

*How can I then return in happy plight,
 That am debarred the benefit of rest,
 When day's oppression is not eased by night,
 But day by night and night by day oppressed?
 And each (though enemies to either's reign)
 Do in consent shake hands to torture me,
 The one by toil, the other to complain
 How far I toil, still farther off from thee.
 I tell the day (to please him) thou art bright
 And dost him grace when clouds do blot the heaven:
 So flatter I the swart-complexioned night,
 When sparkling stars twire not, thou gild'st the even.
 But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,
 And night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger.*

This companion piece to Sonnet 27 gives even fewer suggestions of time and place. The speaker is "still farther off" (l. 8), but the reader learns no more. Also, the speaker's condition is more wretched because he has no vision of his friend's "shadow" to comfort him. How can he return home in a happy state when he gets no sleep? (This downward plunge of emotion will reach its lowest point at the beginning of Sonnet 29.)

Day and night oppress one another; though they are constantly at war, they happily join forces to torture the speaker. The day tortures him with hard work; the night by the miseries of toiling even further off from his beloved. The heavenly stars, whose help the speaker could hope for in Sonnet 26 (ll. 9ff.), now conspire against him.

The speaker tries to placate the day by telling him how bright he looks even though the clouds have blotted out the sky. Likewise the speaker flatters dark-complexioned night by telling him how he brightens the evening although the stars do not sparkle ("twire," l. 12).

The couplet neatly summarizes the speaker's grief by pairing the day and night again--one line for each. Daily the day draws out the speaker's sorrows, making them seem longer; nightly the night lengthens the grief to make it seem heavier. Such are the cosmic dimensions of trouble.