

*But wherefore do not you a mightier way
 Make war upon this bloody tyrant time
 And fortify your self in your decay
 With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?
 Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
 And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
 With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers,
 Much liker than your painted counterfeit:
 So should the lines of life that life repair,
 Which this (time's pencil or my pupil pen)
 Neither in inward worth nor outward fair
 Can make you live your self in eyes of men.
 To give away your self keeps your life still,
 And you must live drawn by your own sweet skill.*

This sonnet is the second in a continuous trio that ends the first section of the sequence. It steps up the tension with the speaker's challenge to the youth to exceed his efforts in the war against time, which in Sonnet 15 ended as a draw. With the device of two balanced questions of two lines each, Shakespeare has his heavy-handed speaker repeat his argument for procreation. Some intensity is gained by using the imagery of war, but the obvious purpose is the same. Immortality through poetry has been abruptly dropped.

The images of marriage change, too. In the second quatrain, the speaker portrays the young man as standing "on the top of happy hours" (l. 5), not so subtly suggesting a triumph over time. The prospect of many marriageable virgins ("maiden gardens, yet unset," l. 6) is strikingly new, and the speaker sanctions their desires by labeling them "virtuous" (l. 7). The offspring will be, metaphorically, "living flowers" (l. 7), continuing the thread of natural growth. They are better likenesses than the youth's painted portrait, which is "counterfeit" (l. 8). The originality of the sonnet comes mainly from the imagery, especially when the youth is imagined as an artist who lives by creating his own self-portrait.

In marriage, the speaker goes on to say, the descendants will keep the youth's life alive in a way that neither time's inscriptions nor the

speaker's lesser verses could. No writing can convey to the world their inner virtue or outward beauty in as enduring a fashion as the children themselves.

The paradox of the couplet is already resolved: the youth must give of himself to preserve himself. The speaker, who has already labeled his verse "barren rhyme" (l. 4), must yield place to the youth who is the true artist, surviving through his "own sweet skill" (l. 14)—a suggestive phrase under the circumstances.