

*Devouring time, blunt thou the lion's paws,  
 And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;  
 Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,  
 And burn the long-lived Phoenix in her blood;  
 Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,  
 And do what ere thou wilt, swift-footed time,  
 To the wide world and all her fading sweets:  
 But I forbid thee one most heinous crime,  
 O carve not with the hours my love's fair brow,  
 Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;  
 Him in thy course untainted do allow  
 For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.  
     Yet do thy worst, old time; despite thy wrong  
     My love shall in my verse ever live young.*

The oscillations in the speaker's attitude towards time and immortality are never more evident than they are at this juncture. Just when it seemed most doubtful that time would be conquered because of the youth's failure to marry and have children, the momentum on the side of immortality through verse began to grow, reaching a peak in Sonnet 18. But Sonnet 19 at first reverts to the fearsome ravages of "devouring time." The all-out war with time announced in Sonnet 15 is resumed.

Because of the hyperbolic violence of the opening imagery, the doubts about the speaker's power to foil time begin to grow. Just as Sonnet 18 lists the drawbacks of summer, Sonnet 19 lists all the vicious assaults that the speaker dares time to undertake. The speaker lets his imagination run wild describing mutilations of lions and tigers and the cremation of the phoenix in its own blood (a grotesque paradox since the phoenix was considered indestructible). The speaker's angry tone is built on hyperboles that culminate in the threat of an apocalypse. "And do what ere thou wilt, swift-footed time, to the wide world and all her fading sweets...." The speaker's taunt is an extension and an intensification of the boldness assumed in Sonnet 18.

But hubris is escalating. The sestet conveys this by the series of imperatives virtually shouted at time, forbidding him to carve wrinkles on the youth's forehead. (This is a thread laid down in Sonnet 2.) The speaker

also prohibits time from allowing the youth's beauty to decay because it must furnish the paragon for future generations.

These are wildly futile injunctions. Is the speaker wholly rational when he portrays time as a force that can be persuaded to exempt a single youth from dying? Perhaps feeling he has gone too far, the speaker takes a step back in the couplet—a big one confirming Sonnet 18. No matter, he says, what time does, his verses will perpetuate his love.

How credulous can the youth be at this point? Is the speaker betraying himself by exaggerating his power over time and his ability to make the youth believe in it?