

*How can my muse want subject to invent
 Whilst thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
 Thine own sweet argument, too excellent
 For every vulgar paper to rehearse?
 O give thy self the thanks, if aught in me
 Worthy perusal stand against thy sight,
 For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee
 When thou thyself dost give invention light?
 Be thou the tenth muse, ten times more in worth
 Than those old nine which rhymers invoke;
 And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
 Eternal numbers to outlive long date.
 *If my slight muse do please these curious days,
 The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise.**

The upward mood swing following Sonnet 35, with its deep grief over the sins of both the speaker and the friend comes to a climax of delight in Sonnet 37, where the speaker catalogues his friend's virtues, ecstatic that he can share such glory. In Sonnet 38 the speaker reverts to self-abasement. His ability to create has diminished because his own "slight muse" (l. 13) is not comparable to his friend's powers of inspiration. How, the speaker asks, can he lack subject matter ("argument," l. 3) when his friend is breathing and pouring fine ideas into the speaker's mind? The friend's "argument" (which includes the friend himself) is too good for ordinary poetry, which would repeat it over and over.

The speaker implores his friend to thank himself if the speaker creates anything that will stand up to his friend's critical eye. Who, he asks, is so dull that the friend's light cannot brighten his ideas?

In the sestet, the speaker implores the friend to become a tenth muse, a deity to rank with all nine classical goddesses, instead of just his personal muse. He would be ten times more effective than the "old nine" that inferior "rhymers" call upon. (l. 10) Whoever calls on the friend will give birth to immortal verses, lasting beyond all earthly dates. The flattery here recalls earlier sonnets (e.g., 17 and 18) which lay down the thread of immortality through verse, but in

those poems it was the speaker who confidently assured the youth of the speaker's own ability to confer that honor. Now the friend could confer it.

The couplet returns to the private muse of the speaker, who, if his poetry will please "the world" in the present hypercritical times, will give back the praise to his friend. However, the *pain*--and this word, coming at the beginning of the final line, hits sharply--will be the speaker's. It may be simply the effort of writing, but in the context of the previous poems, it is hard to avoid the double meaning. Memories of the low point of Sonnets 35 and 36 have not been obliterated.