

Mila University Center

Course: English Literature (Second Year BA)

Lesson Three: Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

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Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

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

I. Summary of Sonnet 18

Sonnet 18 is developed as an argumentative monologue, delivered in response to the question "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". The speaker provides a negative answer to this question arguing that his beloved is more lovely than a summer's day. Although summer is a beautiful and a pleasant season, it remains subject to inconsistency and change because of bad weather and this makes it a poor comparison with the beloved. As the sonnet progresses, the speaker suggests that the beauty of his beloved is more enduring than that of summer.

II. Analysis of Sonnet 18

A) Quatrain one:

- This quatrain opens with a question whether the poet can compare the beauty of the young man to a summer's day. The expected answer to this question is "yes" but the speaker surprises his readers with an unconventional and flattering response in the following line that reads "Thou art more lovely and more temperate". In this line, the speaker begins to explain why he will not make the comparison suggested in line one. It can be noticed that there is a repetition of the word "more" in this line which suggests that the speaker sets up his beloved in an elevated state that his loveliness is more temperate and consistent than summer. The beauty of the beloved exceeds the beauty and loveliness of the natural world that is represented in a perfect "summer's day".
- Line three stresses the fact that nature's beauty is not consistent because early summer storms bring cruel days and "rough winds" that destroy the beauty of the May's flowers. Also, the rest of the season seems to pass in haste, especially in Shakespeare's homeland, England. In short, the last two lines of this quatrain contain the reason why summer is not the basis for such a desirable simile made in line one.

B) Quatrain two:

- The second quatrain continues to explain why the young man cannot be compared to summer's beauty. The first two lines of this quatrain are set to criticize some of the characteristics of summer, for example, "the eye of heaven" that is the sun sometimes gets too hot and some other times it becomes darkened by clouds that tend to cover its "golden complexion". This is to say that the beauty of the sun is not consistent, meaning its beauty cannot be enjoyed everyday unlike the beauty of the young man which is temperate.
- The speaker continues to emphasize the inconsistency of nature in these two lines 7 and 8, asserting that everything that is beautiful will eventually decline by chance (something happening out of the ordinary) or nature's changing course. Nature's changing course here reflects the movement of time which is an ever-changing course. In these two lines, the speaker suggests that in the physical world everything including beauty, slowly decays.

C) Quatrain three:

- The beginning of the third quatrain marks a change. This means that the sonnet's subject in this quatrain is not summer but the speaker's description of the young man which promises eternal beauty and youth through the existence of this verse. The young man "owns" his beauty as well as his attractive qualities and will never have to give them up in the same manner in which summer must forfeit its beauty to autumn.
- Line 9 explains that the speaker's beloved is exempt from the nature's changing course because his summer is eternal and that even death becomes impotent against the beauty of the young man as he cannot even wander in its shade.
- Line 11 indicates that death will not be able to claim the young man once it recognizes that he gained immortality through the lines of this sonnet. "shade" of death here does not only mean the darkness associated with the state of death but the "valley of the shadow of death", as described in the Bible's 23rd Psalm. It can also refer to the underworld of classical mythology.

D) Couplet Lines 13 and 14:

- The couplet explains that the life of the young man will be an endless summer in the way that the speaker immortalizes him in the sonnet. This appears in his repetitive use of "this" which refers to the actual sonnet 18. As long as the individual is alive, he/she can read this sonnet, hence, eternal life will be given to the beloved.

III. Theme of the sonnet:

It is important to note that Shakespeare's sonnets can be grouped together under similar themes. For example, Sonnets from 1 to 17 share the same theme which is immortality through procreation where the speaker urges the young man to get married and have children to make his beauty survive. Sonnet 18, on the other hand, offers another theme that is immortality through poetry. In this sonnet, the speaker seeks to achieve immortality through poetry rather than through procreation. He wants to immortalize the beauty of the young man by creating a work of art that will last forever.

IV. Poetic Devices

<u>Figure of Speech</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
1.Extended Metaphor “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”	The speaker compares the beauty of his beloved to the beauty of a summer’s day throughout the sonnet.
2.Imagery: “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May”	Brings the image of harsh winds destroying small, delicate newly sprouted flowers of springtime.
3.Symbolism: “Summer’s lease hath all too short a date”	There are two poetic devices in this verse. The first one is a metaphor; the speaker compares the shortness of summer to a property in lease and this symbolizes the ephemerality of beauty that is subject to aging.
4.Personification “Nor shall Death brag thou wandr’st in his shade”	Death is personified in the way that it is given human characteristic of “bragging”
5.Hyperbole: “you are more lovely and more temperate”	Hyperbole is the use of exaggerating statements. This line shows a sort of exaggeration from the speaker as he argues that the beauty of the beloved exceeds the beauty of the summer.
6.Anaphora: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.	Anaphora is the repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive clauses or verses) Lines 13 and 14 (couplet) both start with the words “So long”, which stress the fact that the beauty of the beloved will continue to exist as long as there are human beings on earth.
7.Alliteration: Every fair from fair declines”	Repetition of the initial consonant sound in three neighboring words in one line
8.Assonance: And this gives life to thee”	Repetition of two vowel sounds in two words in one line
9.Consonance “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May »	Repetition of a consonant sound in more than two words in one line