Sonnet 71: No longer mourn for me when I am

POEM TEXT

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O, if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay,
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

SUMMARY

Stop grieving my death as soon as the gloomy sound of the church bell stops ringing to announce my departure from this lowly world, which is full of disgusting worms. No, if you read this, don't think of me, since I love you so much that I would rather be forgotten than cause you any sadness in my absence. Oh, if, hypothetically speaking, you read this poem when I am, for instance, surrounded by dirt, don't even utter my name. Instead, let your love for me perish like I have perished. Otherwise, the living world will notice your sorrow and will taunt you with the reminder that I'm gone.

THEMES

LOVE AND MOVING ON

In "Sonnet 71," the speaker emphasizes the importance of moving on from grief and loss. More specifically, the speaker knows that clinging to romantic attachments in the aftermath of a lover's death can be quite painful. For this reason, the speaker instructs the lover—to whom the poem is addressed—to move on with life after the speaker dies, urging this person to spend only a small amount of time in mourning. By saying this, the speaker prioritizes the lover's happiness over all else, placing the lover's future contentment before any desire the speaker might otherwise have to be honored in memory. In turn, this sentiment becomes the ultimate romantic gesture, one that demonstrates the speaker's selflessness and the speaker's understanding that the lover will have to move on in order to lead a fulfilling a life.

The poem is focused on the lover's future mourning process, not on the speaker's own emotions. Rather than succumbing to the undoubtedly troubling prospect of dying, the speaker concentrates solely on how the lover will handle this loss. The poem takes on an almost sacrificial tone as the speaker insists that it would be better for the lover to stop thinking about the speaker altogether if such thoughts cause pain.

Indeed, the speaker says, "let your love even with my life decay," actively telling the lover to let all of their romance deteriorate in the interest of moving on. This, it seems, is how much the speaker cares about the lover—so much that the idea of completely fading from memory after death is tolerable as long as it makes the lover's life easier.

On the whole, then, the speaker emerges as someone who only wants the best for a dear loved one, deeply aware of the fact that dwelling on past romance can make it difficult for a person to lead a happy life. In turn, "Sonnet 71" demonstrates not only that moving on after loss is hard but necessary, but also that putting a romantic partner's happiness above all else is sometimes the most profound and enduring expression of love.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE

"Sonnet 71" mainly focuses on love, but it is also a levelheaded meditation on the inevitability of death. Rather than resenting mortality, the speaker accepts that there's no way to avoid death. In fact, the speaker is fairly unemotional when it comes to the prospect of leaving behind the world of the living. This is because the speaker knows life is defined by the steady passage of time and that to be alive is to be destined for death and "decay." In the same way that it would be futile for the young lover to spend too much time mourning the speaker's death, then, it would be futile for the speaker to lament death's approach. Consequently, the speaker views death as little more than a fact of life that, though sad, should not be dwelled upon or obsessed over.

The speaker has not romanticized life, which is one of the reasons the speaker is capable of adopting such an unsentimental attitude toward leaving the world behind. This is made especially evident in line 5, when the speaker describes the living world as "vile" and suggests that dying will free the

speaker from the "vilest worms" that populate the earth. This repetition of the word "vile"—meaning nasty and unpleasant—twice within the span of a single line emphasizes the extent to which the speaker has avoided idealizing what it's like to be alive. Indeed, the speaker sees the living world as dirty and unglamorous, and this ultimately makes it easier to embrace the idea of dying.

However, the speaker's thoughts about worms don't suggest a sense of disdain toward life. Rather, these thoughts align with the later mention of "decay" and the overall image of the speaker's body decomposing in the earth. In this regard, the speaker recognizes that nothing lasts and that this kind of gradual deterioration is natural and unavoidable. As such, it becomes clear why the speaker is so unperturbed by the prospect of dying—after all, the speaker has not only refused to romanticize life, but has accepted that life itself is characterized by decline and impermanence. With this in mind, the speaker is able to face death unsentimentally and urges the lover to do the same, knowing that feeling sad about the fleeting nature of life is useless.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled

The opening lines of the poem make use of apostrophe, as the speaker urges an unidentified person to refrain from grieving the speaker's own death for longer than it takes for the funeral bell to stop ringing. Consequently, the first three lines of this sonnet establish that the speaker is unsentimental when it comes to the prospect of dying, preferring to focus on the poem's anonymous addressee (that is, the speaker's beloved) and how this person will cope with the loss. In turn, the speaker emerges as a selfless, thoughtful person.

At the same time, the speaker subtly acknowledges that the mourning process can be quite sad. This is made evident by the language the speaker uses in line 2, describing the funeral bell as "surly" and "sullen." The word "surly" is an adjective that refers to something that is unpleasant or ill-tempered, and the word "sullen" is generally used to describe something depressing and morose. Accordingly, it's clear that the speaker recognizes that death is usually accompanied by sadness—in fact, it is precisely for this reason that speaker has written this poem, ultimately hoping to relieve the sorrow the lover will surely feel in the aftermath of the speaker's passing.

This, however, doesn't change the speaker's apparently unemotional acceptance of the fact that life leads to death. Indeed, the matter-of-fact tone in these lines suggests that the speaker has made peace with the idea of leaving behind the world of the living, knowing that all souls will someday "fle[e]" from physical existence.

Each of these three lines is also characterized by alliteration and sibilance. To that end, the first line features a brief instance of alliteration with the repetition of the /m/ sound ("mourn for me"), whereas the second line repeats the /s/ sound ("surly sullen"), and the third line repeats the /w/ sound ("warning to the world"). On the whole, this creates a measured but musical sound that echoes the sound of the funeral bell tolling away—an effect that is further emphasized by consonance, as the /l/ sound works through the second and third lines:

> Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
> Give warning to the world that I am fled

In keeping with this musical quality, the poem's first three lines are also written in perfect iambic pentameter, meaning that they each contain five metrical meet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM). In combination with the alliteration, sibilance, and consonance, this unbroken rhythm creates a pleasing sound that is somewhat surprising, considering that the speaker is talking about death. And this, in turn, shows readers just how undaunted the speaker is by the prospect of dying.

LINE 4

From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell;

Line 4 completes the phrase that originally began in line 1, clarifying that after dying the speaker will leave the world of the living. More importantly, though, the specific language in line 4 suggests that the speaker doesn't hold life—or, for that matter, the world itself—in very high esteem. After all, the speaker uses diacope to repeat the word "vile" twice within just one line.

A word used to describe something disgusting or unpleasant, this repetition of "vile" in reference to the world illustrates that the speaker certainly hasn't romanticized what it's like to be alive. On the contrary, the speaker feels as if the world is lowly and full of worms.

It's also worth noting that line 4 is the final line of the sonnet's opening quatrain. For this reason, it makes sense that it is end-stopped with a semi-colon, which separates it from the next quatrain's shift away from thoughts about the speaker's own death and toward a more specific consideration of how the lover will deal with this loss. As if to signal this shift, line 4 is also the first line in the poem to deviate from perfect iambic pentameter, since it isn't made up of five iambs, which are unstressed-stressed metrical feet (da-DUM). The line scans

like this:

> From this | vile world | with vil- | est worms | to dwell;

Although the line still has five stresses and five metrical feet (meaning that it is still in pentameter), the first foot is a pyrrhic instead of an iamb, which means that it has two unstressed syllables in a row ("From this"). In keeping with this deviation from the previously established pattern of iambic pentameter, the second foot is also a metrical substitution, since the words "vile world" come together to form a spondee, or a metrical foot with two consecutive stressed syllables ("vile world"). This, in turn, calls attention to the words "vile world," spotlighting the speaker's unemotional attitude toward the world at large and further illustrating the extent to which the speaker has refrained from romanticizing life.

LINES 5-6

> *Nay, if you read this line, remember not*
> *The hand that writ it;*

In these lines, the speaker focuses on how the lover will cope with loss when the speaker inevitably dies. The speaker has already urged the lover not to spend too much time in mourning—an idea the speaker now emphasizes by starting the sonnet's second quatrain with the word "Nay," which is followed by a caesura.

By beginning line 5 with the word "Nay" (which means "no") and then inserting a brief pause, the speaker underscores how important it is that the lover move on in the aftermath of the speaker's death. The caesura is especially important here because it forces a stress on "Nay," thereby inverting the line's first metrical foot to make it a trochee (stressed-unstressed) instead of an iamb (unstressed-stressed). In this way, the speaker tells the lover to actively forget their relationship, insisting that the lover shouldn't even think about the speaker while reading this very poem.

This section of the poem is a bit more rhythmically fragmented than the rest, since the speaker uses three caesuras within the space of two lines:

> Nay, || if you read this line, || remember not
> The hand that writ it; || [...]

This has a unique effect, one that suggests a certain hesitancy on behalf of the speaker. This makes perfect sense, considering that the speaker is telling the lover to move on from their relationship, which is undoubtedly a difficult thing to say!

At the same time, some readers might choose to interpret this stop-and-start rhythm as an indication that the speaker doesn't *actually* want the lover to move on. Indeed, some readers believe that the speaker's suggestion that the lover should forget about their relationship is actually intended to have the *opposite* effect. Under this interpretation, the speaker's disjointed rhythm in this moment could be seen as a sign of regret and hesitancy in the process of saying the opposite of what the speaker *really* means. And though there isn't quite enough evidence within the sonnet itself to fully support this theory, it is the case that the halting rhythm in lines 5 and 6 contrasts the otherwise smooth flow of the first quatrain, thereby hinting that the speaker might actually feel slightly more troubled by the thought of the lover forgetting their relationship than it might otherwise seem.

Despite the change in rhythm, it's worth noting that these lines maintain the musicality of the rest of the poem. The alliteration of the /r/ sound, for example, creates a pleasing sound that is consistent with the surrounding lines:

> Nay, if you read this line, remember not
> The hand that writ it;

By subtly working this musicality into these lines, the speaker counteracts the disruption of the poem's overall rhythmic flow. As a result, this section manages to sound pleasant and happy even though it's about the aftermath of the speaker's death.

LINES 6-8

> *for I love you so,*
> *That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,*
> *If thinking on me then should make you woe.*

After the caesura halfway through line 6, the speaker explains why the lover shouldn't even think of the speaker when reading this poem. Simply put, the speaker doesn't want to cause the lover any kind of pain. Because mourning the speaker's death would inevitably cause the lover pain, then, the speaker would rather be forgotten altogether.

This request to be forgotten by the lover ironically emerges as a grand romantic gesture, since it shows how willing the speaker is to prioritize the lover above all else. Indeed, the speaker has apparently made peace with the idea of fading into obscurity, as long as this means the lover will be able to lead a happy life. This, in turn, is somewhat ironic, since telling the lover to forget about their relationship is a very romantic deed that might—because of its selflessness and thoughtfulness—only make the relationship that much stronger before the speaker dies, thereby making it even more difficult for the lover to follow the speaker's advice and move on.

Whether the speaker is *aware* of this irony is up for debate, as some readers believe that the entire poem is actually an effort on the speaker's behalf to ensure that the lover *never* forgets their relationship. This interpretation, however, largely depends upon information and ideas drawn from other sonnets in Shakespeare's *Fair Youth* sequence. For the purposes of analyzing "Sonnet 71" on its own, then, it's best to take the speaker's words at face value. This, in turn, means that the

irony (of the fact that the speaker's words actually make it *harder* for the lover to move on) should be read as unintentional.

On another note, these lines feature a number of sibilant sounds, especially if readers count the /f/, /th/, and /sh/ sounds as sibilant. Along with the traditional sibilant /s/, these sounds create a soft, soothing, whisper-like quality:

> for I love you so,
> That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
> If thinking on me then should make you woe.

By working such soft sounds throughout this section of the poem, the speaker maintains the poem's musicality. In fact, it's almost as if the speaker is whispering these lines into the lover's ear, creating a soothing feeling that emphasizes the overall message, which is that the lover should feel free to move on and be happy in the aftermath of the speaker's death.

To go along with this pleasing sound, this section nicely concludes the sonnet's octave (first eight lines) by wrapping up the ABAB CDCD rhyme scheme that the first six lines set up. With this in mind, readers will most likely notice the satisfying effect that arises with the end of the octave, when the speaker rhymes the word "woe" with "so" (from line 6), thereby lending a nice sense of conclusion to the first section of the poem.

LINES 9-10

> *O, if (I say) you look upon this verse,*
> *When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,*

The speaker continues in lines 9 and 10 to urge the lover to move on in the aftermath of the speaker's own death. In many ways, the sonnet's third quatrain mainly reiterates what the speaker says in the second quatrain, since in both cases the speaker imagines the lover reading this poem while in mourning. This time, though, the slight sense of hesitancy that first appeared in the fragmented rhythm of lines 5 and 6 reappears, ultimately inviting readers to ask themselves if the speaker is truly as comfortable with the idea of dying as it seems.

This subtle feeling of hesitancy is created by the combination of the caesura after "O" and the parenthetical asides that the speaker includes. Whether these parenthetical phrases create actual caesuras themselves depends upon how readers hear the overall flow and pace of the poem. Either way, the speaker's insertion of the phrases "(I say)" and "(perhaps)" make the entire idea of death sound less immediate, as if the speaker is trying to soften or distract from the inevitability of this reality—a reality in which the speaker will be dead and surrounded by the earth's soil ("clay"). In this regard, these parenthetical phrases perhaps make it easier for the speaker to consider death, casting it as a hypothetical even though it's clear the speaker knows that death is, in truth, inescapable. The harsh alliteration of "compounded" and "clay," meanwhile, hammers home the reality of death.

The meter in these two lines is consistent with the iambic pentameter of the rest of the poem, meaning that each line contains five metrical feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (creating a da-DUM, da-DUM rhythm). The speaker maintains a sense of composure even while talking about death, thereby demonstrating an ability to take the limits of mortality in stride while still prioritizing the lover's emotions.

LINES 11-12

> *Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,*
> *But let your love even with my life decay,*

In these lines, the speaker once again urges the lover to stop thinking about their relationship in the aftermath of the speaker's death. More specifically, the speaker imagines a scenario in which the lover reads this poem after the speaker has already died. Even in this context, the speaker says, the lover shouldn't even utter the speaker's name.

Although the speaker simply wants to help the lover cope with loss, it's worth noting that forgetting about their relationship will be easier said than done. After all, it would be all but impossible to read a poem written by a deceased romantic partner and somehow manage to *not* think about that person! For this reason, the speaker's advice to the lover is ironic, since it urges the lover to not think about the speaker while also assuming that the lover will be reading the poem and, thus, thinking about the speaker. This irony is reinforced by the alliteration of line 12, which sonically connects the lover's "love" to the speaker's "life."

Setting this irony aside, though, what the speaker says in line 12 is important because it signals an interest in impermanence and "decay." Indeed, the speaker urges the lover to let their romance "decay" along with the speaker's own dead body. As a result, a sense of decomposition creeps into the poem, ultimately suggesting that nothing can last forever. This, in turn, sheds new light on the otherwise harsh attitude that the speaker displays toward the world in line 4, in which the speaker associates the world with "vilest worms." In combination with this concentration on "decay" and impermanence, the speaker's earlier remark about worms takes on a new dimension, effectively functioning not as a criticism of the living world but a simple acknowledgment that everything on earth—including romance—is subject to the kind of decomposition normally associated with worms.

LINES 13-14

> *Lest the wise world should look into your moan,*
> *And mock you with me after I am gone.*

The sonnet ends with a final couplet, which is a standard feature of Shakespearean sonnets. In fact, "Sonnet 71"

perfectly follows the structure of such sonnets, since it contains three quatrains followed by a concluding couplet, which features a turn in the thirteenth line. Whereas the rest of the poem has focused on assuring the lover that all will be okay in the aftermath of the speaker's death, the speaker suddenly transitions in the couplet to ominously suggest that a failure to move on from their relationship might cause pain and trouble for the lover. In this sense, then, the tone of the sonnet shifts from soothing reassurance to something a bit more cautionary and foreboding.

The notion that the world will "look into" the lover's "moan" essentially means that the surrounding environment will register the lover's sadness. This, however, is not necessarily a literal interpretation—indeed, it's not so much that the outside world will truly "mock" the lover's sadness, but rather that the lover will *feel* as if this is the case. In other words, if the lover doesn't forget about the speaker, it will seem like everything in the surrounding environment is a reminder of this loss.

In addition, it's worth mentioning that the speaker uses the word "wise" to describe the world—a description that stands in contrast to the phrase "vile world" that the speaker uses in line 4. This, in turn, suggests again that the speaker doesn't actually have any negative feelings about the world itself. Rather, the speaker is simply a pragmatic person, somebody who accepts not only that life is characterized by "decay" and impermanence, but also that refusing to move on from loss and heartache will significantly decrease a person's happiness. With this in mind, the speaker makes it clear that it is in the lover's best interest to refrain from thinking about this loss too much in the aftermath of the speaker's death, since doing so will only "mock" the lover and make it impossible to lead a happy life.

The meter in these final two lines is noteworthy, especially because the words "wise world" are both stressed:

> Lest the | wise world | should look | into | your moan,
> And mock | you with | me af- | -ter I | am gone.

Line 13 begins with a deviation from the standard rhythm of iambic pentameter, which is made up of five unstressed-stressed metrical feet that create a da-DUM da-DUM rhythm. Instead of beginning with an iamb, line 13 begins with a trochee ("Lest the"). The next foot, however, is a spondee, which is a foot made up of two consecutive stressed syllables ("wise world"). This only emphasizes the fact that the speaker has gone from calling the world "vile" to calling it "wise," a transition that clarifies that the speaker doesn't have a disdainful attitude toward the world, but rather accepts the realities of existence.

Furthermore, the poem's final couplet features alliteration, as the /w/ sound repeats ("wise world") along with the /l/ sound ("Lest," "look"). This, along with the slant rhyme between "moan" and "gone," continues the poem's pleasing sound, ultimately ending the sonnet with the same musical quality that defines the rest of the lines and—more importantly—proves just how comfortable the speaker is about considering mortality.

POETIC DEVICES

APOSTROPHE

The entire premise of "Sonnet 71" is centered around the use of apostrophe, since the speaker has composed this poem specifically for a lover so that said lover can read it while mourning the speaker's death. In keeping with this, the poem is directly addressed to the lover, whom the speaker has prioritized over all else.

This is quite common for love poems, which often make use of apostrophe by addressing themselves to an unidentified "you," as if these lovers are the only people who will read the lines. This, in turn, allows other readers (who *aren't* romantically involved with the speaker) to experience a sense of intimacy and connection with the speaker. In other words, the use of apostrophe draws readers into both the poem *and* the specific world of the speaker's romantic relationship with the lover in question. This dynamic is very much alive in "Sonnet 71," as the speaker writes the poem with only one person in mind: the lover.

But the speaker isn't simply interested in celebrating romance. Rather, the speaker has written this poem to help the lover cope with the grief that will inevitably arise in the aftermath of the speaker's own death. This makes the poem's use of apostrophe somewhat unique, as if the entire sonnet isn't just a meditation on love, but an important message meant to reach the lover from beyond the speaker's grave. Accordingly, apostrophe helps the speaker convey a meaningful sentiment that the lover will most likely need to hear in a moment of sadness—namely, that it's futile to spend too much time in mourning.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

ALLITERATION

The poem has a number of instances of alliteration that add to the poem's sense of musicality. Note the alliteration in the first and second lines, for example:

> No longer mourn for me when I am dead
> Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell

Both the repeated /m/ sound and the repeated /s/ sound also appear on stressed syllables, helping them ring out clearly to the reader and bolster the poem's meter.

Similarly, line 4 is very alliterative and this time calls attention to variations in the meter. Note how the /v/ and /w/ sounds again alliterate on stressed syllables:

> [...] vile world with vilest worms to dwell:

The words "vile world" actually creates a spondee, which is a metrical foot consisting of two stressed syllables in a row. This appearance of a spondee deviates from the poem's overall rhythm, which is otherwise made up of iambs, or metrical feet containing an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM). Overall, the alliteration combined with this tweak in the meter draws extra attention to the speaker's seeming disdain for the "vile word" and the "vilest worms" within it.

In terms of the poem's musical sound, it's also worth noting that there are several examples of sibilance. This is evident in line 2 when the speaker mentions the sound of the "surly sullen" funeral bell. However, there are other even more prominent moments of sibilance in the poem, especially if readers count the /sh/, /th/, and /f/ sounds as sibilant (which many people do). With this in mind, lines 7 and 8 are particularly sibilant:

> That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
> If thinking on me then should make you woe.

This sibilance creates a soft and soothing sound. Consequently, it almost feels as if the speaker is whispering into the lover's ear—an interpretation that makes sense, considering that "Sonnet 71" is supposed to comfort the lover in the aftermath of the speaker's death. In this way, the pleasing sound that both alliteration and sibilance create aligns with the speaker's general attitude, which is designed to put the lover at ease.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "mourn," "me"
- **Line 2:** "surly," "sullen"
- **Line 3:** "warning," "world"
- **Line 4:** "vile," "world," "vilest," "worms"
- **Line 5:** "read," "remember"
- **Line 6:** "writ," "so"
- **Line 7:** "sweet"
- **Line 8:** "me," "make"
- **Line 10:** "compounded," "clay"
- **Line 12:** "let," "love," "life"
- **Line 13:** "Lest," "wise," "world," "look," "moan"
- **Line 14:** "mock," "me"

ASSONANCE

Assonance is one of several devices that make "Sonnet 71" sound musical and cohesive. Although it isn't quite as prominent as the poem's use of alliteration and consonance, assonance has a subtle but still noticeable effect on the way certain lines sound. In particular, assonance appears in short, concentrated areas of the poem, giving certain words a nuanced feeling of emphasis. For example, the brief repetition of the short /i/ sound in line 6 is worth considering:

> The hand that writ it; for I love you so

The assonance here is very fleeting and subtle, but it still calls attention to the words "writ" and "it." As a result, the speaker underhandedly emphasizes the act of writing the poem, which is the exact thing the speaker supposedly wants the lover *not* to think about. In this way, the speaker's insistence that the lover refrain from thinking too much about their relationship or even this poem comes to seem somewhat ironic, since the speaker has just used assonance to draw attention to the process of writing this very sonnet, ultimately undermining the notion that the lover should completely forget about the speaker and the poem.

This use of assonance to call attention to important words is evident in other lines, like when the speaker repeats sounds in line 4 to spotlight the words "vile," "vilest," "world," and "worms." All four of these words are especially important, since they help communicate the speaker's attitude toward the world and, moreover, signal the poem's interest in what it means to leave behind the world of the living. In other words, the assonance that spotlights these words helps readers pick up on the speaker's refusal to romanticize life, effectively associating the world with lowly and disgusting creatures like "vile" "worms."

Similarly, the long /a/ sound repeats three times in lines 10 through 12 in the words "clay," "name," and "decay." All three of these words are thematically significant because they convey the speaker's focus on death and burial ("clay"), legacy and remembrance ("name"), and impermanence ("decay"). In this sense, then, it becomes clear that assonance not only adds to the poem's overall pleasing sound, but also makes sure that certain meaningful words exist as the focal points of the lines in which they exist.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "vile," "world," "vilest," "worms"
- **Line 6:** "writ," "it"
- **Line 7:** "thoughts," "forgot"
- **Line 8:** "woe"
- **Line 9:** "O"
- **Line 10:** "clay"
- **Line 11:** "name"
- **Line 12:** "decay"
- **Line 14:** "mock," "gone"

CONSONANCE

"Sonnet 71" is filled with consonance poem. The speaker frequently repeats consonant sounds, some of which carry over from one line to the next, creating a pleasing but somewhat dense sound that forces readers to slow down as they move through the poem.

Although the first line includes the repetition of the /r/ sound ("longer mourn for) and the /m/ sound ("mourn for me"), the second line is where the speaker's use of consonance truly jumps out at readers for the first time. Notice, for instance, the quick repetition of the /l/, /r/, and /s/ sounds:

> Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell

These consonant clusters have a very satisfying, distinctive sound. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that the line skips easily off of the tongue. On the contrary, the high concentration of such prominent sounds makes it somewhat difficult to work through this line. This, in turn, sets a slow and somewhat mournful pace for the rest of the poem, creating a cadence that reflects the poem's concentration on death and loss.

At the same time, though, the consonance in "Sonnet 71" also adds to the overall musicality of the poem, and this dynamic is at odds with the otherwise somber subject. Indeed, there is something inherently satisfying about the sing-song quality of line 7, in which the /w/ sound repeats alongside the /s/ and /t/ sounds:

> That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot

Here, consonance doesn't build a sad or mournful cadence. Instead, the pairing of these consonant sounds is harmonious and lovely. As such, readers see that the speaker employs consonance in different ways depending on where it appears in the poem, allowing it to convey a certain somberness in some moments and a lighter, more pleasant attitude in others.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "longer," "mourn," "for," "me"
- **Line 2:** "shall," "hear," "surly," "sullen," "bell"
- **Line 3:** "warning," "world," "fled"
- **Line 4:** "From," "vile," "world," "with," "vilest," "worms," "dwell"
- **Line 5:** "Nay," "read," "line," "remember," "not"
- **Line 6:** "writ"
- **Line 7:** "sweet," "thoughts," "would," "forgot"
- **Line 10:** "When," "compounded," "am," "with," "clay"
- **Line 11:** "much," "poor," "name," "rehearse"
- **Line 12:** "let," "love," "life"
- **Line 13:** "Lest," "wise," "world," "look," "moan"
- **Line 14:** "And," "mock," "with," "me," "am," "gone"

END-STOPPED LINE

The majority of the lines in "Sonnet 71" are end-stopped. This is because many of the lines contain clauses that are syntactically complete in and of themselves, even if the lines that come next add nuance or depth. The most obvious example of an end-stopped line in the first half of the poem is line 4, since it concludes the sentence that runs throughout the first four lines. To further illustrate this, line 5 separates itself from the opening quatrain by using the word "Nay" as something of a divider between the end of line 4 and the beginning of line 5. Here, the speaker shifts from imagining the aftermath of the speaker's own funeral to imagining what the lover might feel upon reading this poem. With this in mind, the fact that line 4 is end-stopped helps separate these two ideas from one another.

Similarly, line 8 is very clearly end-stopped because there is a period after the word "woe." This is a straightforward indication that the phrase has come to an end and that the following line will begin a new sentence. To that end, it's worth noting that the two most obvious instances of end-stopped lines in "Sonnet 71" come at the end of the first two quatrains, thereby breaking up the poem in a way that adheres to the structure of the standard Elizabethan sonnet, which is usually divided into three quatrains and a final couplet.

There are, however, other end-stopped lines in the poem that are somewhat less prominent and even subject to interpretation. For example, line 6 is worth considering because some readers might argue that it is actually enjambed. After all, the phrase "for I love you so" seems to lead directly into the next line, which clarifies that the speaker loves the lover so much that the speaker would rather be forgotten than cause the lover pain. As a result, it's certainly the case that the end of line 6 ("for I love you so") and the entirety of line 7 are connected, at least insofar as they work together to convey a single idea—namely, that the speaker wants to be forgotten so the lover won't live in sorrow. However, the phrase "for I love you so" is syntactically complete, since it includes a subject pronoun ("I"), a verb ("love"), and an object pronoun ("you"). For this reason, there is a strong argument to be made that the phrase can stand on its own and is therefore end-stopped instead of enjambed.

Overall, whether a line is end-stopped or enjambed can be somewhat subjective. Regardless of the fact that it can be difficult to determine such things, though, it's still the case that the majority of the lines in this poem are end-stopped, and this lends a sense of regularity to the poem's rhythm. As a result, the use of end-stopped lines emphasizes the poem's use of consistent meter, ultimately enhancing the entire flow and pace of the sonnet.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "dwell:"
- **Line 6:** "so,"
- **Line 7:** "forgot,"
- **Line 8:** "woe."
- **Line 9:** "verse,"
- **Line 10:** "clay,"
- **Line 11:** "rehearse,"
- **Line 12:** "decay,"
- **Line 13:** "moan,"
- **Line 14:** "gone."

REPETITION

The use of repetition in "Sonnet 71" helps direct readers' attention to certain words and ideas. The first and most obvious repetition comes in line 4 when the speaker uses diacope to draw attention to the word "vile":

> From this **vile** world with **vilest** worms to dwell

By using diacope in this way, the speaker underlines the idea that the world is "vile" (which means disgusting or unpleasant). In fact, it's not only the simple act of repeating this word that emphasizes this point, but also the fact that the word first appears as "vile" and then appears more intensely as "vilest," suggesting that the speaker wants very much to impress upon readers a sense of disgust when it comes to the living world.

However, one of the poem's other instances of repetition completely changes the idea that the speaker dislikes the world. Indeed, the speaker mentions the "world" again in line 13. This time, though, the world isn't characterized as "vile," but rather as "wise." Suddenly, then, readers see that the speaker *doesn't* actually have a contemptuous outlook on the world, especially since the latter half of the poem spends time considering (without any sense of anger or disdain on the speaker's behalf) the ways in which "decay" is an unavoidable part of life.

With this in mind, the speaker's relationship with the living world no longer seems as begrudging as it first did in line 4. Instead, readers will perhaps sense that the speaker's use of the word "vile" didn't have the negative connotations one might think, but was simply intended to convey an understanding of the fact that sometimes life on earth is unglamorous. After all, all humans will some day "decay" and, in doing so, will lie with the "vilest worms" in the ground. By repeating "world" in a more positive light, then, the speaker manages to communicate that nothing lasts forever and that this is an unavoidable fact of existence, not necessarily something to complain about.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "world"
- **Line 4:** "vile," "world," "vilest"
- **Line 13:** "world"

CAESURA

The caesuras in "Sonnet 71" add a reflective tone to the poem, making it sound as if the speaker is pausing to carefully choose the right words. Furthermore, the speaker uses caesuras to impress upon the lover various points that call for extra emphasis.

For example, the caesura after the word "Nay" in line 5 calls attention to just how serious the speaker is that the lover should not spend too much time mourning—or even thinking about—the speaker after the speaker has died. In this sense, the pause before "if you read this line" encourages readers (and therefore the lover, who is the person to whom the poem is addressed) to sit for an extra beat with the word "Nay" (which means *no*). This, in turn, underscores the speaker's effort to stop the lover from thinking about the loss of their relationship.

In other moments, though, the caesuras in "Sonnet 71" simply slow down the pace of the poem. This is the case in line 6, when the speaker pauses in the middle of the line before going on to focus on how it would be better to be forgotten by the lover than to cause the lover pain. Then, in line 9, the speaker pauses after the word "O," and this pause slows down the pace of the poem while also functioning as an intensifier, reminding readers that the speaker is considering the morbid but unavoidable inevitability of death.

Lastly, it's worth mentioning that some readers might argue that the parenthetical asides in lines 9 and 10 create caesuras on each side of the parentheses. This is a completely valid interpretation that ultimately depends upon how one hears the speaker's cadence. Because these parenthetical moments are so well integrated into the rest of the line, though, it's also reasonable to argue that they don't actually create pauses significant enough to count as caesuras.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** ", " ", "
- **Line 6:** "; "
- **Line 9:** ", "

PERSONIFICATION

In the poem's final couplet, the speaker personifies the entire world by suggesting that the world will "look into" the lover's suffering and "mock" the lover for mourning the speaker—if, that is, the lover doesn't manage to move on in the aftermath of the speaker's death. By saying this, the speaker treats the world as if it is a human capable not only of recognizing the lover's sorrow, but also of actively tormenting the lover.

The question therefore becomes how, exactly, the world will "mock" the lover. This is a difficult question to answer because the speaker doesn't specify what it might look like for the world to taunt the lover in this way. However, it's worth considering the specific wording of the final line to get a better idea of what the speaker has in mind. Indeed, the last line suggests that the world torment the lover *with the speaker* after the speaker is "gone." In other words, the world will taunt the lover with the speaker's absence.

In reality, though, the world doesn't actually have any kind of personal agency; although the speaker has personified the surrounding world and given it this kind of agency, the fact of the matter is that the lover's surrounding environment doesn't have a consciousness and therefore cannot "mock" the lover. In turn, it becomes clear that it will only *seem* like the world is taunting the lover, ultimately meaning that the lover will most likely project feelings of loss onto everything in the outside world. According to this interpretation, then, the speaker personifies the world in order to illustrate how hard it will be for the lover to lead a happy life if the lover spends too much time mourning the speaker and obsessing over this loss.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-14:** "Lest the wise world should look into your moan, / And mock you with me after I am gone."

IRONY

The great irony of "Sonnet 71" is that the speaker urges the lover to move on after the speaker's own death, but then expresses a number of romantic sentiments that will surely make it quite difficult for the lover to forget about their relationship. Nowhere is this contradictory dynamic more apparent than in lines 5 and 6, when the speaker says:

> Nay, if you read this line, remember not
> The hand that writ it; [...]

As if it wouldn't be hard enough for the lover to avoid thinking about the speaker while reading this poem, the speaker goes out of the way to specifically acknowledge that the lover might read "Sonnet 71" after the speaker has already died. Under these circumstances, a self-awareness arises within the very poem itself—a self-awareness that subtly implies the lover will be so distraught after the speaker dies that it will be necessary to seek comfort in the speaker's own words. And by suggesting this possibility, the speaker ultimately makes it even more difficult for the lover to avoid thinking about this loss. After all, there is perhaps no better way to make somebody think about you than saying, "Don't think about me."

In keeping with this irony, some readers argue that the speaker doesn't actually *want* the lover to move on. According to this theory, the speaker only tells the lover to forget about their relationship in the hopes of making it even more challenging for the lover to actually do this. However, the poem itself lacks enough evidence to fully support this reading, since there are no lines that definitively indicate that the speaker doesn't want the lover to move on.

Nonetheless, though, it's certainly the case that irony is central to the poem, since the very existence of this sonnet will remind the lover of the speaker despite what the speaker says to encourage the lover to move on. In turn, this irony suggests that, though it's important to avoid dwelling in sorrow for too long, it's also impossible to completely forget meaningful relationships and losses.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-12

VOCABULARY

Mourn (Line 1) - To grieve another person's death.

Surly (Line 2) - "Surly" often refers to something (or perhaps someone) that is unpleasant and moody.

Sullen (Line 2) - Sad, gloomy, or morose.

Vile (Line 4) - Disgusting or remarkably unpleasant. In some cases, "vile" can refer to something that is worthless or has very little value.

Dwell (Line 4) - To live or stay in a certain place. In this context, the speaker uses the word "dwell" to note that the world is full of "vile worms."

Nay (Line 5) - No.

Writ (Line 6) - An archaic form of the word "wrote."

Woe (Line 8) - Extreme sadness, sorrow, or distress. In the context of this line, the speaker uses "woe" to refer to the emotional pain the lover might experience when thinking about the speaker after the speaker has already died.

Verse (Line 9) - This poem, this writing.

Compounded (Line 10) - To be "compounded" with something is to be mixed with it. In this case, the word indicates that the speaker's dead body will slowly combine with the earth's soil in the process of decomposition.

Clay (Line 10) - A layer of soil in the earth that is tough, sticky, and difficult to break.

Rehearse (Line 11) - In this context, to "rehearse" something is to practice it by saying or reciting it.

Lest (Line 13) - In case.

Moan (Line 13) - A yelp or loud sound that a person makes to express an excess of emotion. In this usage, the lover's "moan"

would be one of pain and sorrow in response to the speaker's death.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Sonnet 71" is, of course, a sonnet. More specifically it is a Shakespearean sonnet. Accordingly, its 14 lines are divided into three four-line quatrains followed by a final two-line couplet:

- Quatrain
- Quatrain
- Quatrain
- Couplet

The first three quatrains essentially say the same thing: that the lover should not mourn the speaker's death. Line 13 then marks a turning point in the poem (indeed, the final couplet of an English sonnet is called the "turn"), when the speaker says that the world will register the lover's sorrow if the lover doesn't manage to sufficiently move on from mourning the speaker's death. Whereas the first 12 lines of the poem feature a reassuring tone intended to make the lover feel better about the speaker's death, then, the turn introduces the somewhat harsher idea that there will be consequences if the lover doesn't follow the speaker's advice.

METER

In keeping with the standard sonnet format, "Sonnet 71" is written in iambic pentameter. This means that the majority of the lines contain five iambs, or metrical feet that contain an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM). For instance, the first two lines are perfect examples of iambic pentameter:

No lon- | ger mourn | for me | when I | am dead
Than you | shall hear | the sur- | ly sul- | len bell

Although most of the lines after this opening also follow iambic pentameter, not every single one perfectly adheres to this rhythm. In fact, there are several lines that stray from the iambic rhythm (da-DUM) but still count as pentameter because they contain five stresses.

For example, lines 4 and 13 both feature two non-iambic metrical feet at the beginning of the line. The scansion looks like this:

Line 4:

From this | vile world | with vi- | -lest worms | to dwell

Line 13:

Lest the | wise world | should look | into | your moan

In line 4 cases, the first metrical foot is a pyrrhic, meaning that it's made up of two unstressed syllables ("From this"). In line 13, the first foot is a trochee ("Lest the"). In both lines, Next, the second foot is a spondee, which is made up of two stressed syllables ("vile world" and "wise world"). Of course, these aren't the only metrical substitutions in "Sonnet 71," but they *are* the most interesting, since both lines reference the world but in different ways. Therefore, the fact that they have the same metrical deviations ties them together, effectively highlighting a connection that might otherwise get lost over the course of the poem. In this way, the speaker's use of meter enhances the sonic qualities of the sonnet while calling attention to important parallels.

RHYME SCHEME

"Sonnet 71" follows the standard rhyme scheme of the Elizabethan sonnet, which looks like this:

ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

The regularity of this rhyme scheme adds a pleasing sound to the poem. This musical sound contrasts the bleak nature of the subject, since most people wouldn't associate beautiful, soothing sonic qualities with death and heartbreak. And yet, this is a perfect representation of the speaker's unemotional willingness to embrace death as natural and inevitable, choosing to approach mortality in an unsentimental way.

Furthermore, there are certain rhymes that are less prominent but still notable. For instance, the appearance of the word "say" in the beginning half of line 9 serves as a precursor to "clay," which appears at the end of the next line and then reappears at the end of line 12. By including the word "say" in parentheses in line 9, the speaker enhances the satisfying sense of cohesion that already exists in the rhyme scheme.

At the same time, though, not all the rhymes in "Sonnet 71" are quite as musical as others. Most notably, the rhyme in the final couplet is a slant rhyme, since "moan" and "gone" aren't perfect rhymes. This means that they only vaguely echo one another, and this has a significant effect on how the poem ends, one that aligns with the fact that the overall tone shifts in the couplet. Indeed, the use of a slant rhyme instead of a perfect rhyme goes against the otherwise pleasing sound that characterizes the poem, and this reflects the speaker's shift from soothing the lover to warning the lover about the negative consequences of mourning for too long.

SPEAKER

Although there is no identifying information about the speaker of "Sonnet 71," many readers and critics turn to other Shakespearean sonnets within the "Fair Youth" sequence to

draw conclusions about the speaker. Because there are a number of thematic consistencies that run throughout the 126 sonnets of the "Fair Youth" sequence (including "Sonnet 71"), many people believe that the entire sequence features the same speaker and that this speaker is an aging male poet. Moreover, the general belief is that most of the poems in this sequence are addressed to an anonymous young man with whom the speaker has a romantic relationship. To this day, critics debate whether the speaker is Shakespeare himself and whether this suggests that he had an extramarital affair with a young man.

Setting aside these theories, though, "Sonnet 71" itself contains very little in the way of identifying information. The only thing that remains clear is that the speaker will—presumably—die before the lover, meaning that the speaker is most likely older than the lover. Beyond that, it is difficult to say anything else about the speaker of "Sonnet 71" without superimposing outside details drawn from either Shakespeare's personal life or the other sonnets in the "Fair Youth" sequence.

SETTING

"Sonnet 71" doesn't have a discernible setting, though there are important details about the context in which the poem takes place. To that end, the fact that the speaker expects to die sometime in the near future is noteworthy, especially since the speaker spends the first quatrain imagining the aftermath of a funeral or burial. In this way, the sonnet opens with a hypothetical (or perhaps *future*) setting, but this fades away when the speaker focuses more specifically on the lover's emotions.

Having said that, although the exact setting of the poem isn't quite clear, it's worth noting that many readers believe that Shakespeare himself is the speaker of "Sonnet 71" and the other 126 sonnets in the "Fair Youth" sequence. If this is the case, then one might argue that the poem is set in 1590s England—the time and place in which Shakespeare composed these sonnets. In fact, even if Shakespeare is not the speaker, it makes sense to situate this poem in the context of late 16th-century England, since it follows the standard structure of the Elizabethan sonnet, which was wildly popular in England during that time.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Shakespeare is perhaps best known for his many plays, but the 154 sonnets he wrote during his lifetime are also extremely well-respected in the world of literature. Of course, "Sonnet 71" is related to the other 154 Shakespearean sonnets known to exist, but it also engages with the broader literary landscape of Renaissance poetry. In the 1300s, the Italian poet Francesco Petrarch began writing sonnets in a form now known as the Petrarchan sonnet. These sonnets focused primarily on love and desire, two fascinations that ultimately ended up fueling the vast majority of sonnets written during the Renaissance period.

Whereas Petrarchan sonnets are comprised of an eight-line octave followed by a six-line sestet, though, the Shakespearean sonnet includes three four-line quatrains followed by a final couplet. To go along with this, the Shakespearean rhyme scheme differs from that of the Petrarchan sonnet. All in all, since "Sonnet 71" adheres to the standard structure of a Shakespearean sonnet, it is a perfect example of how the sonnet evolved between the 1300s and the late 1500s.

Furthermore, "Sonnet 71" belongs to Shakespeare's "Fair Youth" sonnet sequence, which includes the first 126 of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets. This sequence explores the many joys, nuances, and difficulties of love and desire. Most readers believe that the speaker is the same aging male poet throughout the entire sequence and that the sonnets are addressed to a young man with whom the poet is romantically involved. And though each sonnet is capable of standing on its own as a unique and individual poem, it's also worth noting that the "Fair Youth" sequence leads into what is generally known as the "Dark Lady" sequence, in which the young lover drifts away from the poet after starting a romantic relationship with a woman (who is referred to in the sonnet sequence as the "Dark Lady"). In this section, the speaker struggles with his own conflicted feelings about the "Dark Lady."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As far as the history of England goes, the 1590s—the period during which most scholars believe Shakespeare wrote his sonnets—were remarkably calm. The British victory in the Spanish Armada of 1588 left the kingdom in high spirits, and there weren't yet any signs of new unrest or violence. Of course, the plague returned to London in 1592 and 1593 and killed 15,000 citizens, but the only political, crown-related concern was that Queen Elizabeth was aging and had never married or given birth to heirs. And though this was certainly a serious concern at the time, it didn't overshadow the fact that the period was primarily marked by a flourishing of the arts. Indeed, without wars to focus on, England was able to foster a vital artistic tradition, and this not only enabled writers like Shakespeare to work prolifically, but also created a culture in which their work was valued and encouraged.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- 1609 Facsimile — If you're curious about what it would

have been like to read Shakespeare when he was still alive, take a look at this copy of "Sonnet 71," shown exactly as it was when it was published in a 1609. (https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/book/UC_Q1_Son/30/?work=&zoom=500)

- A Dramatic Reading — Listen to a dramatic reading of "Sonnet 71" by the actor David Tennant. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUNrs0elFkw)
- Shakescleare Translations — Explore all of Shakespeare's sonnets (including "Sonnet 71") in our understandable, modern translations. (https://www.litcharts.com/shakescleare/shakespeare-translations/sonnets)
- The Bard's Life — Learn more about Shakespeare's life and work in this concise yet comprehensive biographical overview. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-shakespeare)
- The Sonnets — The British Library put together this brief but helpful explanation of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets and the way they relate to one another. (https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/book/UC_Q1_Son/30/?work=&zoom=500)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE POEMS

- Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds
- Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
- Sonnet 138: When my love swears that she is made of truth
- Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
- Sonnet 29: When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
- Sonnet 30: When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
- Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold

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