

SONNET 18

*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 man can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

THEME

Eternal summer and eternal life are attributes of the Spirit. For those who live according to the highest spiritual precepts, the beauty of the Spirit, found in the soul of man, is everlasting and outshines the seasons of life.

GLOSSARY

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:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more beautiful and more balanced in Thy Nature. The rough times are difficult in the springtime of life, and the flourishing times are all too short:

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;

Often in our lives, we feel the eyes of heaven hotly upon

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us, and at other times the golden face of Spirit is only dimly perceived; and every beautiful and flowering thing begins to decline, either by misfortune or due to the course of nature.

*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.*

But thy soulful flourishing shall never fade, nor lose its vibrancy and beauty, nor shall death be able to touch you. When you live your life in spiritual renewal, time cannot touch you, and your flowering never ceases.

*So long as man can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives
life to thee.*

So long as man can breathe, or eyes can see, so long lives this eternal way of life, and this gives everlasting life to Thee.

COMMENTARY

Shakespeare frequently borrowed from scriptural sources, as has been well-documented in Noble, Shaheen, and others. Sonnet 18 suggests the following from Isaiah, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" (Isa. 40:18)

In Sonnet 18 Shakespeare continues the theme of man's spiritual renewal explored in Sonnets 15, 16, and 17. Time is the "bloody tyrant" (Sonnet 16.2) and, as in Sonnet 15, time seems to conspire with "decay . . . To change your day of youth to sullied night." (Sonnet 15.11-12) Man must exercise his free will to choose "means more blessed than my barren rhyme" so "virtuous wish would bear you living flowers." (Sonnet 16.4, 7)

Sonnet 17 provides a transition from Sonnets 15 and 16 to Sonnet 18. In Sonnet 17, Shakespeare laments that even if he could express the praises of the Divine, few would understand. "If I could write the beauty of your eyes, and in fresh numbers number all your graces, the age to come would say, 'This poet lies.'" (Sonnet 17.5-7)

In Sonnet 17, Shakespeare avers that when spiritually-attuned souls should in the future ("some child of yours alive that time") read "my rhyme"

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they may be spiritually inspired and gain from a deeper understanding of the Sonnets; thus they will “*live twice.*” (Sonnet 17.13-14)

Again in Sonnet 17.5-6, our Poet says: “*If I could write the beauty of your eyes, and in fresh numbers number all your graces,*” few would understand that this refers to the soul of man, which is a reflection of the beauty contained in Spirit. “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” (Ps. 82.6)

In Sonnet 18, Shakespeare considers the possibility of comparing the Spirit, in its aspect of Beauty in creation, to a “*summer’s day.*” As the soul of man is made in the image of the Creator, it also contains all the perfection of an idyllic “*summer’s day.*” While the Spirit, however, is changeless and perfect, man must live upon this “*fiuge stage [which] presenteth nought but shows.*” (Sonnet 15.3) Life is full of changing fortunes (“*rough winds*”) and our days are few as “*summer’s lease hath all too short a date.*” Even when all seems to be flourishing, misfortune and the vagaries of life pursue man’s footsteps. “*And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance, or nature’s changing course untrimm’d.*”

A “*summer’s day*” fades, but the Spirit, an innate reflection in man’s soul, manifests Beauty which does not diminish—“*But thy eternal summer shall not fade.*” The secret is for man to live in “*lines of life that life repair*” (Sonnet 16.9) or “*in eternal lines to time.*” The choice to live “*in eternal lines to time*” means to consciously pursue a life in tune with timeless spiritual values. In this way, one is renewed in Spirit (“*I engraft you new*”) (Sonnet 15.14) and such a course of pursuit “*gives life to thee.*”

BIBLICAL PASSAGES SUGGESTED BY SONNET 18

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.” Ps. 8:3-5

“Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” 1 Cor. 15:46-49

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” 1 Cor. 15:26

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