

## Shakespeare's Sonnets—An Explanatory Note.

By

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### *Shall I Compare thee to a Summer's Day (Sonnet no. 18)*

Written probably in the 1590s but printed only in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe, Shakespeare's sonnet sequence consists of 154 sonnets. These fall easily into two distinct sections, as sonnets 1-126 focus on the relationship between the poet and a 'Friend' while the rest are addressed to a 'Dark Lady'. *Shall I Compare thee to a Summer's Day* is sonnet no. 18 in the sequence and is addressed to the poet's young friend.

The sonnet opens with the poet's comparison of the friend's youth and beauty to that of a summer's day. The friend's beauty is idealised in hyperbolic terms. In a truly romantic vein the poet goes on to declare his friend's beauty as superior to a bright summer's day.

However he finds the analogy inadequate. Applying some playful arguments and observations based on a keen sensitivity, the poet points out some of the shortfalls of the summer's day. For example, the summer's day is characterised by intemperate heat, rough winds, occasional cloudiness and most importantly a short tenure. This thought brings in the consideration of the universal law that Nature and natural things are transient and changeable and are subjected to decay. Contrasted to these qualities of the natural season, the friend's beauty is more perfect. Certain things are to be noted here. Although the poet mentions about a twenty-four hour summer's day, critics like T.G. Tucker interpret it as the season which would cohere logically with the summer related imagery in the rest of the poem. Reading 'summer's day' as a synecdoche signifying the entire season might answer the debate. The poet calls his friend more temperate than the summer season. Although this would mean