

For today's poem, who better to go to than the person we have been talking about this week - WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE?

Shakespeare was not only great at writing plays, but he was also a fantastic poet - and over the course of his lifetime, he wrote 154 SONNETS, which is a particular type of poem - it's 14 lines long, and normally has 10 syllables in every line. Imagine trying to make your poem fit those rules! But Shakespeare could do it over and over again, while writing not only some of the best love poetry of all time (though for whom is very mysterious - people speculate a lot about which people the sonnets were written for) but also talking about life and death and immortality and the nature of love. This poem - SONNET 18 - is one of this most famous. Read it through and then I will explain a bit about it.

18.
Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?
Thou art more louely and more temperate:
Rough windes do shake the darling buds of Maie,
And Sommers lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heauen shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And euery faire from faire some-time declines,
By chance, or natures changing course vntrim'd:
But thy eternall Sommer shall not fade,
Nor loose possession of that faire thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade,
When in eternall lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breath or eyes can see,
So long liues this, and this giues life to 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 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 wand'rest 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.

So it seems like Shakespeare begins the poem by saying something nice about the person the poem is about (let's call them P, for person). Shakespeare's saying, 'Hey P, shall I compare you to a lovely summer day? Nah - you're way better than that. Even if it's summer, it can still get a bit windy, and in any case the sunshine either doesn't last very long or it's just really unpleasantly hot to be outside.' That's the first six lines.

But the seventh line, which starts 'Every fair from fair' is starting a completely new line of thought. Shakespeare is now moving on to say something different. Comparisons with summer are out. Now he's saying something like, 'And you know what? There's loads of people who are really gorgeous, but in time they lose their looks - either something bad happens to them, or they just get old. But you, you, my friend - you are never going to stop being as hot as you are. You are never going to lose your looks. And even if you're dead, you're still going to be alive.' By this point, P would be entitled to be really puzzled. 'Hang on a sec - I'll accept all the stuff about remaining gorgeous no matter how old I am, but how on earth can I still be alive if I'm dead?' Shakespeare gives the answer: 'You're still going to be

alive, and you're still going to be as hot as you are at the moment, because this poem is going to be read forever and ever - and everyone who reads this poem is going to imagine what you were like. And so you are still going to live on in people's imaginations, and it's me, me, Billy Shakespeare, who is going to make that happen.'

So what starts off as a poem that seems to be about complimenting P for being so lovely turns into a poem that by the end is complimenting Shakespeare on being such a great poet that no matter how long humanity exists, his poems and writings will always be read. And by boasting about that, Shakespeare might be saying to P, 'You'd better be nice to me because I'm the only hope you've got of never being forgotten long after you are dead.' So it's still a love poem, but a love poem with a bit of a threat about it. Is that a nice way to behave to someone you love? Probably not, but when people are in love, they get a bit desperate. And maybe Shakespeare had got word that P fancied someone else, and dashed this poem off in the hope of getting back into P's affections.

The actor who is supposed to be the greatest at reciting Shakespeare's sonnets is SIR JOHN GIELGUD (pronounced 'Geel - good') and this is him reciting Sonnet 18:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVtObfiCXVA>