

John Donne: Batter My Heart

"Batter My Heart" is a poem written by John Donne. It is Sonnet no. XIV. The poem was printed and published for the first time in Poems in 1633. There are two types of images in this sonnet. One type of image is associated with the martial warfare while the other relating to love and marriage. Military and amorous – these two types of discourses are found in this holy sonnet. The military discourse is prominent in the octave, manifested in the martial images like "batter", force, break, blow, burn, usurp'd town, due victory, defend, captivated, and defend. The poem has a metaphorical and metaphysical canvas. The speaker is like a usurped town imprisoned by Satan. Satan represents sin. The country is awaiting God to use His power and set him free from the bondage of Satan. The image of "three-person'd God" stands for a bigger cosmic power for the redemption of mankind. It represents trinity. The amorous images like dearly I love you, loved, betroth'd, divorce me, untie or break that knot, enthrall me, chaste, ravish are used in the sestet of the poem. The speaker imagines that he is captivated by God's enemy. Gradually he is betrothed to the evil. The poem is unique in blending the violent and the sexual images. The speaker desires to be violated by the Lord. He seeks physical communion with Him. The physical intimacy with God indicates the separation from Satan's clutches. The poet speaks of the necessity of being ravished and remade by God to have salvation. His soul needs to get destroyed completely as it cannot be mended. This process of conversion is associated with the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. According to the theologian William Perkins: "he that will believe in Christ must be annihilated, that is he must be bruised and battered to a flat nothing..."¹ The act of suffering to gain life after death is typical for Calvinists, especially Puritans. This religious group was known for their extreme doctrines regarding subjecting oneself to God, one of them being a process called "humiliation" which included a masochistic and self-destructive belief that "[t]he will had to be crushed before it would be, or while it was being, taken over by God." The poet asks God to restore his soul. The poet is like a besieged town. Knocking at the gate is not enough. God must batter or thrash. The very beginning of the sonnet "Batter my heart" speaks of the poet's craving for God's mercy. The poet wants God to use His force to assault his heart like battering down a door.

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batter_my_heart,_three-person%27d_God

<https://www.gradesaver.com/donne-poems/study-guide/summary-holy-sonnet-14-batter-my-heart>