

*Be wise as thou art cruel; do not press  
 My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain,  
 Lest sorrow lend me words and words express  
 The manner of my pity-wanting pain.  
 If I might teach thee wit, better it were,  
 Though not to love, yet love to tell me so;  
 As testy sick men, when their deaths be near,  
 No news but health from their physicians know.  
 For if I should despair I should go mad,  
 And in my madness might speak ill of thee.  
 Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,  
 Mad sland'ers by mad ears believed be.  
     That I may not be so, nor thou belied,  
     Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide.*

**I**nstead of desperate servility, the speaker adopts a more aggressive attitude, telling the mistress to be as wise as she is cruel and warning her not to try his patience with her haughty ways. Her behavior will force his “pity-wasting pain” (l. 4) to express itself in words. His patience has made him “tongue-tied” (l. 2), but he is already speaking out. Sorrow is lending him words that show how he suffers.

As he is prone to do, the speaker softens his tone almost immediately and gently proposes to teach the mistress wisdom. If you cannot love me, he says, you can still take delight in telling me so. (l. 6) He likens himself to a testy sick man who, near death, won't take any news from his doctor unless it is good.

The speaker falls back into his forlorn mode but he does not completely give up his threats and there are touches of cynicism in the sestet. He also advances an argument that he hopes will be convincing: If he is forced to despair, he will go mad, and if he goes mad he might speak ill of her. The speaker gains leverage by citing “the ill-wresting world” – the world that twists the truth (l. 11). The situation is so bad that a mad slanderer (such as he might become)

would be believed by the “mad ears” (l. 12) of the world.

The speaker closes his argument with a direct injunction: if you want to avoid being slandered, look straight ahead. Be honest and don't flirt with sidelong glances, even though your proud heart is roaming.