

Student Name  
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## ANALYSIS OF “DEATH BE NOT PROUD” by JOHN DONNE

Death has been an interesting and important topic in world literature. Writers of all times were disputing on the idea of death. John Donne in his metaphysical poem “Death Be Not Proud” expresses his personal understanding and attitude to religion, fear, and death that have been defined as dreadful fatal power by the society. The poem has no title as the work really speaks for itself. The first few words of the very first line of John Donne’s poem capture the interest of the readers and do not let it go until the ending. “Death Be Not Proud” is a narrative Petrarch’s sonnet enriched by various literary devices. John Donne’s poem “Death Be Not Proud” is not an unquestioning argument that everybody should accept; however, it gives number of masterfully developed points that can help to take a fresh look at such horrible (or not) enemy of all human beings as death and help them to get rid of their fear of it.

In his poem “Death Be Not Proud”, John Donne touches such themes as mortality, fear, faith, and religion. For example, the theme of mortality is quite paradoxical as the author states that mortality is mortal itself. John Donne claims that the fear of death exists only because of people. The mortality is not “mighty and dreadful” and does not mean the end of living at all. John Donne as the speaker in the poem looks in the face of his enemy without fear and even begins to have mercy on death. Thus, as he overcomes hate inside

him and transforms it into compassion, the speaker gains a victory. In addition, the author raises the controversial theme of faith and religion as it promises that God will not let his children down; however, it cannot guarantee salvation. Thus, religion leaves people face to face with their nescience and doubts that create the fear of death.

In “Death Be Not Proud”, any images of real physical world could hardly be found. The speaker and death are in the fictional metaphysical world as their dialogue could happen only there. John Donne creates an atmosphere of empty space where there are only the speaker and death – the last barrier between the speaker and eternity.

From the very beginning, the speaker treats death as a person and defies him with the words “death be no proud”. Mortality does not scare the speaker as that was society who gave him fearful qualities,

Death be no tproud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so

In true, both weighty terms “mighty and dreadful” do not belong to any majesty of death.

Further, the speaker begins to talk in contradictions, claiming that people do not really die meeting death. Seeing Death is fooled himself, the speaker feels pity upon his enemy,

For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

Therefore, fatality of death is overpriced.

The speaker sees death not like a final battle; however, he compares him to an easy and pleasant sleep where everyone will find a rest,

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And so ones tour best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soules delivery.

However, further, the speaker begins to doubt in the power of death and considers him as a slave of circumstances and illnesses. The speaker outdoes his enemy positioning “poppy or charms” higher Death,

Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sicknessed well,  
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better then thy stroke; why swell's tthou then?

Therefore, death is nothing more then sleep, a “short sleep” after which everybody will be reawakened. The speaker believes that that well-known “mighty and dreadful” death will disappear as nobody will be scared of it anymore. Thus, death will be killed by himself.

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,  
And death shall b eno more; death, thou shalt die.

It is very interesting that even after defeating his enemy, the speaker does not start to shout or dance on death’s grave. The narrator is still controlling himself and staying calm.

The mood of the speaker is reflected on the mood and tune of the whole poem. Such elements are well-considered, not passionate words and steady rhythm contributed to calm and straight forward mood in the poem “Death Be Not Proud”. The tone changes from mockery to mercy and back again.

In his poem “Death Be Not Proud”, John Donne uses various literary devices such as personification, alliteration, epithets, synecdoche, paradox, and irony.

Personification appears in the first line when the speaker talks to death like a human being; in the 9<sup>th</sup> line, he compares death to a slave, and in the 14<sup>th</sup> line, death is considered to be mortal like people. Alliteration appears throughout the poem, but most notably in the 3<sup>rd</sup> line, “For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow”. Irony can be met throughout “Death Be Not Proud” as well, however, in the mix with paradox it appears only in the last line: “death, thoushalt die”. Synecdoche appears in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> lines, where “the bones” of “the best men” stand for the whole body. John Donne uses number of epithets to enrich his language, for example, such epithets as mighty, dreadful, and poor that attribute special qualities to death with the purpose to personify it.

Talking about metrical devices of the poem, “Death Be Not Proud” is a Petrarch’s sonnet; however, the rhyme in the poem differs in the last 6 lines from the standard. John Donne’s poem ends in CDDCEE instead of CDCDCD. However, the meter of the poem does not differ from the standard for Petrarch’s sonnets. Therefore, “Death Be Not Proud” has iambic pentameter.

The identity of the narrator is not clear. Probably, the speaker symbolizes author’s mind that is looking for truth and fairness. Thus, the look of the narrator is clear of common human emotions that could stand in his way to justice.

The poem “Death Be Not Proud” by John Donne shows death in another light. Usage of different literary devices that personify death helps to express the weakness of it. By touching important themes such as religion, faith, and mortality, the author calls people not be afraid of dying. The ideas raised in John Donne’s poem “Death Be Not Proud” are still actual ones nowadays and can be useful for those people who cannot enjoy their lives because of the fear of death.



## Works Cited

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Donne, John. "Death Be Not Proud."