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False Monarch of Death

The dread of death has been ingrained into humans on a genetic level. Not all have fallen prey to “it” as observed by “Death, be not proud,” written by John Donne. The sonnet discusses how death is not a ruler/king, but a mere peasant that is subject to the will of others. The work falls into a category known being the “Holy Sonnets,” written during the metaphysical period. Topics related to faith and God, loved by the devout John Donne are discussed in the series (Bloom 1999). The morality of humans is called into question in this specific text which helps to further refute the necessity of death.

John Donne constantly broke new grounds in intelligent discussions such with referring to women as “intelligent creatures,” (Bloom 1999) which was heavily criticized at the time. He was one of the most prominent leaders of the metaphysical period, set during the 17th century, and filled with loose fitting authors (Schoenfeldt 2012). The school mainly focused three different points— using an intellectual argument rather than emotional, conceit, and paradoxes. The intellectual arguments aided discussing spiritual/philosophical topics in a new way rather than the emotional filled disputes of the past (Schoenfeldt 2012). Conceit is defined as an unusual type of metaphor that compares two separate entities that are not alike in a unique approach. Readers, when confronted by this unconventional comparison, are forced to produce

more attention to the poem in order to understand it fully. A paradox is a contradiction within the statement itself and will often be confusing. Paradoxes act as an ending in most of metaphysical poems, and they add more than one interpretation to the poem. Analyzing metaphysical poems while paying attention to these main points will allow a more profound understanding of the work as a whole.

Interpretations are by themselves mere theories that readers have obtained while examining a work. This builds up to a variety of theories, but one is not more correct than the other because they still incorporate facts. A recent analysis by Joanne Woolway details her conclusions reached after reading the poem. The main points break down to— death is personified to weaken him, the author holds no fear of death, the conclusion of the poem doesn't have a decisive or joyful conclusion, and lastly the impossibility of avoiding death (Woolway). Although some of the points made are in disagreement with my own analysis, they are still a noteworthy argument.

The first line of the poem begins with "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee," this bluntly points out that Death is personified as a living being rather than an event. Conceit is intertwined with personification as comparing Death, a natural event, to an animated character is using an uncommon metaphor. Death is personified to give him a sense of vulnerability as living creatures are prone to risks. This is in agreement with the statement by Woolway of Death being personified in order to weaken him. The second part of the first line by stating that Death is not as proud as he seems gives the speaker more power. The speaker is denouncing Death's pride, insulting Death to his face gives the sense that the speaker is not afraid of him. This is also in accordance with the second point made by Woolway. The last line

of the poem “And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die” is a paradox. Death although personified is still symbolic of the event itself and therefore can not die. This is in agreement with the third point about the ending not being decisive, but is in disagreement about it not being joyful. Death throughout the poem is beaten down and insulted demeaning him. This is a happy conclusion as Death himself can’t be avoided, but through religion it is only a mere event.

The poem teaches a lesson about how Death should not be feared as it is only a moment in your life. The perception that humans have about Death over the course of history with it being a scary/unmentionable event is refuted. Humans have the power to overcome everything that blocks them and Death is just the end for an entirely new life.

Works Cited

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