

*But be contented when that fell arrest
 Without all bail shall carry me away;
 My life hath in this line some interest,
 Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
 When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
 The very part was consecrate to thee.
 The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
 My spirit is thine, the better part of me.
 So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
 The prey of worms, my body being dead,
 The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
 Too base of thee to be remembered.
 The worth of that is that which it contains,
 And that is this, and this with thee remains.*

The intricate shifts of focus and emotion come to a kind of climax in the section that begins with this sonnet; it is a climax that threatens to be a conclusion. There is also a new beginning in store with the introduction of the so-called “rival poets” in Sonnet 78. The sonnets in between are transitional. In Sonnet 74 the theme of immortality comes to an apparent resolution when the speaker decides how he will best be remembered after his death. There is an upswing of mood when in the first line the speaker tells his friend to be contented. Some “interest” (value) in the speaker’s “line” (his poetry) will remain with his friend (ll. 3-4), and that will be spiritual, appearing in the poems when his friend rereads them. Here the speaker talks not about black ink and the preservation of his public person, but “the better part of me” (l. 8) — his soul, fused with his friend’s. Clearly, the body is “only the dregs of life,” (l. 9), good only as food for worms. Though these themes have been established earlier, there is a transcendence here that betokens resurrection.

The opening lines depict death as an arrest without bail. Later (l. 11), it is “the coward conquest of a wretch’s knife.” So it is, poetically, a fusion of crime and punishment. Interestingly enough, what saving grace the verses have is the “interest” which will stay as a memorial, and this key financial image carries us back to the opening sonnets, showing, finally, what true worth is.

The emphasis is on affirmation, an avowal of faith. The very word *consecrate* (l. 6) has an air of sanctity, raising the sonnets themselves to the realm of the Platonic ideal. Perhaps the speaker has not betrayed himself after all. Now we can hear "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments" (Sonnet 116) coming in the distance. We scarcely notice that the speaker is revoking his appeal to his friend to forget him. We soon forget, too, the seeds of doubt sown at the close of Sonnet 73. Shakespeare makes his speaker all too human in his ups and downs of feeling, his inconsistencies and apparent contradictions. There are more struggles to come.