

WORK SHEET NO. 1

Sub: English Literature

Class: 11th

Summary of sonnet 18

One of the best known of Shakespeare's sonnets, Sonnet XVIII is memorable for the skillful and varied presentation of subject matter, in which the poet's feelings reach a level of rapture unseen in the previous sonnets. The speaker opens the poem with a question addressed to the beloved: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" The next eleven lines are devoted to such a comparison. In line 2, the speaker stipulates what mainly differentiates the young man from the summer's day: he is "more lovely and more temperate." Summer's days tend toward extremes: they are shaken by "rough winds"; in them, the sun ("the eye of heaven") often shines "too hot," or too dim. And summer is fleeting: its date is too short, and it leads to the withering of autumn, as "every fair from fair sometime declines." The final quatrain of the sonnet tells how the beloved differs from the summer in that respect: his beauty will last forever ("Thy eternal summer shall not fade...") and never die. In the couplet, the speaker explains how the beloved's beauty will accomplish this feat, and not perish because it is preserved in the poem, which will last forever; it will live "as long as men can breathe or eyes can see."

Commentary

On the surface, the poem is simply a statement of praise about the beauty of the beloved; summer tends to unpleasant extremes of windiness and heat, but the beloved is always mild and temperate. Summer is incidentally personified as the "eye of heaven" with its "gold complexion"; the imagery throughout is simple and unaffected, with the "darling buds of May" giving way to the "eternal summer", which the speaker promises the beloved. The language, too, is comparatively unadorned for the sonnets; it is not heavy with alliteration or

assonance, and nearly every line is its own self-contained clause—almost every line ends with some punctuation, which affects a pause.

An important theme of the sonnet (as it is an important theme throughout much of the sequence) is the power of the speaker's poem to defy time and last forever, carrying the beauty of the beloved down to future generations. The beloved's "eternal summer" shall not fade precisely because it is embodied in the sonnet: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see," the speaker writes in the couplet, "So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The theme of the ravages of time again predominates; we see it especially in line 7, where the poet speaks of the inevitable mortality of beauty: "And every fair from fair sometime declines." But the fair lord's is of another sort, for it "shall not fade" - the poet is eternalizing the fair lord's beauty in his verse, in these "eternal lines." Note the financial imagery ("summer's lease") and the use of anaphora (the repetition of opening words) in lines 6-7, 10-11, and 13-14. Also note that May (line 3) was an early summer month in Shakespeare's time, because England did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752.

The poet describes summer as a season of extremes and disappointments. He begins in lines 3-4, where "rough winds" are an unwelcome extreme and the shortness of summer is its disappointment. He continues in lines 5-6, where he lingers on the imperfections of the summer sun. Here again we find an extreme and a disappointment: the sun is sometimes far too hot, while at other times its "gold complexion" is dimmed by passing clouds. These imperfections contrast sharply with the poet's description of the fair lord, who is "more temperate" (not extreme) and whose "eternal summer shall not fade" (i.e., will not become a disappointment) thanks to what the poet proposes in line 12.

Although lines 9 through 12 are marked by a more expansive tone and deeper feeling, the poet returns to the simplicity of the opening images. As one expects in Shakespeare's sonnets, the proposition that the poet sets up in the first

eight lines — that all nature is subject to imperfection — is now contrasted in these next four lines beginning with "But." Although beauty naturally declines at some point — "And every fair from fair sometime declines" — the youth's beauty will not; his unchanging appearance is atypical of nature's steady progression. Even death is impotent against the youth's beauty.

In line 12 we find the poet's solution - how he intends to eternalize the fair lord's beauty despite his refusal to have a child. The poet plans to capture the fair lord's beauty in his verse ("eternal lines"), which he believes will withstand the ravages of time. Thereby the fair lord's "eternal summer shall not fade," and the poet will have gotten his wish. Here we see the poet's use of "summer" as a metaphor for youth, or perhaps beauty, or perhaps the beauty of youth.

Some scholars suggest that the "eternal lines" in line 12 have a double meaning: the fair lord's beauty can live on not only in the written lines of the poet's verse but also in the family lines of the fair lord's progeny. Such an interpretation would echo the sentiment of the preceding sonnet's closing couplet: "But were some child of yours alive that time / You should live twice; in it and in my rhyme." The use of "growest" also implies an increasing or changing: we can envision the fair lord's family lines growing over time, yet this image is not as readily applicable to the lines of the poet's verse - unless it refers only to his intention to continue writing about the fair lord's beauty, his verse thereby "growing." On the other hand, line 14 seems to counter this interpretation, the singular "this" (as opposed to "these") having as its most likely antecedent the poet's verse, and nothing more.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SONNET 18

Aristocratic patronage was amongst the greatest asset that a professional writer could have during the Elizabethan reign of England. It offered the writer a pension, protection, and prestige. Shakespeare's Sonnets stand out from others of his time due to their controversial subject-usually sonnets were written about a

beautiful young woman, but Shakespeare decided to write about a beautiful young man. Shakespeare wanted to set himself apart from his contemporaries, which he successfully accomplished, so he took the accepted norms of poetry and tweaked them a little. He expanded the range of moods that could be portrayed in sonnets; he built off of the traditional despairing Petrarchan lover, and allowed him to experience delight, pride, melancholy, shame, disgust, and fear. Shakespeare's Sonnets 18 rejoices the beauty of the young man, and establishes the motif of Time being both destructive and transience and the only way to counter is through the force of love and the permanence of poetry.

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; (lines 1-4)

In this first quatrain, the speaker is trying to find something that compares to the beauty of the young man. The speaker tries to compare him to a summer's day, but realizes that the young man is both more lovely and more temperate (mild/more even in temper and personality) than summer. The flower buds that appear in the May (spring time is usually thought of as the time for love) are destroyed by the strong winds; thus, summer can be cruel and rough, which the young man is not. Summer also doesn't last all that long, which is inadequate for the description of this young man. The speaker's main goal is to help the young man live on forever; since we know from the previous seventeen sonnets that he does not wish to procreate the only other alternative is to find immortalize him in verse, and the speaker is trying to capture the splendor of his beauty by comparing it to others things.

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. (5-8)

The second quatrain is concerned with the natural progression of nature. The "eye of heaven" is referring to the sun, which shines so brightly at times and makes everything so hot; this is one extreme. Line six offers a different extreme weather variation; summer lacks the expected brightness, meaning that it is muggy or rainy. Line six is the complete reversal of line five. When the weather is too extreme in one direction (i.e. too hot or too dimmed) there is a negative effect on nature, which causes what is considered to be fair (beautiful) to decline in fairness. Furthermore, the things that we expect to be beautiful during the summer months-flowers, plants, and the landscape as a whole-can often times become unappealing due to overly hot temperatures or because they got too much moisture and not enough sun. During extreme weather conditions flowers are not able to bloom properly, and are often destroyed by too much heat or too much rain. Extreme weather happens either by chance or simply because nature has been divested of its beauty.

Buy 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: (9-12)

In the third quatrain, the narrator asserts that the young man is superior to nature, because his beauty will not fade like that of summer. "Ow'st," in line ten, is a pun because it means both ownest and owest; the young man owns his beauty, but he owes it to nature. The speaker treats beauty as if it is a possession (something that lasts forever), instead of something that has been given to the young man as a gift of nature that will eventually fade. I believe he does this to show that the young man will maintain his beauty as long as the poet's verse lives on. The young man is able to escape the hands of Death by being engrafted into these

lines; time and death cannot harm the beautiful young man as long as his beauty is written about in verse.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (13-14)

The speaker tells the young man that he will live on forever, as long as men are alive and can read. His verse gives life to the young man; every time someone reads this verse the young man comes alive again, and will thus live on forever.

ASSIGNMENT work sheet no 1

Q1. What is sonnet? What are its types and explain its rhyme scheme.

Q2. Explain the theme of the sonnet.

Q3: How Shakespeare offer the sonnet as a defense against the ravages of time?

Q4: Explain the couplet as the central idea of the poem.

Q5: Total number of sonnets written by Shakespeare is....., sonnet to are addressed to....., sonnettoare addressed to.....

G.V.E.