

Sonnet 18

William Shakespeare



Background to poem:

- Wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets
- Sonnets composed between 1593 – 1601 and published 1609

- Born in Stratford-upon-Avon
- Actor and writer in London



William
Shakespeare
(1564-1616)

- Earl of Southampton became his patron = financed his art.

- Believed Sonnet 18 dedicated to Earl as W.S was fond of him

- W.S retired from stage after 1612

- W.S passed away 23 April 1616 at age of 52

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease has all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st.
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breath, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Summary:

- Sonnet 18 is written to praise the youthfulness, attractiveness and positive characteristics of a young person.
- Starts with rhetorical question: Should the person's beauty be compared to the beauty of a summer's day?
- Speaker answers himself: The young person is more beautiful and has a milder nature than English summer.

Summary:

- Summer: Strong destructive winds blow, too short, too hot, sometimes overcast.
- Every beautiful thing in nature will lose its beauty
- Speaker makes startling claim: The young person will never grow old or become less beautiful by ageing or chance, the young person's beauty will grow with the passing of time.
- This poem will ensure that the memory of the person's youth, beauty and excellence will never die.

Sonnet in plain ENGLISH

- At times the sun is too hot,
- Or often goes behind the clouds;
- And everything beautiful sometime will lose its beauty
- By chance or by nature's planned out course.
- But your youthful beauty shall not fade,
- Nor will you lose the beauty that you possess;
- Nor will death claim you for his own,
- Because in my eternal verse you will live forever.
- So long as there are people on this earth,
- So long will this poem live on, making you immortal.

Type:

- Shakespearean/ English Sonnet
- 14 lines
- Shakespearean/ English Sonnet has steady rhythm
- **Iambic pentameter** = Words in each line has ten syllables. These follow a pattern of five pairs of syllables, which each pairs having an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.
- 3 quatrains (4 lines) =
Poet argues why friend is better than summer's day
- Ends with rhyming couplet (2 lines) =
Strong conclusion = Friend will eternally 'live' in this poem
- Rhyme scheme: abab cdcd efef gg

Title:

- Shakespeare **numbered all his sonnets;** they do not have titles.
 - People refer to Shakespeare's sonnets either by their number or by **quoting the first line.**
 - ❖ **Apostrophe**
 - ❖ **Rhetorical question**
- } "Shall I compare thee..."

Themes:

1. Poet contrast the imperfections of a summer's day with the perfections of his patron/friend.
2. The fleeting nature of beauty and youth
3. Love and time – Love outlasts time
4. The immortality of poetry – poetry outlasts love and time.

The immortality that the speaker offers the young person is the immortality of the memory of beauty and youthfulness.

5. Summer is a time of change and transience, but art is timeless and permanent/lasting.
6. Other: beauty, death, mortality, friendship.

Tones:

1. Calm, victorious, triumphant, awestruck throughout.
2. Admiring / respectful
3. From line 9 onwards his tone is one of quiet conviction and confidence.
4. It becomes disparage/belittling when he addresses death.

Mood:

1. Poem starts on a joyous mood.
Speaker feels happy and enthusiastic about his beloved and the comparison he is about to create.
2. The use of 'thee' which was a word used for somebody you know really well, creates a mood and tone of gentleness, intimacy or closeness.

Analysis:

First quatrain:

- Speaker compares and contrasts the young person with the typical English summer.
- In Northern Hemisphere summer lasts from May to August – the warmest, most pleasant season of the year, as well as the period of growth in nature which culminates in maturity.
- **Figuratively:** summer refers to the period of maturity in persons life – fully developed in body and mind.

Line 1: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Rhetorical question

Apostrophe

Old-fashioned English for 'you'

Shall expresses
uncertainty/doubt

Addresses beloved
directly

Indicates close
relationship – special
bond.

Will this comparison
do justice to his
friend?

Metaphor: Beloved compared to pleasant long summer. Summer is symbol of most pleasant weather. Perfect season with no flaws.

Line 2: Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

you are

Emphasises close relationship

Beloved is physically more beautiful than beauty of summer's day

Person's temperament (personality) is gentle and not as unpredictable as the summer weather.

Colon:
All imperfections of summer listed afterwards

Beloved is not as changeable, possesses a peacefulness and contentment, is balanced in mood or temper

Conclusion: He decides in favour of his beloved. Does not want to compare him to something as transient and imperfect as summer's day.

Line 3: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

Sometimes harsh winds blow in May, shaking tender buds off

His friend is NOT unpredictable and erratic

Personification: Winds acts violently towards delicate buds

Antithesis: The destructiveness of wind is contrasted to the vulnerability of the flower buds

'darling' = dear/little/valuable
'bud' = partially opened flower

England summer: June-Aug.
May is beginning of warmer weather

Line 4: And **summer's lease** has all too short a **date**:

Personification: Summer is compared to a person renting a property.
property
Emphasises summer is brief

Period of time for which property is leased. Summer will disappear when lease has expired to make way for Autumn.

'lease' = contract to rent

Metaphorically: Describes fleeting nature of beauty. It won't last forever.

This line is in contrast with line 9

Summer lasts for a short period of time; his beloved's beauty, in comparison, is eternal and not even death can affect it. His friend is not as short-lived as summer. He believes it will be immortalized in this poem.

Analysis:

Second quatrain:

- Speaker continues to personify summer.
- Gives examples of extremes of summer and its transient nature.

Line 5: Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

Sometimes= Occasionally

Implication = it will happen sooner or later. It shows inevitable decay of any form of beauty.

Sun = sometimes too hot, other times hidden by clouds.
His beloved's beauty doesn't change like the sun.

Personification: Sun is compared to a person that looks down from above. Creates the idea that the sun is beautiful and powerful.

Line 6: And often is his gold complexion dimm'd:

Personification: his refers to sun

The sun is compared to a person with a beautiful complexion. It depicts the beauty of the sun which is the provider of light and heat. The golden colour of the sun is blotted out by the clouds, the bright sun becomes dim, darkened.

Gold suggests warmth

The colour or look of the skin.

Elision: 'e' left out for the sake of metre.

Inversion: Word order is changed. It places strong stress on '*dimm'd*' to show the sharp contrast/antithesis between the bright appearance of the sun and the dark clouds which obscure it.

In contrast with the sun whose light is sometimes concealed, the speaker's loved one outshines the clouds of life and shines brightly no matter what.

Line 7: And every fair from fair sometime declines,

Repetition of and line 4, 6 and 7:
Exposes the defects of a
summer's day and stresses the
unavoidable deterioration of
beauty.

Thing of beauty.
Everything eventually loses its
beauty either by accident or
natural causes. Even summer.

Alliteration of f:
Emphasises that
everything fades
with time

Repetition of fair highlights the
fact that this fate is
inescapable.

At one time or another

Line 8: By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd.

Unexpected/by accident.
natural course interrupted in an
unnatural way.

Metaphor: Natural cycle of seasons
changing is compared to the set
course of something well-planned,
like the course of a ship.

There is continuous progress through
the different stages in the life of man
and all things in nature.

Trim = to decorate/
beautify.
Untrimmed – to take
away beauty / loss of
decoration and frills.

Beautiful things
naturally lose
their perfection
and beauty over
time

This line implies that the degeneration takes
place either by accident or as a result of
nature's cycles.

Analysis:

Third quatrain:

- Introduced by 'But' which signals a turning point has been reached in the poet's comparison and contrasts of the young person's beauty to summer.
- The speaker tells his beloved that he has nothing to fear. He will neither age nor lose his beauty nor will he die.
- The youth's reputation for being beautiful and virtuous will even grow (because of this poem).

Line 9: But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Apostrophe:
Speaker speaks directly to his beloved

Lasting forever

Implies poet's certainty that his friend will have everlasting 'summer'. His friend will not lose any of his beauty, brilliance or honour – in contrast to line 7 where it is stated that nature's beauty fades.

fade = gradual loss of brilliance, strength, beauty. Compliments his friend by telling him his beauty is eternal.

Hyperbole = He claims his beloved will become immortal.

Line 10: Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st.

His friend's qualities are part of him and will never be lost.

Stands for beauty and loved one's excellent qualities

He owns it, eternally. The implication is that he will live eternally through this poem.

Line 11: Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

Personification:

Death is personified as a person who falsely boasts that it will claim the speaker's beloved. That boasts about his power to destroy life. Seen as the ruler of the underworld (shade)

Show off, boast

Indicates speaker's certainty about his beloved having an everlasting reputation and timeless beauty. Death would be powerless to affect his beloved. Beloved will die bodily death, but he will be given immortality through the poem.

Walk about without any particular purpose.

The darkness associated with death. Creates a gloomy image of death.

Metaphor: Shade is metaphor for time of one's death.

Irony:

Death cannot brag about having power, poet is bragging about his poetry being so powerful that it will become immortal.

Line 12: When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

Reason for immortality of the youth is given in this line. Beloved is immortalised in poem.

Refer to lines of poetry. he believes will become timeless because poem will be read forever. His poetry eternalizes his youth, beauty and endless merits/worth.

Instead of passing into the obscurity of death when he dies (to be forgotten), he will continue to grow as more people read this poem.

Analysis:

Rhyming couplet:

- Intended to reinforce the speaker's argument by expanding on line 12.
- The speaker claims that as long as people are living and can read, this poem will be read and the memory, or fame, of the youth's beauty will never die, giving it immortality.

Line 13: So long as men can breath, or eyes can see,

Tone: Confident

As long as man exists

Synechdoche:

'eyes' refer to people who are alive and have an interest in literature, this poem will be read.

Shakespeare states confidently that his poetry will persist as long as there are people on this earth.

Line 14: So long lives **this**, and this gives life to thee.

Repetition of 'this':

Stresses the importance that Shakespeare attaches to his own poetry. This idea is enhanced with the reference to 'life' and 'lives'.

This poem – art is victorious over death.

Each time poem is read the memory of his beloved will live on. Beloved will remain 'alive' in lines of this poem.

Irony:

The poem itself will have a longer effect on readers than the beauty of the speaker's loved one. The immortality of the poem is the reason why the reader knows about his beauty and worth, not the other way around.