

" ...though some have called thee
mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;"
--SONNET X, John Donne (on death)

CRITIC'S REVIEW OF A LEADING ROLE

I

Death never was the villain we supposed,
nor is he sinister or strange. Our acts
could not go on without him. Plays are closed
by saturation, seasons, emptied facts
and change. It's Death, our wordly partnership,
our ancient contract still inviolate,
that makes the drama work, that gives us grip
and drive. Consider how the years deflate
our starring parts. Foreverness allots
a strung-out tedium of now and here
while grinding down our once-dynamic plots.
The wise Director lets no sonneteer
recite so long he mouths a shibboleth
instead of song. The scene is saved by Death.

II

Sometimes he loiters when we'd wish more haste;
sometimes he's crude, obscene, and far from neat.
He may come on too soon which seems a waste
of knowledge, skills, a sorrowful defeat.
Yet Death is just a word we mortals use
for what we think will end all life the same.
Time curves away, form alters to diffuse
its atoms, rebuilds, takes another name.
Then unimagined drama will unfold
in new dimensions, past the spectrum's hues.
The human story's largely still untold.
Recycling stages offer other views.
Our learning is not wasted, never lost.
It's saved beyond all bridges once we've crossed.

(cont.)