

*Like as to make our appetites more keen
 With eager compounds we our palates urge,
 As to prevent our maladies unseen,
 We sicken to shun sickness when we purge.
 Ev' n so, being full of your ne'er cloying sweetness,
 To bitter sauces did I frame my feeding;
 And sick of welfare, found a kind of meetness
 To be diseased ere that there was true needing.
 Thus policy in love t' anticipate
 The ills that were not, grew to faults assured,
 And brought to medicine a healthful state,
 Which rank of goodness would by ill be cured.
 But thence I learn and find the lesson true,
 Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you.*

The speaker's apologetic strain continues in a series of images involving gluttony and disease. Gluttony looks back to the first sonnet; disease towards the end. In contrast to Sonnet 116, the conceits are puzzlingly intricate and insistently unpleasant. The first quatrain consists of two similes, two lines each, dealing with eating and illness respectively. The first simile describes how we sharpen our appetites with "eager compounds" (sour or bitter sauces); the second tells how we fend off possible sickness ("maladies unseen," l. 3) by purging, a common practice in Tudor times.

Similarly, says the speaker (in the second quatrain), he changed his eating habits to include "bitter sauces" (l. 6), a metaphor for mixing with low company. This, he contends, was to forestall an overdose of his lover's "ne'er-cloying sweetness." (l. 5) He was "sick of welfare" (that is, faring well) and thought it would be beneficial to become "diseased" (l. 8), before a truly serious illness came on.

As clever as all this verbal trickery is, it does not constitute a solid argument for the speaker's straying, and he must admit it. His "policy" (strategy, with the connotation of shrewdness) to prevent "ills" in love has backfired. (ll. 9-10) He now knows that he has committed sins ("faults assured") and therefore must have taken "medicine" for a "healthful state." (l. 10) That the speaker would fear "rank"

(excessive – even putrid) goodness (l. 12) does not bode well for his relationship. His friend has not seemed anything but perfect before. Has the idealistic marriage of true minds been undermined?

The moral stated in the couplet seems almost too simple and the tone is harsh. The blame has shifted to his friend with surprising speed.