

*Where art thou, muse, that thou forget'st so long
 To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?
 Spend'st thou thy fury on some worthless song,
 Dark'ning thy pow'r to lend base subjects light?
 Return, forgetful muse, and straight redeem
 In gentle numbers time so idly spent;
 Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem
 And gives thy pen both skill and argument.
 Rise, resty muse, my love's sweet face survey
 If time have any wrinkle graven there;
 If any, be a satire to decay,
 And make time's spoils despised everywhere.
 Give my love fame faster than time wastes life;
 So thou prevent'st his scythe and crooked knife.*

The wave of hatred has subsided, and as usual when a new emotional swell is beginning, the muse is re-invoked. Here the muse is apostrophized three times, at the beginning of each quatrain. In the first, the muse is an intermediary whom the speaker chides for forgetting the friend who “gives thee all thy might” (l. 2). Instantly, the power hierarchy has shifted, boosting the friend back up to the top. Obviously the speaker is rebuking himself (as well as the muse) for writing on lesser matters than the friend. Why, he asks, do you waste your inspiration (and your anger) on lesser poems and darken your power “to lend base subjects light.” By this time it is evident that the muse invoked is the speaker’s own and not a separate being.

In the second quatrain, the self-chastisement continues. Now the tone is gentler, and “gentler numbers” (softer verses) are called for. (l. 6) When the muse is told to “sing,” recollections of the classical epics come rushing to mind. There is a dignity and an impersonality about this section. Is the ear that the muse is asked to sing to the speaker’s or the friend’s? Perhaps both, as a token of reunion.

The “resty” muse addressed in the next quatrain is slothful—slow to act. (Another of the Seven Deadly Sins makes an appearance.) This muse is asked to peruse the face of the friend and look for the wrinkles

in his brow, a thread traceable back to Sonnet 2. If he finds any, the speaker asks him to be a “satire” (satirist) to decay and drive them out. This will make “time’s spoils” (l. 12) the laughing stock of “the world.”

Most importantly, the speaker’s personal muse is implored to bring fame to his friend faster than time can erode his life. Suddenly the threatening image of death appears, his dual weapons doubling the urgency of the speaker’s plea.