



William Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18” Revisited

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Abstract

Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 18* is world-famous and considered as one of the most meaningful sonnets in literature, however, until this day many do not agree on its actual meaning. It is well known that Shakespeare is one of the best poets of the sixteenth century. There was even a style of sonnet named after him- the “Shakespearean sonnet”. This study will provide information and different outlooks on Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”, the 16th century and the changes that have led to the literature of that time. This will be done by stating the aims and research problems in chapter one. Then, more information will be given about England in the 16th century, the English literature of that time, and we will then go further in depth about the Shakespearean sonnet. Then, we will provide a literature review and explain more about Shakespeare’s “sonnet 18”.

The aim of this research is to provide the meaning of Shakespeare’s “sonnet 18” and prove that Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18” is a structure that goes deep in meaning. It has an idea of wholeness, is transformative and has the idea of self-regulation. We will do this by stating the rhyme pattern of the sonnet together with the figurative language used. Before all that, information must be given about the 16th century in order to fully understand the sonnet.

This study attempts to answer these questions: how is the rhythmic pattern found in William’s Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 18*? And what kind of figurative language is used in William’s Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 18*?

Key words: Sonnet; Shakespeare; Renaissance; Love; Quatrains; Couplet

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INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the oldest forms of literature and described in many ways by different people. For instance, Maya Angelou has described poetry as: “Poetry is a starch in your backbone so you can stand, so you can compose your life”. According to Gupta, poetry is something where thoughts and emotions through language, and the perceptual material is sound. If communication is to be accurate and clear, then the material should be beautiful and must be sounded in rhythm and form. The poetic experience is the blissful and meditative, far better than emotional insight, while the experience of intellectuals is more colorful (Gupta, 2010).

William Shakespeare is a writer who is famous for his witty language and brilliant use of words, however, what made a great impact on poetry are his sonnets which are poems that consist of 12 lines, each line consisting of 10 syllables. The sonnets are made up of 3 quatrains and one couplet. The rhyme schemes for the quatrains are ‘ABAB’ and the foot and meter are that of the iambic pentameter. Approximately, we can say that Shakespeare has written about 154 sonnets that are divided into two categories. The first category is “young man” and sonnets 1-126 included in that category. The second one is “dark lady” and sonnet 127-152 are included in that category. Commonly used themes in Shakespeare’s sonnets are destruction of time, the confirmation of eternity and devotion. Sonnets 18 explores the eternal life of beauty and love through poetry. Shakespeare used various poetic devices to express the eternity of beauty and love, and guide readers to a brilliant and never-ending aesthetic pleasure.

In general, literature consists of three categories; poetry, prose and drama. As said earlier, poetry is one of the oldest forms of literature and Victoria Bull, writer of the Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary has described poetry as the following: "poetry is a piece of writing arranged in lines, usually with a regular rhythm and often with a pattern of rhymes" (Bull, 2008).

ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE 16TH CENTURY

As mentioned in 2.1, the philosophical ideas were changing in the 16th century which means the art and literature changed as well. Writers published work that they often dedicated to an important figure or God. This was considered more prestigious. They published their works preferably with a portrait of themselves or at least their names written on it, this gave his work even more prestige, the highest aim was to become a poet a laureatus (acclaimed poet). In Roman Antiquity, the best writers were crowned with laurel wreaths, this practice revived in the Renaissance (Flood, 1997). Classicism which is the imitation or imitation of great classics, determined the literature in the Renaissance. Concepts of Greek Aristotle and Roman Horace's literature and other literary works of classical writers were studied. The main genres taken from the Greek and Romans by the Renaissance writers were the epic and tragedy (Kelly, 2011). There were Three ways to follow the classic examples:

- Making the best possible translation (translatio) in your own language.
- Trying to emulate old masters through imitation (imitatio).
- Attempt to surpass old masters or aemulatio, which means that pagan content was made Christian, classical gods were replaced by the one Christian god, classical heroes became Christian heroes.

When we look at renaissance drama, there are two main forms; tragedy and comedy. Tragedy writers read and learned the works of classical tragedy writers such as the Greek Sophocles and Euripides and the Roman Seneca. They did this to arrive at the best content and form of tragedy. Aristotle and Horace were also studied. In Renaissance tragedies were played in theaters for elitist audiences, the rich had seats in galleries. Pitches were reserved for ordinary people. A tragedy had to obey the following rules:

- It had to be written in a poetic form.
- It had to consist of five parts (display, working towards climax, climax, turning towards fatal outcome, fatal outcome).
- In between parts a choir had to sing or speak about the part. This gives a review of what has played and what follows.

- Three units must be observed: unity of place (drama had to take place in one place, so no set changes), unit of time (time within play should not exceed 24 hours), unity of action (play must only deal with one theme, no side intrigues).

- The hero (main character) had to be an important figure who perishes a character weakness through his own fault. Tragedy writers hoped to evoke feelings of fear and pity in onlookers through tragedy.

Some writers strictly adhered to the rules, others less so. Main characters from national, mythological or biblical history were often used. Shakespeare is considered one of the greatest tragedy writers in history (Belsey, 2014). Famous tragedy writers of the renaissance were; William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd and Thomas Middleton.

Comedy originally blossomed with Romans Terentius and Plautus. Often divided into 3 or 5 parts. The aim was to point out to the audience their own shortcomings by making them laugh. The comedies had no real message. Writers often used elements of medieval folk theater (Griswold, 1986). Famous comedy writers of the renaissance were; William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton. If we go further into poetry, the epic and sonnets were very popular in the renaissance.

The epic includes many physical actions: wars, battles and great deeds of active martial arts heroes. The classical or Renaissance epic model is shown as a strong man (hero) fighting against seemingly overwhelming opponents and winning. The incidents are explained coherently and reasonably (Vickers, 1983). The sonnet however was new. It is a poem made up of 14 lines. The Italian Francesco Petrarca was the inventor of the sonnet. He soon got followers and it became a trend. Petrarkism was the most commonly used form of the sonnet. Basically it means that in the sonnet, the most important theme is the longing of a woman that's out of reach or unrequited love. The women in these sonnets are often described as beautiful with curly hair, shining eyes, blushed cheeks, white teeth and red lips. Well-known Petrarchan poets were: Wyatt, Spenser, and Shakespeare. (Spiller, 2003).

ORIGIN OF THE SONNET AND ITS TYPES

The origin of the sonnet is in thirteenth-century southern Italy, where it was probably 'invented' at the court of Emperor Frederick II, possibly by Giacomo da Lentini who belonged to the group of poets of the Sicilian school. The most famous early sonnet writer, however, was Francesco Petrarca, whose Canzoniere consisted largely of sonnets. Dante also published many sonnets. After this, the sonnet quickly became popular throughout (Western) Europe, and a multitude of variations on the solid form arose. Writers such as the English Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard and William Shakespeare, the Frenchman Pierre

de Ronsard and the German Martin Opitz each gave their own twist to the verse form. In the eighteenth century the sonnet fell out of favor for some time, but around the time of the French Revolution the poem resurfaced in many countries. Poets such as August Wilhelm Schlegel and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Germany, William Wordsworth in England, Alexander Pushkin in Russia wrote many famous sonnets. Since then the fourteen-line poem does not seem to have disappeared from any European literary tradition. Originally the word sonnet was only the general term for 'a short poem'. Many poems that were still called sonnets in the sixteenth century no longer fall into that category for us. Nowadays we understand a sonnet only to mean poems that consist of exactly fourteen lines of verse and meet certain specific formal requirements with regard to stanza division, rhyme and meter.

The turn in the poem, the volta or chute, usually but by no means always falls immediately after the octave, so that the octave and sestet are contrasted. The volta is a substantive change that has a certain relationship with the preceding, usually the octave. The quatrains can provide a summary description, an exhibition, or a metaphorical image. The sestet then respectively gives a contradiction, a conclusion or an application of the image. Also possible are a point, a summary or a contemplative conclusion. In order to bring the tension in the poem to a climax, the second move is often a sharpening of the first. Sometimes the turn is not made until after the first move, or in another place. For Hoof's sonnet 'Swift Gray' it has been proposed to read the turn on the second half of the eighth line.

ENGLISH OR SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

In England in the sixteenth century a deviating form emerged, the English sonnet or Shakespeare sonnet named after William Shakespeare, who wrote the longest and most famous sonnet cycle in this form. The English sonnet consists of three stanzas of four five-footed yams (quatrains) each, followed by a two-line stanza (distichon). The exact location of the volta is more difficult to determine. According to some, the English sonnet does not contain a volta or chute, but the final distich often functions as a conclusion or pointe, according to others, such as C. Buddingh 'the volta falls after the twelfth line. the climax. The rhyme scheme used by Shakespeare is abab cdcd efef gg. we will go further into details later in the paper.

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

As mentioned before, the Shakespearean sonnet is a poem consisting of 14 lines where each line has 10 syllables (Bull, 2008). Fundamentally speaking, this is a dialectical

construction, which allows the poet to solve or just reveal the two concepts, emotions, mentalities, beliefs, behaviors, and events that usually contrast with each other by juxtaposing two opposing ones. In other words, the sonnet shows the reader two related but different things. Metaphors and personifications must be used in the sonnet. Because the selected words have the ability to convey what is felt on the inside.

The sonnets were published in 1609 and are the final print of Shakespeare's non-dramatic work. Scholars are not sure when each of the 154 sonnets were composed, but the evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets for private readers throughout his career. This theory can be backed up by Francis Meres' reference to Shakespeare's sonnets that he made before the two unauthorized sonnets appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599. He referred to them as "surged sonnets among his private friends".

Few analysts believe that the published series follows Shakespeare's established order. He seems to have planned two very different series: one is about the uncontrollable desires of a dark-skinned married woman "dark Lady", and the other is about the conflict of love with a young man "the fair youth". Whether these words represent real people is still unknown, or that the authoritative figure "I" who spoke to them represents Shakespeare himself, although Wordsworth believes that "Shakespeare unlocked his heart" in the sonnets. Critics praised the sonnet as a deep meditation on the nature of love, sexual passion, reproduction, death, and time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Runsdorf, 2020), Shakespeare's *sonnet 18* "shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" might be a reaction to Spenser's "hymne in honour of beatic". (Fraser, 1989) said about *sonnet 18* that the answer to the rhetorical question in begins with is not required or important to the poet. However, it helps a great deal in putting the emphasis on the eternal youth of the beloved. The first line being a question does give the suggestion that there is a dialogue and a dialogue can only happen when there are two people holding it. Further evidence are the "I" and "thee" used in the sonnet. The question however is whether whether the lover's contemplation in the sonnet is about the beloved being addressed. The most logical and satisfactory answer to that question would be that it is both. Shakespeare is talking to himself as much as he is addressing the beloved or the friend. (Steen & Gibbs, 2004) Talked about Shakespeare's *sonnet 18* as "a masterful display of literary genius, not least because of the playful, almost teasing quality of the opening line. It is as if the speaking voice could have compered the addressee with equal ease to any other object, after which the self-set task in hand is executed". (Mukařovský, 1970) explains that generally speaking, the interpretation

of the first quatrain is that Shakespeare is comparing his beloved to a summer's day, describing the beloved as more lovely and more temperate. This particular line is the example that the characteristic of poetic language is shown which intentionally violates the norm of the standard. Robert Jakobson in (Wert, 1976) has said that Shakespeare's love is immortal through the sonnet itself. Once again, the structure of "Sonnet 18" shows the flow of themes/problems formed in the three quatrains, and then summarizes through couplets to provide solutions.

LANGUAGE IN SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Shakespeare's sonnets 1 and 116 contain the main themes about beauty, time and love. These three factors are the main characteristics of the Renaissance, and William Shakespeare explained this in a dazzling and indelible way in his sonnets. It leaves readers in awe.

The strong connection that binds these factors together cannot be separated from each other. William Shakespeare described how time affects the beauty and love in sonnets 1 and 116. Time is inevitable. How do we spend time and who we are with is always our main concern. The environment around us will always contain love, but what if love keeps pace with time and beauty? This is Shakespeare's reflection of the young man in his sonnets.

He told him that time will always affect beauty, and beauty will affect time. True love will be challenged by time and beauty. Love is always higher than our human awe. In the sonnet, the speaker urges and inspires young people to create their own lives by looking for work and stop wasting their precious time.

This is more of a guiding advice to his students to promote their life for the better, and inspire them to have a strong willpower and create their own life. Time is like a sword, it is inevitable, even if we don't want it to be. "From fairest creatures we desire increase that thereby beauty's rose might never die" The writer/speaker reflects that all creatures are beautiful, and we always hope to get more beauty. He urged that reproduction is the nature of human beings, and hopes to increase beautiful creatures in order to maintain the beauty of the world. In the third quatrain, the speaker tells the young man that his beauty is "only heralds the gaudy spring". As time goes by, it will gradually disappear, and eventually he will bury his beauty in his own self, and finally, the speaker urges the young people to increase "pity in the world, or else this glutton be", with other words, if he doesn't reproduce, he will die and with it will his beauty die. This reflects that beauty will disappear over time, young people should build their own families and reproduce, because life awaits anyone. "But as the ripper should by time decease". Time will always be a concern to human nature.

The speaker encourages young people not to waste their lives and time, because time will always end.

Therefore, Shakespeare used a major poetic device, the "rhyme" along the rhythmic pentameter. "creatures we desire increase", "riper should by time". William Shakespeare once again explained the importance of time and how it affects beauty and love. Sonnet 116 reflects the importance of marriage and it is the source and reflection of love. Shakespeare has said that sonnet 116 contains the definition of love when the speaker says "the marriage of true minds". This shows that the speaker tells the young man that marriage is not only about physical attraction or beautiful words. Marriage is the collision of two ideas, which is consistent with the direction of the soul. The love conveyed in marriage is perfect and consistent. What keeps the love and the marriage strong is the marriage of mind. It is seen as an essential factor and the collision or combining of ideas, thoughts and mindsets that the two lovers possess. When the speaker says "admit impediments. Love is not love", it means that love is more than just our feelings and hearts. It is not just physical but mental as well and it includes the mind. In the second quatrain, Shakespeare uses the following metaphor; "That looks on tempests and is never shaken; ", "It is the star to every wand'ring bark". This in turn is a reflection on what love is according to the speaker, it is not susceptible. It's a solid, not easily breakable thing. The speaker tries to explain that when time is involved, love and beauty are certainly not the same. "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come". According to this line, the difference between love and beauty is that love cannot be changed and it doesn't fade away. Beauty however, does.

Even if the beloved is gone, it still has the power to retain, even if time is challenged, love will remain unchanged. In the final couplet, the speaker proved his certainty and challenged others if they could prove that he might be wrong by the following line; "If this be error and upon me prov'd, I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd". The last important note is that Shakespeare wrote sonnets 1 till 226 more as a teacher or mentor, addressing a young man and giving him motivation to live his life to the fullest by finding love, beauty and family.

Since then, many Shakespeare's sonnets have reflected the characteristics of the Renaissance that continued into modern times. Many modern poets and writers use Shakespeare's sonnets as inspiration for the beauty of time and love, and how these three characteristics will never leave our time or life. In short, beauty and love are the hallmarks of our humanity, and time is always our main concern.

ANALYSIS OF "SONNET 18"

"Sonnet 18" is perhaps the most famous of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, mainly because of the opening motto "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" every true romantic

will know it. However, this line has more than just an eye-catching effect, you will find more information later in this analysis. The sonnets of William Shakespeare are world-famous and critics believe that they are written for “a young man” (1-26) and a “dark lady” (127-54). However, it is not certain that this theory is correct because the sonnets do not identify anyone. It is believed that even though Shakespeare was a very well-known man. In his time, he was also very good at keeping secrets.

Shakespeare’s sonnets were published seven years before the death of Bard in 1607 and have been famous ever since because of its excellence. What differentiated Shakespeare from the other sonneteers were the depth and range of his sonnets. *Sonnet 18* in particular is one of the most famous ones and the poem focusses on the love the writer has for a friend or lover. The sonnet starts out with a rhetorical question of whether the writer should compare the beloved to a summer’s day. After that, the speaker continues with stating the advantages and disadvantages of the weather. In the end, the speaker assures the beloved that the sonnet will keep him/her alive for ever.

The following is *sonnet 18* in full followed by explanation and analysis:

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. (“Sonnet 18”)

Line-by-Line Analysis

“Sonnet 18” is dedicated to praising a friend or lover and is traditionally referred to as “fair youth”. The sonnet itself can ensure that the beauty of this person will continue. Even death will be silenced because the lines of this poem will be read by future generations, and when the speaker/poet and lover are away, they will keep their fair image alive through the power of poetry.

Line 1

The opening line of *sonnet 18* is almost teasing. The speaker is uncertain whether he should compare his beloved to a summer’s day or not. The rhetorical question is not only meant for the speaker, but for the reader as well. The second line however reveals that the beloved is lovelier and more temperate than a summer’s day. In today’s English language, lovely is still commonly used and carries the same meaning (nice, beautiful and pleasing). Temperate however has changed in meaning. In Shakespeare’s time it meant restrained, moderate and composed.

Line 2

The second line directly uses the second person pronoun Thou to refer to the lover, which is now obsolete.

Lines 3–8

Lines three to eight focus on the advantages and disadvantages of the weather and are distanced, taken along on a steady iambic rhythm, except for line five. Looking from a weather perspective, the summers in England are not very warm and sunny. Most likely, the wind blows, it’s rainy and the season seems to be too short. This was the same case in Shakespeare’s time and even if the summers were warm, people would complain that is too hot. In the sonnet, the speaker suggests that the summer season will pass by very quickly and that the young people, as is natural, will grow old and their beauty will fade with the passing of time.

Lines 9–12

Lines 9 to 12 turn the argument to senescence. The speaker once again promised: Your eternal summer will not disappear, his lover will become eternal, remain fair, and even deceive death and time.

Lines 13 and 14

Lines 13 and 14 reinforce the notion that the speaker’s (poet’s) poetry will ensure that the lover stays young, the words become their breath and vitality, and ensure that their lives continue.

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SONNET 18

Within each line, there are combinations of assonance and repetition that are very interesting and add to the texture a phonetical cape of the sonnet. Examples are; Rough/buds, shake/May, hot/heaven, eye/shines, often/gold/complexion, fair from fair, sometimes/declines, chance/nature/changing, nature/course. For most people (if not everyone), life is not an easy passage through time. Random events can fundamentally change our identity, and all of us will be affected by time. During this period, as the speaker tried to put everything in perspective, time and time again evoked the unpredictability of the British summer weather.

In the end, the beauty of the beloved, like eternal summer, will always remain in the poet’s immortal verse. Lines 13 and 14, which are the two final lines, are considered harmony in themselves. The twelve lines before them did not contain any punctuation, pauses or breaks in the delivery of the lines. Line 13 and 14 however, do. That simple comma gives balance to the poem, life even. Another notable factor is the use of “shall”, which brings a different tone to the lines. In the first line, the word “shall” refers to uncertainty. In the 9th line however, it is almost a sense of definite promise. In line 11, it gives the idea that the speaker is commanding death to stay silent.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this analytical study, we state that poetry is one of the oldest forms of literature and described in many ways by different people and that William Shakespeare is a writer who is famous for his witty language and brilliant use of words, however, what made a great impact on poetry are his sonnets which are poems that consist of 12 lines, each line consisting of 10 syllables.

Shakespeare's work is influenced by the renaissance, the political views, important political events, social events and economical events of the 16th century. The Renaissance or Elizabethan age was all about studying and following into the footsteps of the classical roman and Greek literature and this was done in the following ways; Making the best possible translation (translation) in your own language, Trying to emulate old masters through imitation (imitation). And the attempt to surpass old masters or aemulatio, which means that pagan content was made Christian, classical gods were replaced by the one Christian god, classical heroes became Christian heroes.

The origin of the sonnet is in thirteenth-century southern Italy, where it was probably 'invented' at the court of Emperor Frederick II, possibly by Giacomo da Lentini who belonged to the group of poets of the Sicilian school and there are different types of sonnets; Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, English or Shakespearean sonnet, Spenserian sonnet and Miltonian sonnet. The Shakespearean sonnet is a dialectical construction, which allows the poet to solve or just reveal the two concepts, emotions, mentalities, beliefs, behaviors, and events that usually contrast with each other by juxtaposing two opposing ones. Shakespeare's sonnets 1 and 116 contain the main themes about beauty, time and love. These three factors are the main characteristics of the Renaissance, and William Shakespeare explained this in a dazzling and indelible way in his sonnets. It leaves readers in awe. "Sonnet 18" is perhaps the most famous of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, mainly because of the opening motto: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". Within each line, there are combinations of assonance and repetition that are very interesting and add to the texture a phonetical cape of the sonnet.

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