

*I never saw that you did painting need,
 And therefore to your fair no painting set;
 I found (or thought I found) you did exceed
 The barren tender of a poet's debt:
 And therefore have I slept in your report,
 That you your self being extant well might show
 How far a modern quill doth come too short,
 Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow,
 This silence for my sin you did impute,
 Which shall be most my glory, being dumb,
 For I impair not beauty, being mute,
 When others would give life, and bring a tomb.
 There lives more life in one of your fair eyes
 Than both your poets can in praise devise.*

An undercurrent of desperation to keep his friend's love flows through Sonnet 83. I could have done, the speaker seems to say, what my rivals have done by way of "painting" — that is, embellishing — the friend's beauty. As in Sonnet 82, the speaker argues his case cleverly. First, he tells his friend, I never believed you weren't perfect; therefore I indulged in no painting.

At this point, however, some doubt creeps in when he admits that he *thought* he found nothing to detract from the young man's beauty. (l. 3) A poet, he says, is obliged to praise his idol, but since he thought at first that the friend's beauty exceeded all expectations, he didn't feel it necessary to sing his praise: "And therefore I have slept in your report [refrained]." (l. 5) The speaker reinforces his argument by rephrasing lines three and four: Since you are living ("extant," l. 6) you yourself can show by your presence how a trivial poet ("a modern quill," l. 7) falls short of praising you in his verses.

In the sestet there is a little eye-opener for the reader. The friend has charged the speaker with sinning against him by his silence. (l. 9) Now the speaker can cap his argument with a paradox: I am not impairing your beauty by being mute. Quite the contrary, my silence is my greatest glory. My rivals want to pump more life into you, but their praises are like tombstones. (l. 12)

The couplet brings the speaker's barb home. One of his friend's eyes has

more life than both poets can create. Back comes some of the speaker's humility as he puts himself in the same category as his rivals. Is he purposely inconsistent? In the previous sonnet he has bragged about telling the truth and shunning "gross painting." Plainly, he likes to play the virtuoso even more.