

# Sonnet 18

« Sonnet 18 »	
<div><div>18.</div><div>Shall I compare thee to a Summers day? Thou art more louely and more temperate: Rough windes do fhake the darling buds of Maie, And Sommers leafe hath all too short a date: Sometime too hot the eye of heauen shines, And often is his gold complexion dimm'd, And euery faire from faire some-time declines, By chance, or natures changing courſe vntrim'd: But thy eternall Sommer ſhall not fade, Nor looſe poſſeſſion of that faire thou ow'ſt, Nor ſhall death brag thou wandr'ſt in his ſhade, When in eternall lines to time thou grow'ſt, So long as men can breath or eyes can ſee, So long liues this, and this giues life to thee,</div></div> <div>Sonnet 18 in the 1609 Quarto of Shakespeare's sonnets.</div>	
<div></div>	
Q1	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: 4
Q2	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: 8
Q3	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: 12
C	So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. <sup>[1]</sup> 14
—William Shakespeare	

**Sonnet 18** is one of the best-known of the 154 sonnets written by the English playwright and poet William Shakespeare.

In the sonnet, the speaker asks whether he should compare the young man to a summer's day, but notes that the young man has qualities that surpass a summer's day. He also notes the qualities of a summer day are subject to change and will eventually diminish. The speaker then states that the young man will live forever in the lines of the poem, as long as it can be read.<sup>[2]</sup> There is an irony being expressed in this sonnet: it is not the actual young man who will be eternalized, but the description of him contained in the poem, and the poem contains scant or no description of the young man, but instead contains vivid and lasting descriptions of a summer day; which the young man is supposed to outlive.<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Structure

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Sonnet 18 is a typical English or Shakespearean sonnet, having 14 lines of iambic pentameter: three quatrains followed by a couplet. It also has the characteristic rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The poem reflects the rhetorical tradition of an Italian or Petrarchan Sonnet. Petrarchan sonnets typically discussed the love and beauty of a beloved, often an unattainable love, but not always.<sup>[4]</sup> It also contains a *volta*, or shift in the poem's subject matter, beginning with the third quatrain.<sup>[5]</sup> line 1: Rhetorical Question The couplet's first line exemplifies a regular iambic pentameter rhythm:

x /   x /   x /   x /   x /  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, (18.13)

/ = *ictus*, a metrically strong syllabic position. x = *nonictus*.

## Context

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The poem is part of the Fair Youth sequence (which comprises sonnets 1–126 in the accepted numbering stemming from the first edition in 1609). It is also the first of the cycle after the opening sequence now described as the procreation sonnets. Some scholars, however, contend that it is part of the procreation sonnets, as it addresses the idea of reaching eternal life through the written word, a theme they find in sonnets 15–17. In this view, it can be seen as part of a transition to sonnet 20's time theme.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Notes on the text

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"Complexion" in line six, can have two meanings:

- (1)The outward appearance of the face as compared with the sun ("the eye of heaven") in the previous line, or
- (2)The older sense of the word in relation to The four humours.

In Shakespeare's time "complexion" carried both outward and inward meanings, as did the word "temperate" (externally, a weather condition; internally, a balance of humours). The second meaning of "complexion" would communicate that the beloved's inner, cheerful, and temperate disposition is constant, unlike the sun, which may be blotted out on a cloudy day. The first meaning is more obvious: a negative change in his outward appearance.<sup>[7]</sup>

The word, "untrimmed" in line eight, can be taken two ways: First, in the sense of loss of decoration and frills, and second, in the sense of untrimmed sails on a ship. In the first interpretation, the poem reads that beautiful things naturally lose their fanciness over time. In the second, it reads that nature is a ship with sails not adjusted to wind changes in order to correct course. This, in combination with the words "nature's changing course", creates an oxymoron: the unchanging change of nature, or the fact that the only thing that does not change is change. This line in the poem creates a shift from the mutability of the first eight lines, into the eternity of the last six. Both change and eternity are then acknowledged and challenged by the final line.<sup>[4]</sup>

"Ow'st" in line ten can carry two meanings, each common at the time: "ownest" and "owest". "Owe", in Shakespeare's day, was sometimes used as a synonym for "own". However, "owest" conveys the idea that beauty is something borrowed from nature—that it must be paid back. In this interpretation, "fair" can be a pun on "fare", or the fare required by nature for life's journey.<sup>[8]</sup> Other scholars have pointed out that this borrowing and lending theme within the poem is true of both nature and humanity. Summer, for example, is said to have a "lease" with "all too short a date". This monetary theme is common in many of Shakespeare's sonnets, as it was an everyday theme in his budding capitalistic society.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Recordings

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- Paul Kelly, for the 2016 album, *Seven Sonnets & a Song*
- Chuck Liddell Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91XXO0lv0p0>) on YouTube
- David Gilmour
- Bryan Ferry, for the 1997 album *Diana, Princess of Wales: Tribute*

## Notes

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## External links

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-  Works related to [Sonnet 18 \(Shakespeare\)](#) at Wikisource
- Paraphrase and analysis (Shakespeare-online) (<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/18detail.html>)
- David Gilmour's recording of Sonnet 18 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8Osse7w9fs>) on YouTube
- Poeterra's recording of Sonnet 18 (<https://itunes.apple.com/tr/album/shall-i-compare-shakespeare/id900163391?i=900163601&uo=4>)

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