Death Is Not Powerful In John Donne?S ?Death Be Not Proud? Essay, Research Paper

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John Donne?s ?Death Be Not Proud? is one of his twenty-six ?Holy Sonnets?. In this poem the author makes fun of Death, showing that Death possesses no power over mankind. Donne believed in immortality, which led to the writing of this sonnet and his disparaging view on Death. Donne talks to Death as if it were another individual.

Throughout ?Death Be Not Proud? Donne ridicules Death. At the beginning Donne states, ?Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so? (1-2). This shows his disdain of Death by stating in unequivocal terms that Death is not powerful and fearful. In speaking to Death in this manner Donne assumes Death to think that it is both. Donne further writes, ?For those whom thou think?st thou dust overthrow die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me? (3-4). In this passage he tells the reader that Death doesn?t even have the ability to kill. Again, Donne takes the tact that Death thinks it has the power to kill but, of course, does not. Later in the sonnet Donne writes, ?Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men, and dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell? (9-10). Clearly, Death has no power, as he states Death is a ?slave?. Death must wait for other events before it can claim its victims; poisons, disease, kings declaring war, and criminals.

?From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow? (5-6) plainly illustrates Donne?s contempt for Death. Death does not even have a monopoly on the characteristics of the dead. Death is just mimicking rest and sleep in many ways. ?And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well, and better than thy stroke? (11-12) further emphasizes that Death is not even unsurpassed at what it does best. Drugs, hypnotism, and magic are also competitors of Death. All these challengers to Death?s supposed uniqueness are better in both the experience and the consequence.

Donne strikes Death with the final blow in his last two lines, ?One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and Death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.? (13-14). Life after Death cheats Death from his ultimate futile attempt at power. He does not even allow Death a partial victory as he commits suicide. Death loses all power by non-existence. John Donne?s ?Holy Sonnet? ?Death Be Not Proud? clearly shows that Death possesses no power over mankind.

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