

Shakespear/Sonnet 18 – First period

- It was written by William Shakespeare and it belongs to a collection of sonnets.
- From the first reading, you can immediately realize 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 on reading to find out the identity of the addressee and the reason for such comparison.
- To satisfy his/her curiosity, the reader goes on reading to find a possible answer and understands the sonnet exploits the Elizabethan or Shakespearean structure to send/convey/communicate its message.
- Indeed, the sonnet is organized into three quatrains and a rhyming couplet and therefore he/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 rhyming couplet. The question the speaking voice ask is, of course, a rhetoric question, since the speaker does not wait for an answer and therefore there is not 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 "more and more" on one side presents an addressee who is full of pleasure and positive virtues, on the other creates a phonological parallelism that underline 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 its most. Indeed, summer has got its own natural circle and, therefore, lasts for a short time; at the same time "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May" (line 3) while the relationship the poet is referred to is more balance and pleasure. William Shakespeare exploits the semantic feel of nature to develop his argumentation, he justified his rhetorical question in a long comparison where his beloved addressee always wins the competition "summer", "wins", "buds", "summer", "heaven", "all together" create the background to which his beloved addressee is continually compared and whose destiny is always better.
- The intelligent reader also realizes that poet's stylistic choice to exploit the semantic feel of nature on one side and the feel of time on the other "thou", "more....and more", "May", "lease", "too short", "a date", "sometime", "often", "sometime", "eternal summer" helps and adds the development of the problematic situation he is going to express.