

Analysis of donne's holy sonnet 7



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John Donne's Holy Sonnet 7 is a poem that intertwines elements of allusions and wit to arouse emotions and to depict the dramatic conflict between holiness and sin. By specifically analyzing the rhyme scheme, the allusions, the tone, and the specific language and word choices apparent in Sonnet 7, it is apparent that the poet is delineating the transformation from overwhelming guilt to earnest desire of faithfulness. Although this poem concludes with a sense of hopefulness, this sonnet is only a microcosm of the Christian life with God. Through the collection of the Holy Sonnets, Donne ultimately reveals the speaker's obsession with his own death and his great fear of eternal damnation. Sonnet 7 is one that encompasses the depravity and failure of humanity to convey a struggle of internal fear and guilt, but at the same time, it shows awareness of God's redemptive power. Donne utilizes a structure that is divided into distinct sections. Following a similar pattern to that of the Italian sonnet, the first eight lines have a rhyme scheme abbaabba. The speaker's abhorrence for himself is deeply intensified as the aggressive imageries predominate the first eight lines. Donne starts the poem with "Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,/ Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,/ For I have sinned, and sinned." These six verbs provide readers with a vivid image of Christ's suffering on the cross. There is a crescendo in the way these six verbs are ordered as the violence is intensified from the spitting on the face to the crucifixion on the cross. The rhyme scheme is crucial and it does not change the abab end rhymes in the eight lines in order to portray the speaker's guilt and anger as he sees the depths of his own sins. The first quatrain of Sonnet 7 also serves as an allusion to the suffering endured by Christ as he is pierced to the cross and crucified. The weight of his sins is so heavy, as emphasized by the repetition

of " For I have sinned, and sinned." In addition, the repetition also underlines the separation the poet experiences from God and his unworthiness of God's grace. His self-awareness of his sins is what motivates him to tell the Jews to crucify him as they have done to Christ. At the end of the fourth line, there is a colon, which marks a transition. However, as noted earlier, the transition is not a separate idea because the rhyme scheme remains the same. The beginning of line five marks a change in tone as shown by the word " but." The speaker expresses in these four lines the surpassing glory of Christ's crucifixion. Even his own suffering and death " cannot be satisfied" as it does not have the redeeming power of Christ. By interlacing words like " impiety and inglorious" with " glorified," the poet ultimately reveals to his readers that the Jews crucified a man they deemed " inglorious" because they did not know he was the Son of God. More so, however, is the reality in which the speaker now knows that Christ is " now glorified," yet continues to " crucify him daily." Therefore, the beginning octave is driven by guilt as the speaker reflects on how his sins are what nailed Christ to the cross. The final six lines of Sonnet 7 are divided into four lines that follow the rhyme scheme cdcd and conclude with a rhymed couplet, ee. By following this specific rhyme scheme, the structure changes the tone from guilt to amazement and wonder in acknowledgment of Christ's love and sacrifice. In line 9, the speaker exclaims, " Oh let me then, his strange love still admire," marking a stark contrast in tone from the octave to the sestet. Why would Christ die for a man who will keep sinning? The overflow of Christ's sacrifice and love is a concept the poet cannot grasp and he stands simply in awe of this " strange love." Lines 11 and 12 serve as allegorical elements in relation to the Old Testament. Jacob, son of Isaac, is the younger twin to his brother, Esau. Upon

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his father's dying days, Jacob disguises himself as Esau in order to reap his father's blessings that would have been given to Esau through the patriarchal lineage. Jacob was "clothed in vile harsh attire" and had "gainful intent," but "God clothed himself in vile man's flesh, that so, he might be weak enough to suffer woes." Therefore, even though Jacob receives his father's blessings intended for his brother, he is still clothed in "vile man's flesh," exposing him to the temptations and sufferings on this earth. The word "vile" is repeated twice to delineate the wickedness of human nature. Sonnet 7, then, is not merely a sonnet that seeks justice or indulges in guilt-ridden sufferings, but it is a presentation of the life of a Christian man. In his daily life, this man will sin and crucify Christ daily, but he will not wallow in self-hatred but only seek repentance in prayer and humble reflection upon God's love. Most importantly, there is great redemptive power exuding in this poem as the depravity of mankind collides with the divinity of Christ. Because this sonnet is just one of the poems from Donne's collection of Holy Sonnets, it is important to see how Sonnet 7 fits neatly with themes of his other sonnets. As implied in the naming of his sonnets, Donne emphasizes the themes of sin in mankind, grace, and redemption. Although sonnet 7 focuses on the wonderment in God's sacrifice, we must not forget the wickedness of mankind and the temptations from the Devil in hopes to lure us away from Christ. The Holy Sonnets altogether seem to suggest that although God is loving and forgiving, punishment will come to those who transgress from His Word. Therefore, Christ's marvelous love cannot be abused as it involves misery and fear. Through Biblical allusions, rhyme scheme, specific word choices, and tone, the speaker shows the violently

intense relationship he has with God and the wonderful and baffling love of Christ that rescues and saves.