

*As a decrepit father takes delight
 To see his active child do deeds of youth,
 So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
 Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.
 For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
 Or any of these all, or all, or more,
 Entitled in their parts, do crowned sit,
 I make my love engrafted to this store:
 So then I am not lame, poor, nor despised,
 Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give
 That I in thy abundance am sufficed,
 And by a part of all thy glory live:
 Look what is best, that best I wish in thee;
 This wish I have, then ten times happy me.*

In Sonnet 36 the speaker volunteers to keep the “blots” on his friend’s character to himself and so protect the honor of his name. In Sonnet 37 he takes pride and comfort in the honors his friend has amassed, and he more than hints that because they are as one he will “by a part of all thy glory live.” (l. 12) The speaker metaphorically subordinates himself to his friend as a “decrepit father” (l. 1) who delights in what his active child is doing. Though he was, in the preceding poem, wounded by his friend’s deeds, he has pushed that aside for the present. Now he can count his blessings.

Fortune’s keenest spite has been erased by the youth’s virtue and truth (l. 4), as well as his beauty, birth, wealth and wit (l. 5). All or any of these, the speaker proclaims, are worthy of being named among his friend’s splendid attributes (“parts,” l. 7), which sit upon his head like a crown. The speaker will add his love to this treasury and thereby profit from their collective glory. Elated by this prospect, he predicts that he will no longer be “lame, poor [or] despised” —not that he was any of these things literally. These are the hyperboles of the speaker in his manic phase. More realistically in the sestet, he feels that he can live by a shadow of his friend’s substance. That will be abundance enough for him.

After the sufferings of Sonnets 35 and 36, the speaker’s fortunes seem to have changed completely. According to the logic of the couplet, this is a matter of perspective. He wants his friend to find out whatever is best, and when this wish is fulfilled the speaker will be ten times happier than before.