

Shall i compare thee
to a summer's day
essay



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In Shakespearean sonnets (also known as English sonnets), all poems are written about one thing; love. Each sonnet consists of fourteen lines. A sonnet also consists of an iambic pentameter, a rhyme scheme in which each sonnet line consists of ten syllables. The syllables are divided into five pairs called iambs or iambic feet. An iamb is a metrical unit made up of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable (such as fare WELL). In each stanza (four lines) the rhyme scheme is usually ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, and GG. Every A rhymes with every A, every B rhymes with every B, and so forth.

But with Shakespearean sonnets, the lines are unrhymed and not grouped into stanzas. For example; Shall I / com PARE/ thee TO / a SUM / mer's DAY? Thou ART / more LOVE / ly AND / more TEM / per ATE (Sonnet 18). An unrhymed iambic pentameter is called blank verse. Every sonnet consists of three quatrains and a couplet. Quatrains are consecutive lines of verse that make up a stanza or division of lines in a poem and a couplet is two consecutive rhyming lines of verse. But there is something that truly makes sonnets special. A Sonnet is an argument.

It is built in a certain way to use metaphors in its argument. Each quatrain represents the conflict that the speaker faces. Quatrains are repetitive with difference; meaning each quatrain will be the same, but the next quatrain will have more depth as well as a slight change in metaphor without losing its flow. The first quatrain gives off the main theme and the main metaphor of what Shakespeare is speaking of. The second quatrain gets more into depth with his first quatrain but instead of using the first metaphor, he complicates it.

In his third quatrain, Shakespeare gives a peripatetic line (a twist), often introduced by a “ but”. The couplet (last two lines), summarizes the conflict of the quatrains, and leaves the reader with a new concluding image.

Shakespeare has written over 154 sonnets, but one of his most famous and most loved sonnets is Sonnet 18 and is wildly read all around the world. It is also one of the most straightforward in language and intent. Shakespeare's reason for Sonnet 18 is to show that through his sonnet; love is stable, and has the ability to immortalize his words to keep his beloved alive.

In line 1, the speaker begins by asking the rhetorical question, “ Shall I compare thee to a summer's day”? The speaker's metaphor (summer) sets the setting of what or whom he is going to compare. Line 2, the speaker talks specifically to his beloved and says that she is “ more lovely and more temperate”. He is saying that his beloved is as beautiful and moderate as the summer. The speaker changes his tone a little as he describes the negatives of summer. “ Rough winds shake the darling buds of May; and summer's lease hath all too short a date” (lines 3-4). The darling buds of May” is not only speaking about the month directly but, to the May tree (the Common Hawthorn) that flower in England. The Hawthorn is important in the mythology of old England and there's a rich symbolism to this tree. Legend has it, that Joseph of Arimathea (a saint believed to be a relative of Jesus) arrived to England from the Holy Land and fell asleep. His walking stick had a thorn which pricked into the ground and it began to flower, and flourishes every year on Christmas to remark the birth of Christ. The English believes that the Hawthorn brings good luck.

The meaning in line 3 could also be about spring producing new flowers and leaves on trees; however, they are blown away by strong winds that summer brings. The speaker is saying that the transition from spring to summer isn't pleasant. In line 4, the speaker mentions "summer's lease" to let the reader know that summer is soon to an end, and that summer in actuality is not constant. In our second quatrain, line 5, "Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines", the speaker changes his metaphor from summer to "the eye of heaven", in which he is referring to the sun.

He is keeping the same setting and is getting in depth with his first metaphor. "And often is his gold complexion dimm'd (line 6)", the speaker mentions that as grand as the sun may be, it is dimmed by clouds. So, if clouds can block sunlight; that would mean that the sun, like summer, is temporary. In line 7, "and every fair from fair sometime declines", the speaker uses "fair" as his noun; interpreting something beautiful. Line 7 simply means; that everything beautiful eventually loses its beauty. "By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd" (line 8), the speaker is writing about the simple change is nature.

The word "untrimm'd (untrimmed)", is referring to the untrimmed sails on a ship. Summer is nature, and nature is like a ship sailing with untrimmed sails through life; no change is course because nobody is adjusting the sails. The ship does what it wants (mind of its own); just like the independence of human desires or willpower. Now that the octave's (first eight lines; 1 & 2 quatrains) purpose was to show the mortality of summer; the speaker's third quatrain has the purpose of letting the reader know that there's a twist in the metaphor, and that the metaphor is much more than just mortal and

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useless. But thy eternal summer shall not fade; nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st (lines 9-10), the speaker is referring to his beloved's beauty and that her beauty will never fade. This gives the reader an indication that the speaker is keeping his beloved alive through his poem. Ow'st in this poem also refers to possession, could be possession of the poetry, beauty or self. In line 11; the speaker's writes; " Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade". He wants the reader to know that death can never say that his beloved was taken because his beloved can never die.

In line 12; the speakers says that " when in eternal lines to time thou growest". I believe the speaker was telling his readers that his lines in his poem are what keep his beloved alive. The speaker is using a grafting technique. Grafting technique is used for two plants to join together by cords to become one. Basically, his beloved as well as poetry (the two plants) are joined together by the eternal lines (cords) to be grow as one (time thou growest). The couplet serves as our new idea of what the speaker's quatrains were intending. So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, so long lives this and this gives life to thee (lines 13-14). The speaker is basically saying that as long as this poem is read or seen, his beloved, unlike summer, shall never die. Therefore she is immortal. Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, shows a great appreciate for his beloved. In his first two quatrains, Shakespeare showed the lack of interest in summer, and how summer is really just a course that comes and goes; summer dies. But, in his third quatrain, Shakespeare changes the tone of his poem. The word " but" (line 9) serves as the volta.

Volta means a rhetorical turn, and it often introduces a change of argument. In Shakespearean sonnets, the volta occurs at the moment of the couplet (between lines 12 and 13). In Sonnet 18, however, this is not so. The volta is signaled by the word " But" at the beginning of line 9 (as a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet). From here, Shakespeare introduces the change in the arguments from the octave and leads the reader down to the couplet. Since humans are meant to die; his immortal words, that readers encounter serve the purpose of keeping his beloved alive.