

*They that have pow'r to hurt and will do none,
 That do not do the thing they most do show,
 Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
 Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:
 They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
 And husband nature's riches from expense;
 They are the lords and owners of their faces,
 Others but stewards of their excellence.
 The summer's flow'r is to the summer sweet,
 Though to itself it only live and die,
 But if that flow'r with base infection meet,
 The basest weed outbraves his dignity.*

*For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
 Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.*

Read in context, Sonnet 94, one of the most famous, clearly reveals another step in the speaker's growing jealousy. Like some other well-known sonnets (116 and 129, for example), it is not addressed to anyone, but takes on a tone and an argumentative stance appropriate to a sermon. And that sermon, which is also a meditation, is aimed at his friend, whose potential is described in the first line: "They that have pow'r to hurt and will do none." As models of behavior, they do not need to do what they can do best just to show off, and though they arouse others, they can remain unmoved, coolly objective, and not easily tempted.

Such paragons deserve heaven's grace. They also conserve nature's resources by resisting spendthrift ways. Instead of being mere "stewards of their excellence," they are rulers of their own appearances. The word *faces* (l. 7) is surprising, but it connects with the previous sonnet.

The sestet is a short allegory, like an *exemplum* used to point the moral in a medieval sermon. And the imagery picks up threads from Sonnet 1: the "summer's flower" (l. 9) connects with beauty's rose, its human counterpart. It will stay sweet though it lives and dies alone. (Living and dying alone is the fate the speaker warns the youth about in Sonnet 1.) The flower in Sonnet 94 is threatened, too; it may meet with "base infection" (a disease, l.

11), and so sink lower than the “basest weed” (l. 12). The parallel to the speaker’s friend is obvious, but more threatening than the imagery in Sonnet 1.

The logical aphorism of the couplet warns against “sweetest things” turning sour in their deeds, and condenses the moral into a single forceful line: “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.” By the end of the sequence—Sonnets 153 and 154—the threat turns into a reality: the speaker has contracted a venereal disease. The imagery of infection in Sonnet 94 is a preview; it also suggests that the friend may be the source of contamination.