

*Then hate me when thou wilt, if ever, now,
 Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
 Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
 And do not drop in for an after-loss.
 Ah, do not, when my heart hath 'scaped this sorrow,
 Come in the rearward of a conquered woe;
 Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
 To linger out a purposed overthrow.
 If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
 When other petty griefs have done their spite;
 But in the onset come, so shall I taste
 At first the very worst of fortune's might,
 And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
 Compared with loss of thee will not seem so.*

Just when the reader thinks the worst has happened – that the friend has come to hate the speaker – emotions take another plunge. What is worse than the rift is that the speaker seems to welcome the catastrophe; “if ever, now.” (l. 1) As usual, he professes a logical approach: it is better to face the worst woe now because then the minor griefs that follow will be more bearable. Of course, the speaker’s ultimate aim is to recover his love and what he really wants now is to prevent any further erosion of their relationship. His method seems to be directly contrary to common sense. “Don’t make things even worse,” we are tempted to exclaim after reading the opening injunction: “Then hate me when thou wilt.”

Echoing Sonnet 29, in which he contemplates his “disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,” he speaks of his mistreatment by “the world” and, in his masochistic fashion, pleads with his friend to join in fortune’s spite and not wait until after the initial body blows. Because we the readers have no knowledge of the external facts, we cannot tell whether he is paranoid or truly persecuted.

The perverse logic of the main body of the poem leads to a conclusion tantamount to “Please hit me while I’m down, not later, because it won’t hurt so much.” This is made plausible by the eloquence of “Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,”

(l. 7) one of those aphoristic gems that stud the sonnets.

The opening clause of the sestet, "If thou wilt leave me," in the context presages defeat, not a happy event. Still, the speaker wants to salvage what he can. Talking about his war with "the world," he calls his social misfortunes "petty griefs." (l. 10) However, this simply underscores the magnitude of the friend's hatred. The rhetorical strategy is clear: the speaker wishes to shame his friend with a logical indictment, proving to him that his behavior is worse than that of "the world."