple*.

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## Abstract:

George Herbert, a perfiguration of the ideal Restoration clergyman, was supremely known as what Barnabas Oley (a Royalist divine) claimed, 'primitive holy and heavenly soul', had the power to manipulate and communicate the God to create a strong mythological impulse of the religious domain of the seventeenth century England (Poetry Foundation 2&3). Herbert's primary aim and concern was to relocate the soul to a new and higher place to attain his God, and to deliver His messages to his fellow people. The creative impulse of Herbert's poetry is so akin and deep as to interpret something like that of mythological stories. Herbert shared the basic theological concept of his age to vivify the inner recesses of his soul by making a mythological milieu with his devotional prayer. Herbert's *The Temple* is a plea of his dejected heart to God, is a record of his spiritual journey throughout his devout life all by alone, and likewise might be able to find out the rebirth of his soul at the cost of his enormous prayer-his painful sacrifice. Herbert's aim is to establish a sense of devotion in such a way as to make the soul proficient how, through prayer, to be perennial from its obsession and eternal damnation. This paper is exploring Herbert's deepest attempt of bridging a close connection with his God, and thereby exploring the different voices into an unified sense of devotion.

## Key notes:

Devotional prayer, ethnographical exploration, myth, devout life style of the seventeenth century, axioms of the religiosity.

## Introduction:

George Herbert, a true creator of man's amphibious state and a pioneer of the new trends and outlook of the devotion of the seventeenth century muddling atmosphere, noted and sacrificed himself, whatsoever its importance are to be measured or not in the milieu of deepest sacramental identity, during the most disturbing and detestable plight of the entire England, to attain the God and the Divinity from the earth, a struggling place of the morbid humanity. Herbert's ideas of expressing and devoting the self for the salvation and purification of the burdened soul of himself and the humanity, are of worthily and brilliantly summarized in "*The Temple*" - a very conflicting specimen of his dejected poor soul and the God. Stanley Fish, in this regard, has noted

brilliantly about the central importance of the sacrifice for Herbert, explaining “Herbert seeks finally to do away with his sense of self, as distinguished from God, to give up even the experience of giving up” (Seelig 9). His ways of entertaining the sacramental ideas, expounding in the very thematic views of his each poem, during the shabby political and social moments, are to be valued with ease and greatest excellence, reminding us of his brilliant handling of the encompassing a new vistas of divinity, and thereby proving us with a new definition of how to praise and pray to God to have the ultimate mercy and grace to unfasten the soul from the very cycle of birth. Herbert, by the very writings and objectives of *The Temple*, did not lose himself, but rather tried to find out the definite answer of who he was and what was his identity, and that’s why he delivered all his writings, before his death, to his bosom friend Nicholas Ferrar, with whom Herbert made his deepest appeal. Helen Vendler, for the matter of fact, noted that “he is valued to those who share these all” (Sundaram 23). The contents of his poetry are not esoteric but these are the perfect specimens of different tastes with different ingredients having purity of his deepest yearning.

Herbert was, born at Montgomery Castle on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1595, the fifth son of Richard Herbert and Magdalen Herbert, lost his father at the age of three and half years, received primary education of morality and basic senses from his mother, obtained scholarship on 5 May, 1609, matriculated from Trinity College on 18 Dec. 1609, was thereby awarded B.A. degree in 1612-13, and obtained M.A. in 1616, became an orator of the University, and handled pressure of becoming a member of the Parliament. He knew how to love and create the sense of devotion, praising his thoughts by his Anglican sense, and commemorating the belief of Christianity over the mentalities of the puzzlement and surprise of the age. *The Temple*, as a whole, is the purest product of Herbert’s processed soul, a detailed creed of his fine and genuine beliefs on God directly extracted from the deepest corner of his heart, and thereby a paradigm of his detailed and thorough practical observation upon his uncontrollable addition to cling to the grace and mercy of God during his life. He knew the three sins relating to the Christianity- the original sin, the venial sin and the mortal sin, and that’s why he, without believing to other correlative objectives, directly recommending his soul to be honoured and valued by the prospect of God, and thereby wishing to recommend this process to the humanity of the dejected souls. Like a myth maker, he substantially nominated his souls straightforwardly to God, the Awakening State, granting, by the deepest understanding of the religious schemes and trends of the seventeenth century England and its overall circumstances, the traditional theology and cosmology to vivify and establish the creed and milieu of myth, and surrendering himself to the God to forget what he wished to be remembered at his prior life. Herbert’s primary as well as secondary purpose are centring one view point, to attain and continue a friendly relationship to God for the salvation of the soul, and creating a definite route of attaining Him and acknowledging this route universally and virtuously. Earnest and solemn prayers, associated with the creed of his poetic heart, are represented brilliantly in *The Temple*. Sometimes Herbert’s poems are represented as one side, narrating the deepest conditions of his inner thoughts, convincing the route of evangelical and sacramental ideas to link up with God just to have the grace and solace for his dejected poor soul, which paradoxically symbolizes the entire doleful conditions of the humanity of the proceeding age of Herbert’s England (Mason 89).

In fact, Herbert’s ways and styles of approaching to God, through his brief passive conversation to God, is esoterically reminding and acquainting us deeply of the myth in its truest sense, channelling our attentions towards the Divinity. He believed and centralized the God to be his Master and Father of evangelical creed, but did not depend on Him blindly, but rather tried to substantiate his views of devotion with some ideological kinetics proposition, for Herbert believed sincerely that to have the ultimate mercy and grace of his Master

would have to be devoted completely with sincerest and uncontrollable prayer in seclusion. The very essence and aroma of Herbert's poetry and its universal appeal in reciprocating a new dimension of devotional and ecclesiastical stance are, without any doubt, the products of his sincerest appeal and enormous prayer to God who, what Mason has rightly justified, "nominated Herbert's keen experiments and observation by a secure path of the devotion, encouraging the entire humanity to nurture and practice the exercise of sacramental ideas, and thus maintaining a side by side relationship to the Divinity for detailing the evangelical milieu of the age, where broadening the ideas of Christianity was of great challenge with the matter of unexpected facts" (121). The aim of writing *The Temple* is not simply expressing his deepest yearning to have the mercy and favour of God for the salvation of his soul, rather it demonstrates the principles axioms of lost and fading glory of the Christianity over the Puritanism. In fact Herbert's redefined the meaning of faith is allude to that of the meaning we are referring to today, through sin and the deep repentance, good and the evil import of the soul-the axiom of his poetry with which he has been governing us to heighten the very assimilation of the soul with the notion of evangelical milieu. And in this prospect, Herbert creates successfully, if not sincerely and mistakenly granted, a true variable of the myth and vindicates the principles of how, with the effects of deep devotion and constant prayer to God, significantly and brilliantly a myth is to be prosecuted to shade and cast a sacramental view on the delectable condition of the entire humanity (Drury 422). Herbert's *The Temple* shows the pictures of the very conflicts of his minds and also proficiently depicts the re-enactment of those conflicts within the souls of the reader. Herbert wished the humanity to be remained apart from the clutch of sinfulness, to be adamant and persistent to have the grace of his Master, and also projecting his theory, by assessing *The Temple* each and individual work, with simple piety, ease, and veneration. Herbert notified us, by objectifying the external milieu and tendencies of the seventeenth century religious conditions, the difficulties through which he went through since his assessing of devotional journeys for which he had been longed for. Herbert, additionally and brilliantly with his full ease and conscience, reciprocated the tendencies of his soul, and establishing the facts that the truest endeavour of humanity must be able to attain the paragon of the Divinity, serving God to gain pleasure and honour of the humanity with more plausibility.

Herbert is very polite and humble at and during his prayer, analysing the principle need of his soul to represents the entire human's judgemental condition, and reciprocating the importance of the skilful and continuous prayer of God and his will power and pertinacious dedication to have the creed of God. Herbert's *The Temple* is not only a specimen made up of many poems, but rather a deep amalgamation of different conflicts of his minds, reminding us of what he is and what he feels. Herbert gained confidence by his excessive touch and caring of Him, maintaining an atmosphere, values and ethics of his prayer within which truth is obtained, for to derive the truth of the soul is the very critical theme of his writings, of his soul in order to mingle himself within the paragon of His state (Drury 178). The zeal and spirit of Herbert's appeal to have and gather His mercy is the ultimate creed of his esoteric and tantalizing mind that brilliantly linked up and advocated the propose acknowledgement of his soul, for Herbert made his soul acquainted directly to the prospect and grace of His divine milieu (Seelig 178). Sidney Lee, in his book *George Herbert; Poet- A Short Biography*, gave us a clear picture of Herbert's deepest intension behind advocating the mercy and love of God, expressing [Herbert's] the deepest repugnance against Puritanism and his unrest attempts of regaining the fading zeal and crisis of Anglicanism. He quoted "the overwhelming feeling about the immensity of God's and the abundance of His grace permits Herbert's poetry" (70).

The ways Herbert encompassed for creating a connection to God are direct and absolute. His attaining and thereby performing the task of Him are noteworthy, accelerating his simplicity to decompose his pride, for he knew very well that to have the grace of God soul must be free from shackles and prejudices. Herbert's being as a priest led himself to be guided by the path of devotion with soul's struggles. And having been a part of this transformation, Herbert wanted to lift himself higher from the custodian of worldliness. He knew that to remove the struggles of his souls is thereby to eradicate the dejection of the humanity, to surrender soul to the feet of God is to shake off the pride of humanity, and to mingle with God with his soul directly refers his universal acknowledgement of the virtuous souls of the entire humanity from their eternal damnation. His poems are the best creation of representing the elevation and the distillation of the soul, and like a myth maker, Herbert was very serious during and since his recommendation of his soul to his Master. The meta-aesthetics<sup>1</sup> of Herbert's devotional world demands a subtle and remarkable essence of his deep understanding of God, representing a special web of Christianity into the tough labyrinth of Protestantism, and in the disorder of the seventeenth century English religion. Herbert's meta-aestheticism deplores a meaninglessness of his past life, learned him to explore his soul through his myths- a record of his deep yearning to be mingled to his God, to testify the capacity of his soul, and therefore to restore and reawakening his soul from its eternal damnation. Herbert, very sympathetically and virtuously, made his soul clear with the fact that, without devoting himself with full ease and consciousness, no evangelical grace and pleasure would be granted and gifted too to himself and to the humanity, and apparently acknowledged his universal facts by his each devotional prayer cum poetry so that the diseased souls might be woke up to start their journeys with new impact of devotion. Herbert's each poetry is the deepest and detailed investigation of the naivety of his processing heart that beats only with the appraisal of the God, and this doctrine is enormously linked up of his writing of myth, and in that sense he, somehow, as it seems to me, might be allowed as a skilful master of myth –maker of the seventeenth century poetry of devotion, a trailblazer and discoverer of new vistas of devotional poetry in the history of the British devotional poetry.

#### Discussion:

Perhaps it seems to me that Herbert might be aware with some sense of telepathy, for when he prayed to the God, deeply summoned to his Master he felt an unnecessary and completely unexpected rapture, a calmness into his soul, and into his stagnant body. In "Love (III)" Herbert stately, in this matter, exposed his intension:

Glory be to God on high

And on earth peace

Good will towards men.

(line 19-21)

He incorporated and made us briefly acknowledged with this message vibrantly and positively. Herbert, a creator of the myth of sacramental scheme, portrayed his soul would be free from the worldly entanglement of 'dust and sin' (line 2) only by practicing a prayer. He, in "Love (III)", so adroitly made a charm of myth that his

<sup>1</sup> Meta-aesthetics is a term used to denote the subtle and conspicuous beauty of the one's mind and conscience to represent the extreme and aesthetic beauty of the outer-self; i.e. physical beauty. This term is basically used here to represent Herbert's keen and subtle sense of his inner beauty with which he, thus be, able to incorporate and procreate *The Temple* with ease and tenacity. Meta-aesthetics simply denotes the inner recesses of Herbert's ideological ideas with extreme beauty.

reader knew the fact of his deepest intimacy and privacy with his God, making us aware of His question of whether he lacked anything at his homely place like earth:

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,

If I lacked anything. (line 5-6)

Like a mythical story, Herbert constantly made us familiarize of how brilliantly and efficiently he started formulating a relationship and close bonding to his Master, what he did actually to have the minimum grace and affection of his Master to be arrested by His labyrinth ultimately. He called himself to be the guest who was trying to entering the boundary of the evangelical prospect, and thus be worthy to attend the principal Host virtually. Unlike a genuine myth-maker, Herbert talked as if He were his closed and intimate friend, or a family leading family member with whom he could share everything unhesitatingly without fear:

I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,

I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

Who made the eyes but I? (line 9-12)

As an Anglican practitioner, Herbert blended sacramental effects of his soul to the creed of his Master, investigating how far his soul would be eligible to have the final mercy of his God at the time of dooms day, how much patience his soul would bear to be served for its own purgation and resurrection. God, to Herbert, is a matter of having and thus experiencing through the deep objective of prayer. T. S. Eliot, in 1957, claimed that *The Temple* is a book constructed according to a plan.....what has at first the appearance of a succession of beautiful but separate lyrics, comes to reveal itself as a continued religious meditation with an intellectual framework” (Steenwyk 4). Additionally, the fact must be acknowledged to us that Herbert’s excellent and brilliant uses of images are therefore signalling his growing tendencies of applying the myths in the light of devotion.

In “Heaven” Herbert investigate the story of the Bible to include and compile a mythical effect into his writings, where he directly asked questions of creation and the human importance to his Master to remind us the first scene of the Bible where God instructed Noah what would be the statics of the projected Earth for the living place of human beings. Light, keeping in mind the principle object of the light in the Bible, along with joy played a very significant role, and thereby:

And are there any leaves, that still abide?

Bide.

Herbert, therefore, is establishing the goal of human life, what a Hindu devotee Sri Ramakrishna Paramhanshadev suggested us brilliantly this motto. His poetry are typically devotional no doubt and pastoral too to procreate some deeper essence of ecclesiastical milieu. His search for sincere art of prayer and of praise of God is dolefully painted in “Judgement” where he sumptuously presented himself to be the inferior to other devotees at the time of the cross verification of how much they prayed to God, cried for God and devoted

themselves to God to have His sympathy and ultimate mercy. Herbert, very sincerely, argued to God to cross-examine the factors and elements used by his prayer to his Master, and thus wanted to have been taught the Testament by his Master during his judgement (Bennet 95):

What others mean to do, I know not well;  
 Yet I hear tell,  
 That some will turn thee to some leaves therein  
 So void of sin,  
 That they in merit shall excel. (line 6-10)

What Herbert asserted here is very constructive, defining what Carrie Lynn Steenwyk brilliantly noted, “a devotional sense of exaltation with profoundest pity and merriment of soul in the paragon of pious sense” (71). Herbert, in *The Temple*, presented two themes- one univocal and other multi-vocal, defining the correlation of the co efficiency of his soul’s delectable conditions since the time of rejuvenation of the soul by his excessive prayer (Needs 57). Herbert made a significant argument to his Master that whatever he did and committed, according to his belief, his since his birth. He gave the greatest manifestation of his love for the entire mankind in the gift of his son. The territory of Herbert’s poetry was vast but it revolves only one central theme- to visit his soul to his Master so that he will be judged and be advised of what would be done to uplift the latest condition of the his soul as well as of the mankind:

And thrust a Testament into thy hand:  
 Let that be scanned.  
 There thou shalt find my faults are thine. (line 13-15)

Herbert’s pioneer works as a moral theologian, his general tendencies towards the invocation to God, his skilful uses of sacramental words, and overall his limitless and continuous believe on his Master kept him apart and beyond the traditional route of local practitioners of the devout thoughts of the seventeenth century England (McAdoo 15). In fact, Herbert’s liveliness of mind, the gracefulness and large magnanimity of his prayer towards his Master, his broadest minds and outlook towards Him made a deep and succinct impact on the fading and lost glory of Christianity at the cost of his limitless devotion. He prays wishes to share his devotions to Him as if He were his good fellow, and in “The Banquet” Herbert sophisticatedly wished Him ‘welcome’ (line 2) like his friend, and also asked Him to be with him and inside him for ever:

Welcome dear,  
 With me, in me, live and dwell: (line 2-3)

He also requested Him to stay with him and made him to be one of the divine objects so that Herbert would feel the touch of heaven with which he might be able to fill his soul with sacramental ideas:

O what sweetness from the bowl

Fill my soul

Such as is, and makes divine! (line 7-9)

So that Herbert could experience and get rid of sins out of his soul (“to subdue the smell of sin; line 15). Vaughan’s intellectual level was too deep as to create a very effect of his inner thoughts, reminding us of his major concern of what Polya Tocheva argued straightforwardly, “the theological dualism blended of his poetry” (11). He felt what he would want, demand to stabilize the connection of his soul to the God who, to Herbert’s belief, would scent his soul with pure aroma of devotional essence:

Only God, who gives perfumes,  
Flesh assumes,  
And with it perfumes my heart. (line 22-24)

Herbert’s methods of advocating the mythical effects in his poetry is detailed and full of whimsical, testifying the objective corrective under the shell of different issues, maintaining a axiom among the substations of different routes of his soul to philosophize the God. The zeal and passion of creating myths by his very fundamental ideologies are aptly summarized here (Ebner 44). Collier, in this regard, made a comment that “Herbert’s perception of objectifying the pre and post existence of soul is aptly narrated, and that he made this impact very clear through and by detailing the projection of his soul’s prayer to his Master” (97).

In “Discipline” Herbert aptly pleaded to his Master to shake off the mood of arrogance and be pleasant and sympathetic to those who were in a big trouble and are unable to vouchsafe their sufferings to Him. He stately began this poem by quoting:

Throw away thy rod,  
Throw away thy wrath:  
O my God,  
Take the gentle path. (line 1-4)

Herbert’s intension of assimilating the soul to the God is brilliantly expressed, and that he was known sincerely by the exact characteristics of his Master is clearly shown too. The repetition of the words “throw away” (line 1 & 2) exclusively reminds us of Herbert’s detailed and protein relationship to his Master, brightly presenting a father-son relationship in this regard. Herbert’s keen understanding of God and his immediate desire of making a relationship with God are what Allen said brilliantly “of thousand time greater and forceful than that of his mundane understanding. For that, he was thus able to germinate such type spirits and impetus onto the plightful condition of his soul” (67).

Conclusion:

The narrating style of Herbert’s poetry in assessing and creating the immediate effect of myth is undeniably significant to imbibe the creed of his poetry. His poetry shows brilliantly how a new mythical story in relating to the relationship of the soul and the God is to be formed and created, to be tempered with the hue of

multilayer textured of different voices that enriched the paragon of the seventeenth century divinity and its later period too. Herbert's using of different voices helped him to fabricate the different textures of myth, compacting the ideas into a unified with associated sensibility. The distinctive milieu of Herbert's poetic creed of his creation of myths are strongly made us fragrant that it takes us to the sublime effect of his absolute scheme of prayer through which he would break into the obsession of the humanity. Herbert's myths are strongly enough of judging the uncontrollable things during the web of his controlled statics, and thereby providing and creating an evangelical atmosphere of with pure devoutness.

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