John Donne Holly Sonnet X Analysis Essay, Research Paper

Death, commonly viewed as an all-powerful force against life, is otherwise described in John Donne?s Holy Sonnet 10. As found in any English Sonnet, there is a rhyme scheme and a standard meter. Although the standard meter is iambic pentameter, as in most English Sonnets, the rhyme scheme differs a little from the usual, consisting of ABBA ABBA CDDC AE. Sonnets convey various thoughts and feelings to the reader through the different moods set by the author. In this case the speaker having to confront Death and defeat it, sets the mood. Throughout existence, there have been many theories regarding exactly what role Death plays in the lives of those who experience it. Some think Death is the ultimate controller of all living things, while others believe it is nothing more than the act of dying once your time has come. Donne, on the other hand, has his own philosophy.

The entire Sonnet, Donne speaks directly to Death. He personifies what to man has always been a spirit and has never been touched, seen or furthermore killed. He gives Death life, and therefore makes it mortal, exposing it to pain, torment and eventually defeat. In lines one and two Donne says ?Death, be not proud, though some have called thee, Mighty and dreadful thou art not so.? By referring to Death as a person, he makes it easier for the reader to bring Death down to a level of a weakness and venerability, allowing us to examine it to see what Death really is.

Humans have always been slaves to Death, fearing it, running from it, and trying to prevent it. In line nine, the speaker goes against that to say that Death is a slave to fate, chance and us. When Death becomes a slave it is because it will benefit from who will die, but doesn?t have the power to kill. Without fate nothing could be determined, therefore, our fate is truthfully what controls our lives and deaths. It decides when our time has been completed on this earth, and then comes Death to take us away. Chance plays a huge part in ones destiny as well, because at any time, anything could happen that will also require Death to come. We, however, play the largest role when it comes to our deaths. Both desperate men and Kings can cause Death at any time; therefore we should leave open the option that we control what happens to us after all. Next, in line 10 he says ?And dost with poison, war? and sickness dwell;? Therefore, not only is Death a slave, but it is also dependent on people in order to survive.

Death is shown a sense of insecurity in line three when the speaker says, ?For those whom thou think?st thou dost overthrow, die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.? Donne is telling Death that all those who it think it killed it really didn?t, and that it cant kill him, again proving that Death is not what takes lives but what delivers them. Death is also compared to sleep in line five by suggesting that if much pleasure is brought by rest and sleep, then Death must have much more to offer. Dreams can only offer so much, as compared to eternal happiness will never ceases to give tranquility.

Although we tell Death it does not control what our destiny is, we still recognize that eventually all of us will get there one way or another as stated in lines seven and eight, ?And soonest our best men with thee do go, Rest of their bones, and soul?s delivery.? All of us will end up meeting Death; nevertheless it will not come for us during our lifetime, it will only watch from a distance, until called again.