

*In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
 For they in thee a thousand errors note;
 But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
 Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.
 Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune
 delighted,
 Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,
 Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited
 To any sensual feast with thee alone:
 But my five wits nor my five senses can
 Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
 Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,
 Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be.
 Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
 That she that makes me sin awards me pain.*

Another surprise occurs in Sonnet 141 when the speaker declares that his heart – not his eyes or other senses – is what enslaves him to his mistress: “’tis my heart that loves what they [the senses] despise.” (l. 3) His eyes see the truth now, noting a “thousand errors” (l. 2) in her appearance, whereas in Sonnet 137 his eyes are portrayed as corrupted, seeing beauty though the mistress is in reality foul; both the heart and eyes have erred (l. 13).

The octave of Sonnet 141 is an orderly list of the deficiencies of the mistress’ appeal to the five senses: the eyes (l. 1), the ears (l. 5), touch (l. 6) taste and smell (l. 7). None of the senses can arouse desire for “any sensual feast with [her] alone.” (l. 9) At this point we are permitted to wonder how the speaker and the mistress might finally unite if her eyes wander and his eyes fail to dote. It is the heart now, but the heart has erred before and may do so again. Ultimately, it is the speaker who cannot understand what is wrong or give a coherent explanation.

Instead, the speaker imagines adding the five wits (kinds of intelligence) to the five senses, but even these collective personifications cannot persuade the heart to overcome its slavery. And so the speaker is left as a shadow of a man who remains the vassal of the proud mistress’ heart. (ll. 11-12)

The paradox with which the reader is left is that the speaker’s sole gain is a “plague” (implying disease). The cruel one has not only made him sin but has given him pain as well. His disease is madness. It may not be venereal now, but it will be eventually.