

# An Analysis of English Poetry

Romantic to Modern Ages  
*For Graduate and Post-Graduate  
[ English ] Students*

*Revised & Enlarged Edition  
based on NEW SYLLABUS*

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## *P*REFACE

The present edition of 'An Analysis of English Poetry' is enlarged and thoroughly revised and intended for the students of English Honours and M.A. and also designed for SSC and other competitive examinations. It is a detailed and analytical study of some selected poems written by the poets of the literary ages ranging from the Romantic to the Modern, and the selection of the poems has been made on the basis of the syllabuses prescribed by the universities of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. This volume also covers the English syllabus for SSC examination.

Poetry generally proves tough for students to read, understand and enjoy. The volume has been written in a such that those for whom it is intended will find it an interesting study. Each poem has been properly summarized and its theme has been analysed with a critical bent of mind. A comprehensive discussion on each of the poem has been presented in the volume in the form of "Introduction" which precedes the discussion and analysis of the poem. Words and difficult expressions have been adequately noted and annotated. Besides, important lines and stanzas have been elaborately elucidated and explained.

The volume contains texts of the poems and their elaborate analysis. The discussion has been admirably enriched with adequate references and illustrations. Rhetorical problems have been clearly explained. The volume aims at providing interest as well as knowledge to the students so

that they read poetry, understand it and enjoy the pleasure of reading poetry. Some important university questions with their answers have been appended to the end of the volume.

What is special about this volume is that I have incorporated in it the characteristic features of poetry from the romantic to the modern ages. The discussion on this point will, I am sure, provide the students with a definite glimpse into the study of poetry. It will also enable them to understand the poets, the poetic views, the characteristics of the ages, the social and literary theme presented in their poems and above all, their philosophical approaches to life and society in the background of changing social, political and literary situation in the world.

It is a matter of immense pleasure that this volume entitled "An Analysis of English Poetry" which was previously published in two separate volumes, has been warmly received by the students of English literature of all the universities of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. I write with pride and joy that teachers of English have praised highly of the book as it adequately provides to students all which they need to read, study, understand, analyse and enjoy English poetry.

The present edition of this combined volume has been enlarged and enriched with additional material and information. Printing errors which crept into it have been corrected. This volume also covers the English poems prescribed by West Bengal Central School Service Commission. I owe my indebtedness to a good many number of teachers and scholars in reshaping this volume. I hope that it will continue to serve the purposes of the students of English literature.

I am heavily indebted to many scholars and teachers whose ideas, views and opinions about the poems have been freely used in the volume. I record my gratefulness to Prof. S. P. Sengupta, Prof. S. Bardhana, Prof. P.K. Karmakar, who always inspired me to write this book which will admirably serve the purpose of those for whom it is meant. I am indebted to my wife, Madhabi Pandey, whose valuable suggestions have made the volume scholarly. Shri Pronay Banerjee, Kolkata deserves great appreciation for neatly and artistically composing the manuscript of the volume. Sri, Amit Saha, Kolkata, who has designed page setting and provided the decorative idea of the printing of the book is always gratefully remembered. Above all, I am immensely indebted to Sri Sandip Nayak, who kindly deigned to publish this book. My humble effort will be deemed highly prized if it serves the purposes of the students.

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### GEORGE HERBERT (1593 - 1633)

George Herbert came of a noble family, a branch of that of the Earls of Pembroke. He was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was ordained and appointed rector of Bemerton, Wiltshire in 1630, where he spent the remainders of his life. He was intended for a political career but he gave up worldly hopes to become a parish in Wiltshire. He produced some of the most intensely moving religious poetry in the English language. His prose *Remains* includes *A priest to the Temple*, consisting of practical and spiritual instruction for the country parson. He was a distinguished scholar and able musician. All his life he had to battle against disease. He died in 1633.

Of all Donne's disciples. George Herbert was perhaps the most conspicuous. He was the saint of the Metaphysical School. He was among the greatest writers of poems on sacred subjects. His theory was that a man should take all high of God's service, and he believed that a poet should make the altar blossom with his poetry.

He wrote poetry chiefly during the three years of his rectorship at Bemerton and during the period of indecision that preceded his ordination. All his poems, included in a collection *The Temple* (1633), are marked by a quiet contemplativeness of wit and reason and a fervent piety. Grierson comments that Herbert's central theme was the psychology of religious experience. The metaphysical element is seen in his use of striking imagery drawn from church ritual, farming, trade and even household pursuits. His lyrics are marked by simple language and colloquial rhythms. In his diction, his rhythm and frequent conceits he was unmistakably a Metaphysical poet. His achievement is remarkable because he uses a wide variety of metrical forms. His technical skills in inventiveness are extraordinary. He shows Donne's influence but his style is simpler and he does not quibble or make parade of his learning. Sincerity and raciness are the keynotes of his best poems.

◆ **HERBERT AS A RELIGIOUS POET :** George Herbert is not only a Metaphysical poet but also is known as a great religious poet. He was a priest and during his short career as a priest he wrote devotional lyrics collected in his volume *The Temple*. Grierson says that Herbert's central theme was the psychology of religious experience. He is considered by many critics as one of the best among the Metaphysical poets. Devotional though his poetry is, it has

nothing to do with the tepid, characterless verse which we call devotional. He writes of the problem of resignation, and of his sense of his own unworthiness; he explores and analyses as subtly as Donne his own emotional relationship with God, constantly striving towards a closer knowledge of God and of himself. The concept of his poems is that many of them are direct communion with God, expressed in a conventional tone of remarkable intimacy.

Herbert is a religious, Christian poet. He is the saint of the Metaphysical School. He is among the greatest writers of poems on sacred subjects. His theory is that a man should take all high gifts to God's service. His poems are all religious. In them he affirms his absolute faith in and total dedication to God. He asserts, like Milton and other English religious poets, in his poems that man should surrender himself to God for his spiritual redemption and mental peace. The poems in *The Temple* show Herbert's zeal for the church of England and are concerned with practical theology. His treatment of religious theme has the simple, unstudied earnestness of Longfellow. His religious poems are marked with a note of devotion and simplicity. It is the simplicity of Herbert which is the secret of his power.

His religious poems reveal his deep Christian conviction and faith in God. He eulogizes those who are virtuous. Life in contact with divine blessing can have meaning. It attains permanence. *The Temple* is marked by a quiet contemplativeness of wit and reason and a fervent piety. The poems contain condensed sermons, wise precepts and moral lessons. The lessons which Herbert seeks to impart to people in *Virtue* are that the world is perishable, and all that we find in the world are subject to death and decay; nothing remains undestroyed or imperishable. Only virtue lasts long. It is imperishable in the transient world. A virtuous soul survives and shines. It is not effected by the laws of death and destruction. Virtue in divine.

## VIRTUE

George Herbert (1593 - 1633)

Sweet<sup>1</sup> day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal<sup>2</sup> of the earth and sky:  
The dew shall weep<sup>3</sup> thy fall<sup>4</sup> tonight  
For thou must die.

Sweet<sup>5</sup> rose, whose hue<sup>6</sup> angry<sup>7</sup> and brave<sup>8</sup>  
Bids<sup>9</sup> the rash<sup>10</sup> gazer<sup>11</sup> wipe his eye:  
Thy root<sup>12</sup> is ever in its grave<sup>13</sup>  
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets compacted<sup>14</sup> lie<sup>15</sup>  
My music<sup>16</sup> shows ye have your closes<sup>17</sup>,  
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
 Like season'd timber, never gives<sup>18</sup>  
 But though the whole world turn to coal<sup>19</sup>,  
 Then chiefly lives<sup>20</sup>.

1. Pleasant, 2. union, 3. bemoan, 4. end, 5. beautiful, 6. colour, 7. fiercely bright, 8. defiant, 9. commands, 10. thoughtless, 11. onlooker, 12. origin, 13. death, 14. close together, 15. are kept, 16. poetry, 17. ends, 18. gives way, fails, 19. perish, 20. alone remains eternal.

♦ **CONTEXT** : Virtue is the poem which occurs in Herbert's collection of poems "The Temple". The volume consists of one hundred and sixty poems, chiefly of religious types. It is wonderful collection of condensed sermons, wise precepts and moral techniques. It is a singular work full of faith fervour. The theme of Virtue is the poet's reflection on the immortality of virtue in the transient world. Nothing lasts long in this world. All we see and feel are subject to the transient nature of the world. But virtue enjoys eternity and is proof against the destructive forces. The poem rings with Christian faith and is deeply religious and sincere in its expression of the poet's glorification of virtuous souls.

♦ **TITLE** : The poem deals with Herbert's with reflection on the immortality of virtue in the transient world. Virtue is a quiet moral quality, and it ennobles a soul, elevates the character and purifies the mind. It is equated with divinity. A man who possesses virtue attains perfection that immortalizes his soul. The poem celebrates the Christian morality of virtue. It celebrates the triumph of power, and all are ephemeral; but in this transitory human existence, virtue alone enjoys immortality and eternity. Herber implies a comparison between different natural elements and a virtuous soul and concludes that virtue triumphs over all in a world of flux and transitoriness. He stresses the Christian vision of the immortality of a virtuous soul. The discussion reveals that virtue which is a perennial quality of reverence for all societies constitutes the subject-matter of the poem. Herbert idealizes a virtuous souls which is proof against the destructive forces. The poem ends in an optimistic trumpet-call of the eternity and immortality of virtue:

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
 Like season'd timber, never gives;  
 But though the whole world turn to coal  
 Then chiefly lives.

♦ **RHYME** : Lyricism characterizes the poem. This is well rhymed. In each stanza the first line rhymes with the third, and the second line with the poem fourth, all the first three stanzas begin with sweet, containing the same rhyme scheme ending with die. This is designed to show that all earthly beautiful objects are subject to the destructive forces of nature. The last stanza has a shift in the position of 'sweet' and ends with 'lives' implying that virtue lasts for ever. It is not subject to decay and destruction. The poem begins with a pessimistic mood and ends in optimism.

♦ **SUBSTANCE** : Transience is the characteristic of the world. What we see around us in the world are subject to death and decay. Nothing is imperishable in the perishable world. A pleasant day which is cool, calm and shining and looks festive ends with the coming up of night accompanied by dew-fall. A beautiful rose whose shining brightness dazzles our eyes gradually loses its brightness. Spring which is a season of beauty and pleasure lasts a limited time. Thus all earthy objects are transient. They appear according to the laws of Nature and vanish accordingly. But virtue is eternal. It is not subject to the inevitability of mortality. In the transient world a virtuous soul survives and shines. It lasts for ever.

♦ **CENTRAL IDEA** : Eternity of virtue and transitoriness of all worldly objects constitute the central idea of the poem. Virtue is divine; it remains unaffected by the laws of death and decay. The world is perishable. All that we see around us in the human world and in nature have their beginnings, and they end with the passage of time. They cannot withstand ravages; they yield to death and decay. A man who possesses virtue survives and shines in the transient world. A virtuous soul lasts long and the effects of transitoriness cannot affect it. In this poem Herbert writes that a pleasant day, natural beauty, lovely flowers and their fragrance, the pleasure of spring, all end according to the laws of nature, but a virtuous soul never dies. It withstands the inevitability of mortality and remains imperishable. He thus glorifies and eternalizes virtue and eulogizes a virtuous soul. Since virtue is divine, a virtuous soul can be equated with a divine soul.

### WORD NOTES AND ANNOTATIONS

#### ■ Stanza - 1 : Sweet day ... thou must die.

**THEME** : The day is pleasant and enjoyable as it is cool, quiet and bright. It wears the look of the wedding festivity of the earth and the sky. This will not last long; it will end as night will come up with the dew fall. The end of such a pleasant day is inevitable as death is unavoidable in life.

♦ **COMMENTS** : What is stressed here is the transitoriness of all earthly things concrete or abstract. Nothing lasts for ever. Beauty, pleasure, day and night, all are of ephemeral nature.

*Sweet* — Pleasant. *Sweet day* — the days which are pleasant and enjoyable. The poet means to say that the sights of the day are very appealing to him. The pleasantness of the day is characterized by transitoriness. *So cool, so calm, so bright* — the day is very cool, quiet and bright. A day which is cool, quiet and bright is really pleasing and enjoyable. The use of 'so' before the three adjectives makes the figure of speech 'palilogia'. *Bridal* — union or marriage. This implies the wedding ceremony. This forms a metaphysical conceit. *The bridal ... and sky* — The poet visualizes the marriage of the earth and the sky. The day is so clear and pleasant that the marriage of the

earth with the sky is to be solemnized. Both 'earth' and 'sky', which are two natural elements, have been personified here. *The dew shall weep* — dew will drop. This implies dewdrop. Dew, which is a natural element, has been personified as it seems to be weeping like a human being. *Thy fall* — the end of the day; the day will end soon. *Tonight* — the night which is coming up. *The dew ... tonight* — the day will come to an end with the coming up of night with the dew fall. *Thou* — the pleasant day. *For thou must die* — the day will not last; it will end very soon. What the poet stresses is the inevitability of all earthly objects. According to the laws of nature, the world is transient.

■ **Stanza - 2 : Sweet rose ... thou must die.**

**THEME :** A rose is lovely; it has brilliantly bright red colour. It dazzles the eyes the gaze at it. It blossoms and fades from the very same root on earth. But it must die one day.

♦ **COMMENTS :** Transitoriness of all natural objects is stressed here. The sad strain of transience of the first stanza is echoed in this stanza. Pessimism is the tone of this stanza.

*Sweet* — brilliant and bright. The rose is brilliantly red. Its brilliant and bright red colour has a dazzling effect on eyes. *Sweet rose* — the brilliance brightness and of the colour of the rose is very appealing. *Hue* — colour; the colour of the rose. *Angry* — fiercely bright. *Brave* — defiant, the word here means beautiful and splendid. *Bids* — command. *Rash* — impulsive, thoughtless. *Gazer* — one who looks at the bright, attractive colour of the rose. The beauty and brightness of the rose has a maddening effect upon the impulsive mind. *Wipe* — remove the dazzling effect by rubbing the eyes. *Wipe his eyes* — the eyes become dazzled by the sparkling brightness of the red colour of the rose. *The impulsive person* — one whose eyes become dazzled has to clean and dary the tears trickling out of them *Thy* — of the plant of the rose. *Root* — the part of a plant that grows under the ground and draws food and water from the soil. *Grave* — the spot under the soil. *Thy ...grave* — it is a pensive suggestion; the poet means to convey the idea of transitory existence of the rose that symbolizes beauty. The rose blossoms and fades with the passage of time at the same spot. The rose is beautiful and splendid today and its beauty and splendour is ephemeral because it will fade tomorrow. *And those must die* — the rose cannot avoid its transient existence. It must fade and its beautiful petals will drop. It cannot be proof against the destructive forces of nature. It is subject to the destructive law of nature. Nothing that grows and we see around can claim permanence. What has is birth and beginning must die and end. It is the law of nature.

■ **Stanza - 3 : Sweet spring, full sweet ... all must die.**

**THEME :** Spring is a season of pleasure. It is rich with nature's beauty. The days of spring are fine and enjoyable. Beautiful roses add to the pleasure and beauty of spring. Spring is compared to a box that contains assortments of