

A STUDY OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN *JOHN DONNE'S DEATH, BE NOT PROUD*

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study is to scrutinize different interpretations of metaphorical representations of death in John Donne's *Death, be not proud* applying the recently developed version of Lakoff and Johnson's theory of Conceptual Metaphors 1997. The study employs purposive sampling technique to analyze the selected contents from the holy sonnet. Death as a prevalent metaphor underlies the thematic exploration of mortality and defiance of the selected holy sonnet. It is found that the metaphor of death communicates its central theme: the triumph of the human spirit over death. Moreover, this investigation serves to deepen our appreciation of timeless and universal relevance of metaphorical expressions in literary works, highlighting their capacity to convey complex concepts and evoke profound emotions.

Keywords: personification, paradoxical, religious, conventional, metaphor of victory.

1. Introduction

The use of conceptual metaphors is a common practice in literature to create an imaginative and expressive effect on readers. The Greek term *metaphora*, which implies the transfer or transmitting a word out of its literal meaning, is the source of the French word metaphor, which has the same sense (Skeat, 1993, p. 28; Cruse, 2000, p. 202; 2006, p. 972). It is believed that it is simpler to provide an example of a metaphor than to describe a metaphor (Childs and Fowler 2006, p. 138). Knowles and Moon

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describe that a metaphor is the process of using language to relate to something different from what it was initially used to, or what it literally means, to indicate some likeness or draw a link between the two things, (2006, p. 2). According to Semino and Steen, a metaphor refers to one thing by naming another thing for rhetorical effects. It may enhance (or obscure) clarity or reveal hidden parallels between two distinct ideas. Metaphors are also frequently contrasted with other figurative language forms such as hyperbole, antithesis, simile, and metonymy (2008). Kovecses (2017) says when the concept of the conceptual metaphor is restated more technically, the development of metaphor will take the form of "a conceptual metaphor is built of congruence of two realms of experience" (p. 2). Many academics and scholars have varied viewpoints on the classification of metaphors, despite the fact that metaphor has two domains, the target domain and the source domain (Lifen, 2016). As a result, it is possible to recognize metaphors and their domains, which are divided into two categories: target domain and source domain.

This qualitative study aims to analyze use of different conceptual metaphors for death in John Donne's holy sonnet, *Death, be not proud* through the recently developed version of Lakoff and Johnson (1997). It involves exploration of underlying symbolic themes of mortality, cultural implications, and emotional impact of these metaphors by providing a variety of possible interpretations to the readers. According to Ruiz et al. (2011), Lakoff and Johnson have advanced a more complex kind of the conceptual metaphor theory in 1999 by integrating Christopher Johnson's theory of conflation (1997) and Grady's theory of Primary metaphor (1997). In the light of these theories Johnson contends that there are two development stages in the domain of conceptual metaphors. At the first stage of conflation, source and target domains are triggered simultaneously, and on the second stage, both the domains are differentiated from each other. stages in developing a conceptual metaphor. First, there is a conflation stage during which the source and target domains are co-activated since the two concepts tend to co-occur in experience. At a later stage the concepts are differentiated.

The use of metaphors in Metaphysical poetry is diverse and essential to its core. Metaphors are strong vehicles for addressing philosophical, theological, and emotional subjects in this literary tradition, allowing poets to articulate complicated concepts in practical and innovative ways. These metaphors challenge readers' traditional thinking, inspire them to participate in intellectual reflection, and elicit powerful emotions. Metaphysical poets created a body of work that continues to engage and

inspire readers today via their imaginative and daring use of metaphors. Metaphors in Metaphysical poetry go beyond simple comparisons; they generate vivid and surprising connections between seemingly unconnected ideas, encouraging readers to engage in deep thought. These metaphors, sometimes known as conceits, are extended analogies that convey the poetry's complicated and intellectual character. They serve as vehicles for the poets to express their complex thoughts and feelings, resulting in poetry that is both academically interesting and emotionally resonant. The metaphors in this genre are often drawn from a wide range of sources, and are characterized by their wit, playfulness, and use of extended conceits. Through their use of metaphors, the poets of the metaphysical era sought to challenge the reader's understanding of the world and the human condition, offering new and unexpected perspectives on the nature of existence. (Johnson and Lakoff, 1980, p. 5). The metaphors make metaphysical poetry often elaborative, imaginative, and even paradoxical, seeking to express complex and abstract ideas through concrete and tangible images. These metaphors often involve unexpected comparisons, juxtaposing two seemingly unrelated objects or concepts to create a new and surprising perspective. (Evans & Green, 2018, p. 38). Metaphor is the projection of an item in one domain into another domain (Evans 2007, p.136).

1. Review of Literature

Metaphor, according to Johnson and Lakoff (1980), is a figurative device used to interpret one notion in terms of another. Furthermore, it is employed for decorative purposes by the writer to enhance their write-ups. As a result, it is regarded as a matter of words rather than contemplation. Metaphors, on the other hand, have caught the interest of Cognitive Linguistics and Psychology in the last twenty (20) years. Both disciplines have increased their scope of application (Richard, 2003). In response to Generative Linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics (CL) was established in the late twentieth century. According to Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor is more than just a feature of language; it represents intrinsic conditions and states of people's minds, such as how people conceive and think before speaking and acting (Gibbs, 2006). This concept was developed by Lakoff, Johnson, and other scholars working in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. CL's proposed Theory of Cognition gives rise to Conceptual Metaphors (Richard, 2003).

Until the 1980s, a metaphor was considered as a figure of speech that was only utilized in poetic language and was considered to be a source of grammatical or semantic violation (Leech, 1969, pp. 48-49). In the 1980s, Lakoff and Johnson established the notion of conceptual metaphors, and

the product of their work was the publication of the *Metaphors We Live By*. “The core of metaphor is knowing and experiencing one object in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 5). The primary premise of CMT is that metaphor is more than just a decorative or entertaining mechanism of human expression and communication; it reflects how an abstract or conceptual domain (e.g., life, love, death, war) is cognitively structured. Johnson and Lakoff (1980) argue that conceptual metaphors are utilized frequently and extensively by people without understanding them, since they are such essential components of language. As a result, it might not be as unusual to describe one conceptual domain through another. According to Kövecses (2018), conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) is a nonliteral language that is an important component of human perception and expression. Several earlier research on the use of metaphor in poetry have been conducted by (Awaluddin, 2011; Kuosmanen, 2002; Iryanti, 2010; Raisa, 2017; Setiaji, 2017).

The use of metaphors in Metaphysical poetry is a distinguishing feature of this 17th-century literary trend. Metaphysical poets such as John Donne (1572 – 1631), George Herbert (1593 – 1633) and Andrew Marvell (1621 – 1678) used metaphors as potent instruments to examine complicated philosophical, theological, and existential subjects. Metaphysical poets were preoccupied with philosophical issues, and metaphors provided them a way for them to examine abstract notions in tangible terms. Their poetic metaphors reflect their intellectual curiosity and eagerness to engage with significant concerns about life, perception, and the essence of reality. By using metaphor to connect abstract ideas to actual objects or experiences, they provide a bridge between the intangible and the concrete, helping readers to better understand complicated philosophical concepts.

Building on this exploration, Jones (2023) focuses on the interplay between metaphors and religious symbolism in the sonnet. Jones argues that the metaphors in *Death, be not proud* serve as vehicles for conveying spiritual insights, blurring the lines between the physical and metaphysical realms. By connecting the metaphors to religious concepts, Jones underscores the poet's ability to evoke profound contemplation on the eternal nature of the soul. Additionally, Brown (2021) examines the impact of cultural context on the interpretation of metaphors in *Death, be not proud*. Brown's study investigates how shifts in cultural attitudes towards death influence the way modern readers engage with the metaphors Donne employs. By considering religious, historical and social contexts, Brown highlights the evolving relevance of the poet's use of metaphors and their continued resonance in contemporary society. The process by which the

human spirit will be released, re-embodied, and transported into the eternal, crystalline purity and ecstasy of that heaven—which, for many Christians, was the real world and real life—is described by Sugg (2007) as "Donne's almost scientific curiosity" (p. 192). His sermons, elegies, love ballads, and sonnets all vividly convey this idea. Xiaowei Fu (2010) examined that LOVE IS a UNITY metaphor, focusing on a specific conceptual area that characterizes LOVE. The occurrences of the metaphor "LOVE IS A UNITY" were examined in Fu's (2010, p. 9–10) research, and the study demonstrated several cases of the sub-categories of a metaphor, such as "love is a unity of 2 complementary parts," "physical closeness," and "the stability of the love story is physical stability." Fu (2010) decided to examine these subcategories by examining a variety of love songs, as well as the qualitative analysis revealed that those songs frequently referred to LOVE as a connection, which might be brittle, unbreakable, or irreplaceable between two persons (p.27).

2. Method and Methodology

Metaphysical poetry, characterized by intricate wordplay and elaborate conceits, often employs conceptual metaphors to convey complex ideas. One such notable work is John Donne's *Death, be not proud*, which explores the concept of mortality. Recent studies have delved into the rich tapestry of metaphors within this sonnet, uncovering deeper layers of meaning and their significance. The misuse of fantastic metaphors is one of the key elements of metaphysical poetry, of which John Donne is considered the founder (Burns and McNamara, 1983; Negri, 2012, pp. 5-6). This sonnet is examined using conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980 as the cognitive semantic model. The developed form of Cognitive Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1997) provides a framework for understanding how metaphors play a fundamental role in our cognitive processes, impacting our thinking, communication, and abstract notion conception.

There are various sorts of metaphors used in John Donne's sonnet *Death, be not proud*, to examine the issue of death and its insignificance in the light of endless life. Here are a few examples of prominent metaphors under scrutiny in in the sonnet, presented in the figure 1.

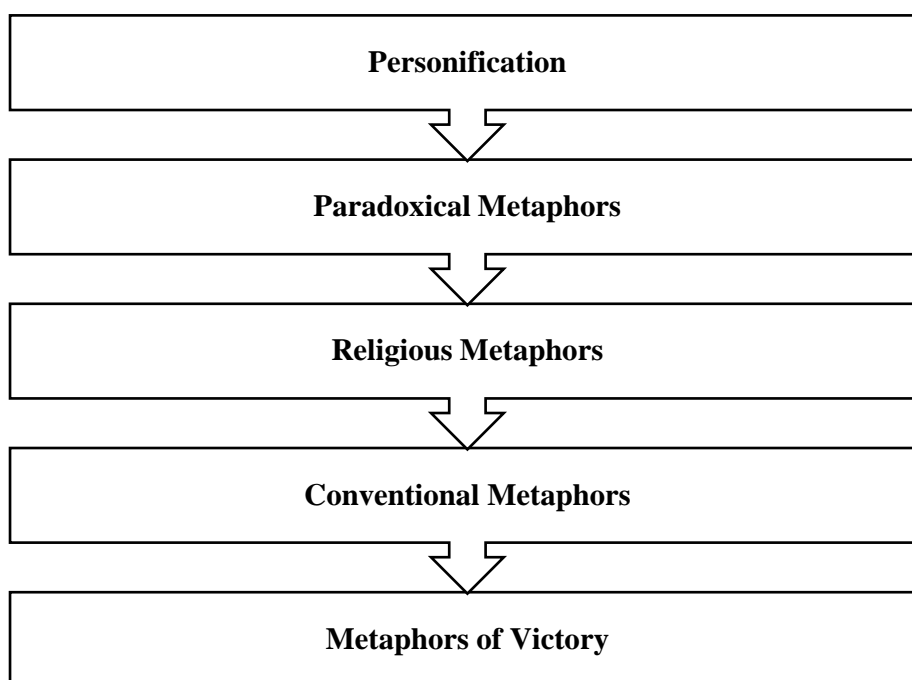


Figure: 1

3. Analysis

As the title of the religious sonnet implies, Donne discusses death throughout the whole sonnet. The poet is describing an abstract idea as if it were right ahead of him. As a result, death is indeed the addressee and the writer is the addresser. The personification serves as the foundation for this poetry. In the sonnet, death is personified in several places. Conceptual metaphors also play a role in the poet's attempt to convey meaning as well as the reader's or listener's interpretation of that meaning.

- **Personification**

The poet personifies death, portraying it as a human-like creature. Death is addressed personally and presented as a haughty and arrogant character. For instance, the statement "Death, be not proud" addresses death directly as if it were a person susceptible of pride.

*"Death, be not proud," though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so"*

Personification is one of the effective techniques that poets and people use to create the idea they wish to express (Ricoeur, 1977). The personification in the first two sentences illustrates the metaphor of death as an adversary since some people view death as being horrible. The two qualities, exemplified by the words, are all human qualities that are executed in this instance. They are employed to describe enemies negatively, namely as having died (Moreno 1988). Death can be viewed as an adversary because

it is something that opposes us and our desires to continue living. Like an adversary, death represents a force that we must struggle against and overcome, but ultimately may triumph over us. Just as an adversary in a physical battle can bring an end to our existence, death is the ultimate end to our lives. In a study by Smith (2022), the author examines the metaphysical conceits used by Donne in *Death, be not proud*. Smith highlights the poets's portrayal of death as a powerless entity through metaphors that draw upon various sources, such as religious beliefs and mythological allusions. By analyzing these metaphors, Smith sheds light on how Donne challenges conventional perceptions of death and invites readers to contemplate life's ephemeral nature.

Moreover, death can also be seen as an adversary in the sense that it is often unexpected and unpredictable. We may not know, when it will come, but we must always be aware of its potential presence. It can strike at any moment, and we must be prepared to face it (Ruiz, 2007). In line 2, it is questioned if death is indeed mighty generally speaking, and following conceptual metaphor, power is up (Sweetser & Dancygier, 2014, p. 166). Death, like an adversary, may be unpredictable, persistent, and merciless in its approach. It is something we frequently fear and want to avoid at all means.

***“For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.”***

The poet mocks death, its adversary, by saying that neither it nor he can be overcome by it. Additionally, the verbs overthrow and kill demonstrate that death is an enemy. Milton (2022) says death can be defined metaphorically as an adversary since it is frequently viewed as something that is opposed to us and our natural desire to survive. Death is portrayed as a hostile entity intent on destroying us, robbing us of our loved ones, and putting an end to our existence. It is an enemy against whom we must battle with all of our resources and might in order to survive and succeed. We must be continually watchful and prepared for the potential of death, just as we would in a combat with an opponent (Zandee, 1960). Studies by Smith (2002), Johnson (2005), and Thompson (2008) each contributed to various perceptions of the metaphors present in the sonnet. Smith argued that Donne employs metaphors of conquest and battle to challenge the personification of death as an entity to be feared. Johnson's study focused on the metaphor of sleep as a means of conceptualizing death, highlighting its transformative nature. Meanwhile, Thompson's analysis emphasized the metaphors of journey and pilgrimage in relation to the afterlife, unveiling the spiritual dimensions of Donne's metaphysical exploration.

In the second line, the poet eliminates the idea that death is powerful or terrifying; this also illustrates the concept that argument is war. It implies that death is like an opponent in a battle, and that the way we approach death is similar to the way we approach arguments. Just as in a combat, the goal is to emerge victorious and conquer our adversary. Here, death is seen as an argument that we must engage with, using all of our intellectual and emotional resources to overcome it. It is a battle of wills, where we must use our reasoning and persuasion to convince death to spare us or at least delay its arrival (Ritchie, 2003).

- **Paradoxical Metaphors**

Donne uses paradoxical metaphors that contrast conflicting themes in order to question traditional views about death. For example, he characterizes death as "mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so" and "rest and sleep," emphasizing death's contradictory nature as both terrifying and lacking actual force or permanence

*From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow*

In these lines, the poet informs death—again, personification is clear—that rest and sleep are two sources from which human joy streams. Death is sleep, and death is rest are the conceptual metaphors that are portrayed here. It highlights the idea that death is a peaceful release from the struggles and challenges of life. It suggests that in death, we are free from pain, suffering, and the burdens of the physical world (Paroschi 2017). By stating that there is more enjoyment in death than that in rest and sleep, the poet, predominantly, expands these two analogies. In this manner, the poet employs his imagination and broadens the conventional metaphor of 'death' by employing the concept of sleep, in order to include the perspective of dreaming (Faur 2012). Donne compares death to sleep, suggests that it is just another form of rest before a new awakening offers a peaceful and comforting perspective on death, emphasizing the idea that it is a natural part of life that allows us to find rest and respite from the struggles of the physical world (Silaški 2011). It suggests that in death, one is able to find a deeper sense of peace and tranquility, as a transition to another phase of our existence. The use of the word "pictures" creates a vivid image of death as a reflection or imitation of sleep (Abdulla & Lutfi (2019).

- **Religious Metaphors**

Donne, a strongly devout poet, used images founded in Christian theology. He equates death to "rest and sleep" or a "short sleep," implying

that it is only a passing phase before the soul awakens to eternal life. These analogies are based on religious ideas about the afterlife and resurrection.

*And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery*

According to (Brenneman, 2016), in both English and Kurdish cultures, it is said that good people have short lifespans and Donne's usage of the term "soonest" reflects this conception linguistically. This is seen to be a gift by Allah, so they can relax from the stresses of life. Here, the term "our best men" serves as a metaphor for all righteous individuals. Dempster (2012) says when it comes to the primary metaphor within "do go", we may compare it to how someone is there with us when they are born and how they leave us when they die. The second metaphor, death as departure, or leaving this world, might also be interpreted in this way. The dying individual is viewed as a traveler who is beginning his trip toward a destination, in this case, paradise, like in the case of the finest men, according to the death is journey metaphor.

Another depiction that the poet views death as just a journey, which refers to such a woman delivering birth to a baby. This provides support for the idea that death marks the start of a new existence and subsequent journey. The excellent men are born (delivered) or born afresh with their passing. Another conceptual metaphor that underlies the remainder of their bones, and the soul's delivery is BODY IS A CONTAINER, where bones are used as a metonym for the entire body (Gathigia *et. al* 2018). The body is a prison for the soul, according to this poetry and Marvell's "A Dialogue between both the Body and the Soul" verses. Thus, the usage of "soul's conveyance" makes this obvious. Therefore, when the spirit departs from the body, it will be released from prison. The poet continues to personify death, but this time it diminishes its power and horror to a degree that is in contrast with how death is typically described. Moreover, he turns to metaphor to have these fresh meanings of death (Umphrey & Cacciatore, 2014).

- **Conventional Metaphors**

In addition to the more complicated metaphors, Donne used ordinary metaphors to describe widely held beliefs about death. He, for example, refers to death as a "slave" and a "poison, war, and sickness" to emphasize its negative features and links with pain and mortality.

*Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell*

The lyrical devices used by Lakoff and Turner (1989, p. 149) raise some doubts. Death is described differently by Donne; it is not a reaper, it is not great, it is not frightening, it has no influence over us, and so on. All of Donne's debunked portrayals of death are found in these lines. Therefore, in the views of the general public, death has power and influence over humans, but the poet here refutes this incorrect, widespread perspective on death (Agha & Pourebrahim 2013). Here, it is observed how fate, chance, king, or desperate mankind undervalue death and even subjugate it. Again, personification is obvious here. Death is portrayed as a slave to chance or a footman. As a result, the abstract idea of chance has been portrayed as the ruler of death. In the same way, intangible ideas like fate, as well as chance, are personified as controlling death by serving as its true cause. These lines have another orientational mental metaphor, one may argue. Being kept down is being under control, according to Here, the poet teaches us that fate, monarchs, etc. are in charge of death. Death is therefore not powerful (i.e. up); this is DOWN.

- **Metaphors of Victory**

In the last section of the sonnet, Donne used images of triumph and victory to decrease death's power. He depicts death as being vanquished by other forces such as "fate, chance, kings, and desperate men," and indicates that death itself will be conquered by eternal life in the end.

*And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke: Why swell'st thou then?*

The EVENTS Being ACTIONS metaphor, a general-level metaphor, is used in these two lines. The act of dying, which is depicted metaphorically as "sleeping", is a metaphorical agent that acts, resulting in death. The same is true of "poppy or charms". Donne lowers the significance of death by equating it with the loss of awareness brought on by poppies and charms and further by claiming that the effects of poppies and charms are superior to and more potent than those of death. In addition to talking to death and describing the human attribute of feeling proud, the last hypothetical question in these lines uses personification. A metaphor can be found in terms of "stroke". According to Jay (2021) a stroke is defined as "the movement of your hand softly on a surface, often numerous times." As a result, it belongs to the semantic category of gentle touching. James, for instance, regularly strokes his cat before bed, and my wife strokes my baby to put him to sleep. As a result, the stroke acts as a physical lullaby for my child. The stronger stroke is also tied to the area of TOUCHING in this sonnet, but the poppy (heroin), charms (magic), and death itself are all shown as maintaining physical hands that they use to lull their captives to

sleep. As a result, the result of these three, which is referred to symbolically as their stroke(s), is that it puts us to sleep. Again, the philosophical metaphor at play here is DEATH IS SLEEP. The sonnet's last couplet effectively reflects the same concept.

*One short sleep, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!*

These two lines further make clear the philosophical analogies DEATH AS SLEEP & DEATH IS NIGHT. The Christian theological tradition provides the foundation for the idea that death is like sleep and darkness (Anderson, 2012). The same is true of our Islamic culture. Muslims hold that Allah Almighty is the one that removes a person's soul both at death and while they are sleeping. As a result, in Islam, sleeping is considered a tiny death whereas actual death is considered a large death (Gulen, 2006). This metaphor creates a powerful image of death as a temporary state that is overcome by a new awakening. The use of the word "short" suggests that death is not a permanent state but rather a passing phase (Nazir, Perveen & Ahmad 2017). We wake up eternally, the second clause also has a religious foundation. It is a fundamental tenet of Judaism, Christianity, as well as Islam that humans will be raised from the dead. This scripture compares the resurrection to waking up after a brief night's sleep. You may think of the idea of endless awake as an extension of the metaphor "death as sleep." In that it incorporates waking up or emerging from sleep, it extends the meaning of the traditional metaphor.

Furthermore, the Islamic sleeping petition "Oh, Almighty, in Thy Name I perish (that is, sleep) or revive (that is, awaken or rise)" serves as a foundation for the notion of DEATH AS SLEEP as well as the idea that an additional life beyond this one. "All compliments are due to Almighty Who revived (that is, awakened) us after He dampened (that is, sent us to sleep)," is the waking up petition. This theological philosophy is well mirrored in the last line of the sonnet, when the author celebrates victory over death by using a flimsy paradoxical tactic referring to death's eventual demise. Once more, personification; death is presented as if it were living, conscious, and in the process of dying (Horn, 2018).

Conclusion

John Donne's *Death. be not proud* employs several conceptual metaphors to explore the theme of death and its relationship with life. These metaphors communicate complex and contradictory concepts about death, questioning its apparent power and emphasizing the victory of life and eternal redemption. The analogies provide vivid imagery, emotional

depth, and intellectual engagement to the overall theme of the sonnet. The metaphors of death as a person, death as sleep, and death as a slave or servant serve to humanize death, contrast it with fear, and emphasize the power of life over death. These conceptual metaphors enrich the meaning of the sonnet, conveying complex ideas through the use of simple and relatable language. The analogies were traditional in that they were simple to understand right away and new. Both the poet's and the reader's conceptualizations of the entire sonnet were influenced by their respective cultural and religious upbringings. As a result, as was already said, culture or personal experience is crucial in shaping how abstract ideas like death and sleep are depicted in *Death, be not proud*.

Future Implications of the Study

The study has future implications in the fields of Linguistics and Literature. The future researchers may explore use of metaphysical conceit in works of different metaphysical poets. Furthermore, it may pave way for researchers to study a variety of metaphorical representations in short stories and novels through theoretical underpinning of Lakof and Johnson's context of conceptual metaphor.

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