

*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.*

**I**n 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 (presumably 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.