

Sonnet 18 - Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

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 hath 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 breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

Shall I compare you to a summer's day?
You are more lovely and more constant:
Rough winds shake the beloved buds of May
And summer is far too short:
At times the sun is too hot,
Or often goes behind the clouds;
And everything beautiful sometime will lose its
beauty,
By misfortune or by nature's planned out course.
But your youth 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.

temperate (1): i.e., evenly-tempered; not overcome by passion.

the eye of heaven (5): i.e., the sun.

every fair from fair sometime declines (7): i.e., the beauty (fair) of everything beautiful (fair) will fade (declines). Compare to [Sonnet 116](#): "rosy lips and cheeks/Within his bending sickle's compass come."

nature's changing course (8): i.e., the natural changes age brings.

that fair thou ow'st (10): i.e., that beauty you possess.

in eternal lines...growest (12): The poet is using a grafting metaphor in this line. Grafting is a technique used to join parts from two plants with cords so that they grow as one. Thus the beloved becomes immortal, grafted to time with the poet's cords (his "eternal lines"). For commentary on whether this sonnet is really "one long exercise in self-glorification", please see below.

Sonnet 18 is the best known and most well-loved of all 154 sonnets. It is also one of the most straightforward in language and intent. The stability of love and its power to immortalize the subject of the poet's verse is the theme.

The poet starts the praise of his dear friend without ostentation, but he slowly builds the image of his friend into that of a perfect being. His friend is first compared to summer in the octave, but, at the start of the third quatrain (9), he is summer, and thus, he has metamorphosed into the standard by which true beauty can and should be judged. The poet's only answer to such profound joy and beauty is to ensure that his friend be forever in human memory, saved from the oblivion that accompanies death. He achieves this through his verse, believing that, as history writes itself, his friend will become one with time. The final couplet reaffirms the poet's hope that as long as there is breath in mankind, his poetry too will live on, and ensure the immortality of his muse.