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The Eternalization of Beauty through Literature *in "Sonnet 18"*

Beauty is a gift that is cherished, but is also one that does not last forever. In other words, fading beauty is unchangeable and beauty cannot be everlasting. At the same time even though beauty is not eternal physically, it can be eternalized figuratively. In "Sonnet 18" William Shakespeare conveyed that same idea where beauty can be eternalized through literature. ✓

Shakespeare aimed to capture one's beauty in "Sonnet 18" but later realized that beauty fades with age, and described that with the use of different literary devices. The author also referred to the mutability cycle or the passing of time, where birth is represented by spring, early adulthood by summer, adulthood by fall and old age or death by winter. Early adulthood beauty, like summer, lasts for a short amount of time. Shakespeare established this point by comparing the subject of the poem to summer "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? . . . And summer's lease hath all too short a date:" (1-4). As a result of these lines, Shakespeare pointed out that summer's beauty does not nearly last long enough. ✓

Consequently, due to the short-lived summer beauty, everything's beauty, no matter how strong, will decline. This is mentioned when Shakespeare wrote "And every fair from fair sometimes declines" (7), using the repetition of "fair" to emphasize its meaning. In addition to similes and repetition to discuss that beauty fades with age, Shakespeare also acknowledged the inevitable passing of time, which cannot be stopped. ✓

Later into the sonnet Shakespeare wrote about the fading of beauty being unstoppable. Much like the mutability cycle, the different seasons of life continue to taper to an end although one may not want them to. Life is destined to continue and the author seemed to know this when he wrote "When in eternal lines to time thou growest:" (12), which explains

that people continue to follow time and to age. Shakespeare knew that beauty was destined to fade, "By chance or nature's changing course untirmm'd;" and he realized that he could not end the fading of beauty. The decline of beauty is fated to continue. Although nature's course may be unchangeable, Shakespeare revealed that beauty had a possibility to be eternalized through literature. ✓

As Shakespeare continued to write about the truth of fading beauty, he demonstrates that one's beauty can be captured and eternalized through literature. Shakespeare used certain words to fortify the concept of everlasting beauty such as "eternal" (9) and "shall not fade" (9). ✓ The use of these words clarifies that Shakespeare wanted to eternalize the beauty of the subject in the poem. In order to eternalize beauty Shakespeare used the hyperbole "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee." (13-14). To put it another way, Shakespeare believed that for as long as mankind is around, this sonnet would give life to the beauty of the subject of the poem. In modern day beauty can be eternalized also through pictures, video or music. By capturing the summer beauty in "Sonnet 18" Shakespeare was able to eternalize beauty through literature. ✓

In "Sonnet 18", Shakespeare conveyed the idea that beauty could be eternalized through literature. He did this by using different literary devices such as similes, metaphors and hyperboles. Shakespeare also linked this sonnet to the mutability cycle, comparing fading beauty to different seasons of the year. As one could see, Shakespeare has achieved his goal, as this sonnet is being taught 400 years after it was written. It is very much possible to eternalize beauty through literature. As the view of beauty throughout the world is ever changing, ✓

freezing one's beauty in a piece of literature is a way to remember who they were in the summer of their life.



Works Cited

Abrams, M. H. editor. *Sonnet 18*. The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 1996.



