

*That god forbid, that made me first your slave,
 I should in thought control your times of pleasure,
 Or at your hand th'account of hours to crave,
 Being your vassal bound to stay your leisure.
 O let me suffer (being at your beck)
 Th' imprisoned absence of your liberty
 And patience tame, to suff'rance bide each check,
 Without accusing you of injury.
 Be where you list, your charter is so strong
 That you your self may privilege your time
 To what you will; to you it doth belong,
 Your self to pardon of self-doing crime.
 I am to wait, though waiting so be hell,
 Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well.*

Although the speaker reaffirms his role as slave to his young master, his voice is rougher than in Sonnet 57. Certainly it is far less willingly submissive than that of the speaker in Sonnet 26, who addresses the youth as "lord of my love" and does not chafe at his vassalage. In Sonnet 57, he tolerates the bitterness of his sovereign's absence and in the couplet quite tenderly forgives in advance any license his friend may take. In Sonnet 58, the thinly veiled resentment is deeper: the "sad slave" of Sonnet 57 (l. 11) has become a vassal "imprisoned" by the absent friend's "liberty" (l. 6), a word which here implies sexual freedom. The negative attitude of the speaker reaches its climax at the end of the third quatrain when he bitterly grants the youth the right to pardon his own crimes. Obviously the speaker has no other choice.

In the couplet, the sado-masochistic venom of the speaker breaks out, as it does periodically in the sequence. The tone is that of sour irony:

I am to wait, though waiting so
 be hell,
 Not blame your pleasure, be it ill
 or well.

At this point we may look ahead to the more famous Sonnet 144, which begins "Two loves I have, of comfort and despair," in which the man "right fair" is the "better angel" (l. 3). Our look raises some questions along with our eyebrows. What man is meant? Is there more than one? If he is the same as that in Sonnet 58, has he actually been

corrupted? If so, how can he remain the good angel?

Whatever answers we give, the truth remains that the speaker's attitude towards the youth continues to oscillate, and forgiveness, however grudging, is always possible because of the speaker's obsession. The explanation for this obsession lies in the opening phrase of Sonnet 58. It is the god (Cupid, not the Christian deity) that has enslaved the speaker, and he is helpless.