

*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 wandr'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.*

Two questions arise at this point in the sequence. First, is there really a break here as traditional wisdom has it? Or is Sonnet 18 simply an amplification of Sonnet 17 with its growing thread of immortality through verse? Secondly, is the person addressed the same youth, the same youth but older, or a different person altogether? There are no firm answers. What is sure, however, is that the plea for progeny has ceased.

Because Sonnet 18 is one of the most frequently anthologized poems by Shakespeare, it is, more often than not, read out of context. Coming upon it in sequence, however, the reader can immediately see the drastic differences from the opening sonnets, but also obvious are the threads that regularly appear. Sonnet 18 has none of the warnings about self-betrayal and possible death that cast shadows over the first two sonnets and that persist until this burst of enthusiasm. There is no argument to persuade, only the assertion that the poet's lines are eternal.

The youth—and we shall assume that it is the same one addressed so far—is declared superior to a summer's day, which, though traditionally perfect, is subject to defects. The list runs from line three through line eight, going from the specific "rough winds" of May through the general decline of nature. The thread of nature can be traced back to beauty's rose in the second line of the sequence, whose decease is

mentioned in the line immediately following. However, in Sonnet 18 the order is reversed: the word *untrimmed*, which closes the octave, is immediately followed by "But thy eternal summer shall not fade."

This assertion at the opening of the sestet is followed by two more. First, the youth will not be dispossessed of his beauty ("fair," l. 10), nor shall death brag that the youth will wander in his kingdom (which suggests the classical Hades, not the Christian afterworld). Last comes the speaker's proud declaration of the youth's immortality assured through his own "eternal lines" (l. 12). The "lines" may be construed not only as the speaker's poetry but as the threads spun by the Fates (a traditional image), though the couplet refers only to this particular sonnet. The crucial point is that now the struggle against time has been won by both the speaker and the youth. Or so it seems to the speaker.