Farewell, ungrateful traitor!

POEM TEXT

Farewell, ungrateful traitor!
Farewell, my perjured swain
Let never injured creature
Believe a man again.
The pleasure of possessing
Surpasses all expressing,
But 'tis too short a blessing,
And love too long a pain.

'Tis easy to deceive us
In pity of your pain;
But when we love, you leave us
To rail at you in vain.
Before we have descried it,
There is no bliss beside it,
But she, that once has tried it,
Will never love again.

The passion you pretended
Was only to obtain;
But once the charm is ended,
The charmer you disdain.
Your love by ours we measure
Till we have lost our treasure;
But dying is a pleasure
When living is a pain.

SUMMARY

Goodbye, you thankless betrayer! Goodbye, my lying lover. May no heartbroken woman ever trust a man again. Sex is delightful beyond words, but it's over far too quickly—and love hurts for so long that the fun part isn't even worth it.

It's easy for you men to trick women into feeling sorry for you when you tell us you're in agony over us. But as soon as we really fall in love with you, you dump us, leaving us to futilely scold you. Before we women have experienced love first-hand, we think it's the best thing in the whole world. But the woman who's actually been through a love affair will want to give love up forever.

The adoration you faked was just your way of getting what you wanted from me. But the instant that you men lose interest in a woman, you scorn her. We women imagine that men's love for us is as strong as ours for them, and give up our hearts and our virginity for its sake. We're left wishing we were dead: life holds only suffering for us once our hearts are broken.

THEMES

THE FAITHLESSNESS OF MEN

"Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" is a lament over male dishonesty in love. The female speaker of this song bids a sorrowful farewell to both the lover who has betrayed her and to love itself. It's not just this one man who's faithless, she sings, but *all* men: men are always professing eternal love, then losing interest as soon as the object of their affections loves them back. Women, in contrast, feel genuine love, and genuine pain when they're betrayed. Men's faithlessness thus makes love a terrible burden for women: the speaker's own experience is just one example among many, and she warns that women should all forswear men if they know what's good for them.

The speaker's farewell to her faithless lover moves quickly from the personal to the general: it's not just her lover who's a disloyal jerk, she argues, but all men. Bidding "farewell" to her "perjured swain" (that is, her lying boyfriend), she goes on: "Let never injured creature / Believe a man again." In other words, in her view, her experience is just one example of a hard, cold, universal truth: *all* men are liars. They only "pretend[]" (or fake) their passion to get what they want, and "disdain" (or scorn) the women they woo as soon as those women give in to them.

The problem here isn't just that men are traitors, but that women are sincere—and that love is tempting. The "pleasure of possessing" (that is, the joy of sex and romance) is great: no "bliss" can possibly compare with it. But women, the speaker warns, should resist love's enticements: they're "too short a blessing" to make up for the inevitable pain of betrayal. Even "dying is a pleasure" compared to the agony of life when one's heart is broken. Love, this jaded speaker concludes, is just too big a risk for women: men will always betray women's sincere feelings.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Farewell, ungrateful traitor!
Farewell, my perjured swain
Let never injured creature
Believe a man again.

"Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" begins with an abrupt ending. In no uncertain terms, a female speaker tells her dishonest boyfriend that she's done with him for good.

In fact, she says so twice:

> Farewell, ungrateful traitor!
> Farewell, my perjured swain

Her anaphora on the word "farewell" here makes her point crystal clear: this "perjured swain" (or lying lover) can go ahead and get out of here, and he shouldn't let the door hit him on his way out.

While this speaker is obviously furious, she's also heartbroken. If her "swain" is a "traitor," her "farewell" comes after he's already betrayed her trust and, it's implied, moved on with someone else. He's said "farewell" to her before she can say goodbye to him.

Having begun with a direct apostrophe to her cheating lover, the speaker suddenly broadens her critique. It's not just *her* "perjured swain" who's a liar and a cheater, she says: it's every man in the world. No "injured creature"—that is, no betrayed woman—should ever "Believe a man again" if she knows what's good for her. In other words: this is going to be a poem not just about how one man cheated on or abandoned one woman, but about how *every* man is a no-good, lying jerk. This is the furious lament of a woman in pain.

These opening lines establish the poem's meter as a mixture of iambic tetrameter and trimeter (that is, lines of either four or three iambs, metrical feet that follow a da-DUM rhythm). Take lines 1-2:

> Fare**well**, | un**grate**- | ful **trai**- | tor!
> Fare**well**, | my **per**- | jured **swain**

This short, bouncy rhythm makes the lines feel both energetic and curt. But, as readers can see above, the first line isn't actually full tetrameter: line 1, like all the odd-numbered lines in the poem is, catalectic, which just means that it's missing its final expressed stressed beat. This adds playful variation to the poem's rhythm.

LINES 5-8

The pleasure of possessing
Surpasses all expressing,
But 'tis too short a blessing,
And love too long a pain.

The speaker began her poem by writing off her cheating boyfriend in particular, and men in general. Now, she reflects back on how she got to this painful point. The "pleasure of possessing" (that is, the joy of sex) is better than she can even put into words, she says. But it's over pretty fast—and the terrible pain of heartbreak just isn't worth that brief pleasure.

The reader might notice that the rhyme scheme does something interesting here. In the first four lines, the rhymes fell in a sing-songy, alternating ABAB pattern (albeit with a slant rhyme between "traitor" and "creature"). Here, there are three insistent C rhymes in a row ("possessing," "expressing," "blessing"), followed by a final B rhyme ("pain") that connects the second half of the stanza back to the first (in that it rhymes with "again" and "swain" from above). This pattern almost feels like the setup and punchline to a joke: the ABAB section introduces an idea, the C rhymes create a suspenseful buildup, and the final B rhyme delivers a knockout: the punchy idea that love is "too long a pain" to suffer in exchange for the brief fun of sex.

That pattern will repeat across the poem, and it helps to shape both the speaker's thoughts and her tone. The ABAB section always deals with bad male behavior; the CCCB section always reflects on how women suffer from that bad behavior. But the controlled and joke-like structure of this rhyme scheme keeps this poem of betrayal from feeling too miserable. Even in the midst of her suffering, this speaker uses a bouncy, witty form. She's still self-possessed enough to shape her thoughts elegantly—and even, as readers will see later on, to make dirty jokes.

But that doesn't mean she's not outraged and sad. Listen to the way alliteration and consonance evoke her emotions in this passage:

> The **p**leasure of **p**ossessing
> Surpasses all expressing,
> But 'tis too short a blessing,
> And love too long a pain.

Here, the pop of /p/ sounds, sharpness of /t/ sounds, and hiss of /s/ sounds make it seem as if the speaker is spitting her words in fury. But liquid /l/ sounds also hint at her heartbroken longing for things to be different.

LINES 9-12

'Tis easy to deceive us
In pity of your pain;
But when we love, you leave us
To rail at you in vain.

In the second stanza, the speaker returns to apostrophe again, this time speaking not just to her cheating lover but to men in

general.

Remember, the first four lines of each stanza always deal with lousy male behavior. Here, the speaker accuses men of faking heartbroken love so that women will take pity on them and agree to sleep with them. But just as soon as women give in, she says, men lose interest, leaving their former lovers to "rail at [them]"—that is, scold or shout at them—"in vain," or fruitlessly.

This poem itself might be read as exactly that kind of "rail[ing]," an angry accusation that the men in question feel free to ignore. The long assonant /ee/ sounds in "'Tis easy to deceive us" evoke the speaker's rage as she tries to get her message through: the reader might imagine her drawing those /ee/ sounds out sarcastically.

Again, though, the speaker isn't just enraged, but hurt. The rhyme scheme reflects her pain. In fact, the rhyme scheme *repeats* her pain: the word "pain" will turn up in every stanza as a B rhyme in the aforementioned pattern, threading the whole poem through with suffering.

In this case, though, the word "pain" doesn't refer to the *speaker's* pain, but to the pain she accuses men of faking to get into women's pants. This sets up a juxtaposition between men and women that echoes through the poem: men fake love and suffering, the speaker argues, but women really feel it.

LINES 13-16

Before we have descried it,
There is no bliss beside it,
But she, that once has tried it,
Will never love again.

The speaker caps her second stanza with another reflection on how women experience love. Before they have "descried it" (or seen it first-hand), she says, women imagine that love is the absolute best thing in the world, a "bliss" unlike any other. But as soon as a woman has "tried it," she'll realize that love's "bliss" simply isn't worth it.

Again, there's not just grief here, but pride, energy, and female solidarity. In speaking *to* all men, this speaker is also speaking *for* all women—a sisterhood of "injured creature[s]" who can swear off lying boyfriends together.

Take a look at the way the meter works here. Again, whole poem is written in a mixture of catalectic iambic tetrameter and pure iambic trimeter. All the odd-numbered lines have a dangling, unstressed syllable at their ends. And in the CCC rhyme section of each stanza, the even-numbered lines are catalectic as well. That's all to say there are three lines in a row here (lines 13-15) that end on an unstressed syllable at the end of the line, like this:

Before | we have | descried | it,
There is | no bliss | beside | it,
But she, | that once | has tried | it,

That extra syllable is what's known as a feminine ending, and it tends to soften lines, making them land less firmly. Here, three feminine endings in a row lead up to a closing line that *doesn't* use that extra unstressed syllable, making the speaker's vow to "never love again" feel truly final.

Feminine endings turn up in plenty of iambic poetry, but here, it's possible that Dryden is using them to make a little poet's joke. After all, this speaker is bringing a very "feminine ending" to her relationships with men.

LINES 17-20

The passion you pretended
Was only to obtain;
But once the charm is ended,
The charmer you disdain.

In the first stanza, the speaker addressed her lying boyfriend; in the second stanza, she addressed lying men in general. Now, in the final stanza, she combines both flavors of apostrophe, using her specific pain to draw conclusions about the wider world.

Take a look at how she switches tenses in these four lines. She starts in the past tense:

The passion you pretended
Was only to obtain;

These lines suggests she's thinking of a specific incident: the time her former boyfriend "pretended" (or faked) a passion for her in order to "obtain" her (and her sexual favors).

But then she turns to a more general apostrophe in the present tense, describing a world in which men *always* deceive and abandon women this way, as a matter of course:

But once the charm is ended,
The charmer you disdain.

In other words: her lover's betrayal wasn't a one-time thing, but something that's probably happening somewhere in the world right now. All men, in this speaker's view, lose interest in a woman's "charm" as soon as they've seduced them. Her polyptoton on the words "charm" and "charmer" here suggests that men find it all too easy to separate the "charm" of sexual allure and excitement from the "charmer[s]" they manipulate.

LINES 21-24

Your love by ours we measure
Till we have lost our treasure;
But dying is a pleasure
When living is a pain.

By the time readers come to the end of "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!", they've gotten used to its regular rhyme scheme and steady meter—and *very* used to the speaker's belief that men

are no-good lying cheaters and women should give up love forever. The last few lines play on all those expectations to set up a final punchline. The last lines of this poem at first look terribly tragic—but also conceal a dirty joke that has the power to make readers interpret the whole poem differently.

The speaker concludes: women believe that men feel love as deeply and sincerely as they do, and for the sake of that supposed love, they give up their "treasure" (a metaphor for anything from their hearts to their virginity). Once they've lost that "treasure" and their lying lovers have dumped them, women are left so brokenhearted that "living is a pain," and death itself seems like "a pleasure."

That all sounds pretty grim. But there's a joke buried in these heartrending lines that sneakily offers a different take on the situation. The word "dying," here, can be read as a pun: "dying" used to be a euphemism for "having an orgasm." In the context of a poem that has had a lot to say about "the pleasure of possessing" and losing one's "treasure," it seems pretty likely that this speaker has experienced this kind of pleasurable "dying." Read with the pun, these last lines might mean something closer to: men always betray women in the end, and life is pain—but the sex was fun, anyway!

In this light, the poem's mixture of tones and styles comes into focus. On the one hand, this is a serious poem about a serious problem: heartbreak and betrayal are no joke. On the other hand, this is a bouncy, witty, elegant poem that treats men's disloyalty with jaded humor—and in so doing, suggests that women have plenty of their own intellectual, emotional, and sexual power to fall back on.

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

The alliteration in "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" evokes the scorn and rage in the speaker's voice—but also helps to give the poem its music.

The most common alliterative sound here is a plosive /p/: it turns up in "The **p**leasure of **p**ossessing," "Sur**p**asses all expressing" (which can be considered alliterative because the shared sound falls at the start of a stressed syllable), "In **p**ity of your **p**ain," "The **p**assion you **p**retended"—and, perhaps most emphatically, in the last two lines:

> But dying is a **p**leasure
> When living is a **p**ain.

These repeated /p/ sounds make it sound as if the furious speaker is practically spitting her words. But they also draw attention the way love's joys turn to suffering: notice that the words "**p**leasure" and "**p**ain" turn up more than once, and the /p/ sounds around them make them stand out even more.

Elsewhere, though, alliterative sounds give the poem some beauty. After all, this poem appears as a musical interlude in a play: it's meant to be sung, and its sounds are melodious as well as meaningful. For instance, the liquid /l/ in "when we **l**ove, you **l**eave us" and the light /t/ of "**T**ill we have lost our **t**reasure" just plain sound good. These musical sounds keep this poem's tone from getting *too* dark: alliteration makes the speaker's voice sound controlled and elegant, not just furious.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "pleasure," "possessing"
- **Line 6:** "Surpasses," "expressing"
- **Line 7:** "'tis," "too"
- **Line 10:** "pity," "pain"
- **Line 11:** "love," "leave"
- **Line 14:** "bliss," "beside"
- **Line 17:** "passion," "pretended"
- **Line 22:** "Till," "treasure"
- **Line 23:** "pleasure"
- **Line 24:** "pain"

ASSONANCE

Assonance works alongside alliteration to fill the poem with memorable music. It also draws attention to some of the speaker's most withering moments of scorn. One strong example comes in the very first line:

> Farewell, ungr**a**teful tr**ai**tor!

Those matching long /ay/ sounds makes the speaker's abrupt goodbye to her lying lover feel even more emphatic. The assonance here calls attention to itself, making this accusation ring out all the more clearly to the reader (and to the treacherous man the speaker is addressing!).

Later, the long /ee/ in "'Tis **e**asy to dec**ei**ve us" does something similar. There, the reader might even hear the speaker drawing her vowels out sarcastically: "Oh, it's eeeeasy to deceeeeeive us—at first." Again, assonance helps fill the poem with unmistakable emotion.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "ungrateful," "traitor"
- **Line 3:** "injured," "creature"
- **Line 5:** "pleasure," "possessing"
- **Line 9:** "easy," "deceive"
- **Line 12:** "rail," "vain"
- **Line 14:** "is," "bliss"

APOSTROPHE

Apostrophe makes this poem what it is: a withering indictment of men in general, and of one man in particular.

The speaker lays down an emphatic apostrophe in the very first line: "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" The whole poem is framed as a direct address to the speaker's lying boyfriend (or, more likely, ex-boyfriend). But the speaker moves quickly from this "perjured swain" to men as a group. By the time she says, "But when we love, you leave us" in the second stanza, the "you" she's talking to isn't that one no-good lover, but every man who's ever insincerely professed his love to a woman.

At the end of the poem, the speaker brings both of these kinds of apostrophe together in one stanza:

> The passion you pretended
> Was only to obtain;
> But once the charm is ended,
> The charmer you disdain.

The first two lines here are directly addressed to her lover, who "pretended" (or faked) his "passion" for her; the next two lines broaden out to say that all men "disdain" their one-time "charmer[s]" the second they get what they want.

This movement between personal and general apostrophe makes the speaker's point crystal clear: what her boyfriend did to her, she feels, is just what *every* man does eventually, and she's through with the whole pack of them.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "Farewell, ungrateful traitor! / Farewell, my perjured swain"
- **Lines 9-12:** "'Tis easy to deceive us / In pity of your pain; / But when we love, you leave us / To rail at you in vain."
- **Lines 17-22:** "The passion you pretended / Was only to obtain; / But once the charm is ended, / The charmer you disdain. / Your love by ours we measure / Till we have lost our treasure;"

END-STOPPED LINE

Most of the lines in this poem are end-stopped, enclosing complete thoughts. By bringing each new idea to an abrupt halt, the speaker evokes how completely done she is with her lying boyfriend, and with men in general. These many end-stops lend her lines a sense of confidence, authority, and firmness.

Take the emphatic first four lines, for instance:

> Farewell, ungrateful traitor!
> Farewell, my perjured swain
> Let never injured creature
> Believe a man again.

Here, as the speaker bids her former lover "farewell" twice, her self-contained lines make those farewells sound final. Cut off with an end-stop, these lines feel downright curt; the speaker isn't interested in leaving room for arguments or excuses.

Even more final is the solid full stop that follows her warning to other heartbroken women. No "injured" lady, she says, should ever "believe a man again": period, end of sentence. This end-stopped line makes it clear that she's not open to further discussion.

End-stopped lines also help the speaker to juxtapose women's sincere feelings with men's faked ones:

> 'Tis easy to deceive us
> In pity of your pain;
> But when we love, you leave us
> To rail at you in vain.

Here, end-stops separate the two stages of love as this jaded speaker sees it. First, men behave like they're desperately in love until women take pity on them; then, when the women are really in love, the men drop them without a second thought. The end-stopped lines here make these stages feel grimly inevitable.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "traitor!"
- **Line 2:** "swain"
- **Line 4:** "again."
- **Line 6:** "expressing,"
- **Line 7:** "blessing,"
- **Line 8:** "pain."
- **Line 10:** "pain;"
- **Line 12:** "vain."
- **Line 13:** "it,"
- **Line 14:** "it,"
- **Line 16:** "again."
- **Line 18:** "obtain;"
- **Line 20:** "disdain."
- **Line 22:** "treasure;"
- **Line 24:** "pain."

REPETITION

Different flavors of repetition help this speaker express her anger and pain, stressing how totally she's rejecting deceitful men and how hurt she feels in the wake of her lover's betrayal.

The poem kicks off with some particularly emphatic anaphora:

> Farewell, ungrateful traitor!
> Farewell, my perjured swain

This repeated "farewell" leaves the speaker's lying lover in no doubt that she's washing her hands of him. (The reader gets the picture pretty quickly, too!) If he wasn't listening the first time, she'll just say it again.

Later, a moment of polyptoton makes it clear exactly why she's done with men:

> [...] once the charm is ended,
> The charmer you disdain.

In other words: as soon as men get tired of a woman's "charm," they dump their former "charmer" in a hot second. The musical movement from "charm" to "charmer" here makes the speaker sound witty and eloquent even through her rage.

But the poem's repetition of the word "pain" throughout hints this eloquent speaker is still suffering. Or perhaps it more than hints: the word "pain" appears in every single stanza as a rhyme word. The contrast between the speaker's sense that "living is a pain" now that she's been betrayed (line 24) and her sarcastic memory of the way she once took "pity" on her lover's insincere "pain" over her (line 10) only makes her point clearer: men fake the agonies that women really suffer. She also returns to the word "again," stressing that she never intends to fall in love again, not even once.

These repetitions aren't as forceful as the anaphora in the first lines, but they form the poem's emotional backbone. They reveal a speaker returning and returning to her suffering—and to her resolution to avoid going through anything like it ever again.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "Farewell, ungrateful traitor! / Farewell, my perjured swain"
- **Line 4:** "again"
- **Line 5:** "pleasure"
- **Line 8:** "pain"
- **Line 10:** "pain"
- **Line 16:** "again"
- **Line 19:** "charm"
- **Line 20:** "charmer"
- **Line 23:** "pleasure"
- **Line 24:** "pain"

PUN

"Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" is a poem about a scorned woman's fury and pain. But it's not just a roar of rage: it's witty, eloquent, and controlled. At the end, a lewd pun suggests that, even in the midst of heartbreak, this speaker still has a dry sense of humor about her situation.

The last couple lines of the poem could easily be read as an expression of total despair:

> But dying is a pleasure
> When living is a pain.

These lines rely on a specific form of parallelism known as antithesis, neatly expressing two opposing ideas in the same grammatical construction. And one possible reading here is that betrayal leaves the speaker in suicidal misery, ready to die rather than go on enduring her heartbreak.

But when this poem was written, "dying" could also mean "having an orgasm." And in the context of the rest of the poem—in which the speaker looks back on "the pleasure of possessing" (that is, the joy of sex) and describes women losing their "treasure" to the men who sweet-talk them—it's very possible that the speaker intends readers to spot a double meaning here.

If one reads the poem with this pun in mind, the last lines express not despair, but a kind of rueful resignation. In this reading, the speaker would be saying something like: well, I've been betrayed, and I should have expected as much, because men are terrible and life is pain; the sex was fun, though!

Where Pun appears in the poem:

- **Line 23:** "dying is a pleasure"

METAPHOR

The single metaphor in "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" carries a lot of weight, evoking how different the stakes of love were for women and men at the time this poem was written.

In lines 21-22, the speaker says:

> Your love by ours we measure
> Till we have lost our treasure;

Here, the "lost [...] treasure" could be a metaphor for any number of precious things: their hearts, for instance, or even their lovers themselves. But there's an especially strong suggestion that the lost "treasure" might be their virginity.

In the late 17th century, when this poem was written, women were meant to preserve their virginity at all costs until they were married. Virginity was often imagined as a "treasure," equated with good character and respectability, and women who had premarital sex could face anything from cruel gossip to a total loss of social status. (Men, on the other hand, were held to no such sexual standards and could do as they pleased.)

Sharing "the pleasure of possessing" with a lover was thus a pretty serious decision for a woman. Here, the "perjured swain" seems to have stolen the speaker's "treasure" and then dumped her or cheated on her without a second thought. This would be bad behavior at any time in history, but in an era when virginity was all that stood between a woman and total ignominy, it's downright malicious. In this light, it doesn't seem at all unreasonable that the speaker would swear off men forever after one betrayal.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 21-22:** "Your love by ours we measure / Till we have lost our treasure;"

VOCABULARY

Perjured (Line 2) - Caught out in a lie.

Swain (Line 2) - A young male lover.

Injured (Line 3) - Here, "injured" should be taken metaphorically: the speaker's young lover has hurt her by betraying her.

Possessing (Line 5) - Winning someone's heart (but also, euphemistically, having sex).

Surpasses all expressing (Line 6) - Goes beyond words. That is: there's no way to describe in words how good it feels to "possess" someone.

Rail (Line 12) - To complain, protest, or scold.

Descried (Line 13) - Clearly seen or perceived.

Pretended (Line 17) - Faked, simulated.

Obtain (Line 18) - Get. In other words, the speaker's unfaithful lover only pretended to adore her in order to get what he wanted from her.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" is broken into three octaves, or eight-line stanzas. Each of these octaves divides into two parts: the first four lines describe terrible male behavior, and the last four lines describe the effect that behavior has on women. The rhyme scheme between these sections differs, and they can be thought of as two quatrains. (See the Rhyme Scheme section for more on the way rhyme marks this division out.)

This poem is meant to be sung. In the play it appears in, *The Spanish Friar*, it's a musical interlude, a little break from the action. Its even, balanced shape reflects those musical origins: this scorned woman's lament might be furious, but it's also melodious.

METER

"Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" uses a steady pattern of iambic trimeter throughout. That means that each line is built from three iambs, metrical feet that follow a da-DUM stress pattern. Here's how that looks in context:

Fare**well,** | un**grate-** | ful **trai**tor!
Fare**well,** | my **per-** | jured **swain**

Readers might notice that the first line here has an extra unstressed syllable tacked onto the end. That's called a feminine ending, and a lot of the lines in this poem use them. While feminine endings turn up in plenty of iambic poetry, it's possible that Dryden is making a little poet's joke here: after all, this poem, in which a heartbroken woman swears off men forever, is very much a "feminine ending." (Because of that extra syllable, some readers might characterize the odd-numbered lines here as being iambic *tetrameter* with catalexis. That just means that there are four iambs per line, but the last foot is missing its final syllable. Whatever you call it, the feel is the same!)

Short trimeter lines suit the poem's tone: they feel curt and snappy, making it clear that this speaker is really telling her lying lover off. There's also plenty of energy in the iambs here: those iambic da-DUMs bounce right along, making this poem feel like a curiously upbeat expression of rage and disgust. The speaker might be hurt, but the meter here suggests she's also enjoying the thrill of telling her lover exactly what she thinks of him (and of men in general).

RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme in each stanza of "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" runs like this:

ABABCCCB

There's a little variation in the first stanza, where the two A rhymes ("traitor" and "creature") don't perfectly match (they're slant rhymes)—but this pattern basically holds firm throughout.

The movement of rhymes here works a lot like the setup and punchline of a grim joke—or the windup to an actual punch! The alternating ABAB section in the first part of each stanza, the setup, describes terrible male behavior; the insistent CCCB section, the payoff, describes how women suffer from that behavior. The B rhyme returns at the end of each stanza to really drive the speaker's point home.

Readers might notice that those B rhymes stay exactly the same across the whole poem: the B rhyme is always on an /ain/ sound, and the rhyme words "pain" and "again" even repeat. (Note that in Dryden's time and place, "again" and "pain" would have been a perfect rhyme: "again" was pronounced "agayn," not "agehn.") That repetition evokes the speaker's fury and suffering. Her "swain" (or boyfriend) has brought her so much "pain" that it's "vain" to try to turn away from it even in her rhymes.

SPEAKER

In the context of *The Spanish Friar* (the play it comes from), this poem is attributed to Olympia, a betrayed woman from the poet Ariosto's famous romance *Orlando Furioso*. But really, the speaker here could be any "injured creature": any woman who's

suffered heartbreak at the hands of a deceitful man.

The speaker here sees herself as a spokesperson for all scorned women. Recently abandoned by a lying lover, she hotly defends the sincerity of women's feelings in contrast with the fickleness of men's. Her experience, she feels, is evidence of a wider truth: men are liars who manipulate women for the sake of their own sexual satisfaction.

This speaker is without question furious and hurt, but there's also a sparkle of pride and even humor in her tone here. There's female solidarity in this poem, not just outrage against men: in decrying "deceivers," this speaker stands with every betrayed woman. (And she's in good company: there's a famous song that has a lot in common with this one in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*.) And she still has it in her to make a dirty joke at the end of the poem: besides its obvious literal meaning, "dying" can mean "having an orgasm."

SETTING

"Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" comes from a play set in crusader-era Spain, but it's attributed to a character from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, an epic poem set in crusader-era Italy. In other words, this song has a doubly romantic setting: it's two layers deep in a glamorized version of medieval Europe, as imagined by a late-17th-century English writer.

But the point the speaker is making here isn't anchored to the middle ages, or to the 17th century, or to any time. In her view, men were liars, are liars, and always will be liars.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

John Dryden wrote *The Spanish Friar* (the play that "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" comes from) in 1681, at the height of his fame and success. Dryden was a popular writer during the Restoration era, when King Charles II returned to the English throne in 1660 after years in exile. For his poems in praise of English greatness and the restored king, Dryden was appointed the first Poet Laureate, a ceremonial position that endures to this day.

Dryden was known as much as a playwright as a poet, and was one of the major figures in Restoration comedy, among writers like William Wycherley and William Congreve. This was a period marked by witty, elegant plays about high society; Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode* is one particularly famous example. But *The Spanish Friar* is a different flavor of play, a stormy tragicomedy of double-crossings and corrupt monks. "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" appears as a musical interlude in this play, and its words get attributed to a character from *Orlando Furioso*, a famous romance by the Italian Renaissance poet Ariosto.

As a stand-alone poem, "Farewell, ungrateful traitor!" fits into a long tradition of songs criticizing men for their treachery and fickleness. One famous example is "Sigh no more, ladies," a song from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* that advises women to stop mourning over unfaithful men. In both of these instances, a male writer speaks on behalf of (or in the voice of) heartbroken ladies—but perhaps also subtly makes excuses for men's bad behavior, suggesting that betraying women is just what men do.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

King Charles II returned to the English throne in 1660, after a period known as the Interregnum. Back in 1649, forces led by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell had deposed (and beheaded) Charles II's father Charles I—an earthshaking event in a country that had been used to seeing kings as chosen by God. The younger Charles escaped to Europe, where he lived in exile. The government that Cromwell subsequently installed, known as the Protectorate, proved unstable and unpopular, and the country eventually welcomed Charles II back from his exile with relief.

Puritans like Cromwell saw the arts as corrupting and blasphemous, and Cromwell's government had shut down theaters, smashed religious statues, and gutted ancient churches in its pursuit of moral purity. Charles II, on the other hand, loved and championed the arts, both sincerely and for canny political reasons: it turns out that people enjoy fun, and the king who provides entertainment is likely to be more popular than the "Protector" who forbids it.

One of Charles' smartest moves was to reopen the theaters, and to champion exciting theatrical innovations—like actresses. Before the Restoration, women weren't allowed on stage; all the women in Shakespeare's plays, for instance, would originally have been played by male actors. Charles II didn't just encourage women to act, he officially decreed that women's roles should be played by "their natural performers" if the theaters wanted to reopen! To further demonstrate his approval of women on stage, Charles even had a not-very-well-concealed affair with a famous actress, Nell Gwyn.

Dryden thus fits into an artistic and political scene full of new freedoms. As Poet Laureate to a handsome, popular, and rather libertine king, he found himself at the head of an exciting and lively art world—so much so that the period when he was writing is still sometimes known as the "Age of Dryden."

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Spanish Friar — Read this song in the context of the play it came from: The Spanish Friar, a tale of deception

and double-crossing. (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16456/16456-h/16456-h.htm)

- Dryden's Life and Work — Read a short biography of Dryden at the Poetry Foundation's website. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-dryden)
- The Poem Aloud — Hear the poem read out loud. (https://youtu.be/ScqTbBsAdfg)
- Dryden's Laureateship — Read about a rediscovered portrait of Dryden—and his role as the first English Poet Laureate. (https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/apr/16/john-dryden-national-portrait-gallery)
- The Poem Set to Music — Listen to the poem set to a jaunty melody. (https://youtu.be/JFfj-nNy-IY?t=1383)

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