Were’t ought to me I bore the canopy,
With my extern the outward honoring,
Or laid great bases for eternity,
Which proves more short than waste or ruining?
Have I not seen dwellers on form and favor
Lose all, and more by paying too much rent,
For compound sweet forgoing simple savor,
Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent?
No, let me be obsequious in thy heart,
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
Which is not mixed with seconds, knows no art,
But mutual render only me for thee.

Hence, thou suborned informer, a true soul,
When most impeached, stands least in thy control.

In this, the next to last sonnet of
the middle section of the
sequence, many threads are
looped together especially the
court, the material world, and
deceptive appearances. At first
the poem seems to be a
meditation, but with yet another
“No” (in l. 9), we find the speaker
addressing his friend again. He
begins with a supposition: would
it mean anything to me if I had
borne or were to bear the canopy
 presumable in a procession of
courtly pomp)? Such a post
would be an outward honor, but
the word *extern* suggests
superficiality. His true self might
not be in full rapport with such
courtly display. The other action
in the first quatrain, laying “great
bases for eternity” (l. 3), would
imply erecting a monument, and
we have already experienced the
speaker’s contempt for such
attempts at immortality.

The speaker goes on to ask—
rhetorically—whether he has not
witnessed the downfall of
worldly folk who rely on their
external behavior to win favor in
high circles, but who lose all their
investment (their “rent”) in such
groveling. Instead of plain
honesty (“simple savor,” l. 7),
they have counted on cloying
flattery.

In the third quatrain, the speaker
ironically turns such
obsequiousness to his advantage.
The only object worthy of
devotion is his friend, to whom he offers his “oblation” (l. 10), a form of praise associated with religious offerings. (This picks up the thread of idolization.) His offering is pure (“not mixed with seconds,” l. 11). It is poor but free, not like the slavishness of courtly behavior, and it doesn’t use trickery (“art,” l. 11). In other words, it is real, not false. And it is a boon to both speaker and friend, though the speaker is giving only himself to his friend. (l. 12) Calling this act “mutual” is one of the speaker’s more strained hyperboles.

The couplet raises a problem: who is the “suborned informer” (l. 13), a traitor who has lied? The “thou” seems to be parallel to that in line ten, but this would be an implausible indictment of his friend here. An alternative reading is that the speaker is now addressing an unknown person who slandered the speaker. If this is the case, the speaker is a “true soul” (l. 13), who rises above such accusations and maintains his probity.