

*So now I have confessed that he is thine,
 And I my self am mortgaged to thy will,
 My self I'll forfeit so that other mine
 Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still:
 But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,
 For thou art covetous, and he is kind;
 He learned but surety-like to write for me,
 Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.
 The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
 Thou usurer that put'st forth all to use,
 And sue a friend came debtor for my sake;
 So him I lose through my unkind abuse.
 Him have I lost, thou hast both him and me:
 He pays the whole, and yet I am not free.*

This sonnet starts out as a statement of fact in legal terms, which persist throughout the poem. First the speaker tells the mistress that she has won over the friend, and declares himself mortgaged to the mistress. She may do with him what she will, the word *will* implying sexual domination.

Note: The word *will* must be understood to have a number of meanings throughout this sonnet and the next two. Treating the word as a pun on Shakespeare's name is appropriate later, but here that makes no sense because the speaker cannot be mortgaged to himself.

Now that he has admitted that his friend is bound to the mistress too, he wants to make a bargain for his friend's freedom. He will forfeit himself if she will restore "that other mine" (the friend) to him as a "comfort" (ll. 3-4). In other words, the speaker needs to make his soul whole again.

How quickly is this proposal dropped! The speaker caves in, making his slavery complete. He accuses the mistress of being "covetous" (l. 6): her deadly sin is greed because she wants to retain absolute control over *two* men, easily exceeding the Petrarchan tradition. The speaker calls his friend "kind" despite the unspecified unkindnesses mentioned in earlier sonnets. Now he is kind because he has given security for the speaker by binding himself to

the mistress, though that was obviously not successful.

In the third quatrain, the speaker gives in again: the mistress will use the power (“the statute,” l. 9) of her beauty freely by acting as a usurer, who puts out all possible money at exorbitant rates. Specifically, she has sued his friend for becoming a debtor on his behalf. Whether these debts are sexual or not, we are not told. Are there other plausible explanations? The upshot is that the speaker takes on the guilt. The “unkind abuse” (l. 12) may refer to the mistress’ abuse of him, his friend’s deception, or his own “unkindness” mentioned earlier. That they are all guilty to some degree is plain.

The couplet restates the two men’s slavery to their joint mistress. However, in the last line the speaker credits the “whole” sacrifice to his friend--a hyperbolic magnanimity indeed. Sadly (but not angrily?) the speaker is not yet free. Like all legal battles – and Elizabethans were notoriously litigious – this one is expensive.