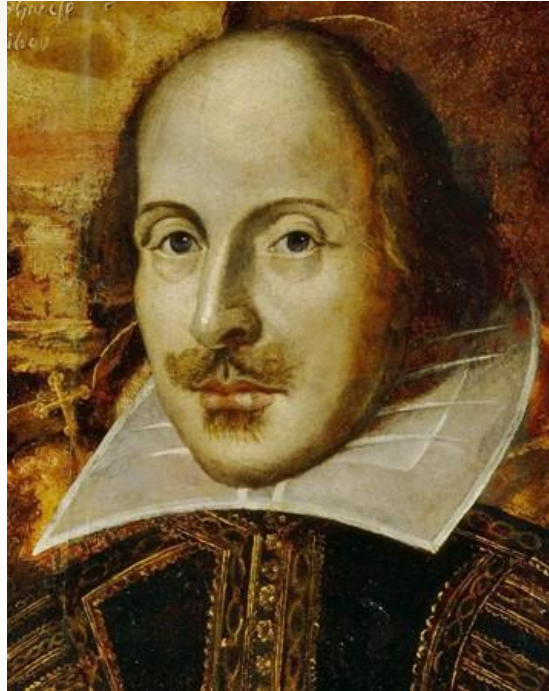


Learning to Appreciate Poetry

Presented by Paul Rogers

William Shakespeare



Sonnet XVIII

A few words in advance

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets

A sonnet is a one-stanza, 14-line poem, written in iambic pentameter. This is a line of verse with five metrical feet (beats), each consisting of one short (unstressed) syllable followed by one long (stressed) syllable.

The sonnet, which derived from the Italian word sonetto, meaning “a little sound or song,” is a popular classical form that has fascinated poets for centuries. The most common — and simplest — type is known as the English or Shakespearean sonnet, but there are several others.

Shakespeare's were written between 1593 and 1601 and were eventually published in 1608. They are dedicated to “Mr. W. H.” which has caused much speculation over the centuries. It is known that Shakespeare's most influential sponsor was the Earl of Southampton, whose actual name was Henry Wriothesley. If we invert his initials, we get W. H. but for many critics, that is too tenuous a link. Quite simply, much of Shakespeare's biography is a complete mystery to us: all we have are the plays and the poems.

The Poem

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.

Rhyme Scheme

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	a
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:	b
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	a
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:	b
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,	c
And often is his gold complexion dimmed	d
And every fair from fair sometime declines,	c
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:	d
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,	e
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,	f
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,	e
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,	f
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,	g
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.	g

The first 12 lines are divided into 3 quatrains (4 lines and 2 rhymes in each). In the three quatrains the poet establishes a theme or problem and then resolves it in the final two lines, which is a rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme of the quatrains is abab cdcd efef. The couplet has the rhyme scheme gg. The metre is iambic pentameter: 5 beats, with the stress falling on the second syllable – di da, di da, di da, di da, di da.

Imagery

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**.

Imagery (figurative language) is represented mainly by **metaphor**, with one **simile**.

The Basic Meaning

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.

A man is thinking about the lady he loves and comparing her to a summer's day – a joyful time. However, she is far superior to the weather. He goes on to list her qualities and how much better they are than just a simple day of warm weather. He says she will **never grow old** because he has preserved her forever in the immortal lines of his poem: **So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.**

Concluding Remarks

I could have chosen any one of the 154 sonnets, but as this one is well known and loved, it seemed a fitting choice.

I would draw your particular attention to the last couplet. Here, Shakespeare is laying claim to a kind of immortality by saying in effect: as long as people are able to read, this poem will be available to them and, consequently that you, my love, will continue to exist. He does not claim any such longevity for himself – it is his words that he hopes, or even expects, will last.

These are not the thoughts of a shy and modest man. As a manipulator of words, he knows he's good. He may not realise the extent he's loved, even worshipped today, but he is not afraid of boasting about his talent, just a bit.

I hope you can see that this poem has been deeper and more challenging than the Chaucer. With Chaucer, the only difficulty for us today is the strangeness and remoteness of his language. As a narrative, we have no problem in understanding what he wants to say.

Shakespeare, by contrast, gives us pure “orange juice.” He requires the diluting effect of our intelligence to make his words meaningful and alive.

Preparing for the Next Unit

