

*O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
 By that sweet ornament which truth doth give.
 The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
 For that sweet odor which in it doth live:
 The canker blooms have full as deep a dye
 As the perfumed tincture of the roses,
 Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly,
 When summer's breath their masked buds discloses:
 But for their virtue only is their show,
 They live unwooded and unrespected fade,
 Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
 Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odors made:
 And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
 When that shall vade, by verse distils your truth.*

In his continuing efforts to woo the friend despite evidence of his infidelity, the speaker falls back on compliments, but compliments that hint at flaws and imply a warning. The opening lines urge the young man to consider what real beauty is and how beauty may be enhanced by truth. Truth implies fidelity and truth is not mere ornament but an essential ideal. To instruct his friend, he draws a comparison between two kinds of rose. Since the young man has been associated with the rose from the beginning of the sequence, the comparison becomes a kind of fable for him. The implied question is, which road will the young man take in life and what model will he follow?

The first rose is the damask, noted for its fragrance; the other is the canker (or dog rose), which is odorless. Both are richly colored, both have thorns, and both play "wantonly" (in a sensual fashion) as they come to full flower. (ll. 7-8) The "virtue" or strength of the canker is mere show. (l. 9) Cankers "live unwooded," (l. 10), fade and die. But the damask roses are sweet and live on as perfume: "Of their sweet death are sweetest odors made." (l. 13)

The couplet ends the story with a prediction as well as a moral. The moral has already emerged in the fate of the canker roses that are all show and therefore shadows, not substance. The youth's beauty may

fade ("vade," l. 14) like the roses' but his truth, which reflects the Platonic ideal, will be distilled by the speaker's poetry. (The sonnet is the perfect instrument for, and an example of, distilling the truth.) As usual, the speaker is subtly establishing his own powers of preservation and so making himself desirable if not indispensable.