

"Death, be not proud" by John Donne

"Death, be not proud" by John Donne addresses death, trying to establish it as a powerless and pitiable contender to life rather than mighty and intimidating. Written primarily in iambic pentameter, the sonnet is a part of Donne's "Holy Sonnets" and is also known as "Holy Sonnet 10". It was written in 1609 and first published in 1633.

The poet has merged the Shakespearean and Petrarchan styles of sonnet in "Holy Sonnet 10" where the division of the sonnet into three quatrains and a couplet reflects Shakespearean style and the rhyme scheme of the sonnet recalls a Petrarchan sonnet.

The poet warns and challenges death in the very first line of the sonnet advising it not to be arrogant only because some people consider it "^{mighty} potent and dreadful". The poet tries to defy the power of death over mortal men by saying "nor yet canst thou kill me". He says that death should not consider itself as fearful and authoritative as it does because those it thinks it has overthrown do not die.

The poet, in the second quatrain, compares death to sleep and rest which are actually nurturing and therapeutic to humankind. One may recall Shakespeare's "Death- counterfeiting sleep" in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Donne argues that death is only a balm for men's weary bones and body whereas their souls migrate to the afterlife.

Having established Death as nothing more than a retreat from the hurry and scurry of mundane existence and a point of transit from the life of an

earth to the afterlife, the speaker reproduces other factors playing key roles in snatching a mortal from his living, breathing existence. The poet says that death is slave to "fate, Chance, kings and desperate men" who create their own courses to kill men in forms of wars, sickness and poison. He further adds that intoxicants like poppy and hypnosis can make one sleep as well and therefore death has no reason to be proud of itself. The poet says that death is just a "short sleep" past which a man enters an eternal life. And thus stripped of its ferocity and invincibility death itself will die if men would be able to make peace with its inevitability.

As a part of the "Holy Sonnets", this sonnet asserts the poet's belief in the Christian doctrines of resurrection and judgement where death is not a symbol of finality but a crossing over to an eternal life. The sonnet is argumentative in tone in line with the characteristics of metaphysical poetry.