

Both “Death, Be Not Proud,” by John Donne and “The Death of Ivan Illych,” by Leo Tolstoy have certain views about death. The authors use literary elements that help get their point of view across to the readers. The selections have contrasting views about death.

In “The Death of Ivan Illych,” Leo Tolstoy uses several different literary elements that illustrate his opinion about death. This selection views death in a very negative way. Throughout the reading, the author uses tone about death that makes the reader fear it. The tone in this selection contrasts with that of “Death, Be Not Proud.” One example of this negative tone used by the author is when Tolstoy refers to death as, “...that unwelcome guest,...” Another instance of a negative tone about death was when Tolstoy referred to death as, “...some terrible person, a bill collector—or worse, a murderer...” These comparisons give death a very negative and frightening feeling. One other literary element used by Tolstoy is allusion. In the selection, Tolstoy alludes to *Outline of Logic* from Kiesewtter’s. The simple logic proof shows that all men are mortal so since Caius is a man, he too is mortal. This small aside proves to Illych that he too is going to die because he is mortal, but he denies it. This small proof also gives death a negative feeling because it basically says that, everyone is going to die, and there is nothing that can be done to stop death. The idea that death is inevitable and it’s going to get everyone is a very negative view and it contrasts with the other selection.

In “Death, Be Not Proud,” by John Donne, the view on death isn’t quite so harsh. In the poem, the speaker is addressing death as if it is a being, or a person. Personification is one of the literary elements that makes death not seem like such a bad thing. If death is just a person or an entity, then it doesn’t seem so frightening. One instance where the speaker addresses death is in the first two lines. “Death, be not proud, though some have called thee/ Mighty and Dreadful,

for thou art not so;...” This example is important because the speaker is basically denouncing death and saying, “You’re not so tough.” This makes ‘death’ seem not as frightening or as powerful. In the next example, the speaker is not addressing death but speaking about death and giving it humanlike characteristics. “And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.” This statement alone is very contradictory with the previous selection because it makes death seem defeat-able. One other literary element that gives death a more positive spin is the metaphor comparing death to sleeping. Several times in the poem, Donne compares death and sleep. This comparison makes death seem as if it’s something peaceful and nothing to be afraid of which heavily contrasts “The Death of Ivan Illych.” In the penultimate line of the poem, “One short sleep past, we wake eternally...”, Donne basically says that after you die, you still have an eternity ahead of you, and death itself is no more so there is no reason to fear it.

“Death, Be Not Proud,” by John Donne and “The Death of Ivan Illych,” by Leo Tolstoy are two contrasting selections. Donne has a more positive outlook upon death while Tolstoy maintains that death is unwelcome and is comparable to a murderer or a bill collector.