

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Sonnet 121

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteem'd,
When not to be receives reproach of being¹;
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deem'd²
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing:

- 5 For why should others' false adulterate³ eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood⁴?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which⁵ in their wills⁶ count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level⁷

- 10 At my abuses reckon up their own:
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel⁸;
By their rank⁹ thoughts, my deeds must not be shown;
Unless this general evil they maintain¹⁰,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.
(115 words)

¹**reproach of being** the reputation of being vile – ²**so deem'd** thought vile – ³**adulterate** corrupt – ⁴**sportive blood** sensuality –
⁵**Which** who – ⁶**wills** desires – ⁷**level** aim, guess – ⁸**bevel** crooked – ⁹**rank** corrupt – ¹⁰**maintain** propose