

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: *lovely/stable*

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date: *duration*
 Sometime too hot the ^{sun} eye of heaven shines, *metaphor* 5
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
 And every fair from fair sometime declines, *metaphor*
 By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade, *metaphor*
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st, 10
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest 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.

The Idea and the Emotion in This Sonnet

The beauty of a day in summer is variable and short-lived. The beauty of Shakespeare's friend, however, is lovelier than this beauty. Shakespeare would immortalize his friend's beauty by means of the sonnets which he has written. Shakespeare's emotion in this sonnet is one of joy in his friend's beauty and also one of pride in his own achievement in having written these sonnets.

Meanings and Explanations

Temperate—equable; neither too cold nor too hot. Here, however, the word "temperate" may be paraphrased as "sweet" or "lovable" or "soothing".

Summer's lease—the period for which the season of summer has the right to stay. *All too short a date*—a very short existence. "Date" here means duration.

The eye of heaven—the sun. (This is a metaphor. The sun shining in the sky has been called "the eye of heaven").

Nature's changing course—the transitions and the alterations which take place as a matter of routine, or sometimes as deviations from routine.

Untrimm'd—deprived; robbed.

The eternal summer—your everlasting beauty. (Here is another metaphor. The friend's beauty has been called his "eternal summer". Summer in England is a lovely season. Shakespeare has metaphorically used the word "summer" for his friend's beauty; and he has described it a "eternal summer" because the friend's beauty would never die).

A Paraphrase of the Sonnet

Would it be appropriate for me to compare your beauty to the beauty of a day in summer? No. you are more lovely and more stable in your beauty. Rough winds cause much damage to the sweet buds of the summer month of May, and the duration of the season of summer is too short. Besides, in summer the sun sometimes becomes too bright and hot, and often is the brightness of summer diminished (by fog or clouds). The fact is that every beautiful thing loses its beauty at some time or the other. Every beautiful thing is robbed of its beauty by chance or by the changing course of Nature. However, your beauty is everlasting, and it would never fade away. Nor would you ever lose possession of the beauty which you now have. Nor would even death be able to claim that it has snatched your beauty away and has made you wander in the darkness of its regions. Death would not be able to make any such claim because your beauty would increase rather than fade through these sonnets which I am writing as a tribute to you. As long as men live in this world, and as long as men have eyes which can see, so long would these sonnets continue to be read; and these sonnets would impart to you an immortal life.

Critical Appreciation

Shakespeare has here glorified or idealized the beauty of his friend. This sonnet is, therefore, his tribute or homage to his friend. The emotion in this sonnet is not mild or lukewarm. The emotion here is intense. In fact, the sonnet seems to throb with emotion. Nor can we doubt the author's sincerity. Spontaneity is another characteristic of this sonnet which seems to have flowed from Shakespeare's pen as naturally as water flows from a spring. Shakespeare's sonnets abound in figures of speech; and here we have several metaphors. If the beauty of Shakespeare's friend is admirable, so is this sonnet which aims at conveying to us Shakespeare's appreciation of his friend's beauty. Here we have one of the most exquisite and one of the most delightful sonnets. But what is perhaps the most remarkable quality of this sonnet is the evidence which it provides of Shakespeare's awareness of his own greatness as a poet. Shakespeare was not an "unconscious" genius, as is sometimes affirmed. He was fully conscious of his exceptional gifts as a poet, and this sonnet shows that consciousness. He knew that his works would be read for all times to come.