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.