

*O call me not to justify the wrong
 That thy unkindness lays upon my heart;
 Wound me not with thine eye but with thy tongue;
 Use pow'r with pow'r and slay me not with art.
 Tell me thou lov'st elsewhere; but in my sight,
 Dear heart, forbear to glance thine eye aside.
 What need'st thou wound with cunning when thy might
 Is more than my o'erpressed defense can bide?
 Let me excuse thee; ah, my love well knows
 Her pretty looks have been mine enemies,
 And therefore from my face she turns my foes,
 That they elsewhere might dart their injuries.
 Yet do not so, but since I am near slain,
 Kill me outright with looks, and rid my pain.*

The delight of mutual flattery by trading lies has already ended, and mutual recriminations have begun. The speaker, turning from addressing the reader directly, pleads with his mistress not to ask him to justify her wrongdoings. (That would be self-betrayal.) Her “unkindness” – the same word was applied to the mutual betrayals of the speaker and his friend in Sonnet 120 – has laid a wrong upon his heart. He also asks her not to wound him with her eye (which, unlike the heart’s truth, works by deception) but – surprisingly – with her tongue. He does not want to die from her artfulness but by her power.

The speaker therefore wants direct spoken truth (“Tell me thou lov’st elsewhere,” l. 5), not the cunning side glances of flirtation so common in the courtly world. She has, he contends, no need of cunning because her strength can easily overthrow his defenses.

Despite all this, he wants to excuse her. But she knows that her artful looks have been his foes; therefore she diverts them to other men she wants to conquer. (Clearly, she wants to make him jealous and she knows how to do it.)

The speaker’s final appeal in the couplet is a negative command: “Yet do not so” (l. 13). This is followed by an almost comical bitter conclusion. The logic is that because he is already nearly slain by her

darting eyes, he might as well be fatally stabbed by them and so be rid of his pain. This can be construed as a parody of the Petrarchan lovers, but it is also serious, a dramatic contrast to the preceding poem.