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TOPIC

VIRTUE

BY

GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1633)

INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTOR

George Herbert (1593-1633) is a minor Metaphysical Poet. His Short religious poems were published under the title of *The Temple*. His poem *Virtue* contrasts impermanent things such as the day, the rose and the spring season with the permanence of virtue.

ABOUT THE POEM

- ▣ Herbert sets out to describe the impermanence of the glorious morning. The morning, calm and lit bright by the refulgent sun, looks like the bridal chamber of a newly wedded couple.
- ▣ The couple here are the earth and the sky. The dews formed at night are fancifully described as tears shed by night at the death of a day.
- ▣ A macabre image is used in the second stanza. The roots of the rose are said to have already reached the grave. The rose is admired by a gazer.

Continued...

- ❑ The rose is angry with gazer because the latter is oblivious of the fact that the rose will wither away soon.
- ❑ The red colour of the rose shows not its freshness as is commonly believed but its anger with the short-sighted.
- ❑ In the third stanza, the spring season with its innumerable pleasures, is compared to a box containing many sweets.
- ❑ In the last stanza the everlasting virtuous soul is compared to seasoned timber which will never turn to ashes. Thus Herbert uses a string of dainty image to drive home the point that only virtue lasts for ever. All other objects are transient.

VIRTUE

STANZA 1

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky:
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
For thou must die.

The morning is cool, calm and bright. It marks the wedding of the sky and the earth. But it will die soon. The dew drops formed in the evening are the tears shed by nature at the dying of the day.

STANZA 2

Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
Thy root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.

The red colour of the rose shows the anger felt by the gazer because it will die soon. The roots of the rose plant are already in its grave. The rose asks its gazer to weep over its imminent death.

STANZA 3

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie;
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

The spring season has many sweet days and roses. It is like a box containing many sweets. The poet's musical poem stresses that spring will close soon.

STANZA 4

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

Only the virtuous soul will never
perish. It will live forever like seasoned timber. All
other things will turn to coal and ash.

THANK YOU