

A Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures?

Shakespeare's sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") and Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" were written with a common purpose in mind; to immortalize the subjects of their poems by writing them down in verses for people to read for generations to come. By doing so, both of the poets are preserving the beauty of the subjects, which are the young friend of Shakespeare and Keats' "Grecian Urn."

Beginning with Sonnet 18, and continuing here and there throughout the first major grouping of sonnets, Shakespeare approaches the problem of mutability and the effects of time upon his beloved friend in a different fashion. Instead of addressing the problem of old age, he emphasises his friend's attributes:

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate... (lines 1-2)"

Though time and death work together to rob man, and particularly the friend, of his youth and beauty putting ugly wrinkles in his face and finally causing his death, the friend's beauty can be made immortal in spite of the ravages of time and death. Shakespeare asserts that his poetry will survive the destructive effects and, since the subject of this poetry is his friend's beauty, it will immortalize his beloved friend's beauty. The poet can make the young man immortal in his verse