

*When thou shalt be disposed to set me light,
 And place my merit in the eye of scorn,
 Upon thy side against myself I'll fight,
 And prove thee virtuous, though thou art forsworn.
 With mine own weakness being best acquainted,
 Upon thy part I can set down a story
 Of faults concealed, wherein I am attainted:
 That thou in losing me shall win much glory.
 And I by this will be a gainer too,
 For bending all my loving thoughts on thee,
 The injuries that to my self I do,
 Doing thee vantage, double vantage me.
 Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
 That for thy right, my self will bear all wrong.*

The farewell in Sonnet 87 is no more said than the door is re-opened. As they often do, the emotional tides in the sequence move swiftly. Moreover, there is an important disclosure: the speaker says, with strong rhetorical emphasis at the end of the first quatrain, that his friend has betrayed him. This establishes that the ironic word *king* at the end of Sonnet 87 may apply just as much to the friend as to himself. Here is an example of Shakespeare's mastery of psychology as he explores the duelling emotions in the speaker's mind. In a paradoxical dramatic action, though he knows that his friend has proved treacherous, he vows to defend him. He will fight against himself and prove his friend virtuous as well. This is hard for the reader to swallow at first, but cannot everyone understand how irrational and unstable love can be?

In another surprise, the speaker announces that he can tell the secret sins he himself has committed (facts unspecified as usual) and so punish himself – and help his friend – by taking the blame. The speaker seems to have reached a peak of unwitting self-betrayal. He convinces himself that the damages he does to himself will not only be to his friend's advantage but doubly so to himself. (l. 13) After all, to use his own logic, he still considers himself to be his friend's soulmate.

The speaker's masochism may be difficult to understand, but still we pity him. The emotions evoked by the situation and the poetry are like those elicited in mid-career of a Shakespearean tragedy. The die is cast. The happy ending envisioned by the speaker in the couplet will be impossible.