
Activity 7:8 The Shakespearean Sonnet

Death, Be Not Proud by John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
5 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
10 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Questions for consideration:

1) John Donne uses an apostrophe in this poem. An apostrophe is a direct address to someone or something that is not immediately present. It is often used by a poet to address a personified object or idea. Where is there an apostrophe in this sonnet? Why does the poet use an apostrophe in this context?

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2) The narrator seems to imply that Death's triumph is hollow. Why?

3) Poets often use paradoxes to make a point. Paradoxes are statements that at first glance seem to be self-contradictory but in fact make sense. Find a paradox in this poem and explain how it intensifies the meaning of the poem.
