

The dexterity and capability of George Herbert's use of hieroglyphs in his poems- A detailed perusal.

Mr. Shantanu Siuli

Assistant Professor* & PhD Research Scholar**

Department of Humanities & Social Science

*ICFAI University Tripura

Kamalghat, Agartala, Tripura (W), India.

** Seacom Skills University, Birbhum, West Bengal, India.

Abstract: The main aim and notion of this paper is to define Herbert's, a man of fantastic and outstanding idea, masterly use of hieroglyphs in his different notable and significant as well as outstanding works and to explicate the very importance of their inherently thematic views keeping in mind the notion of hieroglyphs from the trust sense of this term. His main aim, as it is elucidated in this paper, is to, by no means, clarify a new pattern of poem but rather to define and open out a new "emblematic poetry"¹ that will incorporate the basis psychology and overall view of the poet. Herbert very succinctly lighted the hieroglyphs in his few poems, made them effective and touch-stone to examine the values of poetic soul, and signifying the meaning with a more realistic and symbolic sense.

Key Words: Emblematic poetry, hieroglyphs, philosophy and exact attitude of poetic heart and sentiment.

Introduction:

The word 'hieroglyph' defines a figure, symbol or a sign which has some hidden and unknown meaning. This term was very much popular in the seventeenth century and was obtained from Greek for 'sacred carving'², defining some strong impact on religion and religious matter. The term was commonly used and practised by all the poets of that time. They in fact, used hieroglyphs during their discussion and writing of their poetry. Herbert, a seventeenth century religious and devotional poetry, also imbibed and made a varied use of hieroglyphs in his poems, manifesting the concept of herbertian impact on to the minds of the readers who are devout and pious too to their religion. In his hieroglyphs Herbert never tried to abandon sensibility with natural object. Herbert's uses of hieroglyphs often determine his clear concepts of Bible and Christianity, and also, sometimes, manifest the deep notion of body and soul relationship. The treatment that has been extensively taken for maintaining the hieroglyphs is noteworthy and stupendous too to have a deep impact on Herbert's creative and imaginative faculty that has imbibed the whole art of hieroglyphs, for some instance, in a different way. The massive interest in hieroglyphs no doubt helps Herbert to demonstrate the emblematic quality of his imageries. Joseph S. Summers has rightly mentioned that the use of hieroglyphs is the central and primary concern of Herbert's creative impulse with its gradual progression of tremendous milieu of poetry. Actually the pattern poems are the exposition of Herbert's "hieroglyphic disposition"³. Summers in this regard, made a difference in between the pattern poetry and other poetry, which seemingly indicated that the very importance of pattern poetry to Herbert. The exact nature and

¹ Joseph H. Summers in his discussion about Herbert's use of hieroglyph argued that Herbert no more invented the pattern poem but he invented 'emblematic poetry' or the religious lyric.

² Joseph H. Summers used this term in his discussion "The Poem as Hieroglyph" of *George Herbert and The Seventeenth Century Religious Poetry*. pp. 256.

³ See Bart Westerweel "Patterns and Patterning: A Study of Four Poems by George Herbert" Vol. 41. P. 32.

pattern of his poetry can be traced by hieroglyphic spirits which governed the many contemporaries of his time. Herbert's use of strong but inherent hieroglyphs differentiates some psychology than that of others, and also maintained the effect of broad visualization. There is a certain urgency to shape 'the imperfect materials of sufferings and joy into the pattern symbols of divine order' (Jenny E. Kim, 1). Herbert, considering himself a sinner of the projected world, seeks help to the pattern poetry that will surely lead him, according to his thorough belief and conviction, to divine milieu with faster way.

Two patterns concerning the pattern poetry will be discussed in accessing this topic- *utile dulce* and *opsis* (Westerweel 34). The first defines the concept of Horatian adage and the second one pontifically explains the rhetorical concept taken from Aristotle. But none of these patterns has impacted the works of Herbert and his poetic styles. The description of painting in Ripa's *Iconologia* specifies the basic components of the *ut picture poesis*.⁴ Herbert's pattern poems seem to be adequate to have the succinct meaning of his psychological web house. Hieroglyphs, to some extent, adroitly used by Herbert during the seventeenth century to grasp the meaning of the authenticity of the divine thoughts to project a new dimension of thoughts and feelings, are noteworthy and sublime in its sense. In most cases the hieroglyphs demonstrated and represented the Herbert's fusion in between meta and reality, illusion and originality, and belief and disbelief also, signifying the ultimate sense of absolute being. To Herbert hieroglyph did not reciprocate the central meaning or hidden beauty at all, but rather indicated the sublime thoughts of all creation maintained and germinated by Him. Herbert believed that the hieroglyph was practised "to be read rather than adored"⁵, and it had the auspicious power to lead the reader return to God to have solace. Though the pattern poem is itself a dangerous form of poetry (Cesare 269), Herbert was still conscious and concern too to deal the direct effect of hieroglyph at the time of assessing his poetry of these genre. Actually this genre, i.e. pattern poetry was much popular in the sixteenth century and was heavily practised before and after 1633 by Ben Jonson, Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey.

Discussion:

George Herbert, born in 1593, fifth son of Magdalen and Richard Herbert, was an efficient scholar and true preacher of his time. An intense effect of the loss of his father at the age of three made a succinct impact on the psychological as well as cognitive progression of little Herbert, and eventually lead him, perhaps gradually and silently, to the love and grace of God, his ultimate destination. His constant attachment and affection, during his childhood life in spite of Magdalen's tender and gracious adoration, with God lead him rather persuade him to think and be mingled with God, and that's why he, since his sense of being a human being, practised to have the ultimate grace of God, and became adamant to tread the path of God throughout the rest of his entire life. His aim of life was to venerate and glorify and be assimilated with God, and to be scintillating with His auspicious sacred light, and that's why he, to vivify the strong attachment and his deep yearning to God, very defiantly seeks help of hieroglyphs, maintaining his strong sense of devotional milieu.

In *The Altar* Herbert magnifies the use of hieroglyphs which are religious in nature. Throughout the poem visual hieroglyphs were encapsulated confidently whose effects are simple and straightforward. Herbert's strong and true yearn to be mingled and blessed by God are projected through the subtle touch of his poetic mind, incorporating the effects of hieroglyphs. The heart, made by God's subtle creation, is adamant to pray the supremacy of God. His heart, fragmented into different parts, is compared with a stone, reciprocating the hieroglyph object of Christian belief.

A HEART alone

Is such a stone,

As nothing but

Thy pow'r doth cut.

(line 5-8)

⁴ See Bart Westerweel ; p.36

⁵ See Cesare, *George Herbert and the Seventeenth Century Religious Poets*, p. 269.

The word 'stone', an inanimate and non living thing, is an indication of hieroglyph, which is apparent to the heart of poet. This stone like heart is getting into pieces to strengthen his power of prayer which is very akin and strongly related to God:

Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy name. (line 9-12)

The Altar advertises the strong appeal of the poet whose main intension, as it is inherent and explained throughout the poem, is to praise and vivify the God, enlighten the spirit of God in the human souls, and to be motivated through the strong sense of devotion, i.e. prayer. Herbert's use of hieroglyphs in this poem *The Altar* derives the meaning and understanding of hidden meanings and truths akin to his inner recesses of soul, which is quite unfamiliar to the readers. The hieroglyphs used in this poem- 'stone', 'heart', 'cemented with tears', 'workman's tool' are related to hidden truth of yearning and devotional touch. Herbert by using these kind of hieroglyphs wants to attain 'thy bless' (line 15) to 'praise thy name' (line 12).

His careful use of the word 'altar' twice in this poem magnifies his keen observation on the integrity of the fragmented power of human soul just to have His grace and 'be thine' (line 16): "A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant rears/...../...../ And sanctify this A L T A R to be thine" (line 1 & 16).

In *Easter Wings* Herbert too exposed the same concept through the archetypal use of hieroglyphs with different milieu. He wished to be surrendered completely to console His dejectedness, and intensely tried his level best to be combined (let me combine; line 17) with God and also His truest sense. This is the final poem of the group of 'Holy Week' (Cesare, 268). The detailed layout simplifies the major hieroglyphic concept over the domain of Herbert's extreme proliferation of devotional practices. Words like 'larks', 'wealth', 'store' are the true embodiments of hieroglyphs, signifying the attachment of Herbert to God, so that he would be free to deliver his voice:

As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories: (line 8-9)

The pattern of this poetry is victorious not because "we see the wings but because we see how they are made" (268). The first stanza is the merriment of 'felix culpa' (268) defining the materialistic view of the creation of man and his entire purposeless journey that will eventually lead them to the path of dejection and unhappiness:

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sickness and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin. (line 11-15)

Herbert is truly a sincere and profound lyricist of devotional poetry whose sense of nurturing and experiencing God's grace inside his heart is noteworthy and matter of firm belief. Man's sin and his attempt at redemption are thoroughly discussed. Throughout the poem man's entire journey is depicted by the design of the poem made by Herbert, dissecting the journey from minimum to maximum and vice-versa in life. The shape of the poem illustrates man's struggling journey of entire life, meaning the result of his sins. The first stanza clearly indicates that God has given all the resources to man which is sufficient for survive

(‘Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store’ line 1), and foolishly ends up all the possession and becomes poor:

Till he became

More poor: (line 4-5)

The second stanza turns man to God to have some mercy again because he has nothing to be worthy of. The third stanza of the poem *Easter Wings* reciprocates the sin of man and its ultimate condition and last stanza obviously indicates the man’s ultimate progression towards redemption to have the grace and bless of God:

Let me combine,

And feel this day thy victory:

For, if I imp my wing on thine,

Affliction shall advance the flight in me. (line 17-20)

Easter Wings is a plea of man’s journey towards vindication, absolution to be solaced and pure to its soul. The poem being twice figured in descending and ascending shape not only correlates the journey of man, but also defines the resurrection and rejuvenation of Christ.

In the *Church Monuments* Herbert used religious hieroglyphs with a pleasant way, seemingly beautiful to its entire circumstances and atmosphere of evangelical milieu. He had full control over his mind which could ‘spell’ his elements. His entire bodily flesh was compared to ‘glass’ which ‘holds the dust’ that would be washed out by the gradual and thorough process of prayer to God. Use of hieroglyphs like ‘crumbled into dust’, ‘entomb my flesh’, ‘heap of dust’, ‘my body to this school’, ‘to spell his elements’, ‘flesh is but the glass’ indicates the surrender of the ‘self’ to cast the devotion of self towards the almighty. It will surely learn, as Herbert said so in line 6, the process of carrying and practising His ‘spell’ within the ‘body’:

My body to this school, that it may learn

To spell the elements, and find his birth (line 6-7)

The bodily concept explained by Herbert is so deep and intense that its effect cannot be missed throughout the poem. Herbert made an agreement with his body by calling ‘dear flesh’ to practise the tasks of prayer given by God, and requested it (body) to be true and ‘descent’ at the time of prayer of God, so that he would be mingled with Him by leaving the ‘heap of dust’ of his entire time in earth:

Dear flesh, while I do pray, learn here thy stem

And true descent: that when thou shalt grow fat, (line 17-18)

Actually, *Church Monuments* clarifies, by the use of hieroglyphs, the emancipation of the dust of bodily flesh by the constant act of prayer and evangelical thoughts of God, accessing the dusts of all ‘our time’. The poem is a description of ‘memento mori’⁶, meaning that we will die. It defines how the poet sits in a tomb in order to prepare the death when his body will lie ‘entomb’. According to the concept of Bible, as it is defined by Herbert, the human body is the grouping of the elements of soil which will be blended and turn to soil after death. The flesh will grow gradually and eventually turn into the subject to decay after a certain period of time, that is the profitable truth of life, explained by Herbert through sequential use of hieroglyphs.

The Bunch of Grapes has managed the image of the poet’s lost joy, the image of blessing and the image of the Christian source of joy and happy moments. Throughout the poem the image of joy has been used four times- once in the first stanza, twice in the third stanza and again twice in the last stanza- to inculcate the joy

⁶ ‘A Short analysis of George Herbert’s ‘Church Monuments’ by *interestingliterature*.

of Christianity. *The Bunch of Grapes* is a true specimen of Christ and of the Christian's close association. In *The Bunch of Grapes* Herbert used the hieroglyph with a deeper sense of exaltation, indicating the subject of the meditation is the problem of the absence of joy from the Christian life:

Joy, I did lock thee up: but some bad man

Hath let thee out again: (line 1-2)

Herbert averts the misunderstanding between the two ancient imagery of Canaan and the Red Sea by explaining that every journey of "Children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land"⁷ was a true embodiment of the journey of the Christ from earth to heaven. The image of the bunch of grapes defines not only the "foretastes of Canaan and heaven but also the foretastes of Covenant of Works ('who hath the wine?') and the Covenants of Grace" ('but can he want the grape',...)⁸:

But can he want the grape, who hath the wine?

I have their fruit and more.

Blessed be God, who prospered Noah's vine,

And made it bring forth grapes good stone.

But much more him I must adore. (line 22-26)

The process of Noah's vine is signifying the God's grace and blessing whose effect is endless.

In *Joseph Coat* Herbert never mentioned the name of Joseph. The poem depicts the joy and sorrow of Christian life, difficulties and decadence of human beings. God's power is acknowledged and manifested here with truest belief:

I live to show his power, who once did bring

My joys to weep, and now my griefs to sing. (line 13-14)

The primary concern of using hieroglyphs in this poem is prevailed to signify the canon of Christianity whose very effects scattered into the mind of the poet. The primary concern of the poem is the monopoly of sorrow and grief that have been hovered over the poet's mind and lead him 'to grief'. His use of obscure hieroglyphs to define the condition of Christianity is noteworthy and full of vitality. To find out the solace of Christian mind the 'Joy's coat' that is the clear indication of Jesus Christ's grace and affection:

....and giv'n to anguish

One of Joy's coats, ticing it with relief. (line 10-11)

Joseph H. Summers in his discussion '*The Poem as Hieroglyph*' pointed out that the combination of sorrow and joy of Christian life is no doubt a sign of God's love and deep caring.

Conclusion:

Throughout this paper to examine and vivify the importance and practise of hieroglyphs is my strong forte and major concern too. Herbert's use of hieroglyphs to define and crosscheck the values and ethics of the Christianity is prevailed, and thus successfully made a strong web of hieroglyph to ascertain the exact facts and truth of Christianity from its truest sense. More or less by assessing these poems I am and have been vexed by the subtle use of hieroglyphs by the poet of the seventeenth century, Herbert. From the true sense of poetic sensibility, he surrenders himself to the investigation of God, and His paramount web, which has been guided and overshadowed by the subtle use of hieroglyphs. The main of George Herbert's use of such

⁷ I. Cor. X. The marginal reading for 'ensamples,' v. 11, is 'or, Types'.

⁸ See Joseph H. Summers' "The Poem as Hieroglyph". p. 257.

hieroglyphs is to nominate the adventurous life of Christianity with the thorough process of devotion and divine thinking. The aim of incorporating these thoughts is fulfilled and significant too to deal the evangelical life of Christianity before and since the age of Herbert’s time.

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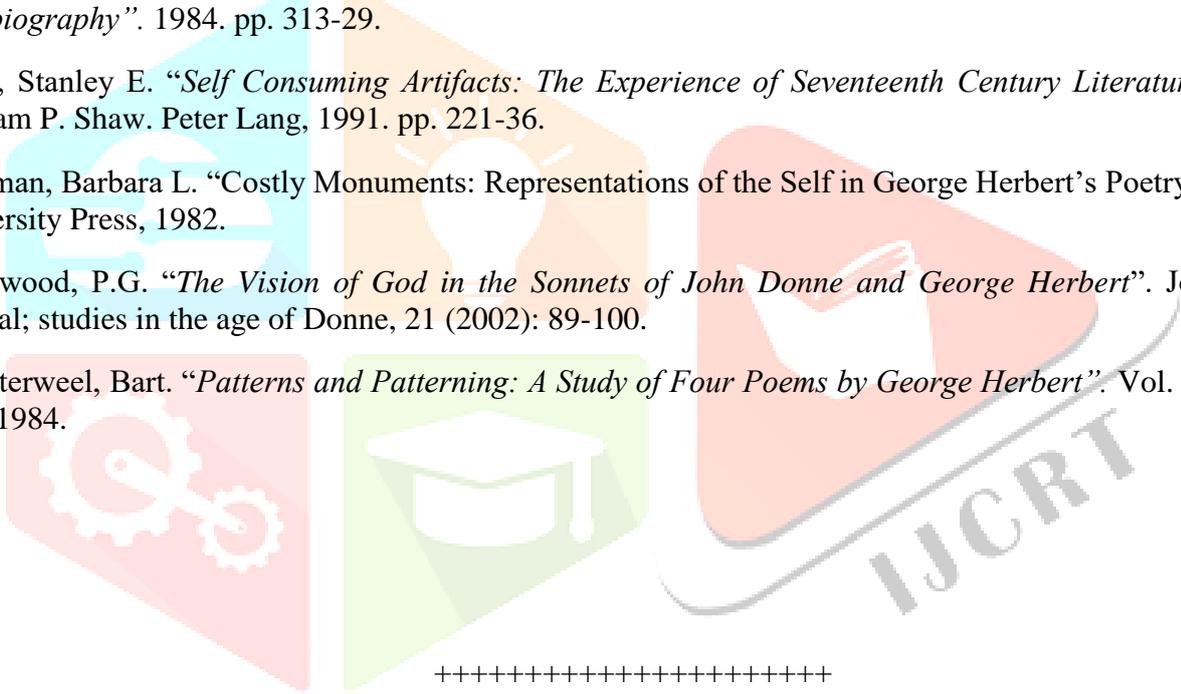
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