



## Sonnet 18

by William Shakespeare

### In a Nutshell

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This is the eighteenth poem in [William Shakespeare's](#) huge series of sonnets published in 1609. By that time, Shakespeare was already a hot shot, with his most famous plays behind him. So, over a couple of years, Shakespeare sat down and wrote (get this) 154 of these little poems. All of them are sonnets, but Sonnet 18 is probably the most famous and widely read.

Why? First, it's the perfect example of the sonnet form, so it's great for teaching, but it's also a great point of access for one of the major issues in all of Shakespeare: the weird relationship between an author, his subject matter, and his audience. Shakespeare's really into messing with how stories are told, and how different kinds of storytelling can affect the content of the stories. He brought his A-game to this sonnet.

Shakespeare's sonnets are considered a treasure trove for trying to understand his personal life. Not much is known about the guy, but scholars have made tons of inferences based largely on these poems. The first seventeen sonnets are thought to be Shakespeare addressing a young man and telling him to go make some babies. The last sonnets are thought to be written to Shakespeare's mistress, whom scholars awesomely call the "Dark Lady." The middle poems, though, of which Sonnet 18 is the first, are generally thought to be love poems directed at a young man (check out Sonnet 20, where this is more obvious). What's the nature of this love? Paternal? Brotherly? Affectionate? Sexual? *You* decide.

### Why Should I Care?

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So how come Sonnet 18 is probably the most easily recognizable poem in the English language? Well, there's the cynical answer: the poem lends itself really well to a poetry class, so every high schooler in the English-speaking world has to read it.

But we think there's another, equally important reason everybody's into this poem: it points toward some basic self-obsession we all have trouble avoiding. Now, here at Shmoop we're big fans of love and art, but even we have to admit that the two share a funny connection. We tend to idealize love as that feeling where you care about someone else even more than you do about yourself; you would do anything for them. We also like to think of the artist as offering up his life and his work for the beautification and betterment of society.

"Nope," says [William Shakespeare](#), "we're all on *major* ego trips." By 1609, Shakespeare was a star, and he knew it, so in this poem he reminds everyone, a bit tongue-in-cheek, "it's all about me, baby." It's also pretty cool that an artist and lover in the early 1600s

realized that the whole idea of love-and-art-as-selfless-sacrifices is a bit of a hoax. Whether we think the voice speaking this poem belongs Shakespeare or a character he's created, it's great to watch a poet throw down the pretense of a flowery, beautiful love poem, and instead admit that he's a total rock star. So what if he can't string together a persuasive love poem? He's got staying power and he knows it.