

*I grant thou wert not married to my muse,  
 And therefore mayst without attaint o'erlook  
 The dedicated words which writers use  
 Of their fair subject, blessing every book.  
 Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue,  
 Finding thy worth a limit past my praise,  
 And therefore art enforced to seek anew  
 Some fresher stamp of the time-bett'ring days.  
 And do so, love, yet when they have devised  
 What strained touches rhetoric can lend,  
 Thou truly fair wert truly sympathized  
 In true plain words by thy true-telling friend.  
 And their gross painting might be better used  
 Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abused.*

Again the speaker tries to convince his friend that his plain style is better than that of other poets, who are attempting to capture the friend's superlative beauty by using contorted rhetorical flourishes. Using his own rhetorical devices, the speaker first concedes that his friend has no obligation (like that of *marriage*, l. 1) to like the speaker's poetry and therefore can suffer no dishonor (*attaint*, l. 2) by reading (*o'erlook*, l. 2) the dedicatory words that writers (the rival poets) lavish on the friend's beauty. Their "blessing" (l. 4) is ironic.

The argument proceeds by setting down as a premise that the friend's mental superiority is as great as his physical beauty ("hue," l. 5). The friend's moral virtue ("worth," l. 6) the speaker has found to be beyond description. Therefore writers are now compelled to seek new styles, such as are suitable to the improving times. The striking phrase *time-bettering days* smells of the same irony as *blessing*, and both are placed at the end of their respective quatrains for emphasis.

The Q.E.D. tone continues at the start of the sestet. "Go along with the other poets, if you must," the speaker says, "but just remember when you read their pompous rhetoric, that you were truly praised by me." The conspicuous repetition of *truly* and *true* (ll. 11-12) has a lightly humorous hauteur, suggesting that the speaker's argument is incontrovertible. This is confirmed by the couplet, which comes right out with "gross painting" (l. 13) to characterize the rivals' praises. "You," concludes the speaker, "need no 'blood' for your cheeks." You are perfect as you are. *I shall not gild your lily.*