

SONNET 116

(THE MARRIAGE OF TWO MINDS)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare



BACKGROUND

One of the most famous of Shakespeare's sonnets. Like all of them it has a regular rhyme scheme of three quatrains (4 line units) and a final rhyming couplet. Because it is about the nature of true love, it is often used at weddings, although it was written to a man.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE POEM?

The first quatrain says that there is no barrier to the uniting of two minds in love (notice it says 'minds' not bodies). Love does not change when it finds change in the beloved, even when the beloved leaves.

The second quatrain compares love to a fixed point which is unmoved or shaken by any storm. It is also seen as a fixed star to a wandering ship. Ships used to navigate by the stars. We can measure its height in the sky suggesting we can in some way measure it but its worth is in the heavens and therefore a mystery.

The third quatrain says that love is alive with 'rosy lips and cheeks' and does not age with time but endures until the end of Time.

The final couplet says that if he is wrong about the constant nature of love then he never wrote anything and no one ever loved, therefore meaning that he must be correct as Shakespeare is a writer and people have loved before. He proves his point!

WHAT ARE THE MAIN IDEAS AND THEMES?

-The main theme is love and how love (true minds) is unchanging, even when it encounters change.

-Pure love in its ideal form is constant, everlasting and unchanged by time and circumstance.

-Time and the passage of time do not alter love.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ASPECTS OF STYLE WHICH ARE EFFECTIVE?

- It is a sonnet of 14 lines and has a regular rhyme scheme.
- It starts with a direct appeal 'Let me not'.
- It ends with a defining couplet which proves his case.

- Two of the central metaphors are that of a star and a ship. The star suggests a heavenly body to navigate by, which always tells seamen the right course and a ship which is more changeable and subject to tides and weather.
- Time is personified as a brief aspect of life: 'brief hours and weeks', 'edge of doom' and 'sickle's compass' suggesting the curved blade of the sickle which will cut a man down when he comes within its circle 'compass'. The Grim Reaper (Death is often pictured with a scythe, a large sickle). Love on the other hand endures for all of Time.