Verses written on her death-bed at Bath to her

POEM TEXT

Thou who dost all my worldly thoughts employ,
Thou pleasing source of all my earthly joy,
Thou tenderest husband and thou dearest friend,
To thee this first, this last adieu I send!
At length the conqueror death asserts his right,
And will for ever veil me from thy sight;
He woos me to him with a cheerful grace,
And not one terror clouds his meagre face;
He promises a lasting rest from pain,
And shows that all life's fleeting joys are vain;
Th' eternal scenes of heaven he sets in view,
And tells me that no other joys are true.
But love, fond love, would yet resist his power,
Would fain awhile defer the parting hour;
He brings thy mourning image to my eyes,
And would obstruct my journey to the skies.
But say, thou dearest, thou unwearied friend!
Say, should'st thou grieve to see my sorrows end?
Thou know'st a painful pilgrimage I've past;
And should'st thou grieve that rest is come at last?
Rather rejoice to see me shake off life,
And die as I have liv'd, thy faithful wife.

SUMMARY

You, who are the only thing I ever think about, the source of all my happiness in life, my sweetest husband and my best friend: I'm sending this poem, my first and last goodbye, to you. Finally, death, that great conqueror, has come to rightfully claim me, which means that you will never see me again. Death lures me to him like a kind lover, and there's nothing scary in his modest face. Death offers me ever-lasting relief from the pain I've been suffering and shows me how I can now trade my earthly joys for the joys of heaven, which are more meaningful and permanent. Death has made me realize that my happiness in life is insignificant compared to the bliss I will experience in heaven. Even so, love, sweet love, makes me want to hold death off, to stay alive a little longer; I picture you grieving my death, and that image blocks my journey to heaven.

But let's just say, my love, my tireless friend—let's say that you're sorry to see an end to my pain. Remember that I've been suffering for a long time, and that death will mean the end of my tiring journey. So why should you be sad when death means that I can finally rest? Instead of grieving, you should celebrate the fact that I'm ridding myself of life, and that I get to die as faithful to you as ever.

THEMES

THE POWER OF LOVE

Monck's poem testifies to the power of love in the face of death. Writing to her husband on her deathbed, the poem's speaker presents dying as inevitable but also appealing: a comforting journey to heaven. Though death offers a tempting escape from her earthly pain, however, the speaker's love for her husband makes her reluctant to die. Love, to this speaker, is thus the one thing that can "resist" death's power—at least for a little while.

The speaker describes death as an almighty "conqueror" who has complete, even rightful power over all life. In fact, the speaker sees death as not just inevitable, but also welcome: death offers "lasting rest from pain," and the glory of heaven makes the "joys" of life seem weak and "fleeting" in comparison. The speaker thus embraces the potential end of her "sorrows" and her "painful pilgrimage" (that is, her painful experience on earth).

Yet even as death calls to the speaker, she finds herself lingering in life because of the love she has for her husband. Powerful as death may be, love resists its allure and "obstruct[s]," or gets in the way of, the speaker's "journey to the skies." The speaker believes that love delays death, pushing back her "parting hour."

The fact that the speaker views death as so welcoming makes her desire to live all the more striking. And this, in turn, is a testament to the depth and power of her love. Even as the speaker looks toward the "eternal scenes of heaven," she can't help but picture her husband one last time. And while death draws the speaker to the "skies," love keeps her grounded on earth so she can write "this first, this last adieu" to her beloved. She thus remains "faithful" even as death (notably personified as a male figure throughout the poem) tries to "woo" her away.

By ending the poem with the words "faithful wife," the speaker also implies that her love and loyalty persist as she passes into heaven. In this way, the poem might ultimately hint that strong love can not only defer death but maybe even survive it.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4

- Lines 13-16
- Line 22

ACCEPTING DEATH

Throughout "Verses," the speaker presents death as an almighty yet benevolent "conqueror." Though death will inevitably take the speaker from her loved ones, the speaker actually embraces death as an escape from her earthly pain and suffering. While her love for her husband keeps her clinging to life, she believes that he should also welcome her death as a bittersweet relief. Death, to this speaker, offers a peaceful and welcome rest, and it's thus more joyful than sad.

Perhaps surprisingly for someone on her "death-bed," the speaker isn't at all scared of dying. She calls death a "conqueror" who will veil her from her husband's sight, yet goes on to imagine death as gentle and kind. She says that death has "cheerful grace" and a "meagre face," for example; he isn't threatening, and he even "wooes" the speaker, seducing her like a lover might. The speaker adds that death shows her "eternal scenes of heaven" that are actually more "true" than other joys—specifically the "fleeting joys" of life. In other words, the quick pleasures of life pale in comparison to the endless pleasures of heaven.

What's more, the speaker believes that death offers refuge from the pain she has suffered on earth. The speaker doesn't specify what or how she has suffered, but her reference to a "painful pilgrimage" hints that she has been ill for a long time. Life has become a burden, something the speaker wants to "shake off." And death promises an "end" to the speaker's "sorrows"—a chance to "rest."

As such, the speaker insists that her husband not mourn but instead celebrate her death. She tells her husband to "rejoice" when she dies because he should be glad that she no longer has to suffer. Of course, it's unclear whether the speaker *actually* believes that heaven is more joyful than life or whether she *wants to* believe this in order to make her death less sad. In any case, she clearly is trying to present a vision of death that is a warm, welcoming, and joyful relief from pain and suffering.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-12
- Lines 18-21

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

Thou who dost all my worldly thoughts employ,
Thou pleasing source of all my earthly joy,
Thou tenderest husband and thou dearest friend,

The opening lines of "Verses" reveal how much the speaker loves her husband and how important he is to her:

- First, she says that he "employ[s]," or occupies, all of her "worldly thoughts." In other words, he is all she can think about.
- Next, she says that her husband brings all her "earthly joy"—that he's the source of all her happiness in this world.
    - Note that, even as the speaker praises her husband in these lines, the words "worldly" and "earthly" add some important qualifications to her statements: her love for her husband is tied to her *life*, her time on *earth*. In this way, the poem quickly sets the ground for a contrast between the speaker's current state and her ultimate destination in heaven (which she describes later in the poem).
- Finally, the speaker calls out to her "tenderest husband" and "dearest friend," emphasizing that their relationship is multi-faceted (he's not just her husband, but also her best friend!) and deeply treasured.

Although her husband is not present—according to the poem's title, he is in London while she's dying in Bath—the speaker refers to him as "Thou." This apostrophe brings her husband close, drawing him into the space of the poem (also note that while "thou" sounds formal to modern years, it's actually an informal, and thus more intimate, mode of address). In fact, the speaker begins the first three lines of the poem with "Thou," and this anaphora strengthens the sense that she really *is* speaking to her husband, or perhaps writing a letter addressed to him.

Another effect of this anaphora is that the first three lines crescendo to line 4, in which the speaker finally reveals that she is addressing her husband in order to say goodbye.

LINE 4

To thee this first, this last adieu I send!

The speaker reveals that she is writing this poem in order to say goodbye to her husband before she dies. She continues to address her husband directly, beginning line 4 with "To thee" (another word that might sound stiff to modern readers but is actually an informal, intimate mode of address).

The caesura in the middle of this line (in the form of a comma after "first") marks a pause as the speaker seems to realize this is the last time she will communicate with her husband. She describes her poem as "this first, this last adieu," repeating the word "this" to emphasize the gravity of her task. By juxtaposing

"first" and "last," the speaker also stresses that her final words are fleeting: she only gets this one chance to say goodbye, and once she does so, she must leave her husband forever.

Ending line 4 with an exclamation point, the speaker draws her first full sentence to a close. She both declares her purpose in writing—to send her goodbye to her husband—and reveals her passion. Evidently, thinking about leaving her husband brings great emotion to this speaker. Although the middle sections of the poem have a calmer tone, this same enthusiasm returns near the end, when the speaker addresses her husband again.

By now, the poem's meter and rhyme scheme are clear. Each line is written in iambic pentameter, meaning there are five iambs (poetic feet with a da-DUM rhythm) per line, like this:

To thee this first, this last adieu I send!

The poem's rhyme scheme, meanwhile, is made up of couplets, or rhyming pairs: AABB. This steady meter and musical rhyme scheme create the feel of a speaker totally in control of her "verses."

LINES 5-6

At length the conqueror death asserts his right,
And will for ever veil me from thy sight;

The speaker now introduces the reason why she has to say goodbye to her husband, writing that "the conqueror death" is coming.

The speaker personifies death, giving him male pronouns and thus setting up a conflict between this "man" and her husband. According to the speaker, taking the living is death's "right," perhaps suggesting that death is natural and necessary, as well as inevitable. It seems as if the speaker has been expecting death to arrive for a while, given that death comes "At length," or after a long wait.

When the speaker initially calls him a "conqueror," it seems like she might fear death, or at least dread his coming. In the next line, however, death appears gentler: he "veil[s]" the speaker so that her husband can no longer see her. This act of veiling evokes the image of the speaker shrouded in her coffin—protected and peaceful in death.

In these first descriptions of death, the speaker's attitude thus seems ambivalent. She obviously doesn't want to leave her husband's "sight," especially not "for ever." But she also believes death is unavoidable, and even if death is powerful, he is not necessarily violent or terrible. Soon, her attitude toward death becomes even more favorable.

LINES 7-8

He woos me to him with a cheerful grace,
And not one terror clouds his meagre face;

The speaker's attitude toward death becomes quite positive as she continues preparing for his arrival. She writes that death "woos" her, seducing her as a lover might. Given that death is personified as male, he seems to compete with her husband for the speaker's love and attention.

And death evidently appeals to the speaker: she describes his "cheerful grace," suggesting that he is friendly and attractive, as well as his "meagre face." Far from intimidating the speaker, death seems almost weak and frail.

However, death is confident that he will lure the speaker into heaven. Imagining that "not one terror clouds" death's face, the speaker perhaps suggests that death is not scared; rather, he calmly and surely asserts his presence. Alternatively, this image perhaps indicates that the speaker *herself* isn't scared to die, as she sees no "terror" in death. Using the word "clouds" to evoke an image of heaven, the speaker further suggests that heaven does not scare her, either. Even before she reveals *why* death appeals to her, the speaker's descriptions of death betray her desire to escape the pain she has suffered here on earth.

LINES 9-12

He promises a lasting rest from pain,
And shows that all life's fleeting joys are vain;
Th' eternal scenes of heaven he sets in view,
And tells me that no other joys are true.

The speaker explains why she welcomes death. Although she never *explicitly* states what has caused her to suffer while living, the speaker has evidently endured great pain—or at least enough pain to make her desire an escape, when her love for her husband would rather keep her here on earth. Continuing to personify death, the speaker writes that he "promises" a chance to "rest" forever. Death, for this speaker, means relief.

Heaven also offers its own set of pleasures. Death "shows" the speaker these pleasures as if showing her the preview to a movie. He presents the "eternal scenes of heaven," telling the speaker that *these* "joys" are "true."

In contrast, the "fleeting joys" of life are "vain," according to death. In other words, the happiness the speaker experienced in life pales in comparison to the happiness she can enjoy in heaven. By extension, that means that even the joy the speaker derives from her marriage should not be enough to keep her clinging onto life.

Although the speaker attributes these ideas to the figure of "death," she seems to agree that dying will be a peaceful, even joyful transition. Of course, the fact that the speaker personifies death might indicate that she's not convinced heaven will be happier than earth—she prefers to have another character express such a bold idea, rather than saying it herself. Even still, the speaker seems inclined to believe death. Her tone is earnest, and she seems to genuinely believe that death will relieve her from her pain.

LINES 13-14

But love, fond love, would yet resist his power,
Would fain awhile defer the parting hour;

The speaker introduces this section of the poem with "But," marking a transition in the poem and in her process of preparing for death. Just as she personified death, the speaker now personifies love, portraying it as death's main adversary: even though death tempts the speaker with views of heaven, her love for her husband makes the speaker resist death's "power."

In other words, love can keep the speaker alive, even while death asserts his "right" to end her life. She repeats the word "love" twice in line 13, using diacope to create an intense, passionate tone.Both death and love vie for the speaker's attention, creating an internal conflict as the speaker prepares to die.

Right away, however, the speaker hints that love's power to resist death is only temporary. The word "yet" suggests that love will give in before long. Indeed, love can only "defer the parting hour," or delay the moment of her death, for "awhile." Eventually, the speaker knows that even her love for her husband cannot keep her alive.

Interestingly, the speaker attributes her resistance to "love," rather than to herself. As a result, perhaps the speaker implies that she doesn't *really* want to delay death—her love just keeps her alive against her will.

LINES 15-16

He brings thy mourning image to my eyes,
And would obstruct my journey to the skies.

Earlier in the poem, death showed the speaker views of heaven. Now, love shows her the image of her husband. The juxtaposition between these two visions reveals the speaker's complicated internal struggle:

- On the one hand, death shows the speaker that heaven will bring her relief and joy.
- On the other hand, love shows her the husband and "dearest friend" she must leave behind to enter heaven, and this vision makes her reluctant to die.

Referring to love as "He," the speaker personifies love as a man, just as she did with death, creating a natural opposition between these two entities. Love shows the speaker that her husband is "mourning." Later in the poem, the speaker tells her husband *not* to mourn, but for now, his sadness seems to make her resist death because she doesn't want to increase his grief.

According to the speaker, love shows her this image of her husband in order to "obstruct," or block, her "journey to the skies"—a metaphor for dying and entering heaven. The word "would" here implies that although love *wants* to keep the speaker alive, he won't necessarily succeed. In the end, death still has ultimate power over the living, no matter how strong the love that keeps folks tied to earth.

LINES 17-20

But say, thou dearest, thou unwearied friend!
Say, should'st thou grieve to see my sorrows end?
Thou know'st a painful pilgrimage I've past;
And should'st thou grieve that rest is come at last?

Near the end of the poem, the speaker pivots back to address her husband again. That "But" at the start of line 17 marks this moment as another big transition in the poem.

At this point, the punctuation and tone grow more emphatic, as the speaker pleads with her husband not to mourn her passing. The speaker calls her husband "thou dearest, thou unwearied friend," once again displaying her affection for her husband, while also using repetition of the word "thou" to stress her passion and devotion.

The word "unwearied" here is ambiguous: perhaps the speaker suggests that her husband faces her death bravely, or maybe she merely means that while she is dying, he remains healthy and strong. Either way, the exclamation point at the end of the line reveals the speaker's emotion as she communicates with her husband.

Repeating the word "say" near the start of lines 17 and 18, the speaker uses anaphora to ask her husband, with an emotional and dramatic tone, whether he will "grieve" when she dies. The caesura after the second instance of "Say" heightens the gravity of her question, marking a dramatic pause that suggests the speaker finds it hard to ask her husband this question and to contemplate how he will endure her death.

Although the speaker phrases her query as an open-ended question, she clearly believes that her question has only one right answer. (This is thus an example of aporia: she's posing the question in order to provide an answer.) Asking twice, "should'st thou grieve," the speaker implies that her husband should *not* grieve.

Throughout this passage, the speaker describes her death as the "end" to her "sorrows" and as "rest." Comparing her suffering to a "painful pilgrimage," the speaker emphasizes that she looks forward to escaping life, which has become unpleasant. She has clearly suffered for a long time: the word "pilgrimage" suggests a long and arduous journey, while the words "at last" hint that the speaker has been waiting for death for quite some time already. The striking alliteration of the phrase "painful pilgrimage I've past" adds to the bitter tone, capturing the speaker's disdain for her own suffering.

After spending the majority of the poem describing a conflict between death and love, this section thus reveals that the speaker has mostly made up her mind. She *wants* to die—she just has to show her husband that death is best for her so that

he won't be too distraught when she leaves him for good. By repeatedly referring to her pain, and by asking whether he will "grieve," the speaker implicitly urges her husband to welcome the end of her suffering.

LINES 21-22

Rather rejoice to see me shake off life,
And die as I have liv'd, thy faithful wife.

Having asked her husband whether he will "grieve" when she dies, the speaker pivots to tell him *not* to grieve. Instead, he should "rejoice," she says, because she is eager to "shake off life." Describing life as something to "shake off," the speaker again reveals how much she has suffered. She is ready to die, and she views her coming death as a happy occasion—something to celebrate, not mourn.

In her attempt to comfort her husband, the speaker concludes the poem by adding that even on her deathbed, she remains "faithful" to him. Whether she means that she will love her husband until death or even into the afterlife, the speaker insists that her love is strong and steady.

The caesura in line 22 sets the final words, "thy faithful wife," apart from the rest of the line, emphasizing that the speaker prioritizes her love and devotion above all selfish concerns. She leaves her husband with the promise that she will always love him, and she seems to hope that this promise will make her death less painful for him.

Juxtaposing the words "die" and "liv'd," the speaker further softens the thought of her dying. The closeness of these two words on the page suggests continuity between death and life. Because the speaker can envision death, it seems like a peaceful, even comforting transition, rather than an event to fear or delay.

Most importantly, the speaker still remains her husband's "wife." By ending the poem on this word, the speaker again shows how much she loves her husband. Even though she consents to leaving her husband forever, she still holds him incredibly close to her heart.

POETIC DEVICES

APOSTROPHE

The speaker begins the poem with an apostrophe addressed to her husband. As indicated by the poem's title, her husband is in London while the speaker is in Bath, so many miles separate them as the speaker writes these verses. Despite that distance, the speaker refers to her husband as "Thou" and "thee," old-fashioned—and today, formal-sounding—terms for "you." (In Mary Monck's time, these terms wouldn't seem quite so stiff.)

In the first four lines, the speaker repeatedly addresses her husband, describing all the ways she loves him: he occupies all her "worldly thoughts," brings her "earthly joy," and serves as her "dearest friend." Later in the poem, the speaker again calls to her husband, "thou dearest, thou unwearied friend!" She even asks him questions, as if he is present to provide answers.

By speaking directly to her husband, the speaker expresses her strong desire to communicate with him before she dies. She doesn't just want to write a poem about her love—she wants to write *to* her beloved, so that he can hear directly from her pen that she remains "faithful" on her deathbed.

Plus, by using apostrophe, the speaker makes her husband feel closer to her than he really is. She brings him into the poem itself, creating a sense of intimacy as she writes her final goodbye.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** "Thou who dost all my worldly thoughts employ, / Thou pleasing source of all my earthly joy, / Thou tenderest husband and thou dearest friend, / To thee this first, this last adieu I send!"
- **Line 15:** "He brings thy mourning image to my eyes,"
- **Lines 17-22:** "But say, thou dearest, thou unwearied friend! / Say, should'st thou grieve to see my sorrows end? / Thou know'st a painful pilgrimage I've past; / And should'st thou grieve that rest is come at last? / Rather rejoice to see me shake off life, / And die as I have liv'd, thy faithful wife."

ANAPHORA

In the first three lines of the poem, the speaker repeats the word "Thou" as she addresses her beloved husband. This anaphora creates a sense of passion and urgency in the poem: she doesn't just address her husband once, but three times in a row, adding new descriptions each time. With each repetition of "Thou," with each new line about her husband, the speaker's love feels stronger and more intense.

When the speaker returns to address her husband later in the poem, she again uses anaphora to prove a point. By asking twice, "should'st thou grieve," the speaker suggests that her husband should *not* grieve when she dies, because the speaker is glad to escape her pain.

The repetition makes her question feel more like a rhetorical tool, a pointed reminder to her husband that her death is something to "rejoice" over, rather than to "grieve." In this second instance of anaphora, the speaker uses a common technique of varying the first word of the line, then repeating the important part of the phrase that follows. As a result, the anaphora here doesn't feel *too* repetitive, but instead like a compelling way to capture the speaker's powerful feeling.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Thou"
- **Line 2:** "Thou"
- **Line 3:** "Thou"
- **Line 18:** "should'st thou grieve"
- **Line 20:** "should'st thou grieve"

ALLITERATION

While there are some moments of incidental alliteration in the poem, the most powerful and important instance of the device doesn't appear until near the end: in line 19, the speaker describes her suffering as "a painful pilgrimage I've past."

By repeating the sharp /p/ sounds at the start of three words in the same phrase, the speaker expresses her bitterness at having endured so much pain. Pronouncing the letter "p" feels almost like spitting; saying line 19 aloud, repeating the /p/ sound three times in close proximity, might reveal some of the speaker's unhappiness. Furthermore, because this line occurs after the speaker has already mentioned her suffering, her alliteration captures the emotion that has built up throughout the poem.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 14:** "fain," "defer"
- **Line 18:** "see," "sorrows"
- **Line 19:** "painful pilgrimage," "past"
- **Line 21:** "Rather rejoice"

APORIA

The speaker turns to aporia at the poem's end to make an important point. When the speaker asks her husband, "should'st thou grieve to see my sorrows end?" she clearly has an answer already in mind. She uses this question and the one that follows—"should'st thou grieve that rest is come at last?"—to prove to her husband that her death is a positive event, something to "rejoice" rather than regret.

She doesn't really want to know whether he will grieve. In fact, she probably doesn't even expect a response, as he might not have a chance to write back or see her before she dies. Rather than seeking answers, then, the speaker poses these questions to give herself the opportunity to say, as she has said throughout the poem, that she has suffered in life, and that she looks forward to relief in death.

Far from uncertain, the speaker now seems more sure than ever that death will mean the "end" of her "sorrows" and a chance to "rest" from pain. Repeating her question twice further indicates that the speaker already knows the correct answer.

Even if she poses her questions only rhetorically, however, these instances of aporia give the speaker another chance to address her husband. She speaks as if he is present, or, at least, as if he can respond to her inquiries and engage in conversation. As such, aporia provides another tool for the speaker to bring her husband close to her, mentally closing the distance that physically separates them as she prepares to die.

Where Aporia appears in the poem:

- **Lines 17-20:** "But say, thou dearest, thou unwearied friend! / Say, should'st thou grieve to see my sorrows end? / Thou know'st a painful pilgrimage I've past; / And should'st thou grieve that rest is come at last?"

METAPHOR

Throughout "Verses," the speaker uses multiple metaphors to describe death and the act of dying. Most prominently, she refers to death as a "conqueror," comparing him to a powerful person who has the "right" to take her life. This metaphor (which is also an example of personification) extends throughout the poem, as the speaker continually imagines death performing various actions. Death "woos" her, shows her his "meagre face," and "promises" that she can trade pain for joy in heaven.

Through this metaphor of death as a benevolent, even seductive "conqueror," Monck shows how death can seem both frightening and appealing to the dying. Moreover, she suggests that death's approach might feel like the coming of a friend or enemy, raising hopes and expectations for what an encounter with death might mean.

In a related metaphor, the speaker also describes dying as a "journey to the skies." This metaphor indicates that the speaker equates dying with entering heaven, suggesting that her religious beliefs make death seem like a welcome transition. The word "journey" also evokes a physical transition, capturing the speaker's feeling that she will be moving to another realm in the afterlife. The euphemisms the speaker uses to describe death, calling it a "rest" or "shak[ing] off life," work similarly, presenting death as something pleasant and welcoming.

Finally, the speaker calls her suffering on earth a "painful pilgrimage," using this metaphor to convey her exhaustion. She has been suffering for such a long time that her discomfort feels like a "pilgrimage," or a long and arduous journey, which she wishes to end soon. However, the word "pilgrimage" also suggests that she will reach a spiritual destination or transformation when her journey is complete. This metaphor thus underscores the speaker's conviction that she will enter heaven when she dies.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-8:** "At length the conqueror death asserts his right, / And will for ever veil me from thy sight; / He woos

me to him with a cheerful grace, / And not one terror clouds his meagre face;"
- **Lines 13-14:** "But love, fond love, would yet resist his power, / Would fain awhile defer the parting hour;"
- **Line 16:** "And would obstruct my journey to the skies."
- **Line 19:** "painful pilgrimage"
- **Line 20:** "rest"
- **Line 21:** "shake off life"

PERSONIFICATION

By personifying "death" and "love" as competing, human-like characters, Monck illustrates how the speaker's affection for her husband makes her want to resist dying.

The speaker refers to death as a "conqueror," giving him male pronouns and human attributes. Death acts like a person when he "veil[s]" the speaker from her husband's sight, as well as when he "woos" the speaker with "a cheerful grace," behaving almost like a lover who seduces the speaker away from her husband.

The speaker also imagines that death has a "face." Even if death has super-human powers, like the ability to show the speaker "scenes of heaven," Monck thus personifies death to show how dying can have the persuasive, appealing quality of an attractive stranger.

In opposition to death, Monck also personifies love. Though love has fewer human features than death—the speaker never describes love's body, for example—love also has male pronouns, along with the capacity to "resist" death's power over the speaker.

The conflict between death and love, evoking a conflict between human enemies, reveals the tension the speaker feels between two strong, competing desires:

- On the one hand, she's deeply attracted to death, who offers her refuge from pain and lures her with his "cheerful grace."
- On the other hand, the speaker still feels love's great intensity. Her passion for her husband makes it difficult to relinquish life.

Throughout the poem, death and love pull the speaker in opposite directions—toward heaven and earth—similar to two friends dragging her toward different destinations.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-16:** "At length the conqueror death asserts his right, / And will for ever veil me from thy sight; / He woos me to him with a cheerful grace, / And not one terror clouds his meagre face; / He promises a lasting rest from pain, / And shows that all life's fleeting joys are vain; / Th' eternal scenes of heaven he sets in view, / And tells me that no other joys are true. / But love, fond love, would yet resist his power, / Would fain awhile defer the parting hour; / He brings thy mourning image to my eyes, / And would obstruct my journey to the skies."

PARALLELISM

At various points throughout "Verses," Monck repeats words and phrases in order to emphasize the speaker's intense feeling as she writes her farewell to her husband. During her opening address to her husband, the speaker calls her poem "this first, this last adieu." These phrases are gramatically identical but mean opposite things, making this parallelism also an example of antithesis.

The closeness of these phrases on the page underscores the fact that the speaker only gets one chance to say goodbye; her first farewell coincides with her last. As this is the first time the speaker pauses in the middle of a line, the caesura between "this first" and "this last" also implies the speaker's sadness upon pronouncing the word "adieu." That is, it seems as though she must take a beat to pause and consider the gravity of what she is about to say.

When addressing her husband later in the poem, the speaker uses a similar parallel structure to express her passion. She calls her husband "thou dearest, thou unwearied friend," describing him with two separate adjectives that capture her fondness for him. Once again, the pause between "thou dearest" and "thou unwearied" indicates some hesitation, as if the speaker struggles to say these words to her husband.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Thou"
- **Line 2:** "Thou"
- **Line 3:** "Thou tenderest husband and thou dearest friend,"
- **Line 4:** "this first, this last"
- **Line 13:** "would yet resist"
- **Line 14:** "Would fain awhile defer"
- **Line 17:** "But say," "thou dearest, thou unwearied"
- **Line 18:** "Say," "should'st thou grieve"
- **Line 20:** "should'st thou grieve"

JUXTAPOSITION

In addition to personifying death and love as adversaries, Monck juxtaposes images of heaven and earth to underscore how the speaker stands at the boundary between these realms. First, the speaker juxtaposes "this first" and "this last" to suggest that her current state—still living, but prepared to die—is transitory. Her "first" and "last" chance to say goodbye happen all at once because she only has a brief time before

death takes her from her husband.

Death, personified as a "conqueror," presents the next example of juxtaposition. He shows the contrast between "life's fleeting joys"—which are "vain," or superficial and fleeting—and "Th' eternal scenes of heaven." Set side-by-side, these images of "life" versus "heaven" reveal to the speaker that heaven is more truly joyful than life. At the same time, juxtaposing "life" and "heaven" hints that the speaker is about to transition from one to the other. Put differently, she can see both life and heaven, which suggests that she is nearly ready to die.

In the final line of the poem, the phrase "die as I have liv'd" again juxtaposes life and death, revealing the proximity of these two states for the speaker. These instances of juxtaposition help capture the speaker's suspense, her readiness, as she waits for death to claim his "right."

Finally, the speaker uses juxtaposition to guide her husband, telling him that rather than "grieve," he should "rejoice" when she dies. Just as contrasting images of heaven and earth revealed that the speaker will experience greater joy in heaven, these juxtaposed verbs suggest that death is a happy, celebratory occasion, at least when the dying have suffered great pain in life. However, the speaker recognizes that most people view death as something to mourn and that her husband is more likely to "grieve" than celebrate when she dies. Through juxtaposition, she contradicts common expectations around how the dying and their loved ones feel toward death, insisting that, in some cases, death can be a positive event.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "this first, this last adieu"
- **Lines 10-11:** "life's fleeting joys are vain; / Th' eternal scenes of heaven"
- **Line 20:** "grieve"
- **Line 21:** "rejoice"
- **Line 22:** "die as I have liv'd"

CAESURA

Monck uses caesura several times throughout "Verses" to convey the speaker's complex emotions. The poem generally includes simple punctuation and steady meter, so each time a comma appears in the middle of the line, it noticeably changes the poem's rhythm. The speaker uses caesura to express her passion as she says goodbye to her husband: her feelings are too strong, in many cases, to proceed smoothly through a line.

In line 4, for example, when she reveals that she is saying her "adieu," the speaker uses a comma to separate "this first" from "this last adieu." This little pause perhaps reveals a bit of hesitation on the speaker's part, revealing her sadness at getting only one chance to say goodbye to her husband.

Then, in line 13, the speaker offsets the phrase "fond love" between commas. These pauses add emphasis to the phrase itself and, in turn, help to stress the power of her love. The speaker uses a similar grammatical structure when she places "thou dearest" between commas in line 17. Pausing twice in these lines, the speaker builds anticipation and intensity as she expresses her affection for her husband.

When she asks whether her husband will "grieve" when she dies, the speaker places caesuras near the beginning of her question. Line 18 begins with "say," a comma separating this opening word from the question that follows. In asking this question, the speaker transitions from describing the battle between death and love, to convincing her husband that he should embrace her death. Both lines 18 and 22 use caesuras to convey the speaker's increasingly decisive attitude toward dying. By the end of the poem, she knows she is ready to die—and she's also confident when she promises her husband that she will stay "thy faithful wife."

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "first, this"
- **Line 13:** "love, fond love, would"
- **Line 17:** "say, thou dearest, thou"
- **Line 18:** "Say, should'st"
- **Line 22:** "liv'd, thy"

VOCABULARY

Employ (Line 1) - Occupy or engage. Monck uses the word "employ" to mean that the speaker's husband consumes all of her "worldly thoughts." In other words, her husband is all the speaker ever thinks about; she pays no attention to anyone else.

Adieu (Line 4) - Goodbye, farewell. The speaker writes this poem as a parting letter to her husband. She says goodbye through verse, knowing that she will never see him again before she dies.

Woos (Line 7) - Seeks to gain someone's affection. Personifying death as a "conqueror" with a "cheerful grace," the speaker imagines that death tries to seduce her—to win her over by convincing her that pleasure waits for her in heaven.

Meagre (Line 8) - Thin, weak. Even though the speaker calls death a "conqueror," the word "meagre" suggests that he is not strong or dangerous. Instead, "meagre" implies that death is either physically thin, like a gaunt skeleton, or lacking richness and strength.

Vain (Line 10) - Useless or worthless. It's not clear exactly what the word "vain" means here. Monck might use "vain" to suggest that "life's fleeting joys" are too temporary to matter, at least compared to the "eternal" joys of heaven. Or, "vain" could mean that the joys of life are silly, meaningless, and shallow compared to the deeper and more "true" joys of heaven. Most likely,

Monck intends a combination of these two meanings.

Fain (Line 14) - Gladly, preferably. In this context, "fain" means that love (personified as an adversary to death) *wants* to "defer" the speaker's death. It is love's goal and desire to keep the speaker alive, because the passion she feels for her husband is strong enough to delay death.

Pilgrimage (Line 19) - Experience in life, or the journey to a destination. Depending on how Monck intends to use the word, "pilgrimage" might simply refer to the speaker's time on earth—the course of her lifetime. Alternatively, "pilgrimage" could be a metaphor, referring to the speaker's journey through life and pain on her way to heaven. Either way, "pilgrimage" stresses the fact that the speaker is weary and ready for her suffering to end, because pilgrimages are generally long, tiring journeys to a sacred place.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Verses" includes just one 22-line stanza, which can be broken up into 11 rhyming couplets (two-line stanzas; given that these couplets are also written in iambic pentameter, they're technically known as heroic couplets).

Taking into account the grammatical and thematic turns in the poem, however, readers can also think of "Verses" as consisting of five quatrains (four-line stanzas) and a final couplet:

- In the first quatrain, the speaker begins her address to her husband.
- In the second and third quatrains, she introduces death and describes how he lures her into heaven.
- The fourth quatrain transitions to discuss the speaker's love for her husband.
- Finally, in the last quatrain, the speaker pleads with her husband to accept her death, before ending with a decisive couplet that concludes her "last adieu."

Though there are no stanza breaks, Monck thus uses grammar to separate the poem into sections, so that the reader naturally pauses between topics and ideas.

METER

"Verses" is written in iambic pentameter, which means that each line includes five iambs: poetic feet with two syllables, one unstressed followed by one stressed (for a full pattern of: da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM). Iambic pentameter is very common in English poetry, and because it sounds almost like a heartbeat, this meter is often associated with romantic poetry. As such, iambic pentameter seems like a fitting choice for a poem all about the speaker's powerful love.

Take a look at lines 2-4 to see this steady meter in action (and note that "tenderest" is read as having just two beats here, "tend'rest"):

> Thou plea- | sing source | of all | my earth- | ly joy,
> Thou tend- | erest hus- | band and | thou dear- | est friend,
> To thee | this first, | this last | adieu | I send!

There are some minor variations here and there, but Monck sticks pretty closely to this meter throughout the poem. This might be surprising, given that the speaker is addressing her beloved husband, but this formal meter would have been more common at the time of Monck's writing. The steady meter also makes the speaker seem calm and collected, which fits in with her insistence that she's not afraid of death.

That said, Monck's occasional use of caesura breaks up the poem's otherwise stable rhythm. Take line 13, which inserts distinct pauses around the phrase "fond love":

> But love, || fond love, || would yet resist his power,

It's also possible to read the second foot here as a spondee (two stressed beats in a row: "fond love" rather than "fond love"). Moments like this allow some of the speaker's inner passion to surface during particularly emotional sections of the poem.

RHYME SCHEME

"Verses" uses rhyming couplets throughout, creating a rhyme scheme of:

AABBCCDD

...and so forth.

Since the rhymes occur in groups of two, this scheme helps divide the poem into quatrains (four-line stanzas) and a final couplet: each section includes two pairs of rhyming lines. Monck never diverges from this pattern, just as she sticks pretty closely to the poem's meter of iambic pentameter. As a result, the poem has a very even, rhythmic feel, and an almost soothing simplicity.

SPEAKER

The first-person speaker of "Verses" is an unnamed woman who knows she is about to die. But given that Monck wrote this poem as part of a collection dedicated to her husband when she was on her deathbed in 1715, it's reasonable to assume that the speaker is the poet herself.

In any case, the poem's title indicates that this speaker is in Bath, a popular English spa city in the 18th century, the period of Monck's writing. It seems as if the speaker has been sick for a long time, so perhaps she traveled to Bath to rest and recover.

Now, though, the speaker senses that death is coming for her. Before she dies, all she wants to do is say goodbye to her husband, who is currently across the country in London.

It's clear that the speaker loves her husband deeply, and that her love for him is the only thing tempting her to resist death. Otherwise, the speaker feels ready to die: she is eager to escape the "pain" and "sorrows" she has endured in life, and she gains comfort from the love she has shared with her husband.

SETTING

According to the title, "Verses" takes place in Bath, one of the largest cities in England. In the 18th century, Bath became a fashionable spa town, drawing visitors from across England and beyond. Monck lived in Ireland, but she came to Bath when she was sick, and she died there in 1715.

In "Verses," Monck doesn't reveal anything about this setting other than the fact that the speaker is separated from her husband. The poem discusses the speaker's thoughts about death and love, but she could have written these verses anywhere—only the title ties the poem to a particular place.

More important is the *timing* of the poem: it's set while the speaker is on her "death-bed" after a long bout with some sort of illness or suffering. She's just about ready to die, but her love for her husband keeps her clinging to life a while longer.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Mary Monck was highly educated, but she wasn't known as a poet during her lifetime. She read widely and learned Latin, Italian, and Spanish. According to some sources, she translated Italian literature and circulated her writings among friends. After her death, her father, Robert, Viscount Molesworth, found Monck's works and published them in 1716 in a volume titled *Marinda. Poems and Translations upon several occasions*.

"Verses" became Monck's most famous poem, though it wasn't published in her posthumous collection. Instead, it first appeared in a collection titled *Poems by Eminent Ladies* that included several of Monck's other works in addition to poems by 18 of her contemporaries.

Little else is known about Monck and her work. Presumably, she was influenced by the literature she studied and translated throughout her lifetime. Other women at the time (and throughout history) wrote poetry for their husbands, and Monck may have been familiar with poems like Anne Bradstreet's "A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment," which describes a woman's love for her husband.

Poems by Eminent Ladies also includes other poems of a similar theme, like Laetitia Pilkington's "Consolatory Verses to Her Husband." Though written in the following century, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)" famously follows this same tradition of women writing poetry for their lovers.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mary Monck was born to a political family: her father, Robert Molesworth, was an Irish politician and writer, and her mother Letitia Coote was sister to Richard, Earl of Bellamont. Little is known about Mary Monck herself, making it hard to say how she was influenced by her historical and political context.

What scholars do know is that in the early 18th century, England and Scotland unified to form the Kingdom of Great Britain. Meanwhile, Ireland technically remained autonomous until the end of the century. The English government in London exerted great control over Ireland, excluding Roman Catholics from power and land ownership, but as a member of the ruling class, Monck probably wouldn't have felt the oppression inflicted on many Irish people. Plus, she evidently had the means to spend her last days in the resort city of Bath.

In "Verses," Monck makes no allusions to the world around her—she focuses entirely on herself and her husband, creating an intimate space within whatever historical context she experienced at the time.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Mary Monck's Biography — Read what little there is to know about the author, Mary Monck. (https://www.libraryireland.com/biography/MaryMonck.php)
- City of Bath — Read about the history of Bath, the city where Monck wrote "Verses," now a UNESCO heritage site. (https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/428/)
- "Verses" Read Aloud — Listen to a reading of "Verses." (https://soundcloud.com/user-485912240/verses-written-on-her-death-bed-at-bath-to-her-husband-in-london-by-mary-monck)
- Poems by Eminent Ladies — Read Monck's "Verses" in context (on page 195) in the volume of its original publication. (https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=bkkJAAAAQAAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=en)

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