

I Have a Rendezvous with Death



POEM TEXT

1 I have a rendezvous with Death
 2 At some disputed barricade,
 3 When Spring comes back with rustling shade
 4 And apple-blossoms fill the air—
 5 I have a rendezvous with Death
 6 When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

7 It may be he shall take my hand
 8 And lead me into his dark land
 9 And close my eyes and quench my breath—
 10 It may be I shall pass him still.
 11 I have a rendezvous with Death
 12 On some scarred slope of battered hill,
 13 When Spring comes round again this year
 14 And the first meadow-flowers appear.

15 God knows 'twere better to be deep
 16 Pillowed in silk and scented down,
 17 Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
 18 Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
 19 Where hushed awakenings are dear ...
 20 But I've a rendezvous with Death
 21 At midnight in some flaming town,
 22 When Spring trips north again this year,
 23 And I to my pledged word am true,
 24 I shall not fail that rendezvous.



SUMMARY

The speaker explains that he will soon meet death, imagining that this will happen on the front lines of a battlefield during springtime, when the leaves on the trees gently shake in the wind and create shade on the ground, and the smell of apple-blossoms is everywhere. Once more, the speaker insists that he has a meeting with death that will take place during the beautiful days and clear skies of springtime.

It's possible, the speaker upholds, that death will lead him by the hand into an ominous and unknown realm, where death will shut the speaker's eyes and stop his breathing. However, it's also possible that the speaker will, for now, manage to slip by death unnoticed. Despite this thought, the speaker repeats that he has a meeting with death, envisioning that this will happen

on a hillside destroyed by battle, though he also imagines that the broader setting of this encounter with death will be characterized by the onset of springtime and all the flowers that will blossom in the surrounding fields.

Having said all this, the speaker admits that he would much rather nestle down into the soft and inviting covers of a cozy bed, imagining how nice it would be to sleep happily next to a lover. Continuing this fantasy, the speaker imagines what it'd be like to sleep so close to his lover that their heartbeats and breathing would mingle, and that they would wake up together in a gentle state of happiness. But this thought trails off as the speaker reminds himself that he has a meeting with death, this time imagining that this meeting will occur at midnight in a burning town. Despite this change in scenery, though, the speaker still believes that his death will coincide with spring as it brings warm weather to the cooler northern regions of the world. The speaker then concludes by asserting that he has made a solemn promise that he will not break—namely, that he will not avoid his meeting with death.



THEMES



DEATH AND ACCEPTANCE

As made clear by the title, “I Have a Rendezvous with Death” is a poem about mortality and, more specifically, the speaker’s acceptance of death. Given this morose subject, readers might expect the speaker to express regret or sorrow that all life must come to an end—but this isn’t the case. Instead, the speaker seems to *embrace* the inevitability of death, seeing it as something as unavoidable as the onset of spring. And though there is still some uncertainty regarding what the actual experience of death will be like, the speaker never attempts to escape this fate. The poem implies that it would be futile and foolish to resist the simple reality of mortality, which is that everyone is destined to die.

Of course, the circumstances of the speaker’s imminent death are unique. Seeger wrote “I Have a Rendezvous with Death” during his time as a soldier in World War I, which eventually claimed his life. For this reason, the poem is more specifically a war poem in which a soldier—perhaps Seeger himself—contemplates the extreme likelihood that he will soon die in battle. This makes sense of the speaker’s assertion that his “rendezvous” (a date or meeting) will take place on “some scarred slope of battered hill,” an image that evokes the distressed landscape of a battlefield.

What’s more, the idea that the speaker is a soldier contextualizes the slight sense of pride that works its way

through the poem and ultimately frames death as somewhat valorous, as if the soldier has made peace with dying precisely because this is something he has “pledged” to do; indeed, he is committed to his fate as a soldier and, thus, has accepted death as a part of that role.

In keeping with this, there is very little regret detectable on the speaker’s behalf. Instead, the speaker simply states that he will surely die very soon, and then he tries to imagine what this will be like, wondering if he will be led into a “dark land.” This is the only kind of uncertainty that characterizes the speaker’s thoughts about death, but it doesn’t change the speaker’s overall outlook on mortality. Rather, the speaker merely expresses curiosity about what it will be like to die. This curiosity is yet another sign that the speaker doesn’t resent or fear death, instead accepting it as something that will happen to him in ways he won’t be able to control—indeed, death might not even come when the speaker expects it to. The only certainty, then, is that it will arrive at *some* point, and the speaker has accepted this.

To go along with this attitude of acceptance, the speaker also associates his own death with the onset of spring, a season that represents rebirth and new life. This, in turn, implies that the world will continue even as the speaker’s life draws to an end. This is a dynamic that the speaker is aware of and seems to have accepted, since nothing in the poem indicates that he begrudges that the seasons—and the living world at large—will keep turning without him. Once again, then, readers see the extent to which the speaker has come to terms with death as a natural part of existence, recognizing that death is as inevitable and unstoppable as the passage of time.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24



DUTY AND HONOR

In many ways, the speaker in “I Have a Rendezvous with Death” sees death as a form of duty. This is because the poem focuses specifically on military honor and war-related deaths, a fact made clear by the suggestion that the speaker will die on a battlefield (or “some scarred slope of battered hill”).

With this in mind, the soldier’s unphased attitude toward death is a bit easier to understand, since it’s clear that he’s contemplating mortality within the context of military duty. This makes it possible for the speaker to conceive of death as an honorable sacrifice rather than a meaningless tragedy. And though the speaker implies in the third stanza that it would be preferable to avoid war and, thus, an untimely death, this is only a fleeting thought that doesn’t interfere with the speaker’s solemn yet assured willingness to die on the battlefield—a

willingness that arises from an honorable sense of duty and commitment to a cause. By putting this perspective on display, then, the poem suggests that it is possible to embrace even the most dismal fate when one sees it as related to a respectable, worthwhile responsibility.

The majority of the poem spotlights the speaker’s unemotional acknowledgment that he is destined to die, as made evident by the fact that the phrase “I have a rendezvous with Death” repeats three times in just 14 lines. However, what seems like the speaker’s complete acceptance of this notion is called into question at the beginning of the third stanza, when the speaker admits that lying in bed next to a lover would be much “better” than facing death on a battlefield. At this moment, the speaker briefly allows himself to entertain the idea that he doesn’t *have* to die, or at least not anytime soon. Indeed, it is only because he’s in the military during World War I that his death seems so imminent and unavoidable, not because he’s actually fated to die in any kind of predetermined or spiritual sense (or at least not so soon).

Although the soldier’s confession that it would be better to lie with a lover than to march toward a bloody death might suggest that he’s not as willing to die as it seems, he doesn’t let these thoughts actually interfere with what he sees as his soldierly duty. To that end, his fantasy about lying in bed trails off with an ellipsis as if passing through his mind, at which point he reiterates: “But I’ve a rendezvous with Death.” This return to his original conviction demonstrates his steadfast commitment to the idea of putting his life on the line as a soldier.

As if to further illustrate this, the speaker adds, “And I to my pledged word am true, / I shall not fail that rendezvous,” revealing that he has actively committed himself to facing death in the name of military service—a commitment he has sworn not to abandon. Above all, this is a testament to the power of duty, which can give a person the kind of honor or pride that is evident in the speaker’s principled refusal to break his “word.” And it is this kind of duty-related honor that makes it possible for people to unflinchingly make sacrifices or face otherwise undesirable circumstances.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 5
- Line 11
- Lines 15-24



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

*I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,*

*When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—*

The poem begins with the speaker declaring that he has a "rendezvous" with death. A "rendezvous" is a meeting or appointment, and this line thus suggests that the speaker's encounter with death has already been planned out or decided upon, that the speaker's death has been somehow predetermined. Of course, this is impossible, but this idea underscores the extent to which the speaker is sure that he will soon die. The word "rendezvous" also has certain military connotations, since it is often used to refer to an assembly point where troops are supposed to meet or gather.

The militaristic association that comes along with the word "rendezvous" helps make sense of the phrase "disputed barricade" in line 2, clarifying that the speaker is [alluding](#) to the front lines of a battlefield, where the "disputed barricade" is the clash of two armies fighting to gain new ground. This, in turn, implies that the speaker expects to die in combat.

At the same time, the idea of meeting death at "some disputed barricade" could also be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the uncertainty surrounding the actual *experience* of death. After all, even if the speaker is confident that he'll die on the battlefield, he has no idea what it will be like to actually pass through the barrier between life and death. It is this sense of uncertainty, then, that makes the "barricade" between the world of the living and the world of the dead feel "disputed."

Furthermore, lines 3 and 4 associate the speaker's upcoming death with the emergence of spring. Consequently, a sense of [juxtaposition](#) arises between the imminent end of the speaker's life and the kind of rebirth and continuation that spring represents. Accordingly, it becomes clear that the speaker recognizes that the world will go on without him, continuing to blossom in beautiful ways despite the fact that he's destined to die a bloody death on the battlefield (at least according to him).

Though one might expect this to upset the speaker, he seems relatively unfazed by the idea of his own death. Rather than bemoaning his unfortunate circumstances, he simply states—without any apparent display of emotion—that he will soon meet death, and his lack of sentimentality regarding this idea suggests that he has accepted this as his fate.

It's also noteworthy that these opening lines establish the overall rhythm of the poem. The speaker uses [iambic tetrameter](#), meaning that each line contains four iambs: metrical feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. This creates a da-DUM da-DUM rhythm that runs throughout the poem:

I have | a ren- | dezvous | with Death

In addition, readers will notice that the second and third lines include [end rhymes](#) ("barricade" and "shade") but that the first

and fourth lines do not; interestingly enough, this is not the beginning of a set rhyme scheme, but rather an example of how the speaker employs random rhymes, matching certain lines with each other to enhance the sound and musicality of the poem without committing to an actual pattern.

LINES 5-6

*I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.*

The [repetition](#) of the poem's opening line establishes it as a [refrain](#) that will appear throughout the poem. The abrupt way that the speaker transitions from talking about springtime and "apple-blossoms" to repeating that he has a "rendezvous" with death suggests that he doesn't want to let himself forget that his life will soon come to an end. Indeed, this refrain serves as a constant reminder that the speaker's death is approaching—something he actively keeps in mind even while waxing poetic about spring.

The [juxtaposition](#) between the speaker's thoughts about spring and the idea of his imminent death is especially striking in these two lines. After all, most readers probably wouldn't associate death with beautifully "blue" spring skies and pleasant, temperate days. And yet, this is exactly what the speaker thinks about after noting once more that he will soon die.

Of course, this could be interpreted as a sign that the speaker doesn't *want* to miss out on life after he's gone, but the unsentimental way that he delivers these lines suggests that he has made peace with the idea that his life will come to an end and that the world will go on regardless.

As if to emphasize this apparent discrepancy, line 6 has a very pleasing sound. This is partially due to the repetition of the /ing/ sound in the phrase "Spring brings." This phrase is both [assonant](#) and [consonant](#), since the short /i/ sound creates assonance and the /ng/ sound creates consonance. What's more, the /b/ sound [alliterates](#) three times in the phrase "brings back blue." Finally, there is the consonant repetition of the /z/ sound in the words "brings" and "days." On the whole, these poetic devices create a happy, musical sound that reflects the idyllic feeling of spring's return, therefore accentuating the juxtaposition between death and seasonal rebirth.

Line 6 also varies from the poem's otherwise strict adherence to [iambic tetrameter](#). The line scans like this:

When Spring | brings back | blue days | and fair

The second metrical foot of this line is a [spondee](#), meaning that it contains two consecutive **stressed** syllables ("brings back"). This emphasizes the idea that Spring actively "brings" the world back to a state of pleasant beauty, effectively calling attention to the endless rotation of the seasons. In turn, readers see that the world will continue along unbothered by the speaker's death and, more importantly, that the speaker is well aware of

this.

LINES 7-10

*It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.*

The speaker begins the second stanza by [personifying](#) death itself, treating death as an actual being with its own agency. Of course, one cannot have a "rendezvous"—a meeting—with something that is inanimate or unconscious. But this is the first time that the speaker *explicitly* refers to death as if it were a person, calling it "he" and wondering if death will take him by the hand and draw him into a mysterious, ominous place.

The effect of this personification is significant, since it invites readers to view death as a sentient being who will soon have complete power over the speaker. Needless to say, this sounds rather frightening, especially since the idea of death leading a person into a "dark land" is quite sinister. However, the speaker's tone remains merely curious, as if he is legitimately intrigued by the question of what actually dying will be like.

In keeping with this lack of fear, it's worth noting that the scenario the speaker imagines doesn't end in a very troubling or climactic way. Indeed, he uses [polysyndeton](#) to describe death leading him into another realm and then gently closing his eyes and extinguishing his breath—a process that, as far as dying goes, doesn't sound so bad, since it isn't painful or torturous.

The word "quench" is somewhat odd in this context, since the most common understanding of the word is that it refers to the act of satisfying one's thirst or desire. Of course, the word also can be used to refer to the act of extinguishing, stifling, or suppressing something, but the idea of death somehow *satisfying* the speaker's breath by killing him is worth remembering as the poem progresses, since it subtly suggests that the speaker is more than willing to die (or even that he *wants* to die). To that end, it's possible that the speaker sees the act of dying in battle as honorable and worthwhile, which is why the loss of his breath might please or satisfy him. With this in mind, it becomes even clearer why the speaker doesn't seem to fear death: he covets the idea of dying for a purpose, and this overshadows any reservations he might have about experiencing an untimely death.

This is not to say that the speaker doesn't still have mixed emotions about dying. In line 10, for instance, he proposes an alternate scenario in which death doesn't take him by the hand and lead him away from life. Instead, he notes that he might succeed in evading death, at least for the time being. That this thought crosses his mind implies that there is a part of him that hasn't fully embraced the idea of dying.

On another note, it's helpful to consider the musicality of lines

7 and 8, which use rhyme to enhance the dazed, dreamlike quality that arises in combination with this mysterious depiction of death. First, there is an [internal rhyme](#) between the words "be," "he," and "me." The frequency of this [assonant](#) /ee/ sound creates a lilting, lightly bouncy sound that pairs nicely with the [end rhyme](#) between "hand" and "land":

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land

The assonant /ee/ sound also appears in the word "lead," further bolstering the musicality of this section—a musicality that changes to something a bit more muscular and heavy in line 9, when the [consonant](#) /z/ sound repeats in the words "close" and "eyes." This tonal shift to a thicker, heavier sound underscores the fact that, although the speaker is seemingly unbothered by the idea of death, he's still considering the very serious matter of dying and is aware of the grave nature of this topic (no pun intended).

LINES 11-14

*I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.*

Although the speaker suggests in line 10 that he might be able to evade death, he once more [repeats](#) the poem's [refrain](#) in line 11, saying, "I have a rendezvous with Death." The stark contrast between these two statements creates yet another instance of [juxtaposition](#), effectively confirming that the speaker wants to remind himself that death is near and unavoidable.

Line 12 builds upon this idea with the mention of "some scarred slope of battered hill," a phrase that creates an image of a war-torn battlefield. In turn, readers will perhaps sense why the speaker wants to remind himself that he has a "rendezvous" (a meeting) with death: he has, as a soldier, committed to putting his life on the line. With this in mind, the speaker's unsentimental acceptance of death starts to make more sense, since it becomes clear that he sees it as his duty to perish in battle. And this duty, it seems, is something he's unwilling to let slip, as evidenced by the frequency with which he repeats the poem's refrain.

To that end, the speaker seems somewhat proud of his willingness to die in combat. This is accentuated by his use of [alliteration](#) (and, in particular, [sibilance](#)) in line 12, as he repeats the /s/ sound three times in quick succession:

On some scarred slope of battered hill

This hissing sound is oddly satisfying, as if the speaker is proud of his commitment to die for a cause. What's more, line 12 also features the [consonant](#) /r/ sound in the words "scarred" and

"battered," a sound that carries over into the next two lines:

When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear

Of course, it's worth mentioning that there's a subtle difference between the /r/ sound in words like "scarred" and the /r/ sound in words like "Spring." However, the overall consonance of this section is still quite prominent, and both kinds of /r/ sounds ultimately create a sound that is reminiscent of something slowly rolling by.

This transitional sound aligns with the subject, as the speaker once again mentions springtime, calling attention to the rotation of the seasons. Again, a notable moment of juxtaposition arises between the speaker's mention of a "scarred" battlefield and the pleasant return of "meadow-flowers." Indeed, the speaker paints a vivid picture of himself dying on a chaotic landscape that is both war-torn *and* surrounded by beautiful flowers. As a result, readers see that the speaker is very much aware that life has continued to progress even in wartime and, more importantly, that his "rendezvous" with death won't stop the passage of time; life, it seems, will unfold without him. And by acknowledging this fact, the speaker can feel proud and valorous about the sacrifice he will soon make.

LINES 15-19

*God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear ...*

Lines 15 through 19 develop the idea that a small part of the speaker isn't ready to fully embrace death. This notion has already surfaced in line 10, when the speaker says, "It may be I shall pass [Death] still," ultimately hinting at the fact that he would welcome the opportunity to avoid dying. Then, in this section, he admits that it would be preferable to be "pillowed in silk and scented down," meaning that he would rather be snuggled up in bed than out on the battlefield.

The speaker extends this fantasy of lying in bed, imagining himself nestled in down (feathered) comforters and sleeping next to a lover whose heart beats right next to his own. He also envisions himself waking up and whispering sweet nothings to this lover. The pleasure inherent to this scene is highlighted by the use of [sibilance](#), which repeats throughout the lines, especially if readers count the /z/, /th/, /f/, and /sh/ sounds along with the standard sibilant /s/ sound:

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,

Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear ...

In combination with the [consonant](#) /l/ sound that appears in words like "Pillowed," "silk," "Love," and "blissful," this sibilance builds a satisfying and soothing sound that reflects the scene's relaxing setting.

All in all, this fantasy creates yet another instance of [juxtaposition](#) in the poem, since this idyllic scene contrasts so starkly with the image of dying on a "scarred" battlefield or even—for that matter—following a [personified](#) version of death into a "dark land." As a result, readers see that the speaker *does* have reservations about dying an untimely death, as made evident by his (very understandable) desire to stay away from battle and live a happy, unbothered life.

In keeping with this dynamic, the [meter](#) of lines 15 and 16 creates a sense of longing for a different reality, one in which the speaker *isn't* about to face his death on the battlefield. The lines scan like this:

God knows | 'twere **bet-** | ter to | be **deep**
Pillowed | in silk | and **scent-** | ed **down**

"I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is written in [iambic tetrameter](#), meaning that the majority of the lines contain four [metrical feet](#), each of which are iambs, or an unstressed syllable followed by a **stressed** syllable (da-DUM). At this moment, though, the speaker strays from this iambic rhythm by using a [spondee](#) (stressed-stressed) in the first foot of line 15: "God knows." This calls attention to this [colloquial](#) phrase ("God knows"), which is most often used to express or emphasize the truth of a given statement.

In turn, the speaker reveals just how much he would rather lie in bed with a lover than march toward death on the battlefield. As if to further underline this point, the speaker uses a [trochee](#) (stressed-unstressed) instead of an iamb in the first foot of line 16, drawing attention to the word "Pillowed" and, in doing so, inviting readers to envision the same luxurious alternate reality that he has in mind in this moment.

However, the way that the speaker [end-stops](#) line 19 with an [ellipsis](#) suggests that this is only a fleeting fantasy, not one that he'll actually pursue. Indeed, the ellipsis after the word "dear" creates a unique kind of pause at the end of the line, effectively making it sound like the speaker's decadent vision of lying in bed has trailed off. Consequently, these thoughts exist as nothing more than a daydream that will seemingly never bring itself to bear on the speaker's reality.

LINES 20-24

*But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,*

*And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.*

Having let his fantasy about avoiding death trail off, the speaker once more reminds himself in line 20 that he will soon die. The word "but" at the beginning of this line is especially important, since it spotlights the speaker's attempt to remind himself of his "rendezvous" (meeting) with death, clearly not wanting to lose himself in unrealistic fantasies about how he could lead a happy life if only he decided to actively evade dying. Consequently, readers will sense that the speaker feels as if it is his duty to meet death on the battlefield, since he's apparently so unwilling to even fantasize about avoiding this fate.

It is out of this sense of duty that the speaker stops imagining a pleasant scene and instead envisions the rather troubling act of dying at midnight in "some flaming town." The [consonance](#) in lines 20 and 21 is worth noting, since the [repetition](#) of the blunt /d/ sound helps underscore the [juxtaposition](#) between the soft, easy fantasy about lying in bed and the harsh, unsettling prospect of dying in the chaos of war:

But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town

This /d/ sound is firm and definitive, underscoring the idea that the speaker won't be able to avoid his fate; in the same way that the /d/ sound is strong and indisputably present in these lines, the speaker's imminent death comes to seem inevitable.

Furthermore, the speaker once again imagines himself dying in springtime. Although he can only speculate about the specific circumstances of his death (saying that it will happen in "some" town because he can't say for sure exactly where), he's certain that it will happen in the spring. As a result, the juxtaposition between his own death and the rebirth that springtime represents once more comes to the forefront of the poem.

Then, in the final two lines, it becomes clear how the speaker has managed to accept the idea of dying. Indeed, line 23 clarifies that he has "pledged" to die the death he has been discussing throughout the poem. In other words, the speaker has actively committed to the idea of sacrificing his own life on the battlefield, giving his "word" that he will honor this commitment. In turn, readers see that he not only sees his own death as inevitable, but also sees it as a duty of sorts, one to which he has devoted himself and therefore must uphold. This, it seems, is why he won't let himself spend too much time fantasizing about avoiding death, since to do this would be to undermine the "pledge" he has made, thereby failing to fulfill his soldierly duty.

This dynamic is emphasized by the [end rhyme](#) that ties the final two lines together. When the speaker rhymes the word "true" with the word "rendezvous," he lends the poem's last two lines a sense of cohesion. Rather than wavering back and forth about his fate or fantasizing about the pleasant life he could lead if he

tried to avoid death, the speaker invests himself in his "pledged word" and, in turn, in the "rendezvous" he has with death, swearing that he will stay true to his willingness to die in battle. Consequently, the poem concludes on a note of resolve that reflects the speaker's overall attitude toward mortality, duty, and sacrifice.



SYMBOLS

SPRING

Because spring is when the natural world traditionally begins to blossom again after winter, it represents vibrancy and rebirth. This is important in the context of the poem because it starkly contrasts the fact that speaker expects his own life to come to an end very soon. In this sense, that the speaker imagines himself dying during the resurgence of spring underscores the fact that the world will continue along as normal even after he's gone. In turn, springtime itself comes to [symbolize](#) not only life and vitality, but also the unstoppable passage of time, which will remain unaffected by the speaker's death.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "When Spring comes back with rustling shade / And apple-blossoms fill the air—"
- **Line 6:** "When Spring brings back blue days and fair."
- **Lines 13-14:** "When Spring comes round again this year / And the first meadow-flowers appear."
- **Line 22:** "When Spring trips north again this year,"



POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) does not appear all that often in "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," but when it does, it significantly enhances the sound of a given line. This is because the alliteration that the speaker uses is usually pretty overt, as is the case in line 6 when the /b/ sound repeats three times in quick succession:

When Spring brings back blue days and fair

This creates a rounded, somewhat buoyant sound that is very musical, giving the entire line a pleasing effect that ultimately aligns with the [image](#) of beautiful spring days. In this way, alliteration helps the speaker accentuate the [juxtaposition](#) that exists in the poem between the thought of death and the kind of joyous rebirth typically associated with the season of spring.

In other moments, the speaker's use of alliteration dovetails with [sibilance](#), like when he delivers the phrase "On some

scarred slope" in line 12. Similarly, the speaker also employs an alliterative /s/ sound in line 16: "Pillowed in silk and scented down." This kind of sibilant alliteration creates a soft hissing sound that perfectly captures the soothing fantasy of lying in bed surrounded by pillows. In turn, alliteration helps the speaker frame these thoughts as idyllic and enviable in comparison to the harsh realities of dying on the battlefield.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "brings," "back," "blue"
- **Line 8:** "lead," "land"
- **Line 9:** "close," "quench"
- **Line 12:** "some," "scarred," "slope"
- **Line 13:** "Spring"
- **Line 14:** "first," "flowers"
- **Line 16:** "silk," "scented"
- **Line 18:** "Pulse," "pulse," "breath," "breath"

ALLUSION

The speaker [alludes](#) several times throughout the poem to the fact that his upcoming death will take place on a battlefield. Although he never specifically states that he is a soldier who expects to die in combat, his allusions to war invite readers to more closely consider the circumstances of his impending demise.

The first allusive moment appears in the poem's second line, when the speaker suggests that his "rendezvous" (or meeting) with death will take place "at some disputed barricade." At first, this might seem like little more than an abstract way of talking about death. After all, it would make sense to use the word "barricade" to refer to some kind of barrier or division between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Indeed, it's even true that the "barricade" between life and death is "disputed" or uncertain, at least insofar as nobody can say for sure what it is like to die.

These interpretations are analytically sound, but the phrase "disputed barricade" isn't simply a description of the division between life and death. It is also an allusion to the actual setting in which the speaker expects to die. To that end, the "barricade" in question is an actual physical point on the front lines of a battlefield where two sides are engaged in a violent "dispute." Under this interpretation, it becomes clear that the speaker envisions a moment of intense combat, and this grounds his otherwise abstract ideas about death, ultimately clarifying the wartime circumstances of the poem without blatantly stating that the speaker is a soldier involved in a bloody conflict.

In keeping with this, the speaker alludes yet again to the battlefield in line 12, this time imagining that he will die "on some scarred slope of battered hill." The word "scarred" in this line is especially significant, since it evokes the kind of damaged landscape that one might associate with intense battle. The

word "battered" further accentuates this dynamic, building upon the image of a hillside that has been decimated by battle.

Similarly, the speaker imagines in the third stanza dying "at midnight in some flaming town." This is yet another allusion to the fact that he expects to die in battle, though it is the least subtle allusion in the entire poem. After all, the notion of dying in the middle of the night in a random town that has been set ablaze seems specifically tied to wartime activity, since very few people would expect to die this way if they weren't already traveling through unknown villages under hostile circumstances.

The fact that the speaker only ever alludes to war is important because it allows the poem to be read in multiple ways. Of course, "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is a war poem that details the thoughts of a soldier who wants to embrace the likelihood of dying in battle, but it can also be interpreted more simply as a poem about mortality *in general*. After all, everyone is destined to die at some point, and the speaker's musings are therefore applicable not just to the life of a soldier, but to the human condition, too. By using allusion, then, the speaker manages to gesture toward the circumstances surrounding his own death without alienating readers who are unfamiliar with what it's like to be a soldier during wartime.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "At some disputed barricade,"
- **Line 12:** "On some scarred slope of battered hill,"
- **Line 21:** "At midnight in some flaming town,"

CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) appears throughout "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," adding to the poem's musicality. This is evident in the first two lines, as the /d/ sound repeats four times:

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,

The [repetition](#) of this /d/ sound creates a decisive effect that matches the speaker's confidence that he will soon die on the battlefield. Indeed, this strong, prominent syllable enhances the poem's overall sonic quality while infusing it with a blunt sound that is difficult to ignore. In this way, it mirrors the speaker's inability to deny that death is approaching. And because the phrase "I have a rendezvous with death" repeats as a [refrain](#) several times, this consonant /d/ echoes throughout the entire poem.

In other moments, the consonance in "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is interwoven with itself. This is the case in lines 15 and 16, in which the /n/ sound briefly interrupts the repetition of the /l/ sound:

Pillowed in silk and scented down
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep

This patterning of the /l/ sound and the /n/ sound once again helps sculpt the overall musicality of the poem, shaping it in a way that sounds pleasant but also forceful—a dynamic that aligns with the speaker's defining characteristic, which is that he speaks pleasantly or even proudly about the harsh but unavoidable reality of death. In this sense, consonance highlights the speaker's relatively unbothered approach to mortality, which doesn't seem to trouble him as much as one might expect it to.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “rendezvous,” “Death”
- **Line 2:** “disputed,” “barricade”
- **Line 3:** “Spring,” “rustling,” “shade”
- **Line 4:** “apple,” “blossoms,” “fill”
- **Line 5:** “rendezvous,” “Death”
- **Line 6:** “Spring,” “brings,” “back,” “blue,” “days”
- **Line 7:** “hand”
- **Line 8:** “And,” “lead,” “dark,” “land”
- **Line 9:** “close,” “eyes,” “quench”
- **Line 10:** “shall,” “pass,” “still”
- **Line 11:** “rendezvous,” “Death”
- **Line 12:** “some scarred slope”
- **Line 13:** “Spring”
- **Line 14:** “first,” “flowers,” “appear”
- **Line 15:** “twere,” “better,” “to,” “be,” “deep”
- **Line 16:** “Pillowed,” “in,” “silk,” “and,” “scented,” “down”
- **Line 17:** “Love,” “blissful,” “sleep”
- **Line 18:** “Pulse,” “pulse,” “breath,” “breath”
- **Line 19:** “dear”
- **Line 20:** “rendezvous,” “Death”
- **Line 21:** “midnight,” “some,” “flaming,” “town”
- **Line 22:** “When,” “Spring,” “trips,” “north,” “again,” “year”
- **Line 23:** “pledged”
- **Line 24:** “shall,” “fail”

SIBILANCE

The [sibilant](#) /s/ sound appears somewhat frequently in “I Have a Rendezvous with Death.” Because sibilance creates a soft sound often associated with the act of whispering, it has a unique effect on the poem, ultimately communicating the speaker's ease. Indeed, although the speaker focuses on death—a traditionally frightening and gloomy topic—his attitude is relaxed and comfortable, and this is reinforced by the comforting hissing sound created by his use of sibilance.

This sibilance is recognizable in the very first stanza:

At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade

And apple-blossoms fill the air

These three lines establish the prevalent /s/ sound that works its way through many other sections of the poem. To that end, nowhere is this sound more prominent than in line 12, when the speaker imagines meeting death on “some scarred slope,” a phrase that is incredibly sibilant. Once again, this creates a pleasing, musical sound even though the speaker is focused on the rather dismal thought of dying on a battle-worn hillside.

It's also worth noting that the poem is much more sibilant than it might seem at first. This, at least, is the case if readers choose to count the /sh/, /z/, /th/, and /f/ sounds as sibilant, which many people do. According to this perspective, moments like lines 18 and 19 are remarkably sibilant even though they don't include very many true /s/ sounds:

Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear ...

In these lines, the /th/, /sh/, and /z/ sounds join the /s/ sound to create a soft, lulling effect that aligns with the subject. After all, the speaker imagines lying in bed next to a lover, creating a fantasy that is calm and comforting in the same way that these sibilant sounds are soothing on an auditory level. In turn, this use of sibilance enables readers to more thoroughly inhabit the speaker's thoughts and perspective.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “some,” “disputed”
- **Line 3:** “Spring,” “rustling”
- **Line 4:** “blossoms”
- **Line 6:** “Spring,” “brings”
- **Line 10:** “pass,” “still”
- **Line 12:** “some,” “scarred,” “slope”
- **Line 13:** “Spring,” “this”
- **Line 14:** “first”
- **Line 16:** “silk,” “scented”
- **Line 17:** “blissful,” “sleep”
- **Line 18:** “Pulse,” “pulse”
- **Line 21:** “some”
- **Line 22:** “Spring,” “trips,” “this”

END-STOPPED LINE

The majority of the poem's lines are [end-stopped](#). In fact, this is even the case for some lines that don't end in punctuation, which is why it's important to pay attention to the speaker's syntax and rhythmic flow when deciding if a line is end-stopped or [enjambéd](#). On the whole, the fact that most of the lines are end-stopped reflects the speaker's uncomplicated acceptance of death, illustrating his resolve to do what needs to be done and his willingness to consider his own demise in a straightforward, levelheaded way.

The poem's first obvious end-stopped line is line 4, when the speaker abruptly stops thinking about apple blossoms, cutting himself off with an em-dash so that he can transition in line 5 to reiterate that he has a "rendezvous" with death. Similarly, line 6 is end-stopped in a very prominent way, as the speaker stops talking about spring bringing back "blue days and fair." By coming to a full stop at the end of this line, he wraps up the poem's first stanza with a confident, terse tone that aligns with his unsentimental attitude toward his imminent death.

Having said that, though, there are some instances in the poem in which it's a bit harder to determine whether a line is end-stopped. For instance, some readers might argue that the line "I have a rendezvous with Death" (which appears multiple times) is actually end-stopped, despite the fact that there isn't any kind of punctuation to suggest this. Because the line "I have a rendezvous with Death" is the poem's [refrain](#), one might argue that it stands on its own, jumping out of the poem in a way that isolates it from the lines that follow it—even if those lines are directly linked to the idea of the speaker having a meeting with death.

This, then, is why it's tricky to say whether the refrain is end-stopped: it can exist on its own, but it also seems connected to the lines that come after it. Given the speaker's overall tone and calm attitude toward death, though, it makes the most sense to see this line as end-stopped, since the simplicity of an end-stopped line matches the speaker's uncomplicated outlook on death.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "barricade,"
- **Line 4:** "air—"
- **Line 6:** "fair."
- **Line 9:** "breath—"
- **Line 10:** "still."
- **Line 12:** "hill,"
- **Line 14:** "appear."
- **Line 16:** "down,"
- **Line 17:** "sleep,"
- **Line 18:** "breath,"
- **Line 19:** "dear ..."
- **Line 21:** "town,"
- **Line 22:** "year,"
- **Line 23:** "true,"
- **Line 24:** "rendezvous."

METAPHOR

The entire premise of "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is based on the metaphor that the speaker outlines in the title—namely, that dying will be like going to a prearranged meeting or appointment. Of course, the speaker doesn't *literally* have a "rendezvous" with death, or at least not in the normal sense of the word, which usually implies a coming together of

two or more people. After all, death is not a sentient being and, thus, cannot make such appointments. At the same time, though, this metaphor for dying is also rather straightforward, since it's undeniable that the speaker will indeed meet his death at some point.

On the whole, the metaphor the speaker presents about what it will be like to die hinges upon the fact that he has [personified](#) death itself, giving it agency and talking about it as if it is an individual who will lead him away from life. However, what's most important about this metaphor isn't necessarily what the speaker imagines dying will be like, but rather that he sees his own death as both an inevitability and an obligation of sorts.

To that end, framing his upcoming death as a "rendezvous" suggests not only that the speaker will soon die, but also that this is an appointment or arrangement he has agreed to uphold and must now go through with. This, it seems, is why the speaker says at the end of the poem that he has "pledged" to meet death and that he will not avoid (or "fail") this "rendezvous." In this regard, presenting his own death as a metaphorical meeting helps the speaker convey the fact that he has committed to dying on the battlefield.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Lines 7-9:** "It may be he shall take my hand / And lead me into his dark land / And close my eyes and quench my breath—"
- **Lines 10-11:** "It may be I shall pass him still. / I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 20:** "But I've a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 24:** "I shall not fail that rendezvous."

JUXTAPOSITION

[Juxtaposition](#) is central to the poem because the speaker frequently imagines scenarios that stand in stark contrast to one another. This is noticeable as early as the third line, when the speaker imagines his upcoming death taking place at a "disputed barricade" and then immediately adds this will happen during springtime and that the smell of "apple-blossoms" will be in the air. Because the phrase "disputed barricade" evokes an image of a chaotic and violent battlefield, it's rather surprising that the speaker goes on to suggest that the battlefield will be surrounded by the beauty of spring, since most people wouldn't associate violence and death with the joyous blossoming of spring.

This juxtaposition is important for two reasons: it suggests that the speaker isn't particularly bothered by the idea of dying, and it also encourages readers to consider the fact that life will continue on without the speaker. Indeed, although the speaker's life will soon come to an end, the world at large will continue to rotate through the seasons.

This is a dynamic that surfaces multiple times in the poem. For instance, it occurs in the second stanza when the speaker suggests that he will die on a "scarred slope of battered hill" and then says once again that this will happen during spring, this time adding that the season's first flowers will begin to sprout up just as he himself is dying.

But death and springtime aren't the only things that the speaker juxtaposes in the poem. He also presents a fantasy of a happy, unbothered life at the beginning of the third stanza, crafting an idyllic image of lying in bed next to a lover that stands in stark contrast to the notion that he will soon die in battle. However, this fantasy trails off at the end of line 19 with an ellipsis, and then the speaker's reality comes crashing back, as he reasserts that he has a "rendezvous with Death."

The juxtaposition between the speaker's momentary fantasy of leading an unbothered life and his acceptance of death ultimately suggests that he *does* have certain reservations about his choice to sacrifice his life in battle. After all, why else would he daydream about lying in bed and leading a comparatively safe life? However, the fact that he forces himself to return to his original thoughts about death indicates just how committed he is to giving his life on the battlefield. In turn, the juxtaposition that exists in the final stanza highlights the fact that he is well aware of the life he's missing out on by willingly marching toward death.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-6
- Lines 11-14
- Lines 15-24

REPETITION

The poem is structured around the [repetition](#) of the central [refrain](#), which is also the title of the poem: "I have a rendezvous with death." This refrain repeats four times, even appearing twice in the six lines that make up the first stanza.

The repetition of this phrase has a clear and straightforward effect, demonstrating the extent to which the speaker is unwilling to let himself forget that he will soon die. Moreover, though, the frequency with which this refrain repeats suggests that the speaker is also trying to remind himself that death is near. This, in turn, aligns with the speaker's eventual mention of the "pledged word" he made to meet death on the battlefield, implying that one of the reasons he keeps saying that he has a "rendezvous" with death is that he wants to remind himself that he has committed himself to this fate.

What's more, the speaker also goes on to mention springtime whenever he repeats the refrain. As a result, the phrase "When Spring" crops up four times throughout the poem, though the end of this sentence changes every time. Still, though, that the speaker always thinks about spring whenever he thinks about

his own death is significant, since this illustrates the extent to which he understands that the world—and the seasons in particular—will go on like normal even when his own life draws to a close. Accordingly, the speaker's frequent return to springtime and all that it symbolizes (rebirth and the passage of time) sheds light on the fact that, although he has accepted the idea of dying, he is very much aware that he will miss out on life when he dies.

It's also worth pointing that there are smaller moments of repetition throughout the poem, like when the speaker uses [polysyndeton](#) in lines 7 through 9, repeating the word "and" to create a sequential, step-by-step feeling as the speaker imagines descending into the "dark land" of death. Additionally, the speaker uses [diacope](#) in line 18, repeating the word "pulse" and the word "breath" to emphasize how nice it would be for the speaker to lie so close to a lover in bed that their heartbeats and breathing nearly became one.

Finally, the repetition of "some" in each stanza, always in relation to where the speaker will have this meeting with death, emphasizes that the specifics of the meeting do not really matter all that much; it will be on *some* "barricade," *some* "hill," or in *some* "town." The speaker does not know exactly how, when, or where he will die then—only that he will.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 2:** "some"
- **Line 3:** "When Spring"
- **Line 5:** "I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 6:** "When Spring"
- **Lines 7-9:** "It may be he shall take my hand / And lead me into his dark land / And close my eyes and quench my breath—"
- **Line 11:** "I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 12:** "some"
- **Line 13:** "When Spring"
- **Line 18:** "Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,"
- **Line 20:** "I've a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 21:** "some"
- **Line 22:** "When Spring"

PERSONIFICATION

[Personification](#) is central to the poem because the entire [metaphor](#) that the speaker sets forth about having a "rendezvous" with death hinges upon the idea that death itself has some kind of personal agency. To that end, the speaker talks about death as if it were a sentient being expecting to meet the speaker on the battlefield. In reality, of course, death doesn't possess this kind of consciousness, but the speaker treats it as if it does.

This, in turn, accentuates all the uncertainty surrounding death,

increasing the sense of mystery regarding what will happen to the speaker when he finally dies. In an attempt to imagine what this will be like, the speaker draws upon his personification of death, suggesting that perhaps death will lead him by the hand into a "dark land," where death will then manually shut his eyes and stop his breath.

By casting death as an actual entity capable of leading him by the hand, the speaker imbues it with personal agency and even motive and intention, as if death is actively pursuing the speaker. This ultimately feeds into the speaker's fatalistic feeling that his death is inevitable and unavoidable, thereby fueling the central metaphor that dying will be like showing up at a meeting that the speaker has already agreed to attend.

In a somewhat less substantial way, the speaker also attributes a certain amount of agency to the season of spring by suggesting that it will actively "bring[] back" beautiful days or that it will "trip north," a phrase that makes it sound like spring is marching toward the speaker. Given that the speaker believes that he will meet death in the spring, this personification of the season is worth noting—in the same way that it comes to seem as if death is actively pursuing the speaker, the approach of springtime begins to feel somewhat ominous, effectively emphasizing the sense that the speaker's death is fast approaching. In this way, then, the speaker's use of personification helps readers understand what it must feel like for the speaker to sense the impending arrival of his own demise.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 3:** "When Spring comes back with rustling shade"
- **Lines 5-6:** "I have a rendezvous with Death / When Spring brings back blue days and fair."
- **Lines 7-11:** "It may be he shall take my hand / And lead me into his dark land / And close my eyes and quench my breath— / It may be I shall pass him still. / I have a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 13:** "When Spring comes round again this year"
- **Line 20:** "But I've a rendezvous with Death"
- **Line 22:** "When Spring trips north again this year,"

ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) is sprinkled throughout "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," often creating subtle rhymes within the lines. For example, an [internal rhyme](#) appears in line 7 between the words "be" and "he," since both make use of the /ee/ sound. Similarly, line 9 features another internal rhyme that depends upon the assonant repetition of the long /i/ sound: "And close my eyes[...]."

However, the speaker doesn't just use assonance to create rhymes. He also repeats certain assonant sounds to give them a

nuanced amount of emphasis. This is the case in lines 5 and 6, when the speaker repeats the /oo/ sound:

I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

The echo of the /oo/ sound calls attention to the word "blue." This gives the word a sense of significance that it might not otherwise have, subtly encouraging readers to dwell upon the image of beautifully clear blue skies. In turn, readers will perhaps feel the [juxtaposition](#) between the topic of death and the beauty of springtime more intensely.

In other sections of the poem, assonance simply adds to the musicality of the verse. For instance, the repetition of the short /i/ sound in words like "pillowed," "silk," and "blissful" in the third stanza helps the speaker convey the luxurious feeling of lying in bed next to a lover instead of thinking about death. In this way, assonance enables the speaker to not only place emphasis on certain important words, but also to give the poem a soothing, satisfying sound that aligns with the speaker's overall attitude, which is surprisingly lighthearted given the fact that he expects to die very soon on the battlefield.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Spring," "with," "rustling"
- **Line 5:** "rendezvous"
- **Line 6:** "Spring," "brings," "blue"
- **Line 7:** "be," "he," "hand"
- **Line 8:** "And," "lead," "land"
- **Line 9:** "my," "eyes," "quench," "breath"
- **Line 10:** "him," "still"
- **Line 13:** "year"
- **Line 16:** "Pillowed," "silk"
- **Line 17:** "blissful"
- **Line 18:** "Pulse," "pulse," "breath," "breath"
- **Line 21:** "midnight," "in," "flaming"
- **Line 22:** "Spring," "trips"
- **Line 23:** "I," "my," "true"
- **Line 24:** "rendezvous"



VOCABULARY

Rendezvous (Line 1, Line 5, Line 11, Line 20, Line 24) - A meeting that takes place at a predetermined location and time. In the context of the poem, the word has important connotations because it is often used in the military to refer to a place where soldiers are supposed to meet at a certain time. This aligns with the fact that the speaker of the poem is a soldier.

Disputed (Line 2) - For something to be "disputed" means that two people or groups are arguing over it. In this moment, the

speaker uses the word to refer to the kind of conflict that takes place on the frontlines of a battlefield. However, the word can also be used to describe something that is debatable or unknown, a meaning that aligns with the fact that nobody knows what it's like to meet death.

Barricade (Line 2) - A division or barrier used to keep something or someone from advancing. In this poem, the word "barricade" refers both to some kind of threshold on a battlefield and to the division between life and death.

Rustling (Line 3) - Lightly waving or shuffling as if in a gentle breeze.

Fair (Line 6) - Beautiful and pleasant.

Quench (Line 9) - To extinguish something or, alternatively, to satisfy one's thirst.

'Twere (Line 15) - Technically, "'twere" is a contraction of the words "it were." However, the speaker uses it to mean "it would be."

Pillowed (Line 16) - Padded or surrounded by soft materials in a comforting way.

Down (Line 16) - Soft feathers plucked from birds and used to stuff pillows, cushions, or comforters.

Pulse (Line 18) - Heartbeat.

Nigh (Line 18) - Next to or near.

Dear (Line 19) - Precious.

Trips (Line 22) - To "trip" in this context means to make a brief journey or excursion.

Pledged (Line 23) - Promised, vowed.

True (Line 23) - To be "true" to something is to remain faithful to it. What the speaker wants to express in this moment is that he intends to uphold his commitment to die in battle.

Fail (Line 24) - To "fail" in this case would be to fall short of something. More specifically, the speaker is saying that he will not miss or avoid his fateful encounter with death.

die, as he imagines several scenarios before reiterating that—no matter what happens—he will die when spring comes around. Then, in the final stanza, the speaker briefly fantasizes about avoiding his death on the battlefield and, instead of sacrificing his life, lying in bed with a lover. In the second half of the stanza, though, he shifts back to his original commitment to embracing death.

In turn, it becomes clear that, although each stanza functions differently, they all feature a reiteration of the speaker's initial idea: that he has an unavoidable "rendezvous" (or meeting) with death. Accordingly, the poem's structure gives the speaker space to explore new ideas in each stanza while also underlining the central idea about death's inevitability.

METER

The poem is written in [iambic tetrameter](#), a meter in which each line contains four iambs. An iamb is a [metrical foot](#) consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. This means that a line of iambic tetrameter features a da-DUM rhythm that repeats four times in a row. The first two lines of the poem are perfect examples of this:

I have | a ren- | dezvous | with Death
At some | disput- | ed bar- | ricade

On the whole, "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" adheres to this meter, especially considering the fact that nearly every single line is made up of eight syllables. Indeed, line 14 is the only one in the entire poem that has nine syllables, but even this slight deviation doesn't throw off the overall meter of the poem.

However, there are several notable moments in which the poem strays from the standard iambic rhythm. For instance, the first two lines of the third stanza use certain metrical substitutions that emphasize especially important words:

God knows | 'twere bet- | ter to | be deep
Pillowed | in silk | and scent- | ed down

In both of these lines, the speaker doesn't begin with an iamb (unstressed-stressed). Line 15 starts off with a [spondee](#), which is a metrical foot made up of two consecutive stressed syllables. This calls attention to the expression "God knows," ultimately suggesting that the speaker is very much aware of how preferable it would be to stay home safe from the war. Furthermore, the word "Pillowed" in line 16 is a [trochee](#), meaning that it contains a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. This divergence from the poem's overall iambic rhythm urges readers to pay extra close attention, underlining just how much the speaker would like to be in bed rather than headed toward death on the battlefield.

In keeping with this sentiment, line 18 features yet another



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"I Have a Rendezvous with Death" does not follow a conventional poetic structure. Each of its three [stanzas](#) are different lengths, with the first containing six lines, the second containing eight lines, and the third containing ten lines. In this way, the poem balloons out as it works its way toward the end.

Each stanza accomplishes something slightly different. The first sets forth the premise of the poem, which is that the speaker will soon die and that this will happen even as the world begins to blossom with the onset of spring. The second stanza focuses on the speaker's curiosity about what it will actually be like to

metrical substitution:

Pulse nigh | to pulse, || and breath | to breath

Again, the first foot of this line is a trochee instead of an iamb. This spotlights the word "pulse," which is also the stressed syllable in the line's second foot. This has an interesting effect, as readers will perhaps notice that the only stressed words in this entire line are "pulse" and "breath." In turn, the speaker is able to more vividly convey the fantasy of lying close enough to a lover to hear that person's heartbeat and exhalations. With this in mind, then, it becomes clear that the speaker's use of meter helps highlight moments that might not otherwise jump out at readers quite as prominently.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem's rhyme scheme is irregular. Although some lines contain [end rhymes](#), these rhymes do not establish a discernible pattern. Rather, the speaker uses them whenever they might enhance the sound and musicality of a given section. Bearing this in mind, it's worth pointing out that the poem's lack of a *predictable* rhyme scheme doesn't mean it doesn't still include quite a few rhymes. In fact, every line of the first stanza features a rhyme. If one were to map this stanza out, it would look like this:

ABBCAC

The rhyme that occurs between lines 1 and line 5 is called an [identical rhyme](#), since both lines end with the word "Death." Otherwise, the rhymes in this stanza are fairly straightforward. This, in turn, reflects the speaker's thoughtful, measured take on his inevitable death.

This, however, is not to say that the rest of the poem follows the rhyme scheme set forth in the first stanza. Indeed, the second stanza makes this quite clear, since its first two lines rhyme—something that isn't the case in the first stanza. Here is the full scheme of the second stanza:

AABCBCDD

And here is that of the third, which is especially unpredictable:

ABACDCEDFF

The rhyme between the words "true" and "rendezvous" are the only two consecutive lines in the entire stanza that rhyme with one another, so they sound especially linked, thereby emphasizing that the speaker will be "true" to his commitment to meet death on the battlefield. This neat and tidy [couplet](#) also helps to lend the poem a sense of closure.

Seeger served in World War I and lost his life in battle not long after writing this poem, many readers choose to view the speaker as Seeger himself. Under this interpretation, the poem gives readers a snapshot of Seeger's thoughts about death and his sense of soldierly duty. And even if readers choose not to view the speaker as Seeger, it is safe to assume that the speaker is a man, since the only soldiers on the battlefields of World War I were men. Whether or not the speaker is Seeger, then, what's clear is that "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is a poem that spotlights a young man's attempt to embrace the idea of dying a violent death instead of going on to live an unbothered, care-free life.



SETTING

"I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is considered a war poem, since it is about the speaker's certainty that he will soon die on the battlefield. The poem is most often associated with World War I, since it was published in 1917 (one year before the end of the war) and was composed by Alan Seeger, who served in WWI. More generally, though, the speaker also implies that the poem is set at the end of winter, since he imagines that his death will take place soon and that it will coincide with the onset of spring.

However, the actual circumstances of his death vary throughout the poem, going from "some disputed barricade" to a "scarred slope of battered hill" to "some flaming town." These details change because the speaker isn't exactly sure where he'll die, since he's only *imagining* his death. In this way, the poem presents several hypothetical settings and even takes readers into the mysteriously "dark land" of death itself, all while remaining fixed in the broader context of life during wartime.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"I Have a Rendezvous with Death" belongs to a category of early 20th-century poetry devoted to detailing the ins and outs of life during World War I. In particular, the proud and dutiful tone of this poem aligns with the patriotic, celebratory attitude expressed in Rupert Brooke's "[The Soldier](#)," which valorizes military service in World War I.

Of course, not all poems about World War I are quite so optimistic. Poets like Wilfred Owen, for instance, focused in their writing on the suffering and sorrow of combat. Owen's "[Dulce et Decorum Est](#)" is especially brutal in its depiction of life in the trenches of World War I, as is Siegfried Sassoon's poem "[Attack](#)." In a way, then, these poems represent a completely different view of the very same war that Alan Seeger so eagerly celebrates in "I Have a Rendezvous with



SPEAKER

The speaker of "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is a soldier who believes he will soon die on the battlefield. Because Alan

Death."

The sense of soldierly pride expressed in "Rendezvous" aligns with Seeger's overall outlook on military service during World War I. Seeger was living in Paris when the war began, and didn't hesitate to volunteer for the French military. He believed that this was the right thing to do and that his home country—the United States—wasn't doing enough to involve itself in the war effort. He expressed these sentiments in the essays and poems he wrote while serving in the military, simultaneously celebrating his fellow soldiers who had died and encouraging others (and particularly his fellow Americans) to join the fight.

Throughout this time, his poetic style reflected his admiration for the Romantic poets and their descriptions of beauty in nature. As time passed, though, he wrote more and more about death, eventually writing "I Have a Rendezvous with Death." By the time the poem was published in 1917, Seeger had already died, losing his life on July 4, 1916, during the Battle of the Somme.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War I began in 1914, when Alan Seeger was living as a young man in Paris. As previously mentioned, he quickly volunteered to fight for the French military, believing that it was the right thing to do because he ardently supported the [Triple Entente](#), which was the name of the alliance formed between France, Britain, and Russia to fight Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary.

It's worth noting that Seeger was an American but that the United States didn't get involved in the war until 1917, when the country deployed two million soldiers to fight on behalf of the Triple Entente. As an American, Seeger was critical of his country's hesitation to join the war effort, seeing it as the moral thing to do. For this reason, he was outspoken about his disappointment in the United States, specifically calling attention to this dynamic in his written work.

"I Have a Rendezvous with Death" proved prophetic: Seeger died in battle, specifically, in the infamous [Battle of the Somme](#), which took place on the banks of the River Somme in France from July 1st to November 18th, 1916. In this battle, British and French allies fought tirelessly to gain ground against the German Empire, but the two sides remained all but deadlocked for many months. In the end, the battle claimed a staggering amount of lives, and the British and French forces only gained about six miles of territory. Although this was considered a respectable amount of ground to gain, whether the Battle of

the Somme was all that effective in the Germans' overall defeat in World War I is still up for debate. Needless to say, Seeger did not live to see the results of this excruciatingly long battle, since he died three days into the fighting.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [World War I](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history) — A helpful breakdown of the major causes, players, and outcomes of WWI. (<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history>)
- [Family History](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1123591) — In this radio clip, Pete Seeger discusses his family history and talks about his uncle Alan Seeger's life before and during the war. (<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1123591>)
- [Pete Seeger Reads The Poem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWQrUPO3Hig) — Check out this recording of Alan Seeger's nephew, the folk musician Pete Seeger, reading the poem. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWQrUPO3Hig>)
- [More About the Author](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alan-seeger) — Learn more about Alan Seeger in this brief overview of his life and work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alan-seeger>)
- [The Battle of the Somme](https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-happened-during-the-battle-of-the-somme) — If you're interested in finding out more about the battle that claimed Alan Seeger's life, take a look at this collection of information and pictures explaining what happened at the infamous Battle of the Somme. (<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-happened-during-the-battle-of-the-somme>)



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