

*No longer mourn for me when I am dead  
 Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
 Give warning to the world that I am fled  
 From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell.  
 Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
 The hand that writ it, for I love you so  
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,  
 If thinking on me then should make you woe.  
 O if (I say) you look upon this verse  
 When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,  
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,  
 But let your love even with my life decay,  
     Lest the wise world should look into your moan  
     And mock you with me after I am gone.*

This sonnet and the next mark the sharp descent of the speaker into the slough of despond and the vision of his own death. His self-effacement begins with an injunction to his friend not to mourn any longer than it takes his death knell to warn the world of his flight. The “surly, sullen bell” (l. 2) announces his sudden departure, his haste conveying his contempt for “this vile world” (l. 4). Although nothing has happened to suggest impending death, the poem is phrased to hint that it is a farewell note, perhaps implying suicide. There is not a little similarity to Hamlet in his soliloquies. Indeed, the *if*s of lines five and nine indicate that the poem is a very private meditation. The word *perhaps* (l. 10) makes the whole situation putative.

Any angry thoughts the speaker had about his friend (in Sonnet 69) are wiped away by his friend’s *potential* woe. The paradox of the speaker is clear: Don’t remember me “for I love you so / That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot, / If thinking on me then would make you woe.” (ll. 6-8)

The pathos builds as the speaker’s self-esteem is obliterated and he enjoins his friend to not even say his name. Worst of all, the speaker *says* he wants his friend’s love to die when the speaker does. All this hyperbole is, it must be emphasized, hypothetical. Nothing has actually occurred.

What makes this sonnet more than a self-pitying moan is the twist in the speaker's motivation in the couplet. His real reason for caring has to do with the world's opinion. The world, sarcastically labeled "wise," may, after the speaker's death, mock the lofty young man for consorting with such a low person. The world, though vile, is powerful. The real tragedy, then, is that the fear of public opinion results in the suppression of the individual's deepest feelings.