

*Canst thou, O cruel, say I love thee not,
 When I against my self with thee partake?
 Do I not think on thee when I forgot
 Am of my self, all tyrant for thy sake?
 Who hateth thee that I do call my friend,
 On whom frown'st thou that I do fawn upon?
 Nay, if thou lour'st on me do I not spend
 Revenge upon my self with present moan?
 What merit do I in my self respect
 That is so proud thy service to despise,
 When all my best doth worship thy defect,
 Comanded by the motion of thine eyes?
 But love, hate on, for now I know thy mind:
 Those that can see, thou lov'st, and I am blind.*

After the moans of self-pity in Sonnet 148 the speaker goes on a rhetorical attack, ironically pretending to support the mistress' cruel disdain for him. His argument now depends on feigned self-abasement, beginning with a question: How can you say I don't love you when I always take your side if you abuse me? After this come five other questions, and each quatrain ends with one. Their cumulative force strengthens as the poem builds to a final indictment.

The second question (the second half of the first quatrain) is also acidic: Don't I think about you when I forget myself and become (like you) a complete tyrant? The third — just one line — says in effect that he would turn against anyone she happened to hate. In the fourth — also just one line — the speaker asks whether he fawns upon anyone she frowns upon, implying that he fawns on her. And, fifth, he asks if he doesn't take revenge on himself by moaning when she glowers ("lour'st," l. 7) at him.

The last quatrain is all one question which is the climax of servility. The speaker swallows his own pride; seeing nothing in himself to praise, he demeans himself by doing what she asks. All his best efforts are put into worshipping her faults as her eyes command him to do. (This recalls how he has condemned her wandering glances.)

In a kind of mock resignation, the speaker tells the mistress to continue hating him because then he will truly know her mind. The last line is a crushing irony: she loves those that see her clearly; therefore, because he is blind, she does not love him. The process of self-recognition continues. The rhetorical questions have been meant to demolish the mistress' case against him, but instead he must conclude his argument by blowing up his own defense.