

Death, be not proud (Holy Sonnet 10)

John Donne - 1572-1631

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, 5
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell, 10
And poppy'or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

poppy – opium (drug) made
from the poppy
flower.

eternally – for ever

About the poem:

This is a sonnet that develops an argument or idea that the poet wants us to believe. In this poem Donne is talking to Death as if Death was a person. He personifies Death. He is telling Death that Death should not think that he is so strong and frightening, because Death can be overcome.

Understanding the poem:

The poet refutes Death's power. He says Death is not strong and terrible. Death does not kill him as Death thinks he does. Death makes men appear as if they are sleeping peacefully. Rest and sleep are enjoyable, and they are like small deaths so real death must be even more enjoyable. When good people die, they get to rest and their souls are freed.

People (such as rulers or mad people) use death like a slave to kill others (no honour in that/ nothing to be proud of). Death lives in horrible things like poison, murder, war and sickness. With drugs or magic, people can put themselves to sleep better than Death can.

Once we die, we go to heaven for eternal life, so you, Death, will be defeated in the end.

This is a sonnet. It has 14 lines.

The rhyme scheme is ABBA ABBA CDDC AE.

Poetic Device: Personification

QUESTIONS:

1. Name the poetic device used in the poem. Explain the poetic device used.
2. Choose one or two words from the list below to describe the poet's feelings towards death. Quote from the poem to support your answer.
 - a) respectful
 - b) contemptuous
 - c) irritated
 - d) rude
 - e) polite
 - f) amused
3. Provide examples from the poem of Donne's most convincing argument against death. Explain your answer.
4. Explain the last two lines of the poem.