

*How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name.
O in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose:
That tongue that tells the story of thy days,
(Making lascivious comments on thy sport)
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise,
Naming thy name, blesses an ill report.
O what a mansion have those vices got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee,
Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot
And all things turns to fair that eyes can see.
Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege;
The hardest knife ill used doth lose his edge.*

The wave of attack on the friend's shame begins to break now. *Shame* concludes the first line and *sins* the end of the quatrain, emphasizing the aggressive tone. So far we have learned nothing concrete about the nature of the sins, but their destructive force is given visual form by the simile of the cankerworm eating the fragrant rose. Because the friend is, on the surface, so sweet and lovely, his inner nature is now a more marked and sinister contrast. The implied image of eating, which echoes Sonnet 1, suggests moral deterioration, and we remember the threat of the "tender churl" becoming a glutton. The speaker's early fears are being realized.

Now the friend is more vulnerable. The world, which makes a weapon of gossip, makes an appearance in the second quatrain in the metaphorical guise of a tongue. Rumors are spreading concerning the friend's "sport," a word suggesting sexual license in Shakespeare's time. However, the odd thing is that the youth's name and reputation are hard to smear. "Naming thy name blesses an ill report." (l. 8)

At the turn of the sestet, the speaker cries out against the injustice of it all. The youth's beauty is a mansion that harbors vices. But strangely, the speaker makes the vices responsible; they were the ones who chose their habitation. (l. 10) Thus the blame is shifted to them and away from the

friend. Beauty is still a veil that hides moral blemishes and turns them into worthiness, at least so far as the eye can see.

A final thrust comes in the couplet. The speaker warns his "dear heart" that the power of privilege, if misused, will work against him. The friend may become, like a knife, a harmful weapon and lose his edge. The sonnet as a whole is the speaker's way of saying that his friend is threatened both from the outside ("the world") and from within (his own dissolute impulses).