**Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds**

By [William Shakespeare](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-shakespeare)

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 wand'ring 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 prov'd,

I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

**Notes – Sonnet no. 116**

**marriage...impediments (1-2):** T.G. Tucker explains that the first two lines are a "manifest allusion to the words of the Marriage Service: 'If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony'; cf. *Much Ado* 4.1.12. 'If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined.' Where minds are true - in possessing love in the real sense dwelt upon in the following lines - there can be no 'impediments' through change of circumstances, outward appearance, or temporary lapses in conduct." (Tucker, p. 192).

**bends with the remover to remove (4):** i.e., deviates ("bends") to alter its course ("remove") with the departure of the lover.

**ever-fixed mark (5):** i.e., a lighthouse (mark = sea-mark).
Compare *Othello* (5.2.305-7):

Be not afraid, though you do see me weapon'd;
Here is my journey's end, here is my butt,
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.

**the star to every wandering bark (7):** i.e., the star that guides every lost ship (guiding star = Polaris). Shakespeare again mentions Polaris (also known as "the north star") in *Much Ado About Nothing* (2.1.222) and *Julius Caesar* (3.1.65).

**Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken (8):** The subject here is still the north star. The star's true value can never truly be calculated, although its height can be measured.

**Love's not Time's fool (9):** i.e., love is not at the mercy of Time.

**Within his bending sickle's compass come (10):** i.e., physical beauty falls within the range ("compass") of Time's curved blade. Note the comparison of Time to the Grim Reaper, the scythe-wielding personification of death.

**edge of doom (12):** i.e., Doomsday. Compare *1 Henry IV* (4.1.141):

Come, let us take a muster speedily:
Doomsday is near; die all, die merrily.

**Critical Appreciation of Sonnet no. 116:**

Sonnet 116 is one of William Shakespeare's most well known and features the opening line that is all too quotable - Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments. It goes on to declare that true love is no fool of time, it never alters.

Shakespeare's 154 sonnets were first published as an entity in 1609 and focus on the nature of love, in relationships and in relation to time. The first seventeen are addressed to a young man, the rest to a woman known as the 'Dark Lady', but there is no historical evidence to suggest that such people ever existed in Shakespeare's life.

The sonnets form a unique outpouring of poetic expression devoted to the machinations of mind and heart. They encompass a vast range of emotion and use all manner of device to explore what it means to love and be loved.

Sonnet 116 sets out to define true love by firstly telling the reader what love is not. It then continues on to the end couplet, the speaker (the poet) declaring that if what he has proposed is false, his writing is futile and no man has ever experienced love.

Sonnet 116 is an attempt by Shakespeare to persuade the reader of the indestructible qualities of true love, which never changes, and is immeasurable. But what sort of love are we talking about? Romantic love most probably, although this sonnet could be applied to Eros, Philos or Agape - erotic love, platonic love or universal love.

Shakespeare uses the imperative Let me not to begin his persuasive tactics and he continues by using negation with that little word not appearing four times. It's as if he's uncertain about this concept of love and needs to state what it is NOT to make valid his point.

So love does not alter or change if circumstances around it change. If physical, mental or spiritual change does come, love remains the same, steadfast and true.

If life is a journey, if we're all at sea, if our boat gets rocked in a violent storm we can't control, love is there to direct us, like a lighthouse with a fixed beam, guiding us safely home. Or metaphorically speaking love is a fixed star that can direct us should we go astray.

And, unlike beauty, love is not bound to time, it isn't a victim or subject to the effects of time. Love transcends the hours, the weeks, any measurement, and will defy it right to the end, until Judgement Day.

Lines nine and ten are special for the arrangement of hard and soft consonants, illiteration and enjambment:

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come;

Love is not harvested by time's sharp edge, it endures. Love conquers all, as Virgil said in his Eclogue. And if the reader has no faith in the writer's argument, then what use the words, and what good is the human experience of being in love?

Sonnet 116 has fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme **ababcdcdefefgg** - three quatrains and a couplet. Most end rhymes are full except for lines 2 and 4: love/remove, 10 and 12: come/doom and 13 and 14: proved/loved. But don't forget, in Shakespeare's time some of these words may have had the same pronunciation. The first twelve lines build to a climax, asserting what love is by stating what it is not. The last two lines introduce us to the first person speaker, who suggests to the reader that if all the aforementioned 'proofs' concerning love are invalid, then what's the point of his writing and what man has ever fallen in love**.**