

## George Herbert - "Virtue"

### Virtue

The poem, "Virtue" by George Herbert, mainly develops with the theme that the world and all living beings and unliving things are mortal, and everything in this world will eventually end or die. This theme is developed by three metaphors; first one is a "day", second one is a "rose" and third one is the "spring". All of these first three images are attractive things that people would want them to last forever and they are concrete images. Nevertheless in the last stanza, the reader can see an abstract image of "the soul" and by that image, the poem reaches a conclusion.

In the first stanza we see the image of the "day"; like all the metaphors used in the poem, first, it is shown some attractive traits of the image. Like it is sweet, cool, calm and bright, and in the second line it is said that the daylight is like the marriage of the earth and sky. Whenever the day turns into darkness, the morning dew mourns and cries with grief because the day must die. The dew here may also symbolize the youth, which is lost with the end of the life. There is a joy dominating the first two lines of the first stanza, whereas in the gloomy third line, the death theme can be seen. Also, while the periodic commas in the first line makes the line slower and longer to read, the constant "s" sound and repeated "so" words make an impression of perpetuation of the "day", which will be wiped with the third and fourth lines.

The metaphorical image in the second stanza is the "rose". The color of the rosé is the color of anger, which is supposed to be red. It is also a brave and daring color, so it makes all people who are looking incautiously, wipe their eyes because it is bright and splendid. The rose is beaming with life, however as in the third line of the second stanza indicates, its roots are already in its own grave. That represents a natural bond between humankind and death, the eternal resting place for all men.

Third image is the spring which is the sum of the first two images. The spring has both sweet days and roses, it is the time of year which is compared with a box of compressed sweet. Its density of life and sweetness makes an impression of eternity again, as the first two metaphors, but spring has an end too. This "end" feeling is given with the word "close" which is the musical ending, or a final chord. Thus the spring and therefore life, compared with a musical piece or a song, that also will end eventually.

The last stanza is a bit different from others for it is not depicting an image or thing that will die or end. It shows the only thing that will survive; it is a virtuous and kind soul, only it would endure the eternal flames of the doomsday when the "world turn to coal", the kind and virtuous soul would not turn into coal or dust, like an ember. It will glow with its faith and virtue. Thus only the soul can live rightfully and eternally which is the only thing that would not die.

To conclude, the poem "Virtue" emphasises on the loveliness of the world but also on the inevitability of death. Without making an argument, but using various kinds of imagery, the poem contrasts the mortal glories of the mortal world with the eternal glory of the immortal soul. Thereby it also contrasts the brief pleasures as day, rose or spring with the eternal pleasures of commitment to virtues.