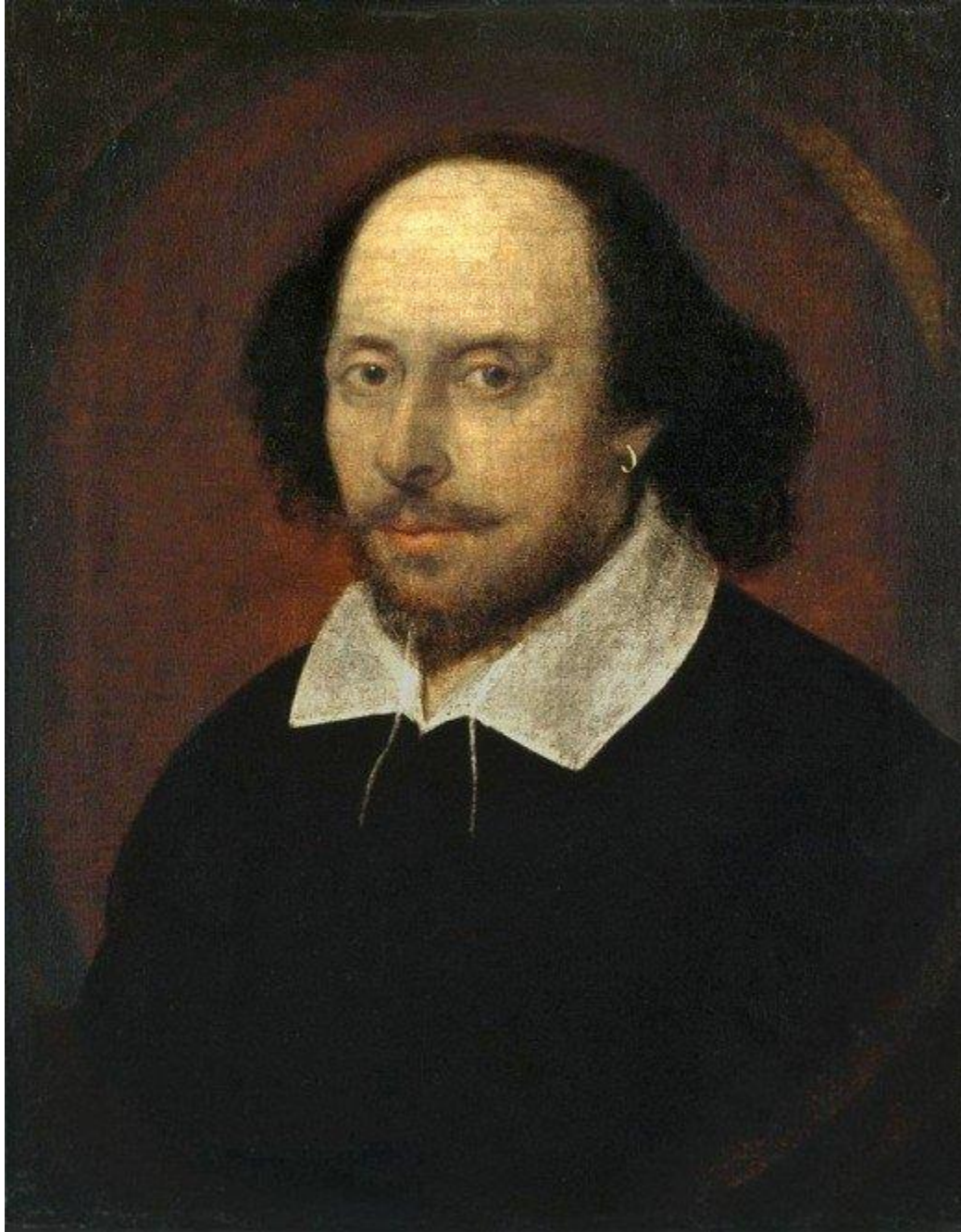


Summary and Analysis of Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare | Source

William Shakespeare and A Summary of Sonnet 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.

- It has the traditional 14 lines, mostly full rhyme, and iambic pentameter as a basic metre (meter in USA).
- There are some lines that do not follow the strict iambic pentameter beat - you can read about them below.
- Note the turn in the final couplet (last two lines), where the poet sums up the previous twelve lines.

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 one hundred and twenty six are addressed to a young man, the rest to a woman known as the 'Dark Lady', but there is no documented 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

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.

Analysis of Sonnet 116 Line By Line

Sonnet 116 is an attempt by Shakespeare to persuade the reader (and the object of his love) 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, Philo or Agape - erotic love, platonic love or universal love.

Lines 1 - 4

- 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 throughout. 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.

Lines 5 - 8

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.

Lines 9 - 12

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, alliteration 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.

Lines 13 - 14

And if the reader has no faith in the writer's argument, then what use the words.

Sonnet 116 has fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme .

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.

Metre

Iambic pentameter predominates - ten syllables, five beats per line - but there are exceptions in lines six, eight and twelve, where an extra beat at the end softens the emphasis in the first two and strengthens it in the latter.

Devices

Note the following:

- Metaphor - love is **an ever-fixed mark** and also love is **the star**.
- in line five the words **ever-fixed mark** - fixed is pronounced fix-ed, two syllables.
- in line six the word **tempest** which means a violent storm.
- in line seven the word **bark** which means ship.
- in line ten the **bending sickle's compass** refers to the sharp metal curved tool used for harvesting, that cuts off the head of ripe cereal with a circular swipe or swing. Similar to the scythe used by the Grim Reaper.