

### Sample Paraphrase

Definition. Very often, in order to achieve his/her effect, the poet will disrupt syntax or use words in suggestive, rather than explicit, ways. A paraphrase is a prose rendering of a poem that regularizes syntax and substitutes for archaic or difficult words language which is more immediately accessible to the non-specialist reader, all the while remaining faithful to the tone, the movement, and the proportions of the poem. Preparing a formal paraphrase of a poem is the first step to understanding that poem, for it alerts the reader to the text's "pressure points"-- that is, to those places where the poet may deliberately be disrupting the conventional reader's linguistic and syntactic expectations in order to advance poetic meaning.

Sample. Compare the paraphrase that follows with the original of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

A. Original spelling:

Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?  
Thou are more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough windes do shake the darling buds of Maie,  
And Sommers lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,  
And every faire from faire some-time declines,  
By chance, or natures changing course untrim'd:  
But thy eternall Sommer shall not fade,  
Nor loose possession of that faire thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade,  
When in eternall 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.

Source: Martin Seymour-Smith, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966)

B. Modern spelling:

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; 4  
Sometime 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 untrimmed: 8  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,

Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest 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.

12

Source: Stephen Booth, ed., Shakespeare's Sonnets (Yale UP, 1977)

C. Paraphrase:

*Shall I compare you to a summer's day? No, you are more lovely and more even-tempered. Rough winds may easily destroy the loveliest flowers in May, and summer is over all too soon. Sometimes in summer the sun shines much too brightly; often it is overcast. And everything that is beautiful must eventually lose its beauty, whether as the result of some accident or through the natural process of age and decay. But your eternal summer shall never fade away. Nor will you lose possession of the beauty that is currently yours. Nor can Death ever brag that you are in his power, when you are captured for eternity in the lines of an immortal poem. As long as there are people living on earth who are able to read, this poem will live and continue to keep the memory of your beauty alive.*

Reminder. A paraphrase is not a substitute for the poem itself, but is an aid to the reader. As the above paraphrase of Shakespeare's lines 11-14 illustrates, the most important part of a poem cannot be paraphrased without losing a great deal of meaning and affect. This is why paraphrase is but a prelude to analysis.