

Sonnet 18 by Shakespeare

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*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 owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

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

The poet begins with the compliment of his loved friend without pretention, and he depicted his friend as a perfect being. This person is first compared to summer but he becomes summer in the third quatrain, "and thus, he has metamorphosed into the standard by which true beauty can and should be judged". The poet's only answer to such deep delight and beauty is to confirm "that his friend be forever in human memory, saved from the oblivion that accompanies death". He attains this through his verse, believing that his friend will be recorded in history. The final couplet confirms the poet's hope that his poetry will be immortalized "as long as there is breath in mankind, his poetry too will live on, and ensure the immortality of his muse".

James Boyd-White rejects to consider this sonnet as a love poem but a 'self-glorification':

What kind of love does 'this' in fact give to 'thee'? We know nothing of the beloved's form or height or hair or eyes or bearing, nothing of her character or mind, nothing of her at all, really. This 'love poem' is actually written not in praise of the beloved, as it seems, but in praise of itself. Death shall not brag, says the poet; the poet shall brag. This famous sonnet is on this view one long exercise in self-glorification, not a love poem at all; surely not suitable for earnest recitation at a wedding or anniversary party, or in a Valentine. (142)

James Boyd-White denotes Shakespeare's beloved as "her", but it is almost known that the poet's beloved is a young man in sonnets 1-126.

Sonnets 18-25 are often argued as a group, as they all emphasize the poet's fondness of his friend.

References

Shakespeare, William. *Sonnet 18*. Ed. Amanda Mabillard. *Shakespeare Online*. 12 Nov. 2008. < <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/18detail.html> >.

References

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Smith, Hallett. *The Tension of the Lyre*. San Marino: Huntington Library, 1981.
