SONNET 18

SHALL I COMPARE THEE

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 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.

ANALYSIS

The sonnet belongs to Shakespeare’s collection of 154 sonnets.

It follows the English or Elizabethian model, that consists of three quatrains in alternative rhyme and a couplet. The lines rhyme thus: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. That is the typical rhyme scheme of Shakespearean sonnets.

Considering the title the reader can understand that the speaking voice is talking to a general ‘thee’, who is the object of his question. The question is a retorical one because the speaking voice already knows the answer, as a matter of fact the answer is the intere sonnet.

In the first two quatrains, the speaking voice says that ‘thee’ is more lovely and more temperate than a summer day. So his love is better than a “summer’s day”.

He gustifies his convinction saing that in summer time winds can be too strong and impetuous, time passes too quickly and even the sun sometimes doesn’t shine enough, just like beauty killed by time.

The poet uses the alliteration of the dental sound ‘d’ to underline the rigidity of nature in contrast with the alliteration of the soft sound ‘m’ in the first line. So the sonneteer uses the phonology to underline that sometimes nature is hard and rude, while his love is always temperate, sweet and timeless.

In the last quadrain the poet compares the fragile beauty of nature with the neverending beauty of his love. The poet makes immortal his love with his lines.

The sonnet ends with the couplet: “*So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this and this gives life to thee”* that means that throught poetry he eternalizes his love. Words have the power to fix in time his feelings and make them eternal.