## William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

With William Shakespeare (1564-1616) English drama reaches its greatest heights. In spite
of the many stories surrounding his person. Facts about Shakespeare’s life are few. He was
born in Stratford-on-Avon, where his birthplace bas become one of the most popular
tourist attractions in Britain. In 1582 he married Ann Hathaway, by whom he had three
children. Of the next ten years of his life we know very little. For reasons unknown to us,
he set off for London to become an actor and try his hand at play-writing. His attempts,
apparently, were successful enough, for in 1598 he is referred to as one of England’s
leading dramatists. ‘Will Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain’s Men’, as the company
were called, performed at the court of Queen Elizabeth and her successor, James I, even
adopted the company, which was now allowed to call itself the ‘King’s Men’. Besides fame,
his theatrical career also brought Shakespeare material success. He bought some land and
various houses in his native Stratford and also had a financial interest in two London
theatres. About 1610, once more for reasons we can only guess at, he decided to put an
end to his theatrical activities, and he retired to Stratford, where he died in 1616 and was
buried in the local church.

Shakespeare’s work was meant to be seen and heard, not read, and the first official
edition of his plays dates from 1623, seven years after his death, when two of his former
fellow-actors collected them in what has come to be known as the First Folio.

**Sonnet 18**

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:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shin.es,

And often is his gold complexion dimmed,

And every fair from fair sometime declines

By chance, or nature’s changing course untrimmed:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st

Nor shall Death brag thou wander’st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**Assignment** **6: Answer the following questions.**

1. a Whom does Shakespeare indicate by words like ‘thee’, ‘thou’ and ‘thy’?

 b What is obviously meant by ‘the eye of heaven’?

 c What other reference is there to the same idea in the poem?

1. a The ‘thee’ of line 1 compares favourably with an English summer day. Mention 3 points that illustrate this.

 b How is the weather compared to the mood of Shakespeare’s beloved?

1. In line 7 the word ‘fair’ is used in the sense of ‘beautiful’.

 a What does Shakespeare mean here?

 b In what two ways may this change take place?

 c Give one example each, from the text, of how this might work out in

 nature.

 d How can this change be applied to people?

1. As you should know, a sonnet is usually subdivided into an octave and a sestet, with a clear break in between (volta of chute). The octave and the sestet are generally divided into two quatrains and two tercets. In a Shakespearian sonnet, however, you generally find a subdivision of the sestet into one quatrain and one couplet.

 a What is the subject of the octave and what of the sestet?

 b What is the function of the couplet?

 c The word “ow’st” is a form of either the verb “ to own” (bezitten) or “ to owe” (schuldig zijn). Of which of these two is it a form and explain why you think so.

1. a To what aspect of summer does he contrast his beloved in line 9?

b When could one say that one wanders in the shade of Death (line 11)?

c Why is ‘Death’ spelled with a capital letter?

d How can a mortal man, Shakespeare, say that the beauty of his beloved will be eternal?

e Does Shakespeare express his opinion about his own poetry anywhere?

f What is meant by ‘this’ in the last line?

g Do you think there is a grain of truth in Shakespeare’s claim that hehas made the person he loves eternal?