

John Donne Poetry Study Notes

Ideas	Donne's poetry and contextual reason for inclusion
Death	<p>➤ In 'Death Be Not Proud' Donne uses rhetorical ingenuity and a disparaging tone to attack death itself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donne chooses to write in the sonnet form as not only was it a traditional choice that was widely understood by his audience at the time• He used it to show-off his ability to present sophisticated ideas in a short poem <p>'Death be not proud'</p>

- Donne uses repetition of the title in the first line of the poem to belittle and attack death, further illustrated as Donne addresses death as an equal through an apostrophe
- The imperative tone depicts Donne's unwavering stance against death as he exerts his own linguistic power over death
- 17th Century Elizabethan context meant that there was a strong religious belief in the after life → thus his diminishing of death to only a pause between lives

'thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings and desperate men...and poppie, or charms can make us sleepe as well'

- Death is further demeaned in the Volta as Donne highlights that death is reliant on 'fate, chance, kings' to put men to sleep, and that 'poppies' and 'charms' have the same ability to put men to sleep where they feign death
- 'Sleepe' is used as a euphemism for death which is a link to Renaissance literature where sleep was metaphorically linked with the appearance with death, and also the Christian believe that death is the departure from the physical world into heavenly existence

- Death's effects are made to seem inconsequential as Donne relates its effects to exhaustion or drunkenness

'and death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.'

- Imperative tone reinstates Donne's lack of fear regarding death
- The comma reduces death to a short pause through ironically highlighting that death's purpose is to lead to eternal life, thereby taking the power and enormity out of it
- Donne paradoxically asserts that mankind is not a victim of death, but rather the victor over death
- Donne is referring to the strong religious belief in the afterlife and the Protestant doctrine of salvation

➤ **Donne depicts a sense of acceptance and calm assurance as he is close to death in 'Hymne to God My God, in My Sicknesse'**

'I their Mapp...I joy, that in these straits, I see my West'

- Donne uses map imagery to depict his salvation into heaven through his 'straits' as 'West' is a traditional image of death, whereas East is an image of beginning

→ thus the globe imagery indicates a new beginning as the two states blend and diffuse to create a cycle of rebirth

- Donne's strong belief in the afterlife and that suffering brings redemption through Christ
- Donne's representation as a map as his physicians read him like a map and attempt to discover how they can treat him
- Contextual link to exploration of trade routes during the 'Age of Discovery' to open up the Orient for commercial enterprise

The extended musical metaphor

- Links Donne's soul to a musical instrument which must be 'tuned' to prepare himself spiritually for judgement by God
- Donne's belief in the afterlife

'receive mee Lord, by these thrones give me his other Crowne' – 'Hymne to God My God, in My Sicknesse'

- Reference to the Bible as the thorny crown represents suffering, Donne asks God for the crown of salvation and eternal life

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donne's compliant tone, rather than emotionally passionate and violent tones in his sonnets, implies confidence that he will be accepted into heaven which helps alleviate his fear of death• Donne's belief in suffering bringing upon redemption through Christ
Human pride and arrogance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Donne's use of the sonnet form<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donne chooses to write in the sonnet form as not only was it a traditional choice that was widely understood by his audience at the time• He used it to show-off his ability to present sophisticated ideas in a short poem➤ Donne's mockery of death to show that it is powerless in 'Death Be Not Proud' 'thou', 'thee', 'thy'<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donne personifies death through using apostrophe and confronts it in a mocking tone to belittle death• Donne chooses to challenge death because of its prevalence in his era due to disease, public executions and violence

Acceptance of mortality (through confronting death)

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	<p>‘receive mee Lord, by these thrones give me his other Crowne’ – ‘Hymne to God My God, in My Sicknesse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to the Bible as the thorny crown represents suffering, Donne asks God for the crown of salvation and eternal life • Donne’s compliant tone, rather than emotionally passionate and violent tones in his sonnets, implies confidence that he will be accepted into heaven which helps alleviate his fear of death • Donne’s belief in suffering bringing upon redemption through Christ
<p>Religion (salvation, redemption, suffering)</p>	<p>➤ Donne’s arrogance towards death is because of his belief in heaven in ‘Death Be Not Proud’</p> <p>‘one short sleepe past, wee wake eternally’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donne reduces death to ‘sleepe’ to take the power from it and disempowers death through informing it that it serves as the entry to eternal life • 17th Century Elizabethan strong religious beliefs <p>‘those, whom thou think’st, thou dost over throw, die not’</p>

- Donne reminds death that those he thinks he has killed will enter eternal life because of judgement day
- 17th Century Elizabethan strong religious beliefs

➤ **Donne's strong religious beliefs help him accept his oncoming death**
'find both Adams met in me'

- This Biblical reference to the crucifixion of Christ and the Garden of Eden, and the forces of good and evil as Donne's physical suffering emphasises the curse of Adam, while concurrently his soul will be saved by Christ
- 17th Century Elizabethan strong religious beliefs