

THE SHAKESPEARE  
COMMITMENT

Sonnet 18  
*Thy Eternal Summer*  
1592

*Southampton has rejected the marriage proposal, spurning a Cecil family alliance and thereby losing the support of William Cecil for his royal claim. Soon the young earl will align himself with Robert Devereux Earl of Essex in opposition to the chief minister and his son Robert Cecil. Oxford pledges his support for his royal son. He vows to preserve the truth of Henry Wriothesley's royal life ("thy eternal Summer") in these "eternal lines to time" as "thou grow'st" along with the chronicle.*

Sonnet 18

Translation

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:

Sometimes 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 untrim'd:

But thy eternal Summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,

So long as men can breath or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Shall I compare you to a most royal prince?  
You are more royal with more claim to the throne:  
Difficulties beset royal children of the Tudor Rose,  
And this golden time has all too short a date.

Sometimes the son of Elizabeth burns too bright  
And often his true blood right can't be seen,  
And every royal son sometimes loses his luster,  
By chance or by Elizabeth's changing mind.

But your eternal royalty will not die,  
Nor will you lose that royalty you owe England,  
Nor will Elizabeth's death conquer it,  
When it grows in these eternal lines of my diary.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this verse, and it gives life to you.

**1 SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A SUMMER'S DAY?**

**SUMMER'S DAY** = a king; (Shall I compare you to a King); the golden sunlight of the day, when the light of the sun-king shines most brightly; "Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious *summer* by this son of York" – *Richard III*, 1.1.1-2; "That sun that warms you here, shall shine on me" – *Richard II*, 1.3.145-146; "Good time of *day* unto your royal grace!" – *Richard III*, 1.3.18; "When is the royal *day*?" – *Richard III*, 3.4.3; "Poor grooms are sightless night, *kings glorious day*" – *Lucrece*, 1013; "As all the world is cheered by the sun, so I by that; it is *my day*, *my life*" – Richard in *Richard III*, 1.2.133-134

**2 THOU ART MORE LOVELY AND MORE TEMPERATE:**

**LOVELY** = filled with "love" or royal blood; echoing Southampton as "the little Love-God" of Sonnet 154, line 1; as "Lord of my love" of Sonnet 26, line 1; and as 'my *lovely Boy*' of Sonnet 126, line 1, in addition to: "And you and love are still my argument" – Sonnet 76, line 10;  
**TEMPERATE** = "The poem develops into a comparison between things of lasting duration –

things that are unchanging – and things of limited duration – things that change; in that connection it is worth noting that the Latin source of *temperate* ... is derived from *tempus* – ‘a period of time’ or ‘time’ in general” – Booth; “The king-becoming graces, as Justice, Verity, *Temp’rance*, Stableness, Bounty...” – *Macbeth*, 4.3.91-93

### 3 ROUGH WINDS DO SHAKE THE DARLING BUDS OF MAY,

**ROUGH WINDS DO SHAKE** = the storm over the marriage proposal, which Burghley is keeping open until Southampton is officially twenty-one years old in October 1594; **SHAKE** = Oxford’s allusion to his pen name “William Shakespeare” that he will introduce next year, by way of dedicating *Venus and Adonis* to Southampton; “Upon those boughs which *shake* against the cold” – Sonnet 73, line 3, written in 1601 in reference to “William Shake-speare” appearing as author of *The Phoenix and Turtle* that year; **DARLING BUDS** = royal children; royal buds of the Tudor Rose

**BUDS OF MAY** = “Out of these *Roses* sprang two noble *buds*, Prince Arthur and Henry...” - *Euphues and his England*, Lyly, 1580; Southampton is a royal bud of the Tudor Rose born in late May or early June of 1574 (as opposed to his “official” birth date of October 6, 1573, when the Countess of Southampton gave birth to a son; “We must remember that May in Shakespeare’s time ran on to within a few days of our mid-June” – Dowden; “When wert thou born, Desire?/ *In pomp and prime of May/* By whom, *sweet boy, wert thou begot?/* By Fond Conceit, men say” – poem attributed to Oxford in *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589; in these private sonnets, Southampton is the budding flower of the Tudor Rose, born in May of 1574 following “the lovely April” of Elizabeth’s *prime* or late stage of pregnancy:

Within thine own <i>bud</i> buriest thy content Thou art <i>thy mother’s glass</i> , and she in thee	Sonnet 1, line 11
Calls back <i>the lovely April of her prime</i>	Sonnet 3, lines 9-10
With <i>April’s first-born flowers</i> , and all things rare	Sonnet 21, line 7
When summer’s breath their <i>masked buds</i> discloses How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,	Sonnet 54, line 8
Whose action is no stronger than a <i>flower</i> ?	Sonnet 65, lines 3-4
Why should poor beauty indirectly seek <i>Roses of shadow, since his Rose is true?</i> Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn, When <i>beauty lived and died as flowers do now.</i>	Sonnet 67, lines 7-8
Before these <i>bastard signs of fair were borne</i>	Sonnet 68, lines 1-3
For canker vice the <i>sweetest buds</i> doth love	Sonnet 70, line 7

### 4 AND SUMMER’S LEASE HATH ALL TOO SHORT A DATE:

**SUMMER’S LEASE** = The loan of royal blood and royal claim to Southampton; i.e., from Elizabeth (“Can yet the *lease* of my true love control” – Sonnet 107, line 3); “Nature’s bequest gives nothing but doth lend./ And being frank she lends to those are free” - Sonnet 4, lines 3-4; “That use is not forbidden usury/ Which happies those that pay the willing loan;/ That’s for thy self to breed another thee” - Sonnet 6, lines 5-7

**ALL** = Southampton; **TOO SHORT** = ends too quickly in real time; “Wer’t ought [aught] to me I bore the canopy,/ With my extern the outward honoring,/ Or laid great bases for eternity,/ Which proves *more short* than waste or ruining?” – Sonnet 125, lines 1-4, marking the funeral of Elizabeth on April 28, 1603, and referring to such royal ceremony that ends even before the House of Tudor can be “wasted” or “ruined”; **DATE** = the date by which the loan must be repaid, i.e.,

before the time of the Queen's death and the royal succession; in other words, that date is "all too short" or coming sooner than you might think

**5 SOMETIME TOO HOT THE EYE OF HEAVEN SHINES,**

**TOO HOT** = with too much royal power; **HEAVEN** = Elizabeth; **EYE OF HEAVEN** = Southampton as the golden eye or sun of Heaven, i.e., son of Elizabeth and royal prince or son of England; ("*that sun, thine eye*" – Sonnet 49, line 6; "Shall the blessed *sun of heaven* prove a micher ... Shall the *son of England* prove a thief" – Falstaff, pretending to be Henry IV addressing his son, Prince Hal, the future King Henry Fifth in *Henry IV*, 2.4.403-405; "And truly not the morning *Sun of Heaven*" – Sonnet 132, line 5, to Elizabeth, about Southampton as royal son; "The borrowed glories that by *gift of heaven*, by law of nature and of nations, *longs to him and his heirs, namely the crown*" – *Henry V*, 2.4.79-81); "This royal infant, *heaven* still move about her" – Cranmer in *Henry VIII*, 5.4.17, about the infant Princess Elizabeth; **SHINES** = "Even so *my Sunne one early morn did shine*./ With all triumphant splendor on my brow" – Sonnet 33, lines 9-10

**6 AND OFTEN IS HIS GOLD COMPLEXION DIMMED,**

**GOLD COMPLEXION** = royal appearance; ("*Kingship is naturally golden*, and golden impressions recur (in the Sonnets) with similar variations in use ... The Sun is nature's king, and also pre-eminently golden; throughout Shakespeare, king and sun are compared ... We have various clusters of *king, gold, and sun*; king and gold come together in 'the gilded monument of princes' (55); and sun and gold, when the Sun's 'gold complexion' is dimmed (18) ... or the young man graces 'the day' and 'gilds' the evening in place of stars (28); we may have all three; so 'great Princes' favorites' are compared to the *marigold* opening to the Sun's 'eye' (25) ... These impressions are not just decoration" – G. Wilson Knight, 1962)

**7 AND EVERY FAIR FROM FAIR SOME-TIME DECLINES**

**EVERY** = Ever = E. Ver, Edward de Vere, *Ever or Never*; **FAIR** = Southampton, royal son, the "fairest creatures" of Sonnet 1, line 1; **EVERY FAIR** = Oxford's royal son; **EVERY FAIR FROM FAIR SOMETIMES DECLINES** = every royal prince sometimes declines from his royal stature; (this applies, secondarily, to the Queen as well)

**8 BY CHANCE, OR NATURE'S CHANGING COURSE UNTRIMMED:**

**NATURE'S CHANGING COURSE** = Elizabeth's changing mind or attitude; "As to behold desert a beggar born,/ And needy nothing *trimmed* in jollity" – Sonnet 66, lines 2-3, about Southampton having been born a royal bastard trimmed or dressed up as an earl

**9 BUT THY ETERNAL SUMMER SHALL NOT FADE,**

**THY ETERNAL SUMMER** = your immortal royalty; "To the onlie begetter of these ensuing sonnets, Mr. W. H., all happiness and *that eternity promised* by our ever-living poet" – the dedication of the 1609 quarto of the Sonnets

**10 NOR LOSE POSSESSION OF THAT FAIR THOU OW'ST,**

**THAT FAIR THOU OW'ST** = that royal blood you owe to England, both by passing it on and by becoming king; ("that beauty thou possessest" – Dowden); "Pity the world, or else this glutton be,/ To eat *the world's due*, by the grave and thee" - Sonnet 1, lines 13-14

**11 NOR SHALL DEATH BRAG THOU WANDR'ST IN HIS SHADE,**

Nor will mortal death boast of capturing you.

**12 WHEN IN ETERNAL LINES TO TIME THOU GROW'ST.**

**ETERNAL LINES TO TIME** = The lines of my verse, the Sonnets, are written according to the mortal time left in Elizabeth's life, but, paradoxically, also written to preserve you for eternity; the Tudor line; "What! Will the *line* stretch out to th'crack of doom?" - *Macbeth*, 4.1.117

**THOU GROW'ST** = you are growing in the womb of the monument of the Sonnets, as my diary records events in real time; "The *living record* of your memory" – Sonnet 55, line 8; in the final

chronological verse Oxford will hark back to this concept: “O Thou my lovely Boy, who in thy power/ Dost hold time’s fickle glass, his sickle hour,/ Who hast by waning *grown*, and therein show’st/ Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self *grow’st*” – Sonnet 126, lines 1-4; (the “lovers” of the preceding line are Oxford and then-deceased Elizabeth, his parents, as well as Southampton’s supporters and would-be subjects of his reign).

**13 SO LONG AS MEN CAN BREATH OR EYES CAN SEE,**

For as long as civilization exists; “Your monument shall be my gentle verse,/ Which eyes not yet created shall o’er-read,/ And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,/ When all the *breathers* of this world are dead./ You still shall live (such virtue hath my Pen)/ *Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men*” – Sonnet 81, lines 9-14

**14 SO LONG LIVES THIS, AND THIS GIVES LIFE TO THEE.**

**SO LONG LIVES THIS** = so long will this verse continue to live; **THIS GIVES LIFE TO THEE** = the Monument being constructed by these verses contains a womb that is recreating your royal life and growing you, to create “The *living record* of your memory” – Sonnet 55, line 8; “Methinks *the truth should live from age to age*” – *Richard III*, 3.1.76; “Death makes no conquest of this conqueror, for now *he lives in fame, though not in life*” – of Julius Caesar in *Richard III*, 3.1.87-88; “This grave shall have a *living monument*” – *Hamlet*, 5.1.297