The Scrutiny

POEM TEXT

I

Why should you sweare I am forsworn,
Since thine I vow'd to be?
Lady it is already Morn,
And 'twas last night I swore to thee
That fond impossibility.

II

Have I not lov'd thee much and long,
A tedious twelve houres space?
I must all other Beauties wrong,
And rob thee of a new imbrace;
Could I still dote upon thy Face.

III

Not, but all joy in thy browne haire,
By others may be found;
But I must search the blank and faire
Like skilfull Minerallist's that sound
For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground.

IV

Then, if when I have lov'd my round,
Thou prov'st the pleasant she;
With spoyles of meaner Beauties crown'd,
I laden will returne to thee,
Ev'n sated with Varietie.

SUMMARY

Why would you say that I have been unfaithful in the time since I swore that I was yours? Lady, it's already morning and I made that crazy impossible vow last night.

Haven't I already loved you a lot and for a long time in the last twelve hours? I would do wrong to all the other beauties—and I would keep you from experiencing a new lover of your own—if I was still devoted to you.

No, all the pleasure in your brunette hair should be enjoyed by other people; I need to investigate pale skin and blond hair like a geologist that hunts for treasure in uncultivated ground.

If, when I have loved all kinds of different women, you prove to be the most beautiful, I will return to you with the riches and treasures of lesser beauties as tribute. At that point, I will be satisfied with variety.

THEMES

FAITHFULNESS AND INFIDELITY

The speaker "The Scrutiny" is a flirtatious and untrustworthy young man. Though he has sworn his love to a lady, that was last night. Today, he's off to explore new love, to try "other Beauties." In a dramatic monologue, the speaker defends his behavior with an ingenious, mean, and playful argument: before he can be faithful, he must try out all his options. Indeed, he argues, he will be more faithful, devoted, and trustworthy if he is given the opportunity to explore "all other Beauties" before committing himself.

As the poem opens, the speaker is responding to the complaints and accusations of his lover. She claims that he is "foresworne," that he has broken the love-vows he made to her. The speaker, however, doesn't feel bound by those vows—he made them "last night"—and now it is "already Morn." He advances a couple of arguments to defend himself: the vow he made was unreasonable, a "fond impossibility"; and he's already loved her for twelve whole hours—more than long enough.

These arguments make the speaker seem almost laughably untrustworthy and skittish: he can't even commit to a relationship for more than twelve hours. But the speaker has an answer to that charge too. The speaker suggests that his untrustworthiness and infidelity are actually part of a larger plan, a strategy. He compares himself to a "skilfull Minerallist" who carefully and thoroughly searches for buried treasure. Like that "Minerallist," he will conduct a thorough, scientific survey of all women, determining which is "the pleasant she." In other words, he plans to sample the love of every woman he can in order to determine who is the most beautiful and satisfying as a lover.

Should his lover prove to be "the pleasant she," then he will return to her as a doting and devoted lover, bringing her "spoyles" from "meaner Beauties." In other words, he will bring her treasures taken from other women and offer them as tribute. The speaker thus suggests that he can only be a faithful and devoted lover once he is "sated with Varietie"—that is, when he has had his fill of other women.

This is, of course, a deeply self-serving argument. On the one hand, it allows the speaker to defend his behavior: he's only unfaithful so that he can be, one day, faithful. On the other hand, it allows him to continue flitting from woman to woman without suffering any consequences for his infidelities. The tone of the poem is thus careless and mean—but it is also playful. The speaker has no intention of convincing his lover or anyone else; rather, he hopes to entertain with his outlandish wit.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Before Line 1
- Lines 1-5
- Between Lines 5-6
- Lines 6-10
- Between Lines 10-11
- Lines 11-15
- Between Lines 15-16
- Lines 16-20

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-5

Why should you sweare I am forsworn,
Since thine I vow'd to be?
Lady it is already Morn,
And 'twas last night I swore to thee
That fond impossibility.

The first five lines of "The Scrutiny" establish the poem's theme, its playful tone, and its form. The poem begins in the middle of a conversation between the speaker and the "Lady" that he loves—at least, he swore that he loved her last night. But that was last night—now that it is "Morn," he has moved onto new loves. He regards the vow he made as crazy, "fond," an "impossibility."

The Lady is, understandably, upset with his infidelity and unfaithfulness. The poem's title, "The Scrutiny," references the pressure that he faces from her: the speaker's own actions are under scrutiny. But he refuses to apologize for his behavior—or even acknowledge that he has done anything wrong. Instead, in the poem's opening rhetorical question, he asks why she's angry in the first place, demanding "Why should you sweare I am forsworn … ?"

Throughout the poem, the speaker directly addresses his mistress, trying to appease her anger and justify his behavior. He does so by calling into question her right to be angry with him—sometimes explicitly, sometimes more subtly. For instance, the assonant /ee/ sound that runs through this first stanza—in words like "Lady" and "already"—suggests impatience with the Lady's demands, her scrutiny. Although he doesn't get there in this stanza, the speaker eventually argues that his unfaithful behavior is justified and natural—he even argues that it will make him more faithful in the end.

The speaker is thus self-confident, even self-righteous. That confidence is reflected in the poem's form. Note, for instance, the heavy amount of end-stopped lines here and throughout the poem: these end-stops reinforce the speaker's air of self-possession. In the rare moments where the poem slips into enjambment, as in line 4, the reader might feel the speaker's confidence cracking—perhaps as he meditates on the vow he made, his self-righteousness comes apart a little bit.

The poem is written with a regular metrical pattern and rhyme scheme. Each stanza is rhymed ABABB. Most of its lines are written in iambic tetrameter (meaning there are four stressed beats per line)—but the second line of each stanza is in iambic trimeter (three stresses a line). Short lines help the poem feel casual and playful—and they keep the poem moving quickly, despite its heavy and regular end-stops. The poem seems to self-consciously avoid a prestigious, elevated meter like iambic pentameter. Instead, the poem's form subtly suggests that the poem itself is intended to be light-hearted, almost like a humorous song. Its speaker is not making a serious argument about love and fidelity; rather, he is simply showing off his wit.

LINES 6-10

Have I not lov'd thee much and long,
A tedious twelve houres space?
I must all other Beauties wrong,
And rob thee of a new imbrace;
Could I still dote upon thy Face.

In lines 6-10, the speaker expands his defense of his unfaithful behavior. He begins in lines 6-7 by calling into question—with another rhetorical question—the very idea that he has been unfaithful. He points out that he *has* been faithful—for a full "twelve houres," a time he characterizes as "long" and "tedious." In other words, he has already given his mistress more faith and dedication than he should have. Like much of the poem, these lines are elegant—the speaker is showing off his considerable poetic skill. That elegance is evident in the alliterations between words like "lov'd" and "long" in line 6 and "tedious" and "twelve" in line 7. But these alliterations also reinforce the speaker's defense of his behavior: they make it seem like he really *has* loved his mistress for a long, tedious period.

In lines 8-10, the speaker introduces a new argument in defense of his behavior. If he does remain faithful to his mistress, he will "all other Beauties wrong." In other words, he will deprive other women of their chance to love *him*. Equally, his mistress will be metaphorically robbed—robbed of her opportunity to love other men, to have "a new imbrace." The metaphor makes the speaker seem almost noble: he is protecting his mistress from a painful and damaging theft. But both arguments are also comical in how self-serving they are.

As is true throughout the poem, it's best to take these arguments for what they are: a playful display of wit and sophistication, not an earnest defense of infidelity.

These lines continue the formal pattern established in the previous stanza. They are rhymed ABABB. Every line except line 7 is written in iambic tetrameter; line 7 is in iambic trimeter (meaning there are only three, rather than four, iambs in the line). All of the lines are end-stopped—reflecting the speaker's considerable confidence in his own arguments. The short lines help the poem feel feisty, playful, and quick—despite its heavy, regular end-stops.

LINES 11-15

Not, but all joy in thy browne haire,
By others may be found;
But I must search the blank and faire
Like skilfull Minerallist's that sound
For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground.

In lines 11-15, the speaker of "The Scrutiny" continues to expand his defense of his unfaithful behavior. Indeed, in the final 10 lines of the poem, he seems to hit his stride. He begins by noting that someone else—another man—might find "all joy" in his mistress's "browne haire." It would be unfair for the speaker to deprive that man of a chance to find such joy. And anyway, as he explains in lines 13-15, he wants to experience the love of other women. While the lady he loves has brown hair, he wants to "search the blank and faire." In other words, he wants to love some women with pale skin and blond hair.

Using a complex simile, he compares this "search" to the scientific inquiry of a "skilfull Minerallist[]"—in other words, a geologist. Like a geologist, the speaker must "sound"—search—"For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground." In other words, the speaker is going treasure hunting, digging into uncultivated ground in the hopes that he will find something precious and valuable. This is all still part of the same, complicated simile—so the speaker is really saying that he regards his unfaithful behavior, the way he flits from woman to woman, as a kind of treasure hunt. The women he loves, briefly, are like treasure: while they may be valuable, even precious, they are not accorded full humanity. The speaker treats them objects.

Lines 13-15 contain a dense run of consonant sounds: for example, the alliterative /m/ sound that links together "must" and "Minerallist" in lines 13-14 and the /l/ sound in line 14: "Like skillfull Minerallist's." These sounds are a mouthful, echoing the difficulty of the labor the speaker describes himself performing. In turn, the consonance supports the speaker's defense of his own infidelities: instead of flitting from one pleasurable dalliance to another, he becomes a hard-working, dedicated miner. However, the speaker slips into enjambment here—lines 13 and 14 are two of the only three enjambed lines in the poem. These enjambments suggest that the speaker feels a little unsettled as he makes up this simile, that he wants to speed through it.

Otherwise, the poem remains formally undisturbed in lines 11-15. It continues to rhyme ABABB. And its meter also remains steady. Lines 11 and 13-15 are in iambic tetrameter, while line 12 is in iambic trimeter. The complexity and seriousness of the speaker's simile is undermined by the light, playful form the poem takes—which continues to suggest that the reader shouldn't take the speaker *too* seriously.

LINES 16-20

Then, if when I have lov'd my round,
Thou prov'st the pleasant she;
With spoyles of meaner Beauties crown'd,
I laden will returne to thee,
Ev'n sated with Varietie.

In the final five lines of "The Scrutiny," the speaker makes his most forceful and extraordinary argument in defense of his infidelities. He imagines what might happen when he has "lov'd my round"—in other words, when he has finally loved enough women to be satisfied, when he is "sated with Varietie." It's possible, he concedes, that his current mistress might prove to be "the pleasant she"—the most beautiful and pleasurable partner. If that happens, he promises to return to her.

And he'll bring something with him: the "spoyles of meaner Beauties." This speaker metaphorically compares his infidelity to war. After various conquests, he'll return to this mistress "crown'd" and "laden" with the "spoyles," or loot, of his victories. What exactly these "spoyles" will be is almost comically vague. Is it bragging rights? Actual jewelry and trinkets stolen from these other ladies?

At any rate, this metaphor supposedly gives the speaker's mistress incentive to tolerate infidelities: she stands to gain the honor and envy of all other women. More broadly, the speaker's argument in these lines suggests that his infidelity will, eventually, make him a more faithful lover—and that he cannot be expected to be faithful until he has "lov'd my round." These lines thus mark the completion of the speaker's defense of himself and his behavior.

It is worth noting how explicitly the speaker addresses his mistress in these lines. Though he has been using apostrophe throughout the poem, the speaker is particularly insistent, particularly obvious about it, in the poem's opening and closing stanzas. The poem—and its argument in defense of his behavior—thus seems to come directly from his mistress' anger with him. Her unhappiness is the engine of the poem.

That engine is running smoothly in the poem's final five lines. Like the rest of the poem, these lines are mostly written iambic tetrameter (line 17 is written iambic trimeter); they are all end-stopped; and they rhyme ABABB. However, it is worth noting that the A rhyme line lines 16-20—"round" and "crown'd"—is the

same as the B rhyme in lines 11-15—"found," "sound," "ground." This is the only moment in the poem when rhyme links together two stanzas: it suggests that, as the speaker approaches the pinnacle of his argument, he becomes more passionate and excited: he has warmed to his subject, found an argument worthy of his erudition and his wit.

SYMBOLS

MORN

The "Morn"—or "morning"—is often a symbol of rebirth and renewal. Poets often compare the cycle of night and day to death and birth: as the sun fades in the west, it seems like it's dying. But, then, when it reappears in the east the next day, it seems to have been reborn, to be renewed. For a more religious poet than Lovelace, this might serve as a symbol for the Christian resurrection. But Lovelace's speaker takes this moment of rebirth and renewal in a very *different* sense. Instead of reminding him of Christian promises for life after death, he takes it as a sign that the vows he made in the past are null, that he is free to pursue new loves. In other words, the "Morn" functions as a symbol for the rebirth of the speaker himself, free of his past commitments and entanglements.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Morn"

POETIC DEVICES

END-STOPPED LINE

Most of the lines in "The Scrutiny" are end-stopped. Indeed, there are only three enjambments in the poem; two of the poem's stanzas have no enjambments whatsoever. For example, the poem's first three lines are all end-stopped:

> Why should you sweare I am forsworn,
> Since thine I vow'd to be?
> Lady it is already Morn,

As the poem opens and the speaker introduces its central conflicts, the end-stops make it feel strong and confident. Although the speaker is wrapped up in a conflict with his mistress—and although his own behavior is anything but stable or trustworthy—the end-stops give the reader a sense that the speaker doesn't feel much doubt. He doesn't question his own behavior.

A poem with a lot of end-stops often feels slow and heavy: end-stops can act as a brake, decelerating the reader's experience of the poem. But that's not the case in "The Scrutiny." Even in the second stanza—which is entirely end-stopped—the poem remains lively and quick:

> Have I not lov'd thee much and long,
> A tedious twelve houres space?
> I must all other Beauties wrong,
> And rob thee of a new imbrace;
> Could I still dote upon thy Face.

Although each line is end-stopped, the reader's eye still flows smoothly and quickly down the page. The poem's short lines compensate for its end-stops. Because its lines are short and smooth, the reader is able to jump from line to line, without being hindered by the end-stops.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "forsworn,"
- **Line 2:** "be?"
- **Line 3:** "Morn,"
- **Line 5:** "impossibility."
- **Line 6:** "long,"
- **Line 7:** "space?"
- **Line 8:** "wrong,"
- **Line 9:** "imbrace;"
- **Line 10:** "Face."
- **Line 11:** "haire,"
- **Line 12:** "found;"
- **Line 15:** "ground."
- **Line 16:** "round,"
- **Line 17:** "she;"
- **Line 18:** "crown'd,"
- **Line 19:** "thee,"
- **Line 20:** "Varietie."

ENJAMBMENT

There are only three enjambments in "The Scrutiny." The poem is strongly end-stopped—it turns to enjambment only in rare and isolated instances. As a result, when it does occur, enjambment feels like a disruption, a break in the poem's pattern—and, equally, a break in the speaker's confidence.

The reader can see this in the poem's first enjambment in lines 4-5:

> And 'twas last night I swore to thee
> That fond impossibility.

After three end-stopped lines, this enjambment is arresting, even disturbing. The speaker is usually very smooth and confident in his own behavior, but here the façade cracks a little bit. It is as if, in contemplating the vow he swore last night, the speaker feels a twinge of conscience, a moment of regret and hesitation. That hesitation is not explicitly acknowledged in the

poem, but the enjambment hints at it.

Similarly, when the speaker tries to justify his actions in lines 13-15, he falls into enjambment once again:

> But I must search the blank and faire
> Like skillfull Minerallist's that sound
> For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground.

The speaker's simile is a bit extravagant—and a bit insulting. He compares his own unfaithful behavior to a scientific investigation: he's like a geologist who digs for treasure in uncultivated land. It's a complicated simile and it takes several lines for the speaker to fully lay it out. As he does so, he switches into enjambment: both lines 13 and 14 are enjambed.

In these enjambments, the reader may detect a hint of nervousness: as though the speaker isn't fully convinced by his own simile, as though he wants to rush through its details and get it over with. Enjambment thus registers moments of uncertainty and disturbance in the poem—moments when the speaker's supreme self-confidence wavers, ever so slightly.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-5:** "thee / That"
- **Lines 13-14:** "faire / Like"
- **Lines 14-15:** "sound / For"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration appears throughout "The Scrutiny." The device plays two roles: on the one hand, it helps the poem sound elegant and refined—a showcase for the speaker's (and the author's) wit, learning, and poetic skill. On the other hand, it often underlines and reinforces the speaker's defense of his own bad behavior.

These two roles often overlap, as in the opening lines of the poem's second stanza:

> Have I not lov'd thee much and long
> A tedious twelve houres space?

The lines are full of rich, alliterative /l/ and /t/ sounds—and these alliterations make the lines sound especially elegant. For instance, the alliteration between "lov'd" and "long" is melodic and beautiful. At the same time, the alliteration also underlines the speaker's complaint: for him, loving the same woman for twelve hours straight is "tedious" and "long." By linking together "lov'd" and "long," the speaker suggests that his love has been "long"—that he has been dedicated to his mistress for a respectable amount of time.

Similarly, the alliteration between "tedious" and "twelve" in the next line suggests that "twelve houres" really is a long time—a tedious, interminable interval. So even as the alliteration gives these lines a refined poetic elegance, it also supports the speaker's justifications for his unfaithful behavior.

Notably, there is a lot of alliteration in the third stanza:

> Not, but all joy in thy browne haire,
> By others may be found;
> But I must search the blank and faire
> Like skilfull Minerallist's that sound

This stanza features the poem's most elaborate metaphor and imagery. The alliteration helps bring that imagery to life. Just as the speaker describes "Minerallist's," or geologists, digging through the ground, the /b/, /m/, /f/, and /s/ sounds create a rocky landscape in the language itself. By making this imagery more vivid, the speaker attempts to make his argument that much more convincing.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "sweare"
- **Line 2:** "Since"
- **Line 3:** "Lady," "it," "is"
- **Line 4:** "last," "swore," "thee"
- **Line 5:** "That"
- **Line 6:** "lov'd," "long"
- **Line 7:** "tedious," "twelve"
- **Line 8:** "wrong"
- **Line 9:** "rob"
- **Line 11:** "but," "browne"
- **Line 12:** "By," "may," "be," "found"
- **Line 13:** "But," "must," "search," "blank," "faire"
- **Line 14:** "skilfull," "Minerallist's," "sound"
- **Line 16:** "Then," "lov'd," "round"
- **Line 17:** "Thou," "prov'st," "pleasant"
- **Line 18:** "spoyles"
- **Line 19:** "laden," "returne"
- **Line 20:** "sated"

ASSONANCE

"The Scrutiny" is not a strongly assonant poem: most of its assonance appears in the poem's rhymes—and is therefore better discussed as part of its rhyme scheme. However, there are a few—albeit, isolated—moments where its assonance intensifies and plays an important role in the poem, reinforcing the speaker's defense of his behavior.

For instance, listen to the /ee/ sound in line 3:

> Lady it is already Morn

The assonant link between "Lady" and "already" underscores the speaker's impatience with his mistress and her complaints about his behavior. The assonance thus reinforces the speaker's argument: that her demands on him are

unreasonable; that she is unreasonable to expect him to remain faithful.

This assonance is strengthened through the rest of the stanza—the same /ee/ sound appears in "thee" in line 4 and "impossibility" in line 5. By the end of the stanza, then, the assonance strongly suggests that the speaker's mistress is dragging him down, forcing him to commit himself to impossible vows he made in the distant past. And in this way, it acts to justify his unfaithful behavior.

Another noteworthy moment occurs in the poem's final two lines:

> I laden will returne to thee,
> Ev'n sated with Varietie.

The long /i/, /a/, and /e/ assonance emphasizes the finality of this line. The speaker confidently wraps up his argument, and the abundance of similar sounds conveys that. This assonance suggests the speaker views his argument as airtight—even if it really isn't!

So, although assonance does not play a major role in "The Scrutiny," in moments like these it subtly reinforces the speaker's defense of himself.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I," "forsworn"
- **Line 2:** "thine," "I," "be"
- **Line 3:** "Lady," "it," "is," "already," "Morn"
- **Line 4:** "night," "I," "swore," "thee"
- **Line 5:** "fond," "impossibility"
- **Line 6:** "lov'd," "thee," "much," "long"
- **Line 7:** "tedious," "space"
- **Line 8:** "must," "other," "wrong"
- **Line 9:** "rob," "imbrace"
- **Line 10:** "I," "upon," "thy," "Face"
- **Line 11:** "Not," "all," "haire"
- **Line 12:** "may," "found"
- **Line 13:** "blank," "faire"
- **Line 14:** "skilfull," "Minerallist's," "sound"
- **Line 15:** "un," "plow'd," "up," "ground"
- **Line 16:** "Then," "when," "round"
- **Line 17:** "she"
- **Line 18:** "meaner," "Beauties," "crown'd"
- **Line 19:** "I," "laden," "thee"
- **Line 20:** "Ev'n," "sated," "Varietie"

CONSONANCE

Although "The Scrutiny" is relatively restrained in its use of assonance, it is much more liberal in its use of consonance—and consonance does, at certain points in the poem, play a role in reinforcing the speaker's argument, his defense of his unfaithful behavior.

Note, for instance, the strong consonance and alliteration that runs through lines 13-15:

> But I must search the blank and faire
> Like skilfull Minerallist's that sound
> For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground.

These lines are rich with sonic play. There's the alliterative /m/ sound that links together "must" and "Minerallist" in lines 13-14, for example. And there's the strong /l/ sound in line 14: "Like skillfull Minerallist's." Note also the /r/, /n/, and /s/ sounds.

These sounds are tough, chewy, harsh. They give the speaker's complicated simile a hard undertone. In these lines, he says that his plan—to sample the love of as many women as possible—makes him like a geologist, digging for treasure. The strong consonant sounds echo the difficulty of the labor he describes himself performing: digging through tough, uncultivated ground to find something precious and hidden. And that supports the speaker's defense of his own infidelities: instead of flitting from one pleasurable dalliance to another, he becomes a hard-working, dedicated miner.

The speaker also uses consonance to heighten his argument in the last stanza:

> Then, if when I have lov'd my round,
> Thou prov'st the pleasant she;
> With spoyles of meaner Beauties crown'd

Here, the /p/, /n/, and /l/ sounds add a forceful insistence to these lines. Now that the speaker's reached the final stage of his argument, he's making it as passionate as can be—hoping, perhaps, that this passion will cover up the faulty logic in his argument.

As these examples demonstrate, then, the speaker uses consonance to underline and reinforce his rather shaky and unconvincing defense of his own bad behavior.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Why," "sweare," "forsworn"
- **Line 2:** "Since," "thine"
- **Line 3:** "Lady," "already," "Morn"
- **Line 4:** "twas," "last," "night," "swore," "thee"
- **Line 5:** "That," "impossibility"
- **Line 6:** "Have," "lov'd," "long"
- **Line 7:** "tedious," "twelve," "houres," "space"
- **Line 8:** "must," "other," "Beauties," "wrong"
- **Line 9:** "rob," "imbrace"
- **Line 10:** "Could," "still," "dote," "Face"
- **Line 11:** "Not," "but," "in," "browne," "haire"
- **Line 12:** "By," "be," "found"

- **Line 13:** "But," "must," "search," "blank," "faire"
- **Line 14:** "Like," "skilfull," "Minerallist's," "sound"
- **Line 15:** "Treasure," "un," "plow'd," "up," "ground"
- **Line 16:** "Then," "when," "have," "lov'd," "round"
- **Line 17:** "Thou," "prov'st," "the," "pleasant"
- **Line 18:** "spoyles," "meaner," "crown'd"
- **Line 19:** "laden," "returne"
- **Line 20:** "sated"

SIMILE

"The Scrutiny" contains a single, complex simile which appears in lines 13-15. In its, the speaker compares his promiscuous ways to the activity of a geologist:

> But I must search the blank and faire
> Like skilfull Minerallist's that sound
> For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground.

The simile contains several parts. First, the speaker announces that he "must search the blank and faire." His mistress has "browne haire": before he can truly be faithful to her, he argues, he must sample the love of fair skinned women with blond hair.

Then, in line 14, the speaker introduces the simile. In sampling the love of these other women, he will be like a "skilfull Minerallist[]." In other words, he will be like a geologist—a scientist who studies the Earth. And like a geologist he will "sound"—that is, search—for "Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground." In other words, he will look for valuable, precious things in uncultivated land. At this point, the reader may have lost track of the fact that this is a simile altogether—and wonder why the speaker is suddenly talking about mining and treasure hunting. But line 15 is still part of the simile that begins in line 13. The speaker imagines that the "blank and faire" women whose love he wants to sample are like abandoned, forgotten treasures—treasures that he will dig up.

The simile is thus implicitly misogynistic: instead of treating the women he wants to love as full people, the speaker regards them as precious objects. They may be, in his estimation, treasures, but they are not fully human. And this may explain his callous attitude to all the women he encounters in the poem: he does not deal faithfully and honestly with his mistress or any other woman because he doesn't grant women full humanity.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-15:** "But I must search the blank and faire / Like skilfull Minerallist's that sound / For Treasure in un-plow'd-up ground."

METAPHOR

The speaker of "The Scrutiny" uses metaphor occasionally. These metaphors do not occupy the center of his attention—or the reader's attention. But they nonetheless help the speaker justify his unfaithful behavior.

For example, in line 8-9, the speaker insists that, if he remains faithful to his mistress:

> I must all other Beauties wrong,
> And rob thee of a new imbrace;

The speaker compares the love that his mistress will lose—if he remains faithful to her—to a robbery. It's as though he would be stealing all those potential lovers from her. The metaphor thus makes the speaker look better: he's not cheating on her, he's protecting her from the theft of future love!

The poem's most important metaphor falls in its final three lines. The speaker imagines what he will do if his mistress "prov'st the pleasant she"—in other words, the most beautiful and satisfying woman he can love:

> With spoyles of meaner Beauties crown'd,
> I laden will returne to thee,
> Ev'n sated with Varietie.

The speaker will come back to his mistress—and he'll bring something with him: the "spoyles of meaner Beauties." The speaker compares his promiscuity to war. After his various affairs, he'll return as if from battle, "crown'd" and "laden" with the "spoyles" of his victories.

In other words, he will take away the bragging rights from other women and give them to his mistress. Though these other women may have been "crown'd" as beauties, they will lose their crowns and their titles; they will be forced to pay homage to the speaker's mistress. The metaphor thus gives the speaker's mistress an incentive to tolerate his infidelities: if she does, she stands to gain the honor and envy of all the other women whose love he samples.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "I must all other Beauties wrong, / And rob thee of a new imbrace;"
- **Lines 18-20:** "With spoyles of meaner Beauties crown'd, / I laden will returne to thee, / Ev'n sated with Varietie."

RHETORICAL QUESTION

"The Scrutiny" contains two rhetorical questions. The first appears in the poem's opening lines:

> Why should you sweare I am forsworn,
> Since thine I vow'd to be ?

Here the speaker is addressing his mistress—a woman he swore that he loved "last night." But he has already evidently broken his vow to her and she has complained to him about his infidelity. The speaker uses the rhetorical question to launch his defense of his own unfaithful behavior: it calls into question the very idea that he has been unfaithful—and that his infidelity is such a bad thing.

Similarly, the speaker turns to a rhetorical question again at the start of the poem's second stanza:

> Have I not lov'd thee much and long,
> A tedious twelve houres space?

The speaker is once again defending his own behavior—and calling into question the grounds upon which his mistress makes her complaint. He admits that it's only been twelve hours since he made his vow to his mistress—but he suggests that twelve hours is an extraordinarily long time to be faithful to one lover.

The speaker's rhetorical questions thus do two things at once. On the one hand, they acknowledge his misbehavior: he doesn't deny that he has made and broken a vow to his mistress, all in the space of twelve hours. But, on the other hand, he uses the rhetorical questions to raise doubts—asking his mistress (and his readers) to wonder whether his behavior might not be justified and honorable, despite its appearances.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "Why should you sweare I am forsworn, / Since thine I vow'd to be?"
- **Lines 6-7:** "Have I not lov'd thee much and long, / A tedious twelve houres space?"

APOSTROPHE

Throughout "The Scrutiny," the poem's speaker addresses his mistress—a woman that he swore he loved just "last night." But he has already broken his vow, even though he made it only twelve hours ago. The poem begins by implying the woman's angry reaction to his infidelity. The speaker tries to defend himself, offering her a range of arguments for why his infidelity is not bad—and in fact may lead him to be a better and more faithful lover in the future. Speaking to his mistress like this, the speaker uses apostrophe—addressing a lover who doesn't respond in the poem.

Apostrophe is thus at the center of the poem. The speaker's arguments in defense of his own unfaithful behavior are prompted by the fact that he is speaking to someone whom he has wronged, a woman who has been hurt by his own bad behavior.

Thus the poem both opens and closes with strong moments of apostrophe, the speaker directly addressing his "Lady":

> Lady it is already Morn,
> And 'twas last night I swore to thee
> That fond impossibility.

And:

> I laden will return to thee,
> Ev'n sated with Varietie.

Although apostrophe runs through the whole poem, it is especially striking in these opening and closing moments.

Although the woman isn't given the chance to actually speak in the poem, it's easy to imagine her standing right there, provoking the speaker to come up with these outlandish arguments. At the same time, the speaker effectively silences the woman, constantly making himself the center of attention without giving her the chance to respond.

The speaker thus grounds the poem in apostrophe: he introduces his argument and closes it by speaking directly to the woman he has wronged. Her unhappiness—and his need to appease her—is thus the engine of the poem, the source of energy that powers its elaborate arguments.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-5
- Lines 6-10
- Lines 11-15
- Lines 16-20

VOCABULARY

Sweare (Line 1) - Insist, argue.

Forsworn (Line 1) - Unfaithful; the lady insists the speaker has broken his vow to her.

Thine (Line 2) - Yours. A now obsolete and informal way of saying "yours."

Vow'd (Line 2) - Promised, swore.

Morn (Line 3) - Morning.

'Twas (Line 4) - It was.

Thee (Line 4, Line 6, Line 9, Line 19) - You (archaic and informal).

Fond (Line 5) - Crazy, foolish.

Lov'd (Line 6, Line 16) - Loved; been devoted to or in love with.

Tedious (Line 7) - Long, boring.

Imbrace (Line 9) - Embrace, a hug. In other words, another relationship.

Could (Line 10) - If I could, if I continued to.

Browne Haire (Line 11) - Brown colored hair. The speaker's mistress is a brunette.

Blank and Faire (Line 13) - Blond and fair-skinned.

Minerallist (Line 14) - Geologists: in other words, people who dig for gems and precious stones in the earth.

Sound (Line 14) - Test, try, search. In other words, the geologists are digging into the "un-plow'd up ground" to find gems or riches.

Un-Plow'd-Up Ground (Line 15) - Uncultivated, un-farmed, or unused land.

My Round (Line 16) - My fill. In other words, once the speaker has loved enough women to be satisfied.

Thou (Line 17) - You (an obsolete and informal way of addressing someone).

Prov'st (Line 17) - Prove; turn out to be.

Spoyles (Line 18) - Spoils, i.e. plundered riches.

Meaner Beauties (Line 18) - Less beautiful women.

Crown'd (Line 18) - Crowned. The speaker will be crowned with "the spoyles of meaner Beauties." In other words, the speaker will return from his romantic adventures as if wearing the crown of victory.It's also possible to read this line as saying that the less beautiful women have been "crown'd." In this reading, they are treated like queens, like the most beautiful and important women in the world.

Laden (Line 19) - Burdened with, carrying.

Ev'n (Line 20) - Even.

Sated (Line 20) - Satisfied. The speaker's appetites for other women will have been appeased.

Varietie (Line 20) - Variety, difference. In other words, the variety of other women the speaker imagines himself loving.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Scrutiny" is a 20-line dramatic monologue. It is broken up into four separate rhyming cinquains, or five-line stanzas. The poem's lines are generally short: most of its lines are written in iambic tetrameter (meaning there are four stressed beats per line); the second line of each stanza, however, is written in iambic trimeter (three stressed beats per line). Although the poem thus employs the elements of formal verse in a regular and controlled way, the poem does not follow any set or inherited form—like the sonnet or the sestina. Instead, Lovelace created this form specifically for the poem.

In doing so, Lovelace self-consciously stayed away from the more prestigious and important formal traditions in English poetry. Rather, he opted for a song-like form that is meant to entertain. Each stanza acts as a verse in this humorous song. So, far from being a concerted, philosophical argument about love and infidelity, the poem presents a playful—and unconvincing—series of witty remarks. The poem's form thus reminds the reader not to put too much weight on the arguments its speaker makes.

METER

"The Scrutiny" uses two different meters: iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter. Most of the poem's lines are written in iambic tetrameter, a meter that follows a duh DUH rhythm for four feet. The reader can hear this rhythm in the poem's opening line:

> Why should | you swear | I am | forsworn

This meter establishes a clear, song-like cadence for the poem.

However, the second line of each stanza is written in a *different* meter: iambic trimeter. Iambic trimeter follows the same duh DUH rhythm. But a line of iambic trimeter is one foot shorter than a line of iambic tetrameter: a trimeter line has six syllables, as compared to the eight syllables of tetrameter line. The reader can hear the rhythm of this alternate meter in line 2:

> Since thine | I vow'd | to be?

As the poem alternates between trimeter and tetrameter, its lines remain short and fluid. The poem moves quickly; it feels light and bouncy.

And the poem notably falls short of iambic pentameter: even its longest lines are a full foot short of a pentameter line. By refusing to write in iambic pentameter—the most prestigious meter in English poetry—Lovelace quietly reminds his reader not to take the poem (or its speaker) too seriously. Instead of giving the reader an elegant and elevated form, the poem gives us a playful meter to match its playful, untrustworthy argument.

RHYME SCHEME

Each stanza of "The Scrutiny" follows a set rhyme scheme of:

> ABABB

The poem's rhymes are generally strong and straightforward: the speaker usually uses single syllable rhyme words and always uses perfect rhymes. And the rhymes usually mark the borders of each stanza: instead of being linked together by shared rhymes, each stanza has its own set of rhymes—except, that is, for the poem's final stanza.

In the poem's final stanza, the rhyme words "round" and "crown'd" in lines 16 and 18 also rhyme with the B rhymes from the previous stanza: "found," "sound," and "ground" in lines 12, 14, and 15. The linked rhymes speed the poem up. Instead of taking a full pause at the end of line 15, the rhyme pulls the

speaker forward into the next stanza. It thus feels like the speaker has warmed to his subject. He seems to feel more passionately about the arguments he makes in these two stanzas than earlier in the poem, when he mounted a more tentative defense for his bad behavior.

The poem's rhyme scheme thus supplies a degree of regularity and control to a poem whose speaker seems always on the verge of spiraling out of control, seduced by his own fantasies and the power of his wit.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The Scrutiny" is flirtatious and untrustworthy: he makes vows to the women he loves, then breaks those vows just as quickly and easily. He doesn't want to commit to one woman; instead, he wants to sample the love of as many women as possible, before settling down with the "pleasant she"—the most beautiful and pleasurable partner.

He defends his bad behavior with a playful—and unconvincing—argument: he claims that he will be *more* faithful because, after all his messing around, he will be "sated with Varietie." In other words, he argues that he can only be faithful to one woman after he's had his fill of many. The reader shouldn't take this argument *too* seriously: though it's mean and self-serving, it is also self-consciously playful and lighthearted. The poem is not trying to make a serious argument about love and fidelity; instead, the speaker is simply showing off his refined and playful wit.

Although the poem itself doesn't explicitly state the speaker is a man, readers of the time would certainly have interpreted it in this way. The speaker plays on conventional gender dynamics between men and women from this time period. We have followed suit in our guide—although, plucked out of the context, the speaker of this poem could easily be interpreted in another way.

SETTING

"The Scrutiny" doesn't tell its reader much—explicitly—about its setting. The poem consists of a long monologue, in which the speaker justifies his infidelities, his resistance to settling down and committing to one woman. The poem thus confines itself to love and relationships; the poem is set in the context of these relationships.

However, the reader may make some educated guesses about the poem's broader setting. For one, the poem takes place in the "Morn," or morning. A reader might imagine the speaker is in bed with his mistress, preparing to leave her and break his vow of love. In this case, the poem playfully inserts itself in a long tradition of poems called *aubades*, or songs of lovers parting at dawn.

With its elevated, playful wit—and with its general climate of luxury and entitlement—the poem also seems to take place in the context of aristocratic courtship rituals. Indeed, the reader might alternatively imagine that the poem takes place at Court: the place where the King conducts the business of the state, and his many courtiers and advisors jockey for influence and power. Though the poem never explicitly situates itself in this exalted setting, its tone, its language, and its mood suggest that one should imagine it taking place in such an aristocratic setting, perhaps even Court itself.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Richard Lovelace was one of the leaders of the so-called "Cavalier" poets. The Cavaliers were a loose group of poets, who lived and worked in the 1620s, '30s, and '40s. Although the Cavalier poets had strong political commitments, their poetry is often strikingly apolitical. Their poems are often playful, highly intelligent, and refined, showing off the poets' wit and sophistication. The Cavaliers were inspired by poets like Ben Jonson—poets who often showed off learning and erudition. As a result, the poetry of the Cavaliers can feel curiously distant from the complex and often dramatic lives the poets themselves led.

"The Scrutiny" also inserts itself into a tradition of love poems called aubades, or songs sung by lovers at dawn. Traditionally, in one of these poems, lovers in bed mourn the arrival of the sun at dawn, which will force them to part. A famous example is "The Sun Rising" by John Donne. Lovelace's poem, of course, has a decidedly different tone—the speaker can't wait to get away from his lover! This is part of the poem's somewhat mean-spirited sense of humor, the way it shuns traditional expressions of love for a witty argument in favor of promiscuity.

"The Scrutiny" is striking for how it turns away from the turmoil of Lovelace's era. However, Lovelace did write other poems that engaged more directly with his own role in the military and political events of his time. In "To Althea, from Prison," and "To Lucasta, Going to the Wars," the speaker again addresses a romantic partner, but these times in the larger contexts of war and political imprisonment.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the poem never acknowledges it, "The Scrutiny" was written during a dramatic and decisive period in British history. Most likely drafted in 1642, Lovelace wrote the poem just before or during the opening months of the English Civil War, a brutal conflict that lasted until 1651. The causes of the Civil War are complex—involving political and economic disturbances that unsettled the country. But, at its root, it was a conflict over religion.

Puritans advocated for the country to adopt a more radical Protestant faith. The king himself opposed them, insisting on the more conservative doctrines of the Church of England. The King's supporters came to be known as the Royalists, while the Puritans were called Parliamentarians—because they wanted to do away with the monarchy altogether, and have the English Parliament rule the country in the king's place.

After a bloody struggle, the Parliamentarians won the war; they even went so far as to execute King Charles I in 1649. However, their victory did not last long. After the death of the Parliamentarian leader, Oliver Cromwell, the country quickly returned to the monarchy and many of the leaders of the Parliamentarians were executed. Lovelace was a participant in these events, fighting for the Royalist cause. However, he died in 1657—before his party was restored to power.

The Cavalier poets were united by their political allegiances: without exception, the Cavaliers were strong supporters of the English king—and more broadly, of the monarchy itself. They thought that God himself authorized the king's power and authority. Most of them were aristocrats: well-born men, who served at high levels in the British government as ambassadors, courtiers, and royal advisors. Richard Lovelace exemplified these trends. The scion of a noble family from Kent, he was, during his life, a decorated soldier and courtier, who fought on behalf of the king during the English Civil War. He was imprisoned for more than a year during the Civil War.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Richard Lovelace — A biography of Richard Lovelace from the Encyclopedia Britannica. (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Lovelace)
- The Cavalier Poets — A history of the Cavalier Poets—a group that Lovelace helped to lead—from the Encyclopedia Britannica. (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cavalier-poets)
- "The Scrutiny" Read Aloud — Jordan Harling recites Richard Lovelace's poem "The Scrutiny." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKxGmHmyqLI)
- Choosing Sides in the English Civil War — An article from the BBC laying out how Englishmen chose sides during the English Civil War. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/civil_war_revolution/choosingsides_01.shtml)
- The English Civil War — An introduction to the English Civil War, with a discussion of the factors that lead to the war, and the factions on either side of it. (https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Origins-of-the-English-Civil-War/)

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