

*Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,
 Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving.
 O but with mine compare thou thine own state
 And thou shalt find it merits not reproving;
 Or if it do, not from those lips of thine
 That have profaned their scarlet ornaments
 And sealed false bonds of love as oft as mine,
 Robbed others' beds' revenues of their rents.
 Be it lawful I love thee as thou lov'st those
 Whom thine eyes woo as mine importune thee.
 Root pity in thy heart that when it grows,
 Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.
 *If thou dost seek to have what thou dost hide,
 By self example mayst thou be denied.**

The paradox that begins Sonnet 142 is much more provocative than that which closes Sonnet 141. Moreover, the assertive tone of Sonnet 140 returns with this strong reproof of the mistress. The speaker first defends himself and his “sinful loving” (l. 2), finding her “virtue” to be hatred of his sin. Then, boldly, he declares that if she would compare his sinful state with her own, his would not deserve any criticism.

Pursuing his attack, he adds that if his actions merit reproof, it could not come plausibly from her lips (“scarlet ornaments,” l. 6), which have “sealed false bonds of love” more often than he has. Most seriously, he charges that she has robbed the beds of wives who lawfully deserve the sexual attentions of their husbands. These charges are put, successively, in metaphors of religion (l. 6), law (l. 7), and finance (l. 8), giving rhetorical force to his accusations.

In the third quatrain, the speaker returns to the wooing through the eyes of Sonnets 139 and 140: if it is lawful – and it is clear that it is not – the speaker loves the mistress as much as she loves those she flirts with. Now the injunction ending this quatrain shifts to the need for pity: “Root pity in thy heart, that, when it grows, / Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.” (ll. 11-12) These are some of the most persuasive words in this section of the sequence and create more feeling for the speaker than do his moans for his own condition. The weaker closing couplet is a repetition of the threat that if the mistress cannot find pity in her heart she, when her turn comes, will be denied it.