

*When in the chronicle of wasted time
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights
 And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
 Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
 I see their antique pen would have expressed
 Ev'n such a beauty as you master now.
 So all their praises are but prophecies
 Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
 And for they looked but with divining eyes,
 They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
 For we, which now behold these present days,
 Have eyes to wonder but lack tongues to praise.*

Having looked towards the future in Sonnet 104 and contemplated the present in Sonnet 105, the speaker reverts here to the past and paints a picture of that ideal embodied in "ladies dead and lovely knights." In the histories of the past ("wasted time," l. 1), he has found descriptions of the most splendid people ("wights," l. 2). Their beauty makes the old poetry even more beautiful. The speaker draws a parallel between the portrayals of the ancient bards "in the blazon of sweet beauty's best" and what he is trying to capture in his friend. The blazon is a catalogue associated with heraldry and is a common type of list in sonnets of the 1590's. Here the iambic beat accentuating *hand, foot, lip, eye* and *brow* suggests the ticking off of a list.

The compliment to his friend is enhanced by making him the ultimate paragon prefigured in the prophecies of the old poets. The climax comes at the end of the octave when, finally, the friend is addressed: he is now the master. That is to say, he has all aspects of beauty at his beck and call. The praise is further amplified when the speaker declares that the earlier bards saw only with "divining eyes" (l. 10); they were inadequate or imperfect seers. Besides, they did not have talent enough to sing his praises properly. Thus the speaker is cleverly implying that poetic vision has greatly improved in his own time.

However—and this caps the compliment—he says in the final lines that we, the contemporary poets, can wonder at the youth’s looks and accomplishments but we don’t have the ability (“tongues,” l. 14) to do him justice. Immediately we are struck by the fact that justice—and a bit more—is what the speaker has been doing since the beginning, often through eloquent hyperbole. Once more, his humility conceals his actual pride in his eulogies, which will certainly continue.