Song

📝 POEM TEXT

1　Love, a child, is ever crying;
2　Please him, and he straight is flying;
3　Give him, he the more is craving,
4　Never satisfied with having.

5　His desires have no measure;
6　Endless folly is his treasure;
7　What he promiseth he breaketh;
8　Trust not one word that he speaketh.

9　He vows nothing but false matter;
10　And to cozen you will flatter;
11　Let him gain the hand, he'll leave you
12　And still glory to deceive you.

13　He will triumph in your wailing;
14　And yet cause be of your failing:
15　These his virtues are, and slighter
16　Are his gifts, his favours lighter.

17　Feathers are as firm in staying;
18　Wolves no fiercer in their preying;
19　As a child then, leave him crying;
20　Nor seek him so given to flying.

📋 SUMMARY

Love is like a child who is always crying. If you make him happy, he is just more likely to run away after something else. If you give him what he wants, he just wants more. He is never satisfied with what he has.

There is no end to what he wants. What he values most is recklessness and stupidity. He breaks all of his promises, so you shouldn't trust a word that he says.

Everything he swears is a lie, and he'll flatter you to get close to you. But if he gets the upper hand, he'll just leave you. What's more, he'll take great pride in having betrayed you.

He'll rejoice in your pain, and he'll cause your mental and physical health to deteriorate. These are his best qualities; the gifts he has to offer are even less impressive.

He's less likely than feathers to stay put. He's as ruthless as wolves in his hunting. As if he's a child, then, let him cry and leave him behind, and don't try to run after him when he leaves.

⦿ THEMES

💔 THE PERILS OF ROMANTIC LOVE

The speaker of Mary Wroth's "Song," like many Elizabethan and Jacobean poets, is pretty fed up with the pains of love. Personifying love as an endlessly demanding, unreliable, and cruel child (an allusion to Cupid, the god of love, often portrayed as a winged boy), the speaker suggests that romantic love is destructive and disastrous—and thus that people who know what's good for them should avoid it altogether.

Love, the speaker laments, is endlessly demanding. "Give him, he the more is craving," the speaker says, meaning that no matter how much time and energy one gives to love, love will only "crav[e]" more attention. And even when love is finally "pleas[ed]" (or satisfied), it's inclined to "fl[y]" away! In other words, even if someone devotes all of their time and attention to romantic love, it still might suddenly disappear.

The speaker also suggests that romantic love is both untrustworthy and cruel: sooner or later, those who love will get hurt. The speaker remarks, for example, that love "vows nothing but false matter." In other words, love's "vows," or promises of happiness and fidelity, are ultimately just lies. Love's promises are as light as "feathers," easily carried away on the wind—but love is also as fierce as "wolves," destroying the people it hunts. For all these reasons, the speaker warns the reader to "[t]rust not one word" that love says. Anyone who trusts in romantic love, the poem implies, will only end up getting betrayed.

Since love is both unreliable and painful, the poem declares, people are better off avoiding it altogether. The safest thing is to "leave" love behind—even if it deceptively "cr[ies]" like a "child" for one's attention.

> **Where this theme appears in the poem:**
> - Lines 1-20

🧍 MEN'S INFIDELITY AND CRUELTY

While "Song," in which a speaker advises readers to give up on love, can be read as a rejection of romantic love in general, it can *also* be read as a powerful critique of male behavior in particular. Imagining love as a heartless, fickle, and pointedly *male* child, the poem's speaker examines the way men

behave towards the women they claim to love, and implies that male cruelty saps women of their agency and independence.

While the speaker's personification of love as a male "child" might simply be read as an allusion to the love god Cupid, it might also suggest that men in romantic relationships with women often behave like impulsive, selfish children. The speaker emphasizes men's unreasonable, demanding behavior when she says that "he"—meaning love itself, but perhaps also a male romantic partner—is "[n]ever satisfied." Even when he is "pleased," he's got a short attention span: he's still likely to "fl[y]," or abandon his partner.

The poem suggests, then, that men can be as endlessly demanding of their partners or wives as a child—but also heartlessly disloyal. In fact, if their love is reciprocated, they are all the more likely to leave.

The poem also depicts men as deceitful flatterers, suggesting that all their pretty words are ultimately just a way of gaining power over women. The speaker remarks that if a man is able to "gain the hand," or gain power over a woman, he will only "leave," and "glory" in hurting her. In fact, the speaker says, "[h]e will triumph in your wailing." In other words, men enjoy hurting their partners because it gives them a sense of power and control.

Women, the poem finally suggests, should thus write men off altogether. Otherwise, they'll only suffer at the hands of the men who claim to love them. Heartless, demanding men, the speaker says, will take and take until their partners have nothing left, becoming the "cause" of women's "failing"—that is, driving them to physical and emotional collapse. The speaker also implies that women are only "pre[y]" for such men. This type of man, the poem suggests, enjoys chasing women for his own pleasure, but has no integrity or faithfulness.

Casting love as a cruel and fickle man, the poem suggests that relationships with such men take away women's independence and power—and that women shouldn't be fooled by men's dishonest declarations of love. Loving a man, in this speaker's eyes, is a thankless and dangerous task.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

🔖 LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Love, a child, is ever crying;
Please him, and he straight is flying;

The speaker personifies love as a male child who is always crying and demanding things. If you give him what he wants, though, he's just more likely to leave.

This personification is also an instance of extended metaphor, as love will be depicted as this child throughout the poem. By representing love in this way, the speaker alludes to Cupid, the Roman god of love and desire, who is traditionally pictured as a winged boy. Importantly, Cupid is also traditionally described as fickle and mischievous, a creator of havoc and confusion.

Beyond this allusion, the representation of love as a specifically *male* child is significant. While the poem's "he" might refer to love in general, it can *also* be read as representing a male romantic partner. From the start, then, by depicting love as a demanding, unreasonable male child, the speaker implies that male romantic partners can act in demanding, immature ways.

The speaker then says that if you "[p]lease him"—if you give love, or a male romantic partner, what he wants—he is likely to "fly," or leave. In other words, the speaker is saying that lovers (and men in particular) are unfaithful, and could leave at any time. The end rhyme between "crying" and "flying" implies that these two actions are interconnected: for this speaker, love (especially male love) is demanding, but also fickle and untrustworthy.

LINES 3-4

Give him, he the more is craving,
Never satisfied with having.

The speaker says that no matter how much you give to love—or to a male partner—he only wants more. He's "[n]ever satisfied" with what he has.

Here, the speaker continues to personify love as a demanding male child. The parallel structure of "Please him" and "Give him" helps reinforce the idea that no matter how much someone gives to a relationship, it's never enough. Lovers (especially male lovers, the speaker implies) can cruelly take all of their partner's attention without regard for their partner's needs or independence.

These lines also establish an element of repetition and parallelism that will be important to the poem. Each end rhyme in this quatrain is a gerund, or noun/verb ending in "-ing": "cry**ing**," "fly**ing**," "crav**ing**," "hav**ing**." The parallel structure and rhyme call attention to these "-ing" words, suggesting that love's—and men's—destructive actions are continual.

With the close of this quatrain, these lines also establish the poem's AABB rhyme scheme. "[C]rying" and "flying" rhyme, while "craving" and "having" would be considered full rhymes in an Elizabethan context (despite the difference between these words' /a/ sounds).

Notice that this quatrain follows a kind of list format: it describes a series of love's actions, linked by semi-colons or a comma. The rest of the poem will do the same. This list structure—in which items could easily be rearranged or added—suggests that there's no end to the destructiveness of love (or men in relationships). It also gives roughly equal weight

to each item, forcing the reader to consider each destructive behavior in turn.

LINES 5-8

His desires have no measure;
Endless folly is his treasure;
What he promiseth he breaketh;
Trust not one word that he speaketh.

The speaker says that there is no end to what love (especially male love) "desires." The word "desires" evokes lust, suggesting that love and men are guided by physical cravings—and that these cravings are "measure[less]."

In fact, according to the speaker, what love values most is "[e]ndless folly." In other words, it "treasure[s]" reckless, destructive behaviors. Building on line 5, line 6 *also* implies that desire-filled men, who are unlikely to stay content or faithful in a relationship, are prone to causing disaster.

Sibilant /s/, /z/, and /zh/ sounds are prominent in these lines: "His desires," "measure," "endless," "treasure." These sounds have a hissing, ominous quality, conveying the sense that love is destructive—and so are men. Short /eh/ sounds also link "desires," "measure," "endless," and "treasure," with the drawn-out assonance emphasizing the wide scope of love's (or men's) desire and folly.

The speaker concludes this stanza by asserting that love will break every promise it makes. In other words, finding happiness or fidelity through love is unlikely, given love's fickle, untrustworthy nature. Again, there's also the implication that men, in particular, are dishonest in relationships and prone to breaking romantic promises.

Given all this, the speaker concludes, the reader shouldn't "[t]rust" a single word that love (or a man) says. The hard, clear consonant /t/ sounds in "Trust not" contrast with the sibilance and /th/ sounds (for example, in the archaic verbs "promiseth," "breaketh," and "speaketh") elsewhere in the stanza. Whereas those smooth sounds have a hissing or murmuring effect, these crisp /t/ sounds convey a sense of clarity. The speaker's advice not to "trust" love or men sounds direct and well-founded.

LINES 9-12

He vows nothing but false matter;
And to cozen you will flatter;
Let him gain the hand, he'll leave you
And still glory to deceive you.

The speaker says that everything that love (still personified as a male child) swears is "false" or untrue. The speaker also says that love will "flatter" you with attention or praise, but does this only to cheat you. In fact, if love (or a man) "gain[s] the hand"—gets power over you—he'll just "leave." What's more, he'll "glory" (gloat) over having lied and tricked you.

The repetition of "And" at the start of lines 10 and 12 (an instance of anaphora) emphasizes that love is endlessly destructive. It stresses that men use false promises *and* cheap flattery; leave suddenly *and* take pleasure in having tricked their partners; and so on. They're always racking up more offenses. The parallel structure of the two statements in the stanza (each contains a main clause followed by a modifying "And" clause) hammers home the nature of love's, or men's, crimes.

The speaker suggests that men "glory" in causing pain to their partners because it gives them a sense of power. The speaker also suggests that romance can seem appealing and flattering at first, but eventually, if a lover gains power over you, you'll just get hurt.

The alliterative /f/ sounds in "false" and "flatter" emphasize that men's *flattery* is just that: *false* words used to gain power and control. The alliterative /g/ sounds in "gain" and "glory" reinforce the idea that this *gain*, and the harm it causes, causes men to *glory* (gloat) sadistically.

Finally, while this quatrain adheres to the poem's AABB rhyme scheme, the last two lines of this stanza actually end on the same word: "you." This repetition calls attention to the person being harmed by all of this behavior—the "you," implicitly a woman, who's suffered in love.

LINES 13-14

He will triumph in your wailing;
And yet cause be of your failing:

The speaker continues to describe how romantic love in general, and men in particular, take pleasure in causing harm. The speaker says that "[h]e" will "triumph" or exalt over "your wailing." In other words, love (or a male romantic partner) will glory in having made a woman "wail" or cry.

The speaker also says that romantic love, or a male partner, will be the "cause" of a woman's "failing." In Elizabethan times, "failing" could describe the deterioration of someone's mental and physical health. Here, then, the speaker suggests that destructive men (and perhaps love in general) will bring those who love to physical and emotional collapse.

These lines continue to use anaphora with the repetition of "[a]nd" from the previous stanza, emphasizing that there is no end to the harm that love and cruel men can cause. Note, too, that lines 13-14, like the opening quatrain, use gerunds ("-ing" words) as end rhymes. Here, though, the rhyme words ("wailing" and "failing") emphasize not *love's* actions, but what someone goes through who has been *harmed* by love. It is the "you"—the woman—whose experience is centered here, as the speaker emphasizes the consequences of such destructive "love" for a woman in this kind of a relationship.

LINES 15-16

These his virtues are, and slighter

Are his gifts, his favours lighter.

With sharp irony, the speaker says that love's (or a male lover's) cruelty and destructiveness are actually his *best* qualities. If these are "his virtues," the reader is forced to wonder, what are his *bad* qualities? ("These his virtues are" is an example of the inverted syntax that was common in older English poetry. It means the same thing as "These are his virtues.")

The speaker adds that love's "gifts" and "favours" (the things he bestows on those who love) are "slighter" and "lighter" (of less weight or consequence) than the harm he causes. Ultimately, the poem suggests, romantic love offers no true advantages. On the contrary, love's greatest "virtue" or most notable quality is its harmfulness. More specifically, the poem implies that loving a man is unrewarding and sure to bring pain.

These lines use subtle sound effects to reinforce their meaning. For example, the consonant /v/ and /r/ sounds in "**vir**tues" and "fa**vour**s" help draw out the speaker's point: clearly sadistic cruelty isn't a *virtue*, so how could the *favours* or gifts of someone who has that quality mean anything? The rhyme on the near-synonyms "slighter" and "lighter" —which includes the repetition of "lighter"—emphasizes how light, or trivial, love's gifts are.

LINES 17-18

Feathers are as firm in staying;
Wolves no fiercer in their preying;

The speaker describes love through two similes. First, she says that love (or a male romantic partner) is as likely to stay and be faithful as feathers are likely to stay in place. Of course, the reader knows feathers are light and will blow away in the slightest breeze. The poem implies, then, that romantic love will quickly depart—and so will male partners, leaving the ones who loved them in pain.

Through a vivid second simile, the speaker compares love and men to "[w]olves" and suggests that men are just as "fierce" in their "preying" as wolves are. This comparison suggests that love is cruelly predatory, and men can be, too. To men, the speaker implies, women are just "prey" for the hunt, not partners to be loved and respected.

Though feathers and wolves might seem very different, the poem uses several elements to emphasize that love, and men, are like feathers *and* wolves at the same time. First, parallel structure ("in...staying," "in...preying") connects the two similes. The poem also places these similes in a paratactic relationship with each other, linking them with a semicolon that suggests they're part of a larger, unified thought. Finally, alliterative /f/ sounds link the two comparisons ("[f]eathers," "firm," and "fiercer"). The implication is that romantic love in general, and men especially, are as unfaithful and unreliable as feathers—*but also* ruthlessly cruel to those they "hunt."

LINES 19-20

As a child then, leave him crying;
Nor seek him so given to flying.

Because romantic love is so destructive, the speaker concludes, people are better off ditching it altogether. Once again, love is personified as "him," perhaps suggesting that the reader should ditch *male* love in particular.

These closing lines repeat the word "child" from line 1, reminding the reader that, above all, (male) love is like an immature, demanding child. According to the speaker, you should just ignore it, even if it "cr[ies]" or appeals to your attention.

The speaker also concludes that the reader shouldn't "seek him so given to flying." In other words, women shouldn't run after an unfaithful partner, trying to get him to come back; nor should they try to make him stay when he is "given" or likely to leave anyway. More generally, the poem suggests that the reader shouldn't seek out romantic love, since it will only disappear sooner or later.

These last two lines end with the same words that ended the opening lines of the poem: "crying" and "flying." This repetition reminds the reader that love is both petulantly demanding and untrustworthy. The assonant long /e/ sounds in "l**ea**ve" and "s**ee**k" drive home the speaker's advice to the reader—and perhaps to women in general: love will only bring disaster, so *leave* it, don't *seek* it.

🎴 SYMBOLS

🐺 WOLVES

The wolves in the poem symbolize danger and ruthlessness. Wolves are traditionally represented as loners (as in the phrase "lone wolf") who have no mercy and care nothing for those around them. They're also associated with hunting and mortal danger.

In the poem, the speaker says that love—or a male romantic partner—is no less fierce in "preying" than wolves are. In other words, just like wolves, men can be ruthless and dangerous.

Through this symbolism, the speaker implies that, for many men, women are just "prey" for the hunt. When seeking sex and romance, they chase women as ruthlessly as wolves hunt other animals. Men, the poem implies, are only looking out for themselves, and their "love" can be deeply or even fatally destructive.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 18:** "Wolves no fiercer in their preying;"

FEATHERS

Feathers are associated with wings and often symbolize lightness, flight, and freedom. In the poem, feathers symbolize how love—especially male love—is likely to "fly" away. Rather than "staying" around, the speaker implies, a (male) romantic partner will probably move on to someone else.

The feathers in the poem also represent superficiality, flightiness, and lack of substance. If love, or a male partner, can fly away as easily as a feather in a breeze, then what true substance or weight was there in the first place? Because love can depart so easily, the speaker implies, it's fundamentally untrustworthy.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 17:** "Feathers are as firm in staying;"

⚒ POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

Throughout "Song," the speaker personifies romantic love as a male child. (This is also an example of an extended metaphor, as the child represents love throughout the poem.)

This personification does several important things in the poem. Because romantic love is intangible and hard to imagine, personifying it makes the speaker's descriptions of love more concrete. For example, it's easy to imagine a child constantly demanding attention; the reader can then apply this idea to romantic love and understand the speaker's point.

Likewise, personifying love as a child helps convey the idea that it's changeable, untrustworthy, easily distracted, and so on. The speaker suggests that you shouldn't rely on love, just as you wouldn't rely on a child to keep their word.

Finally, it's important that the poem personifies love as a *male* child ("he"). This gendered framing implies that the speaker isn't *just* talking about love in general. "He" could also stand in for a male romantic partner—maybe one who acts like a little boy. Love is hard on everyone, the speaker suggests, but men can be especially ruthless, reckless, untrustworthy, and immature toward those they love.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-16
- Lines 19-20

ALLUSION

The personification of love as a male child is also an allusion to Cupid, the ancient Roman god of love and desire. Cupid is traditionally depicted as a chubby little boy with wings. He carries a bow and arrows, and when he shoots arrows at people, they experience overwhelming love.

This allusion connects the speaker's depictions of love to classical mythology, enriching their meaning. Cupid is often represented as fickle, incorrigible, and fond of creating disastrous romantic situations—behaviors that the speaker refers to throughout the poem. For instance, when the speaker says that "[h]is desires have no measure," she may be invoking Cupid's habit of creating desire and love repeatedly, often with destructive outcomes. Essentially, the allusion reinforces her argument that love is untrustworthy and dangerous.

Interestingly, though, the speaker goes a step further. She suggests that love (or Cupid) is actually like a ruthless wolf, and that the victims of his arrows are "prey" for his entertainment. Thus, the poem implies that love isn't ultimately benign—or just fickle and mischievous—but actively harmful to those it targets.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18
- Lines 19-20

SIMILE

In the last stanza, the speaker compares love to both feathers and wolves. These similes illustrate love's untrustworthy and destructive nature.

The speaker first says that "[f]eathers are as firm in staying," meaning that love (or a male romantic partner) is as likely to stick around as feathers are likely to stay in place. Of course, the reader knows that feathers are light and blow away easily. This simile emphasizes, then, that love is fleeting, and that the person who loves will experience pain and loss. It might also imply that male romantic partners are unlikely to stay faithful and will readily leave those who love them.

The speaker then says that "[w]olves [are] no fiercer in their preying." In other words, love is as ruthless and predatory as wolves are, and lustful men, in particular, are like hunting wolves: women are just their "prey." This comparison implies that love, sex, and romance can be truly disastrous for the people who are "hunted."

At first glance, these two comparisons seem quite different from each other; feathers are light and airy, whereas wolves are strong and dangerous. Put together, though, the two similes show that love—and men—can be unreliable and ruthless at the same time.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 17-18:** "Feathers are as firm in staying; / Wolves no fiercer in their preying;"

REPETITION

The poem uses repetition to emphasize its message that romantic love—and a male romantic partner in particular—is destructive. For example, the words "child," "crying," and "flying" appear in the first two lines of the poem. These words then repeat (in the same order) in the last two lines of the poem.

This repetition brings the poem full circle, reinforcing the idea that love (or a male partner specifically) is ultimately just like a spoiled child. He's always "crying" and demanding things, but he's also likely to leave at any time. By the time the speaker repeats these words at the end of the poem, she's built her argument; now, she uses them to urge the reader to ditch love once and for all.

The poem also repeats the word "you" in lines 10, 11, and 12. Here, repetition emphasizes the person who will be harmed by love's actions. It also reinforces the sense that the speaker is addressing the reader; "you" too, the poem suggests, could be "deceive[d]" by love.

Finally, the words "he," "him," and "his" repeat frequently throughout the poem (far more frequently than "you" and "yours"). This repetition helps suggest the selfishness of love—and a male romantic partner especially.

> **Where Repetition appears in the poem:**
>
> - **Line 1:** "child," "crying"
> - **Line 2:** "him," "he," "flying"
> - **Line 3:** "him," "he"
> - **Line 5:** "His"
> - **Line 6:** "his"
> - **Line 7:** "he," "he"
> - **Line 8:** "he"
> - **Line 9:** "He"
> - **Line 10:** "you"
> - **Line 11:** "him," "he'll," "you"
> - **Line 12:** "you"
> - **Line 13:** "He"
> - **Line 15:** "his"
> - **Line 16:** "his," "his"
> - **Line 19:** "child," "him," "crying"
> - **Line 20:** "him," "flying"

PARATAXIS

The poem uses parataxis throughout to demonstrate that romantic love—and men in particular—have a seemingly endless capacity for destruction and harm. This parataxis appears in the poem's list-like structure. Over the course of the poem, the speaker lists love's (and men's) harmful behaviors and qualities.

For example, in the second stanza, the speaker says first that love's "desires have no measure," then that "[e]ndless folly" (or recklessness) "is his treasure" (what he most values), then that

love breaks all his promises. Semicolons appear at the end of each of these lines, connecting each item in the list to the next:

> His desires have no measure;
> Endless folly is his treasure;
> What he promiseth he breaketh;

This structure appears throughout the poem, as the speaker lists other ways in which love (and men) harm people in relationships.

The paratactic structure suggests that each item in the list—each of love's behaviors—is equally important and equally harmful. It also implies that the list could go on indefinitely. In these ways, it helps illustrate love's "[e]ndless folly" and "measure[less]" capacity for harm, reinforcing the point that the reader should abandon love altogether.

> **Where Parataxis appears in the poem:**
>
> - Lines 1-18

PARALLELISM

The poem features various forms of parallelism to add emphasis to certain ideas throughout. For example, the speaker uses many verbs and nouns that parallel each other in their "-ing" endings: "cry**ing**," "fly**ing**," "crav**ing**," "hav**ing**," "wail**ing**," "fail**ing**," "stay**ing**," and "prey**ing**." Each of these is also a line-ending rhyme word. The parallel structure of these words, which indicate continual actions, emphasizes that romantic love—or a male romantic partner—is *continuously* destructive.

Parallelism also links the phrases "he promis**eth**," "he break**eth**," and "he speak**eth**" (archaic verb forms of "promises," "breaks," and "speaks"). Here, it helps drive home the idea that romantic love breaks every promise it makes, so the reader ("you") shouldn't trust it.

The poem also uses parallel clauses, sentences, and stanzas. For instance, in stanza one, the speaker says:

> Please him, and he straight is flying;
> Give him, he the more is craving,

The parallel structure of these two statements, each of which includes a conditional verb and the word "him" ("Please him," "Give him"), reinforces the speaker's message: no matter whether you do *this*, *that*, or something else, love will always demand more.

At the stanza level, parallelism helps give the poem its list-like structure. Each stanza is a complete sentence, and each adds multiple items to a list of love's destructive behaviors. You could rearrange the middle stanzas—or add other, similarly structured middle stanzas—without doing major structural damage to the poem. Ultimately, these effects suggest that the

speaker could go on listing love's flaws forever!

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "crying"
- **Line 2:** "Please him," "flying"
- **Line 3:** "Give him," "craving"
- **Line 4:** "having"
- **Line 7:** "he promiseth," "he breaketh"
- **Line 8:** "he speaketh"
- **Line 11:** "leave you"
- **Line 12:** "deceive you"
- **Line 13:** "wailing"
- **Line 14:** "failing"
- **Line 15:** "his virtues"
- **Line 16:** "his gifts," "his favours"
- **Line 17:** "Feathers are as firm," "staying"
- **Line 18:** "Wolves no fiercer," "preying"
- **Line 19:** "crying"
- **Line 20:** "flying"

ALLITERATION

The poem uses alliteration to enhance its music and reinforce the speaker's message. For example, in the opening stanza, hard /cr/ sounds appear in the line-ending words "**cr**ying" and "**cr**aving." This alliteration suggests a link between the two behaviors, emphasizing the way love—or a male romantic partner—constantly demands and desires more.

In stanza 2, /w/ sounds connect "**o**ne **w**ord," emphasizing the speaker's warning against trusting a single thing love says. In the following stanza, /f/ sounds link "**f**alse" and "**fl**atter," suggesting the close link between falsehood and flattery. Hard /g/ sounds link "**g**ain" and "**g**lory," reinforcing the idea that love's flattery is a way of *gaining* things (sex, power, control, etc.)—which love (or the lover) will then *glory* in, or gloat over.

Repeated /f/ sounds appear again in the closing stanza: "[**f**]eathers," "**f**irm," "**f**iercer." Here, alliteration links two similes, as the speaker compares love both to feathers *and* fierce wolves. The link even helps suggest that love's unreliable, flighty, feather-like quality *adds* to his wolfish cruelty—since, for him, lovers are just "prey" to chase one after the other.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "crying"
- **Line 3:** "him," "he," "craving"
- **Line 8:** "one word"
- **Line 9:** "false"
- **Line 10:** "flatter"
- **Line 11:** "him," "gain," "hand," "he'll"
- **Line 12:** "glory"
- **Line 17:** "Feathers," "firm"
- **Line 18:** "fiercer"

CONSONANCE

Together with alliteration, the poem uses consonance to reinforce the speaker's meaning. For example, in the second stanza, sibilant /s/, /z/, and /zh/ sounds appear in "[h]i**s**," "de**s**ire**s**," "mea**s**ure," "endle**ss**," "trea**s**ure," "promi**s**eth," "[t]ru**s**t," and "**s**peaketh." This sibilance creates a subtle hissing sound, conveying love's threatening quality, and sustains it over several lines, evoking love's "endless" capacity to harm.

In the same stanza, /th/ sounds link "promise**th**," "breake**th**," and "speake**th**." These /th/ sounds (technically known as dental fricatives) are soft, like sibilance, and add to the slightly eerie music of the verse. In *contrast* to these sounds, line 8 uses consonance to stress the message that readers should "[t]rus**t** no**t**" a single thing love says. The hard, clear /t/ sounds in these words stand out among the sibilant and fricative sounds, enhancing the clarity and directness of the speaker's point.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "crying"
- **Line 3:** "him," "he," "craving"
- **Line 4:** "Never," "having"
- **Line 5:** "His desires," "measure"
- **Line 6:** "Endless," "his treasure"
- **Line 7:** "promiseth," "breaketh"
- **Line 8:** "Trust not," "one word," "speaketh"
- **Line 9:** "false"
- **Line 10:** "flatter"
- **Line 11:** "him," "gain," "hand," "he'll"
- **Line 12:** "still," "glory"
- **Line 13:** "will," "wailing"
- **Line 15:** "slighter"
- **Line 16:** "gifts," "favours," "lighter"
- **Line 17:** "Feathers," "firm"
- **Line 18:** "fiercer"

ASSONANCE

Along with alliteration and consonance, the poem uses assonance to connect and emphasize key words. For instance, in the first stanza, short /a/ sounds connect "s**a**tisfied" and "h**a**ving." (English accents and vowel sounds have changed a bit since the 1600s, but these vowels would likely have been similar for Wroth, too.) Here, assonance reinforces the logical link between *satisfaction* and *having* something you want. Of course, "having" also makes a rhyme pair with "craving," underscoring the idea that love—or at least male love—never *has* enough and always *craves* more.

Later, in the poem's final lines, long /e/ sounds appear in "l**ea**ve" and "s**ee**k." This assonance calls extra attention to the speaker's closing advice, as she declares that it's best to *leave* love behind—and not *seek* or run after someone likely to leave you.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "child," "crying"
- **Line 4:** "satisfied," "having"
- **Line 5:** "measure"
- **Line 6:** "Endless," "treasure"
- **Line 16:** "his," "gifts," "his"
- **Line 18:** "Wolves," "no"
- **Line 19:** "child," "leave," "crying"
- **Line 20:** "seek"

VOCABULARY

Flying (Line 2, Line 20) - In the context of the poem (and 1600s England), "flying" means quickly leaving.

Craving (Line 3) - To "crave" means to desire or hunger for something. Here, it suggests lusting or longing.

Folly (Line 6) - "Folly" means reckless behavior.

Promiseth, Breaketh, Speaketh (Line 7, Line 8) - "Promiseth," "breaketh" and "speaketh" are archaic versions of the words "promises," "breaks," and "speaks."

Vows (Line 9) - "Vows" are promises or oaths (as in one's wedding vows).

Cozen (Line 10) - To "cozen" someone means to deceive or delude them.

Flatter (Line 10) - To "flatter" someone means to pay them compliments, often insincerely.

Deceive (Line 12) - To "deceive" someone means to trick or betray them.

Triumph (Line 13) - In the context of the poem, to "triumph" means to exult or gloat over someone. The speaker means that love will gloat over causing someone pain.

Failing (Line 14) - In Wroth's time, "to fail" meant to deteriorate physically and emotionally. The speaker is saying that romantic love (or a male romantic partner in particular) will cause a woman to fall apart physically and mentally.

Favours (Line 16) - In Renaissance England, favors (or "favours" in the British spelling) were gifts or tokens of love.

Preying (Line 18) - To "prey" on someone means to hunt them. The word suggests that the person "preying" is predatory, exploiting other people's vulnerability.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem's 20 lines are divided into five quatrains (four-line stanzas). Most lines in the poem are end-stopped, and each quatrain closes with both an end stop and a full stop—that is,

the end of each stanza coincides with the end of its sentence.

This regular form gives the poem a level, measured quality. Just as the quatrains are even and contained, the speaker sounds self-contained and self-assured. Each stanza leads rationally to the next—until the poem's ending, when the speaker declares that the reader should leave love behind altogether.

As the title suggests, the poem is an example of the Elizabethan form called the "song." English poems of the early 17th century typically fell into one of two formal categories: they were either sonnets (a traditional form dating back to 13th-century Italy) or "songs," also called "lyrics."

Poets of this time often published collections of poems that incorporated both forms. For example, Lady Mary Wroth published "Song" in her sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, which included 83 sonnets and 20 songs. Where sonnets follow a strict formal pattern, songs or lyrics can vary considerably in structure. As the name suggests, these poems were typically written to be sung and set to music, and they often had short lines.

A close look at the poem shows that it does have a song-like quality. Its AABB rhyme scheme, quatrains, and relatively short lines all lend themselves to being sung (and to being understood by the singer's audience). Additionally, where sonnets tend to deal with some internal struggle or tension, the message of "Song" is clear throughout: romantic love may be appealing at first, but it will only bring disaster and harm.

METER

"Song" is written in trochaic tetrameter. In this type of meter, each line has four metrical feet. Each metrical foot is a trochee, or **stressed** syllable followed by an unstressed syllable: the poem has a "**DUM**-da, **DUM**-da" rhythm. For instance, the opening two lines read:

> **Love**, a | **child**, is | **ev**er | **cry**ing;
> **Please** him, | **and** he | **straight** is | **fly**ing;

This meter creates what's called a *falling rhythm*: each line, like each metrical foot, begins with a stressed syllable and ends with an unstressed one. This falling rhythm subtly contributes to the poem's meaning. The poem acknowledges that romantic love might initially be appealing—or a male romantic partner might attempt to "flatter" a woman—but also makes clear that this appeal will soon fall apart, causing the mental and physical "failing" (deterioration) of the one who loves.

RHYME SCHEME

"Song" is written in quatrains made up of two rhymed couplets. Thus, the poem's rhyme scheme looks like this:

> AABB

This consistent scheme, combined with short lines, contributes

to the song-like quality of the poem.

Many of the poem's rhyme words, such as "crying," "flying," "staying" and "preying," are verbs in gerund ("-ing") form. In addition to the regular rhyme pattern, these "-ing" rhymes reinforce the idea that love's destructive behaviors are ongoing and continual.

All the poem's rhymes are also "feminine," meaning that they end on an unstressed syllable ("cry**ing**"). These feminine endings give each line a "falling-away" sound, perhaps echoing the way love falls apart. The use of feminine rhymes might also tie in with the poem's commentary on gender; for example, the speaker might be proudly embracing her femininity in the face of male mistreatment.

Finally, the poem comes full circle at the end, closing on the same two rhyme words ("crying" and "flying") with which it began. This repetition reminds the reader that love—and a male romantic partner in particular—has many flaws, but is above all like a "crying," immature child who will soon leave you ("fly"). Thus, the speaker advises readers to leave male partners—and romantic love as a whole—behind.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Song" can be interpreted in several ways.

First, Lady Mary Wroth included "Song" in her poem sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. Throughout this sequence, a female speaker, Pamphilia (whose name means "lover of all"), addresses her unfaithful lover, Amphilanthus (whose name means "lover of two"), and struggles with her relationship.

- In this sense, "Song" is a persona poem written from the point of view of the fictional Pamphilia, who describes how romantic love—in particular, her unfaithful male partner—has hurt her.

The speaker of "Song" could also be read as a stand-in for the poet, Mary Wroth:

- Like many Englishwomen of her time, Wroth was in an arranged marriage, and her husband was reportedly unfaithful, jealous, demanding, and prone to heavy drinking.
- "Song" (and the sequence as a whole) could be read as expressing—through the persona of Pamphilia—experiences that were all too real to the poet herself.

More broadly, the speaker could be read as any woman (or any person) who has suffered through romantic love, and through mistreatment by a male partner in particular. The poem comments on romantic misfortunes that were recognizable to many readers of the time—and still are today.

SETTING

While "Song" doesn't have a specific physical setting, two of its details help the reader to imagine the world the speaker inhabits:

- First, the description of love as a crying child evokes a domestic setting, in which the female speaker must constantly tend to the needs of those around her.
- Second, the speaker compares love to wolves on the hunt. These wolves evoke a scene of wilderness and danger, as though the speaker is lost in a threatening landscape.

Together, these elements convey the *psychological* "landscape" of the speaker's relationship, within which she feels as though she's both trapped in a domestic world and lost in a dangerous wilderness.

The *absence* of a more detailed physical setting is also important. Since it's not tied to a particular time or place, the poem gains a "timeless," universal quality that helps it connect with a variety of readers.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Lady Mary Wroth included "Song" in her sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. The sequence contains 83 sonnets and 20 songs (lyric poems) and was first published in 1621, at the end of Wroth's prose fiction work *Urania*. The sequence was later published independently.

In the period of English history when Wroth published "Song," it was considered socially acceptable for women to translate work by men, but not to compose their own prose or secular poetry. Wroth was only the second female English poet to publish a complete sonnet sequence (the first was Anne Locke) and was the first Englishwoman to publish *both* a complete sonnet sequence and a work of original fiction.

In writing her sonnet sequence, Wroth also had to contend with gender assumptions built into the form. Traditionally, sonnets and other Elizabethan/Jacobean lyric poems were written from the point of view of a male speaker addressing a female beloved. (There are some notable exceptions to this convention, however, including Shakespeare's Fair Youth poems, in which a male speaker addresses a male beloved.)

The speaker of the poems in Wroth's sequence (including "Song") is a female character, Pamphilia, whose name means "lover of all." In the sequence, Pamphilia addresses her unfaithful lover, Amphilanthus, whose name means "lover of

two." Pamphilia struggles with her relationship to Amphilanthus throughout the sequence and also addresses larger issues of male power and cruelty towards women. The sequence ends with a series of poems addressed to Cupid, the Roman god of love and desire.

Though in many ways Wroth broke the gender norms of her time, both by writing love poems and critiquing male behavior, her work was at least tacitly supported by the English court. As the niece of the renowned Elizabethan poet Sir Philip Sidney, Wroth was also influenced by her aunt, Mary Sidney, who was herself a writer. Wroth's husband, Sir Robert Roth (a likely model for the unfaithful, demanding "love" who appears in "Song") was favored by King James, bringing the couple into the inner circles of the Court. These social and political connections likely enabled Wroth to publish at a time when few other women could.

However, Wroth wasn't able to publish without consequences. *Urania* referred to several actual people from the English court and sharply critiqued their characters. Those who recognized themselves were outraged, attacking Wroth and creating a scandal that made it virtually impossible for the work to be reprinted at the time.

Fortunately, Wroth's work survives today, and her publication of poems and prose—as well as her creation of powerful female protagonists—was an important breakthrough, opening new possibilities for women writers in the centuries to come.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Several layers of historical and social context are important to the poem. First, Lady Mary Wroth lived and wrote during the English Renaissance, when arranged marriages were the cultural norm. Wroth herself was in an arranged marriage that her peers described as terrible: her husband, Sir Robert Roth, was reportedly jealous, demanding, unfaithful, and regularly drunk. The poem could be read as critiquing such disastrous marriages, and specifically the cruel behavior of men towards women at a time when most women had little to no independent social or economic power.

Wroth was also part of the world of the English Court, or the social circle surrounding King James. The court was fraught with corruption and affairs, often conducted to gain social or economic power. Wroth herself had an affair—with William Herbert, the third Earl of Pembroke—and such extramarital relationships were, if not the norm, close to it. This social and political reality may have shaped the cynicism found in "Song," in which the speaker implies that all romantic love is ultimately false or untrustworthy.

"Song" also implicitly comments on the hypocrisy of this social world, in which male adultery is acceptable but women's affairs are not. Wroth herself experienced this double standard: she lost favor in the English court after her husband's death and was criticized for her lifestyle, while Herbert retained his status and power. The speaker of "Song" seems all too aware of such inequalities, as she compares "love" (and a male romantic partner) to wolves for whom women are simply "prey."

📖 MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Complete Text of Pamphilia to Amphilanthus — Read the complete sequence (Pamphilia to Amphilanthus) in which "Song" was first published in 1621. (http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/mary.html#Pamphilia%20)

- More Context for Wroth's Sonnets — Read more about Wroth's poems at Shakespeare and His Sisters, which analyzes parallels between Shakespeare's plays and works by his female contemporaries. (http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/shakespeare-and-his-sisters/amazing-sonnets-by-lady-mary-wroth/)

- Cupid in Context — Learn more about Cupid, the Roman god of love and desire, to whom the "child" in Wroth's poem alludes. (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cupid)

- Podcast about Lady Mary Wroth — Listen to a BBC podcast that discusses Wroth's prose work Urania and the scandal it caused. (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000fwfd)

- Biography of Lady Mary Wroth — Learn more about Wroth's life and work via the Poetry Foundation. This page also includes links to several of Wroth's other poems. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-wroth)

💬 HOW TO CITE

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