

*Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
 Ev'n those that said I could not love you dearer.
 Yet then my judgment knew no reason why
 My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer.
 But reckoning time, whose millioned accidents
 Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings,
 Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents,
 Divert strong minds to th' course of alt'ring things:
 Alas, why fearing of time's tyranny,
 Might I not then say now I love you best,
 When I was certain o'er incertainty,
 Crowning the present, doubting of the rest?
 Love is a babe; then might I not say so,
 To give full growth to that which still doth grow.*

Now the direction of the speaker's praise becomes clearer – and almost comical. His opening assertion that everything he has said about his friend has been a lie would lead the reader to believe that he is about to denounce him. But no. In rejecting earlier hyperboles he is merely clearing the way for greater ones. In chastising himself he calls it a lie to say, "I could not love you dearer." (l. 2) But immediately he exonerates himself by arguing that he could not have known "My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer." (l. 4)

The second quatrain picks up the thread of time the tyrant, whose "millioned accidents" (l. 5) link him to fortune. As twin deities they are even stronger than "the world." The dark tinge deepens. Time's many chance events result in broken vows, and even kings' decrees are altered. We are strongly reminded of the speaker's metaphor in Sonnet 114 likening his friend's love to the crowning of the speaker as king. (Note, too, his phrase "crowning the present," l. 12, which reinforces the connection.)

Sacred beauty, like that of the friend, is made dark ("tan," l. 7). Strong purposes are frustrated (the will to conquer in love would be an example), and the "course of alt'ring things" turns even the strongest of minds. (l. 8) In this line there is an echo of Sonnet 18,

in which even the fairest beauties of nature sometimes fail, "by chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed." (l. 8) But at that time the speaker could assure his friend of immortality through the poet's verses.

In Sonnet 115, the passage of time has caused another fluctuation. The certainty of Sonnet 18 becomes the certainty of uncertainty. (l. 11) Now the speaker wants to say that *this* time he loves his friend in a new and superior fashion. But can this be the final peak? The speaker extricates himself for the time being by arguing via another metaphor that since "love is a babe," it will always grow. (l. 13) Here the future irony is apparent. If, as he says, he cannot say "Now I love you best," he is simply ignoring the fact that the "full growth" (l. 14) of his love may be blighted by time.