

*O truant muse, what shall be thy amends
 For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed?
 Both truth and beauty on my love depends;
 So dost thou too, and therein dignified.
 Make answer, muse, wilt thou not haply say,
 Truth needs no color with his color fixed,
 Beauty no pencil, beauty's truth to lay;
 But best is best, if never intermixed?
 Because he needs no praise, wilt thou be dumb?
 Excuse not silence so, for't lies in thee,
 To make him much outlive a gilded tomb,
 And to be praised of ages yet to be.
 Then do thy office, muse; I teach thee how
 To make him seem, long hence, as he shows now.*

The invocations to the muse continue with the same quatrain construction as that Sonnet 100. At first the “truant” muse is charged with neglect and asked how it will make up for this. The speaker says that his friend’s truth has been “dyed” in beauty (l. 2, *dyed* having no modern negative connotations). Rather the truth and beauty merge in neo-Platonic fashion, and the speaker’s love depends on this. The muse depends on this, too, for dignifying his inspiration.

The speaker, in the second quatrain, asks, rather archly, whether the muse would not answer his charge in the words he supplies in the next three lines. “Truth needs no color” (l. 6)—that is, beautification—because his is permanent, and beauty needs no brush (“pencil” meant brush in Shakespeare’s time) to paint the truth. The “best,” like Platonic goodness, must never be adulterated.

The speaker then, in his own voice, asks if the muse will be silent just because the friend, who embodies the ideal, needs no praise. No, silence cannot be justified on those grounds. It is the muse’s responsibility to make the friend outlive his tomb, and to be celebrated in future times.

There is a playful tone to all of this. The speaker tells the muse what to do and even puts words in its mouth, words that he claims have failed him. In the couplet the speaker says he will teach the muse its duty, which is to make the friend “seem” in the future what he “shows” himself to be now.