

*Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all
 Wherein I should your great deserts repay,
 Forgot upon your dearest love to call,
 Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day,
 That I have frequent been with unknown minds,
 And given to time your own dear-purchased right,
 That I have hoisted sail to all the winds
 Which should transport me farthest from your sight.
 Book both my wilfulness and errors down
 And on just proof surmise accumulate,
 Bring me within the level of your frown,
 But shoot not at me in your wakened hate,
 Since my appeal says I did strive to prove
 The constancy and virtue of your love.*

In this sonnet the reader is jolted back into the reality that he has experienced before. The momentary idealism of Sonnet 116 is wiped out with the stroke of a pen. Instead of the positive picture created from a series of negatives, there is a parade of imperatives that begins with the first word — *Accuse* — and comes to a climax in the speaker's plea, "But shoot not at me in your wakened hate" (l. 12).

The first three words of the poem augur the old masochism, this time laying out for his friend the grounds on which he can be chastised. I have, he says begrudged ("scanted all," l. 1) the debts I owe you; I have forgotten to call upon "your dearest love" (l. 3), to which I am tied each day; and I have kept low company — "unknown minds" (l. 5), he calls them, in sharp contrast to the "true minds" of Sonnet 116. He has also wasted time he should have spent with his dear friend, who has prior claims. Finally, he has failed by "hoisting sail to all the winds" (l. 7) and going farthest from his friend's sight. (There is clearly a connection with the "wand'ring bark" of the preceding poem and the earlier thread of travel.)

In the third quatrain, the speaker asks to be "booked" for all his arbitrary acts, admitting that his friend has the right to become suspicious because of his wanderings ("errors," l. 9). Then, melodramatically, he commands that the young man "bring [him] within the level of [his] frown" (l. 11), the

level being the aim and range of a weapon. (Originally it was an archery term.) But, quickly turning away from his command, he adds, in effect, "Please don't shoot." There is an admixture of lightheartedness here that alters what might be a very grim tone.

The poem ends with a rather lame "appeal" (the last of the legal terms) when the speaker claims to have been merely testing his friend's constancy in love. The case against and for the speaker's plea and the force of his injunctions for his own punishment are too weak to be taken very seriously, yet the negative undercurrent cannot be ignored.