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Love Rules

In sonnet 29, Shakespeare suggests that we need neither God's grace nor the praise of those around us to feel at home in the universe. Though we may "beweep [our] outcaste state and trouble deaf heaven with [our] bootless cries," (line 3), we need only one person whose "sweet love rememb' red such wealth brings" (line 13) to restore us from our "outcaste state" (line 2).

Each of us falls, at some point, into such an "outcaste state" (line 2) wherein we feel in "disgrace with [both] Fortune and men's eyes" (line 1). Here, Shakespeare borrows the notion of the Great Chain of being, placing the accursed subject in his proper place in the universe: at the bottom. Beginning with Fortune and ending the third quatrain by referring to heaven, Shakespeare insists that this person is alone in not just the human society but the universe at large. Heaven itself is "deaf" to his cries, indifferent to the pains that come from being "with what [he] most enjoy[s] contented least" (line 8). The poem goes on to detail the other parties that keep their distance from this person on whom so much scorn has been heaped, referring to the disdain "in men's eyes" (line 1) as well as those "more rich in hope" (line 5) and "with friends possessed" (line 6).

And yet, despite this condition, a condition so vile the speaker is moved to "curse [his] fate" (line 4) and "in these thoughts almost [despise himself]" (line 9), he finds grace in the one person whose opinion and love matter most. To be in a state of disgrace is to fall from God's favor or protection; yet in this sonnet, Shakespeare contends that it is this one person—who could also, in this case, *be* God as the psalms would attest—that restores, if not our place in the universe or our own human society, at least the memory of the "wealth" that is love, a love so rich, so fine, so pure that it creates within us a "state" we would "scorn to change...with kings" (line 14). Such "wealth" would buy us a ticket to the home where, as Robert Frost says, "they must take you in."