SONNET 18

The sonnet I’m going to analyse is sonnet 18. It was written by W. Shakespeare and it belongs to a collection of sonnets.

From a first reading you can immediately realise the speaking voice is addressing to an unknown you (“thee”). The sonnet starts posing an immediate question: the speaker wonders whether he has to compare the unknown you to a summer’s day. The intelligent reader would like to know the reason why the speaking voice asks that question and it is such curiosity that makes him/her go and reading to find out the identity of the addressee and the reason for such comparison. To satisfy his or her curiosity the reader goes on reading to find a possible answer and understands the sonnet exploits the Elizabethan or Shakespearean structure to send its message. Indeed the sonnet is organized into three quatrains and a rhymy couplet and therefor he or she expects to discover the three different aspects of a problem or situation the poet is going to present in the three quatrains and the possible solution the speaking voice is probably advancing in the final rhymy couplet.

The question the speaking voice asks is of course a rhetoric question since the speaker does not wait for an answer and therefor there is no communicative gap in the text. The answer immediately makes clear the addressee is better and superior to a summer’s day because during the summer temperature is often hot while the unknown you is “more lovely and more temperate”(line 2). Right from the very first line of the answer it appears that the speaking voice plays on the mysterious you’s superiority: the repetition of mere and more on one side presents an addressee who is full of pleasant and positive virtues, on the other creates a phonological parallelism thus highlights the positive qualities of the unknown you who is magnified right from the very beginning. The speaker has no doubts he is better than a season when nature is at his most. Indeed summer has got his own natural rule and therefor lasts for a short time; at the same time “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May” while the relationship the poet is referring to is more balanced and pleasant. W. Shakespeare exploits the semantic fields of nature to develop his argumentation. He justifies his rhetorical question in a long comparison where his beloved addressee always wins the competition “summer, winds, buds, even” all together create the background to which his beloved addressee is continually compared and thus destiny is only’s better.

The intelligent reader also realises that the poet’s stylistic choice to exploit the semantic field of the nature on one side and the fields of time in the other (“they, more and more, May, lease, too short, a date, sometime, often, sometime, declines, eternal summer”) helps and adds the development of the problematic situation he is going to express.