

## William Shakespeare Sonnet 18

### Poem Text

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 dimmed ;

And every fair from fair sometime declines ,

By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed :

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.

### Analysis

Poetic tradition and basic etiquette dictate that the only acceptable answer to this question is "yes". But the speaker refuses to answer this clichéd request with more clichés ; instead , he surprises the reader with an unconventional response.

The speaker now begins to explain why he will not make the comparison suggested in the first line .The poem recipient is not only more attractive , but less vulnerable to extremes , than is a typical summer's day. The speaker's use of the word "temperate " is significant ,

because he will continue to praise the qualities of endurance and constancy , over those of change .

The speaker gives the reasons why summer is not the basis for a desirable simile . Early summer storms bring cruel gray days , and the rest of the season seems to pass in a haste – especially in England , Shakespeare's homeland .

Here the eye of heaven refers to sun . The sunshine of summer days is greatly variable and unpredictable . Sometimes it comes so strongly , and other days it ( or he as Shakespeare prefers ) is obscured by clouds . The beauty of the sun's face is thus not to be enjoyed every day , as is the attractiveness of the person addressed in the sonnet.

The idea of summer's brevity and mutability is reinforced by the speaker's use of a sequence of words suggesting the passing of a day : ( shines , dimmed , declines , and fade ). In other words , a summer day can begin and end as quickly as a sonnet .

There are two levels of meaning here , thanks to the play on the word "untrimmed " : age or accident can destroy the balance of sail on a sailboat , just as it can take away the attractiveness of a beautiful youth . In either case , " the wind is taken out of one's sails, " as the old saying goes . Shakespeare's artistry can be seen in his continuation of his sun – based metaphor with "declines" even as new figure of speech is developed.

The beginning of the third quatrain marks a change : now the sonnet's subject , not summer , becomes the focus of the speaker's description , which promises eternal beauty and youth through the existence of this verse .The subject of the sonnet owns and thus controls their attractive qualities and will never have to own them up , as summer must forfeit its beauty.

Death will not be able to claim the sonnet 's recipient when he sees that the mortal has gained immortality through the lines of this sonnet.

"This" in the last line seems ambiguous , but probably refers to "Sonnet 18" itself . The final couplet thus includes a subtle twist on the speaker's praise of his beloved : the life of the subject will be an endless summer , but only because the speaker has immortalized them in this poem , and only if people continue to read these verses .



