Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true

POEM TEXT

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 ev'n to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

SUMMARY

I don't want to accept that anything can come between two people who truly love each other. Love isn't true love if it changes when things get tough, or if it lets itself be diminished. No, instead love is a steady guide, like a lighthouse that even during a storm is never shaken. It is the star that guides ships as they wander at sea: its value is too great to be measured, but it is still used by sailors to help them navigate. Love is not fooled by time, though pink lips and cheeks are diminished in time. Love doesn't change as hours or weeks go by, but continues on, unchanged, until death itself. If I'm wrong—and if my own behavior serves as evidence that I'm wrong—then I've never written a poem and no one has ever loved.

THEMES

LOVE AND CHANGE

Over the course of Sonnet 116, the speaker makes a number of passionate claims about what love is—and what it isn't. For the speaker (traditionally assumed to be Shakespeare himself, and thus a man), true love doesn't change over time: instead, it goes on with the same intensity forever. The speaker establishes this argument from the poem's opening lines, boldly declaring that love isn't really love at all if it bends or sways in response to roadblocks. Instead, he argues that love weathers all storms. It's like a star that sailors use to navigate, providing an unmoving reference point they can use to plot their course across the globe. Love, then, is something that perseveres through "impediments," obstacles, and difficulties without losing any of its passion or commitment.

As the poem progresses, the speaker considers more kinds of change and extends his initial argument. In lines 9-10, he adds that true love doesn't falter even as beauty fades—represented in the poem by the image of youthful, rosy cheeks losing their vitality. Because love isn't primarily concerned with the body, it's not affected by aging. In lines 11-12, the speaker generalizes his argument even further by claiming that love doesn't change under *any* circumstances. It goes on, he claims, "to the edge of doom." In other words, only when a lover dies does love finally change or end.

The speaker is so confident in his argument that he's willing to issue a bet: if he's wrong, then love itself is impossible, and "no man [has] ever loved." In making this bet, he puts up his own behavior as evidence. Here, the speaker acknowledges that he isn't simply an observer of love, but himself a lover. His own relationships might be measured against the standard he's advanced here—and he offers confident assurance that his love *does* live up to this standard. This means that, beneath the sonnet's generalizations about what love is and isn't, the poem is *itself* a declaration of love.

At this point it's important to note that this sonnet is part of a sequence of love poems, traditionally believed to be addressed to a young man. Their relationship, as depicted in the *Sonnets* as a whole, is tumultuous, full of infidelity and gusts of passion. There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to whether this context should affect the interpretation of Sonnet 116. If it doesn't, the poem is a powerful statement about love, addressed to all readers in all times. But if it does, the poem comes across instead as an attempt to repair a damaged relationship, a personal plea directed to a particular person; the speaker is trying to prove to the young man that he *does* love him in spite of everything, and that his love won't change.

For a generous reader, this will be a romantic statement of affection. For a more skeptical reader, it raises some questions. The speaker hasn't just described love as something unchanging; the poem paints a picture of love as a sort of eternal ideal far from the messy reality of real people's lives. It's a star—unattainable and inhuman. In a way, this image of love ceases to be something that humans can actually build and instead becomes something they can only admire from a distance.

The speaker has engaged in hyperbole to defend his position, invoking all lovers in all times in line 14. This, along with the

poem's idealism, might make the speaker feel a bit unreliable; some readers may wonder how realistic the speaker's account of love really is, and find it grandiose instead of intimate. The poem's claims about love can't necessarily be taken on face value, then: they should be evaluated for their sincerity and plausibility—and in these respects, they may be found wanting.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments.

"Sonnet 116" begins with a vow: the speaker of the poem promises—to himself and to the reader—that he will not "admit impediments" to the "marriage of true minds." The fact that the speaker begins the poem with a vow raises some questions. A reader could imagine the poem almost as a prayer: something the speaker says to himself, in privacy, as he ponders the beauty and majesty of true love. Alternatively, a reader could imagine the poem as a passionate declaration: something the speaker says to the person he loves.

In the latter case, the poem and its meditation on love become more complex as readers think about the speaker's motivations. One might wonder why, under what circumstances, a statement as grandiose, beautiful, and moving as "Sonnet 116" would be necessary. In other words, what is the speaker responding to?

Both readings the poem—that the speaker is simply thinking to himself, or that he is addressing a specific romantic partner—are possible. A major challenge for interpreting this poem, then, will be deciding why the speaker says the things he does—and to whom.

In either case, as he begins his vow, the speaker uses a series of rather ambiguous phrases. The reader may wonder what actually constitutes a "marriage of true minds"—or what it would mean "to admit impediments" into such a marriage.

The speaker uses the word "marriage" in the normal way: the legal union between two people. But also he uses it in a metaphorical sense: to refer to a dedicated union between people or things, independent of wedding vows. The use of the word "minds" at the end of line 1, rather than, say, "people," underscores this metaphorical sense: "minds" can't get married in a church, but they can be closely joined together in love or friendship.

This metaphorical sense is potentially key to understanding the poem. The first 127 of Shakespeare's sonnets are addressed to an aristocratic young man with whom the poet has an intimate relationship. The young man and the poet can't be legally married, but their relationship might be profound enough to justify being described metaphorically as a marriage.

At the end of line 1, the speaker lays out the conditions for such a marriage: the parties involved must be "true minds." In other words, they must be true to each other.

In line 2, the speaker concludes his vow, hoping that no "impediments" will interrupt the relationship between these "true minds." The word impediments strongly recalls the language of the marriage service in Renaissance England, as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer, in which the minister would say to the two people getting married, "I require and charge you ... that if either of you do know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, that ye confess it." The opening lines of the poem reenact this marriage ceremony—staging, if only in the speaker's fantasy, a marriage between him and his beloved. One can imagine the opening lines of the poem as the speaker's response to the minister: he does not (and will not) admit any impediments.

It's worth noting that, at the heart of these wedding vows, there is a requirement to confess: the bride and groom must tell the minister if there's a problem. The speaker imposes a similar demand upon himself, asking himself to "admit" any impediments. Here, the word "admit" means two things at once: first, to concede or acknowledge the existence of something; second, to allow something to enter. This means that the speaker's vow might be interpreted in two ways.

First, he will not *acknowledge* any impediments in the marriage of true minds—because no such impediments exist. Second, he will not *allow* any impediments to poison or transform this marriage going forward. Most likely, both interpretations are valid and both senses are at work at once. The speaker is simultaneously enacting a marriage between "true minds" and expressing his highest hopes for that marriage—that it will continue unchanged, indefinitely. In either case, the enjambment between lines 1 and 2 reinforce his point: his sentence flows past the impediment of the line break, without pausing to observe it.

The first line of the poem is metrically ambiguous, though the poem overall is written in iambic pentameter. The first line of the poem could arguably be read as follows:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

This clearly doesn't align with perfect iambic pentameter, perhaps sonically reflecting a kind of "impediment" that the speaker argues love will overcome.

LINES 2-4

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove.

In lines 2-4, the speaker begins to explain the vow he made in lines 1-2: telling us *why* "impediments" cannot be admitted into the "marriage of true minds." In order to do so, he lays out a theory of love that explains what love is, how it works, and—most importantly—what actually constitutes true love.

He begins line 2 with a statement that seems, at first, to be a paradox: "Love is not love." As the reader moves through lines 3 and 4, the meaning of this confusing line becomes clear. The speaker wants to distinguish true love from weak and insincere forms of love. In other words, one might rewrite the end of line 2 as "Love is not *true* love..."

In lines 3-4, the speaker then explains how he's distinguishing between true and fake love. The key question for the speaker is how love responds to the challenges and changes that inevitably occur as a relationship progresses. He refers to these changes in line 3 when he mentions "alteration" and notes that, with true love, such alterations don't change a relationship itself. True love is defined, in part, by its resistance to change and its capacity to endure, even when challenged.

Those challenges emerge in line 4, with "the remover." This phrase is in reference to someone who takes something away—like beauty. Most likely, then, "the remover" in the poem is time itself. True love works against time: it doesn't diminish even as something like beauty fades. Once again, true love is marked by its resistance to change even as the circumstances of the relationship change.

These lines are bold and grand. If they feel almost like proverbs, that's because they are closely related to two proverbs that were well known in Renaissance England, during Shakespeare's life: "A perfect love does last eternally," and "Love without end has no end" (i.e. it has no ulterior motive). Shakespeare is playing on his culture's clichés about love, demonstrating his capacity to transform those cliches into stately, moving poetry.

Lines 1-4 of the poem establish the formal pattern that the poem will follow for its first 12 lines. These first lines are rhymed *abab* and they fall into iambic pentameter. There are a number of rough spots in the meter, particularly the first line of the poem, but overall the rhythm does fall back into the standard *da DUM* feel one expects from Shakespeare.

One might interpret early rough spots in the meter as meant to illustrate the speaker's point about relationships: despite the challenges and turbulence that occasionally crops up in, the poem retains its fundamental rhythm, overcoming obstacles without altering its basic adherence to the formula of the Shakespearean sonnet.

LINES 5-8

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.

In lines 1-4, the speaker makes a broad claim about true love: it doesn't change in response to obstacles or challenges. In lines 5-8, the speaker expands on this idea. If love never changes, he argues, that means it can guide people through the difficulties of life.

In lines 5 and 6, the speaker compares love to an "an ever-fixed mark." In the sense that the speaker uses the word here, a "mark" is a seamark: a beacon or lighthouse that helps sailors navigate dangerous stretches of coast. This "mark" is "ever-fixed," meaning it doesn't change or falter, even during "tempests" (that is, during storms). The metaphor implies that life is complicated and treacherous: people are like sailors, negotiating storms and rocky coast lines. In its solidity and permanence, true love helps people find safe passage through the world.

In lines 7-8, the speaker extends the metaphor, now comparing love to a "star." In Shakespeare's time, sailors used the stars to navigate and employed an instrument called a sextant to measure their position on the ocean. They would do so by measuring the angle of a star relative to the horizon—taking "his height." In this sense, the metaphor implies again that love helps people navigate—or to make sense of—their world.

The speaker is careful to emphasize that love, like the stars, is available to everyone. Every ship (he calls them "wand'ring barks") can look to the sky and find guidance; so too, any person might turn to love for guidance. While in one way this makes love democratic, it also makes it somewhat inaccessible. Though anyone might use the star to guide their course through life, the actual value of love remains beyond human comprehension: its "worth" is "unknown." Here, the speaker plays on a philosophical tradition that dates to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. For Plato, the highest and truest form of love is beyond human understanding. The speaker thus implies that the love he has in mind is exceptionally pure.

Lines 5-8 recall a tradition in the Renaissance sonnet: beginning with Petrarch, Renaissance poets often compared the experience of being in love to out-of-control ships. For example, Thomas Wyatt, in a loose translation of Petrarch's "Rima 189," writes,

> My galley charged with forgetfulness
> Thorough sharp seas in winter nights doth pass
> 'Tween rock and rock; and eke mine enemy, alas,
> That is my lord, steereth with cruelness;

The speaker of "Sonnet 116" reverses this tradition. Instead of leading to failures of navigation, love actually *helps* the mariners in lines 5-8 reach port safely. The speaker thus issues an

implicit rebuke to the poets of the past: their love was not true love. Indeed, love cannot be true love if it leads to a loss of self-control, an inability to safely guide the vessel that is one's life.

As if to reinforce the point, lines 5-8 are far more metrically regular that the lines before them, falling into a smooth pattern of iambic pentameter (though lines 6 and 8 have feminine—unstressed—endings). Meanwhile, the rhyme continues to smoothly fulfill the expectations of a Shakespearean sonnet: *cdcd*.

LINES 9-12

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 ev'n to the edge of doom.

In lines 5-8, the speaker meditates on the ways in which love provides guidance in life, helping people navigate their troubles. In lines 9-12, he returns to the theme of the poem's opening four lines, stressing again that true love does not change.

He begins, in lines 9-10, by thinking about a particular kind of change that any long relationship encounters: aging. People get older, and they eventually lose their youthful beauty. Time, with its "bending sickle," will mow down "rosy lips and cheeks." But, the speaker insists, love is not "Time's fool." Love is not fooled by time: it does not depend on physical beauty, so it doesn't diminish even as physical beauty fails.

Of course, aging is only one of the things that time might do to a relationship: passions might cool, or partners might drift apart. In lines 11 and 12, the speaker defends against these disturbing possibilities. True love, he says, doesn't change at all—even as hours and weeks fly by. Instead, it endures "even to the edge of doom." This phrase might mean two different things. On the one hand, it might be referring to doomsday, the end of time itself. Or it might be referring to death, the moment when the lovers themselves die—as in the famous phrase "till death do us part." Both readings are plausible, though the first one is significantly more hyperbolic than the latter. Depending on how sincere readers find the poem to be, they may favor one interpretation over the other.

These lines thus reiterate the speaker's contentions in lines 2-4. There, the speaker insists that love does change when it encounters obstacles or challenges. Here, the speaker supplies an example of the kind of challenge that lovers might face—aging—and insists that this should not affect their relationship. As a result, the speaker's idea of love comes to seem somewhat rigid. He is so insistent that love never changes, he seems to leave aside the fact that relationships do inevitably change—and, indeed, that change is not always a bad thing.

A reader may thus plausibly wonder whether the love that the speaker describes here is real, or whether it is an unearthly ideal: something that no one could ever live up to. Certainly, describing love as an unattainable, heavenly body—a star—as the speaker does in line 7, suggests that there is something impossible about the kind of love the speaker describes in this poem.

This sense of uncanny perfection is perhaps reflected in the form of the poem in lines 9-12, which continue to uphold the form of the Shakespearean sonnet, rhymed *efef*, in strong iambic pentameter with few substitutions. The rhyme and meter of the poem suggest that the speaker exerts tight control over his language: that the language itself is somehow artificial and constrained.

LINES 13-14

If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

In the final two lines of the "Sonnet 116," the speaker reflects on the argument he's just made, taking a moment to insist that his ideas about love are indisputable. He begins, in line 13, by admitting the possibility that he might be wrong: "*if* this be error." Then he raises a further possibility: that his own behavior might serve as evidence for his ideas about love being wrong.

Here the speaker seems to be inviting us to think about the sonnets that surround "Sonnet 116." Scholars often read Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as a narrative, recounting the speaker's love affair with a young aristocratic man (known as the "fair youth") and, later, a woman (whom scholars call "the dark lady"). The love affairs described throughout the full sequence of sonnets hardly stick to the changeless, ideal love that the speaker presents in "Sonnet 116": they are tumultuous and passionate, full of scandal. So, for a moment at the end of line 13, a careful reader of the *Sonnets* as a whole might think that the speaker is on the verge of repudiating the ideal vision of love he has advanced in this particular poem's first twelve lines.

Instead, line 14 insists with urgency that the speaker's idea of love *is* correct. Completing the sentence that began in line 13, he contends that if he's wrong about love, then he has never written anything—and that no one has ever loved. The evidence for the speaker's claims about love lies in the past: all the poems the speaker has already written (and which the reader has already read—this is the 116th sonnet in a series, after all); and all the people who have ever loved.

The interpretation of these final lines depends, in part, on the interpretation of the poem's first two lines. The poem's opening sentence poses a problem for the reader: one wonders who the speaker is talking to—himself or to a lover. If he is speaking to himself, these final lines might feel like someone repeating and reinforcing a prayer. But if he is speaking to someone else, they might feel less convincing: hyperbolic, grandiose, over-

reaching. In that case, one might feel that the lover is skeptical, unconvinced—and the speaker is struggling to find some way to convince him as the poem ends.

In the final two lines of the poem, the rhyme scheme shifts. In place of units of four lines, rhymed *abab*, we find two lines, rhymed *bb*. The final couplet in the poem returns to the rhyme of lines 2 and 4. This is unusual in a Shakespearean sonnet and emphasizes the speaker's argument. Just as love resists change, so too the poem resists the novelty, returning to its early rhyme sounds—and calling the reader's mind back to the poem's early arguments.

The poem's meter remains strongly in iambic pentameter: indeed, these are two of the most regular lines in the entire poem. This may suggest the speaker's confidence and self-assurance—or, depending on how charitable one feels toward the speaker and his ideas—it may feel artificially smooth and suave, papering over the contradictions and tensions just beneath the surface.

SYMBOLS

MARK

When the speaker mentions a "mark" in line 5, he has in mind a specific kind of mark: a seamark, i.e. a beacon or lighthouse. These structures serve to warn sailors to avoid certain areas filled with reefs or rocky outcroppings on which they might run aground. This warning is potentially life-saving information during a bad storm or in the dark, when a ship might otherwise enter dangerous waters without realizing it. The lighthouse and the beacon are thus frequently symbols for positive forces that guide people through the dark and difficult patches of their life, showing them dangers they might not otherwise see. By associating love with such marks, then, the poem argues that love itself is a solid, guiding force in people's lives.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "mark"

STAR

After comparing love to a beacon or lighthouse in line 5, the speaker compares it to a star in line 7. In many ways, the two metaphors are similar. Like the lighthouse, Renaissance sailors used stars to help them navigate, measuring their own position against the height of the stars. However, there are important differences between the two symbols: a lighthouse is man-made, something you can touch. Stars, by contrast, are distant—inhuman and unreachable.

In invoking the star as a metaphor for love, Shakespeare plays on an ancient philosophical tradition, which dates back to the Greek philosopher Plato. In this tradition, there are different kinds of love arranged in a hierarchy. The highest kind of love exceeds human comprehension; like the star in "Sonnet 116," its "worth's unknown." The star thus serves as a symbol for a kind of ideal, perfect love—beyond what anyone might achieve in a real relationship.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "star"

SICKLE

A sickle is a sharp, hooked agricultural tool. Before the invention of mechanical reapers, it was used to harvest grains and cereals, which a farmer would bend down to cut at the root. In traditional depictions, death carries a sickle or scythe: he is the harvester of souls, who, like the farmer cuts down people at the root. The sickle is thus often used as a symbol of mortality or of the fragility of human life, which can be cut short easily and unexpectedly.

This is how the sickle is being used in this poem, too. Here, time uses its sickle much as death would: it harvests youthful beauty—represented by the "rosy lips and cheeks" in line 9—and transforms the body with age, much as harvesting a lush field reduces it to a barren place. Love, according to the speaker, is immune to time and its sickle; it will not diminish or grow weak with age, and is stronger than the frail, mortal body.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 10:** "sickle"

POETIC DEVICES

HYPERBOLE

The speaker of Sonnet 116 has a number of significant ideas about love—ideas that are worth taking seriously and evaluating. However, his *presentation* of those ideas doesn't always have the same seriousness and credibility. At several moments in the poem, the speaker lapses into hyperbole, making rather some outlandish claims.

For example, in the poem's final lines, the speaker says that his ideas about love are so solid, so indisputable, that, if he's wrong, no one has *ever* been in love before. This is a broad and unsupported generalization—a generalization which includes the whole of human history until the present. This would be difficult to prove in any kind of convincing fashion, but, of course, the speaker isn't particularly interested in *proving* anything. Rather, he wants to impress the reader/listener with

the force of his passion and his rhetorical commitment—that is, with his willingness to stray into hyperbole.

However, as is often the case with hyperbole, the extravagance of the speaker's words may have the opposite effect: instead of building confidence in the speaker, it may cause us to question his passion—which might sound a bit inflated, pretentious, or puffed up.

This final moment of hyperbole is in keeping with the tone of the poem so far, in that the speaker has been very rigid and idealistic in his description of love throughout. Love is "an *ever-fixed* mark" that "*never*" falters; in fact, it lasts even to the "edge of doom"—that is, until death or doomsday. One could argue that this idea of love is so unrealistic as to be meaningless; all relationships change and have the potential for disturbances, even if minor. To say that relationships based on real love *never* feel even the slightest tremor of trouble seems a bit naive. Again, though, the speaker wants to impress upon the reader the sheer *force* of his own beliefs (and, it follows, the intensity of his own love for the potential recipient of the poem).

How someone interprets this final moment of seeming exaggeration, then, reflects on their feelings about the poem as a whole: whether they think that the speaker is being sincere and genuinely romantic in his efforts to describe a transcendent love which human beings should strive for, or if he is being so dramatic that his words lose some of their power.

Where Hyperbole appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "it is an ever-fixed mark"
- **Line 6:** "That looks on tempests and is never shaken"
- **Line 12:** "But bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom."
- **Lines 13-14:** "If this be error and upon me prov'd, / I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd"

ALLITERATION

"Sonnet 116" uses alliteration in several key places to reinforce its arguments. Alliteration helps the speaker take sides in the poem's implicit conflict between true and false love—and the speaker is firmly on the side of true love. In the first three lines of the poem, for example, the reader finds two contrasting patterns of alliteration, using /m/ and /a/ sounds:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments. Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds

In the first line, the strong /m/ sounds create a link between "marriage," "true minds," and the speaker himself ("me"). This pattern of sound stands in contrast to the repeated /a/ sounds that appear in the next two lines. Notably, the words that start with /a/ all deal with the failure and collapse of true love: alterations admitted into a relationship which, the speaker argues, should not ever change. By aligning himself with the words that alliterate on the /m/ sound, the speaker thus subtly hints at his own position: he is, or at least wants to be, on the side of true love. He stands apart from the forces that alter or bend it. In this way, alliteration not only reinforces the argument of the poem; it also signals the speaker's position in *relation* to that argument.

Another powerful moment of alliteration occurs in the poem's final line, with the repetition of /n/ sounds. There is actually a bit of consonance here too, in the final /n/ of "man" (which we've also highlighted in the line below):

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

This makes the declaration of the line all the more emphatic. These negative words—never, nor, no—become a repeated denial, a sort of "no no no," that adds force to the speaker's assertion that if he's wrong, then that means *nobody's* ever been in love.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "m," "m," "m"
- **Line 2:** "A"
- **Line 3:** "a," "a"
- **Line 4:** "r," "r"
- **Line 8:** "h," "h"
- **Line 10:** "c," "c"
- **Line 11:** "b"
- **Line 12:** "B," "b," "e," "e"
- **Line 13:** "e"
- **Line 14:** "n," "n," "n"

CONSONANCE

Alongside its patterns of alliteration, "Sonnet 116" frequently uses consonance to suggest affiliations and connections between the various parts of its argument. For instance, the poem begins with the speaker refusing to "admit impediments" into the "marriage of true minds"—though the speaker doesn't specify what he *means* by "impediments." The speaker's use of consonance helps the reader solve the puzzle. The /m/ sounds at the heart of "admit" and "impediment" echoes in line 4: "the remover to remove." The repeated sound helps the reader establish a connection between impediments and the things the speaker lists in the following lines: the remover (and the removing) *are*, the /m/ sound suggests, *exactly* the impediments that the speaker warns against in line 2.

However, the use of the /m/ sound does create some complications, since the speaker uses the same sound to alliterate in the first line. There, the /m/ sound serves to *separate* the speaker from the alterations he warns against. The reappearance of the /m/ sound, buried in the heart of words

like "impediments" and "remover" perhaps suggest that he is not quite as free of the complications and challenges of love as he'd like his readers to believe.

One could perhaps argue the same thing about the consonance of /l/ sounds in lines 2 and 3, which creates an echo between love and alteration/alters—the very thing that true love refuses to do. Alternatively, this could be read as simply underscoring the general connection between these words, creating a sonically pleasing phrase that sounds almost like memorable aphorism.

As also mentioned in our discussion on alliteration, the consonance of the poem's final line adds emphasis to the speaker's argument; the repetition of /n/ sounds underscores his emphatic assertion that if he's wrong about what love is, then he "never" has written anything, "no nor man ever lov'd."

Another interesting moment of consonance occurs in line 10 with the phrase "sickle's compass come." The repetition of the hard /c/ (or /k/) sound creates a moment of cacophony, underscoring the harsh cruelty of time—which, here presented like the Grim Reaper, cuts down vitality and beauty.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "m," "m," "m"
- **Line 2:** "m," "m," "m," "L," "l"
- **Line 3:** "l," "l"
- **Line 4:** "m," "m"
- **Line 8:** "h," "h"
- **Line 9:** "L," "l," "l"
- **Line 10:** "ck," "c," "c"
- **Line 11:** "L," "l," "b"
- **Line 12:** "B," "b," "d," "d"
- **Line 14:** "n," "n," "n," "n"

ENJAMBMENT

The speaker begins the poem with a proposition: true love does not admit any impediments. Throughout the poem, the speaker works to prove this argument, making a passionate case that true love doesn't change or diminish in response to challenges or obstacles. As he makes the case explicitly, through a series of metaphors and propositions, he also makes the case *implicitly* through his use of enjambment.

Indeed, the end of a line of poetry might be considered an impediment itself: a visual and rhetorical break that creates pause and suspense. A line break also often serves as a place where things change: since it offers a natural pause, poets often use the line break as a space to gather their thoughts and then, at the start of the next line, introduce a new idea.

In "Sonnet 116," the speaker uses enjambment to stage, implicitly, for the reader the feeling of overcoming or refusing impediments. For example, the second line ends with a grammatically complete—albeit nonsensical—sentence: "Love is not love." A reader might be tempted to treat that as a sentence by itself. But, as the reader moves down to the next line, their eye encounters a continuation of the sentence, which makes the nonsensical claim actually mean something: "Love is not love" becomes "Love is not love which alters ..." That is, love is not actually love when it changes in response to obstacles.

Here, the speaker's poetic language mirrors the content of his lines, as he demonstrates to his readers why they should not admit impediments and should instead read beyond or through them.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "minds"
- **Line 2:** "love"
- **Line 5:** "mark"
- **Line 9:** "cheeks"

END-STOPPED LINE

Just as enjambment underlines the speaker's argument in the opening lines—that true love withstands all obstacles—the speaker's use of end-stopped lines is a deliberate means to reflect the intensity of his points. In the first four lines of the poem, there is only one clear end-stop, at the end of line 4, plus a softer end-stop at the end of line 3 (which some might even argue is actually a case of enjambment, in the sense that the complete thought of line 3 overflows onto the following line, despite the slight pause of the comma in between).

The speaker delays this initial hard end-stop in order to give the reader the experience of repeatedly overcoming impediments, linking together units that might otherwise be separated. After the first four lines, the speaker falls into a regular pattern: every other line, beginning with line 6 is very clearly end-stopped—with periods and semi-colons indicating distinct breaks in the speaker's thoughts. The intervening lines, starting with line 5, are more subtly end-stopped, with only the minor pause of a comma in between (line 9, of course, is enjambed outright). As with line 3, lines 5, 7, and 11 could even be argued as being enjambed rather than end-stopped, given that the completion of their thoughts overflows from one line to the next.

In either case, after its plunging, enjambed opening, the poem finds a steady, more even rhythm. Yet because the reader comes to this steady rhythm only after the rushing enjambments of the first four lines, the resulting steadiness feels earned: not a natural state, but something precious and hard-won, something that must be preserved. The speaker's explicit end-stops throughout the poem serve to emphasize the intensity of his argument; he is declaring that he is absolutely correct, and entertains no arguments to the contrary.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "finds, "
- **Line 4:** "remove. "
- **Line 6:** "shaken; "
- **Line 7:** "bark, "
- **Line 8:** "taken. "
- **Line 10:** "come; "
- **Line 11:** "weeks, "
- **Line 12:** "doom. "
- **Line 13:** "prov'd, "
- **Line 14:** "lov'd."

METAPHOR

In "Sonnet 116," the speaker presents true love as an ethereal, almost unintelligible force. He thus searches throughout the poem for language to express what true love is and how it operates in people's lives. Faced with such a challenge, the speaker turns to metaphor, comparing love to a series of objects that suggest its power and its constancy. For example, in lines 5-8, the speaker compares love to two separate things: a star and a lighthouse (this is what the speaker means by "mark," referencing a "seamark").

There are important similarities between these two comparisons. In the Renaissance, sailors used both stars and lighthouses to navigate: both objects helped sailors pass safely through dangerous waters and to chart courses across the vast oceans. But there are also important differences between these objects: lighthouses are man-made; stars, obviously, are not. Lighthouses can be bought and sold, one can put a price on them; stars cannot. *Their* worth is, as the poem says, "unknown." Stars are also unreachable—a guiding force that is nevertheless well beyond people's ability to actually touch or grasp.

These metaphors thus convey somewhat contradictory things about love: it is and is not man-made; its price can and cannot be fixed. These paradoxes are, ultimately, appropriate to the speaker's ambitions. He is trying to describe something beyond human comprehension: it only makes sense that it would be full of complication and apparent paradoxes—which metaphor helps him bring out.

The reference to marriage in the first line could also reasonably be thought of as a metaphor. Minds, of course, cannot literally stand at an altar and get married (though marriage can also reference a broader idea of mingling). The use of the word "marriage" underscores the steadfast connection between true lovers, whose "marriage" extends beyond the physical ceremony to encompass a more spiritual union—a true meeting of the minds.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "the marriage of true minds "
- **Lines 5-6:** "is an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken; "
- **Lines 7-8:** "It is the star to every wand'ring bark, / Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. "

PERSONIFICATION

In line 9, the speaker of "Sonnet 116" personifies time. Time is not simply something that flows along: it is active and destructive, an entity made into a proper noun with its capital T. It—more specifically deemed a "he" in lines 10 and 11—wields a sickle as it harvests human beauty. This is a complex and fanciful way of describing the way that people age and, as they do, lose their youthful beauty. In the process, it gives Time unusual powers: it has agency, the capacity to act and shape the world.

Notably, however, the speaker does not have the power to resist Time—nor do the people he describes. They cannot prevent Time from harvesting their "rosy lips and cheeks." The best response to this rampaging force, then, is simply to love: since love alone is "not Time's fool." In personifying time, then, the speaker also implicitly marks the limits of human agency—and amplifies the power and dignity of love. It alone allows people to contest the power of Time.

Love is also personified throughout the poem, given human qualities and agency that help the speaker define what love actually is and is not. Love cannot literally "look" at storms, nor "bend," "alter," or be a "fool." Instead, the speaker grants love human-like attributes in order to help readers understand exactly how the speaker thinks of love and how that love functions in the world.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-4:** "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds, / Or bends with the remover to remove. "
- **Lines 5-6:** "it is an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken; "
- **Lines 9-9:** "Love's not / 's fool"
- **Line 9:** "Time"
- **Line 10:** "Within his bending sickle's compass come; "
- **Lines 11-12:** "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, / But bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom. "

CAESURA

There are spots throughout the poem where clauses and sentences come to an end in the middle of the line, creating caesuras. In some places, these caesuras feel natural and unobtrusive—as in line 9: "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks ..." Here the qualification introduced after the comma extends and complicates the sentence. As a result, the

slight pause before that qualification feels natural, as though the speaker is gathering his thoughts, and perhaps entertaining doubts.

In other places, though, the caesuras are more abrupt and unexpected. For example, the sentence that starts in line 1 ends abruptly in the midst of line 2: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments. Love is not love ..." Falling just after the word "impediment," the period itself feels itself like an impediment! The caesura thus stages the kind of break or challenge that true love must overcome or exclude. And it supplies the reader with the *experience* of overcoming such a break. The next sentence does not depart from the first, but rather explains it, clarifies it. Despite the caesura in line two, the first four lines of the poem are one continuous thought that gradually expands and explains itself. The caesura gives the reader a chance to both experience and to overcome the kind of impediment that challenges love.

Caesura again appears in line 5, as an exclamation mark following the speaker's denial—"O no!" This again adds a sense of forcefulness to the speaker's emphatic assertion of what love is not. The final caesura in line 14, adds a slight dramatic pause to the poem's closing line—creating space for anticipation before the speaker essentially lets his mic drop by claiming that if he's wrong, no one has ever loved before.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** ". "
- **Line 5:** "! "
- **Line 8:** ", "
- **Line 9:** ", "
- **Line 14:** ", "

POLYPTOTON

In lines 3 and 4, the speaker repeatedly uses polyptoton, playing on the words "alter" and "alteration," as well as "remover" and "remove." The speaker's use of polyptoton suggests something subtle and complex about what happens when love fails. When relationships come apart, the speaker implies, love loses its very identity. Instead of being the tenacious, unchanging force that the speaker describes elsewhere in the poem, it alters, or it removes. It takes on the characteristics of the things that would destroy it—becoming itself an "alteration" or a "remover." The speaker's use of polyptoton thus allows him to do two things at once: even as he describes true love, he also describes what happens when true love fails—namely, how it loses its integrity and identity.

Where Polyptoton appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "alters," "alteration"
- **Line 4:** "remover," "remove"

VOCABULARY

Marriage (Line 1) - Literally, the word "marriage" describes a ceremonial union between two people—often licensed by the state and the church. During Shakespeare's life, the concept of marriage was in transition. In the medieval period and the early part of the Renaissance, marriage was often a formal arrangement between families, which they entered into to transfer property or to secure political advantage. However, during and after Shakespeare's life, a new concept of marriage emerged, which stressed companionship—that is, the love and bonds between two people. Shakespeare uses the word in that sense here, emphasizing the way that marriage is a matter of shared values and mutual sympathy.This new kind of marriage also opens up the possibility of using the word metaphorically. Instead of referring exclusively to a religious or legal contract between two people, marriage might refer to any intimate bond between people or things. The speaker may use the word in this metaphorical sense here. After all, the lover that Shakespeare addresses throughout the first 126 of his sonnets is a young man: he and the speaker cannot literally get married. The speaker may be interested in asserting that their relationship is like a marriage, even if it lacks the stamp of legal approval that would make it an actual marriage.

Impediments (Line 2) - An "impediment" is an obstacle or problem. In Renaissance England, the word was strongly associated with marriage. During the wedding ceremony, the minister would say to the bride and groom (as written in the Book of Common Prayer), "I require and charge you ... that if either of you do know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony , that ye confess it." Though the word "impediment" might refer to any kind of obstacle, Shakespeare's early readers would likely think of the kind of impediments that might prevent a marriage—things like affairs and broken vows. The speaker works to exclude such problems from his account of love: true love does not include such issues.

Alteration (Line 3) - An "alteration" is a change or transformation. The word is generic: it does not refer to any specific kind of change or transformation. It may also indicate the rapid alteration of mental states. Shakespeare uses the word in that sense in his play *King Lear*: in Act V, Edmund says regarding the Duke of Albany, "He's full of alteration." This sense may be relevant to "Sonnet 116," but it is not the only relevant sense. Instead, the reader should take "alteration" generally: it includes mental transformations alongside a range of other changes. From the start, then, the speaker insists that love resists any kind of change.

Remover (Line 4) - A "remover" is someone who removes something, who takes something away. It can also refer to a restless person—someone who removes themselves. The speaker uses the word in a fairly generic sense here: he does

not give the reader a sense of what is being removed—or, for that matter, who is doing the removing. However, we get some clarification in lines 9-12 when the speaker talks about the relationship between love and time. Time too is a remover: it strips away physical beauty and carries lovers off to the grave. It may be, then, that "the remover" in line 4 anticipates the emergence of Time as a major challenge to true love later in the poem. Time may not be the only "remover" the speaker has in mind line 4, but it's certainly one of the most important removers with whom the poem wrestles.

Ever-fixed (Line 5) - "Ever-fixed" is a compound word, containing the two separate words "ever" and "fixed." Taken together they mean something like "constant" or "unmoving." In context with the next word in the line, "mark," they describe a navigation device, like a seamark or lighthouse: an established point that warns sailors of dangers. The key, here, is that the mark is unmoving and unmovable. It endures forever; it is not displaced or transformed, even in violent storms.

Tempests (Line 6) - A tempest is a violent storm. The word is a favorite of Shakespeare's; he even titles one of his plays *The Tempest*. It is a particularly suggestive word here because of its etymology. Tempest comes from the Latin word *tempus*, meaning "time." For Shakespeare's early readers, many of whom were fluent readers of Latin, there is thus a quiet pun in the line: the "ever-fixed mark" not only endures bad storms, it also endures time itself.

Bark (Line 7) - The speaker uses the word "bark" here in a now obsolete sense: he's not talking about the bark of trees, but rather about sailing vessels. The word "bark" could, at one time, refer to any such vessel: it was roughly synonymous with the word "ship."

Sickle (Line 10) - A "sickle" is a sharp, curved tool. It was used in farming to harvest grain and other crops by hand, prior to the invention of mechanical reapers. In traditional iconography, death is often pictured holding a sickle: a tool he uses to harvest human lives, instead of grains. The speaker uses the word in a similar, metaphorical sense here. Time doesn't have a literal sickle, but it does act like death itself: cutting youthful beauty down.

Compass (Line 10) - A tool, used in mathematics for drawing a circle. Because the sickle is a curved tool, and because a farmer using a sickle to harvest grain swings it in an arcing, circular motion, the tool itself acts as a kind of compass; its movement is compass-like. In other words, the speaker not only describes Time as having a sickle. For him, Time's sickle is actively at work, cutting down vitality and beauty.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Sonnet 116" follows the form of a typical Shakespearean sonnet. Though Shakespeare was not the first person to write sonnets in this particular style, he popularized the form—so much so that it was eventually named after him. The Shakespearean sonnet is divided into two sections, formally: the first twelve lines of the poem—which can be broken down further into three quatrains—and the final two, which make up a rhyming couplet.

The shift between line 12 and line 13 is called the *volta* or *turn*, and this shift in the organization of the rhyme also marks a shift in its content. In the Petrarchan sonnet—an older form, from which the Shakespearean sonnet diverges—the volta falls between lines 8 and 9. That means that the speaker in a Petrarchan sonnet has a lot of space before the poem ends—six lines, to be exact—to reconsider, to change their mind, to explore new possibilities. For this reason, it often feels like the speaker of a Petrarchan sonnet is having an argument with themselves.

By contrast, in the *Shakespearean* sonnet, like we have here, the volta comes very close to the end of the poem—there isn't much space for the speaker of the poem to reconsider or to change course. For this reason, the volta of a Shakespearean sonnet often serves to confirm or summarize the rest of the poem. This is certainly the case in "Sonnet 116," where the poem's final lines reaffirm—to the point of being hyperbolic—how certain the speaker is of his position.

While the "if" that begins line 13 could be read as the speaker granting a moment of hesitation, perhaps allowing himself space for reconsideration, this is abruptly countered in line 14: he is *not* arguing with himself, but rather setting himself up to hammer his point home even more emphatically. If he's wrong, then he's never written anything and no one has ever been in love—two things that are patently not true. As such, he must *not* be wrong, and the poem's form itself refuses to entertain any arguments to the contrary.

METER

Like all of Shakespeare's sonnets, "Sonnet 116" is in iambic pentameter. Indeed, it contains a number of lines that are perfectly iambic, adhering to the meter without relying on the slight substitutions that often mark iambic writing. For example, line 7 is exceptionally smooth:

> It is the star to every wand'ring bark,

Here, the regularity of the meter mimics the solidity and dependability of the star itself. In its smooth, unblemished meter, the line becomes an image of love, embodying its

changeless nature.

Not all of the poem is quite this smooth—there are other lines where the meter is slightly more irregular. For example, lines 6 and 8 have feminine endings:

> That looks | on temp- | ests and | is nev- | er shaken;

And:

> Whose worth's | unknown, | although | his height | be taken.

These lines contain an extra syllable, making them each 11 syllables long. However, this extra syllable doesn't significantly disrupt the rhythm of the lines: the stresses still all fall in the correct spots, maintaining the iambic "da DUM" rhythm. These metrical substitutions—and others like them—contribute to the sonic richness of the poem, but they do not significantly affect its interpretation.

The first two lines of the poem are more complicated and, potentially, more significant. They contain a number of unusual and suggestive substitutions:

> Let me | not to | the mar- | riage of | true minds
> Admit | imped- | iments. | Love is | not love

The first line is metrically ambiguous: different readers may place the stresses in different places. For instance, one might plausibly scan the first three words of the line as an anapest: "let me not." This comes with some disadvantages: for instance, it reduces the total number of stresses in the line to four, rather than the five one generally finds, even in the most irregular iambic lines.

However, one might plausibly doubt whether this line is iambic at all: there is only one clear iamb in the line, in the third foot, "the mar." Unlike many of Shakespeare's sonnets, "Sonnet 116" does not immediately establish a strong iambic rhythm and then, subsequently, build in variations. Instead, it starts in rhythmic chaos and then gradually rights itself, slowly building an iambic rhythm.

This rhythm emerges in the first three feet of line 2—though it is quickly troubled again, with a trochaic substitution in foot 4: "Love is." It's not all that unusual to find a trochee in this position, especially following a caesura. But it is striking that the cause of this metrical variation is the word "Love"—which, the speaker, argues is the thing which least causes variation and change. In other words, there is a tension between the poem's argument, its content, and its form in the opening lines of the poem: even as the speaker asserts that love brooks no change or alteration, his lines are full of metrical changes. One might go so far as to describe these impediments: hiccups that catch and perturb a careful reader.

In a sense, though, this tension between form and content reinforces the speaker's point. Love does not change when it encounters difficulties or challenges, he argues. So too, his poem perseveres through its initial metrical difficulties, eventually establishing a smooth and effective iambic rhythm. The metrical disturbances of the first two lines model for the reader the conflicts and troubles that inevitably crop up in every relationship—and the poem itself models how love overcomes those difficulties.

RHYME SCHEME

"Sonnet 116" follows the standard rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet, for the most part. Though the poem is one stanza, it can be divided into three quatrains and a final couplet. The three quatrains are rhymed

ABABCDCDEFEFBB

Throughout, the speaker uses strong, perfect rhymes. In his rhyming, at least, the speaker is confident and smooth, fully capable of making his argument—and making it sing. For modern readers, this may come as a surprise. A number of the poem's rhymes seem like they ought to be treated as slant rhymes—"love" and "remove" in lines 2 and 4; "come" and "doom" in lines 10 and 12. For Shakespeare's early readers, however, these would've been full rhymes: in the centuries since the poem was written, English pronunciation has shifted, so that words like "love" and "remove" no longer rhyme.

In the final two lines of the poem, the organization of the rhyme scheme shifts—and breaks from the usual pattern of the Shakespearean sonnet. Traditionally, the final two lines of a Shakespearean sonnet are rhymed *GG*, introducing a new rhyme sound at the very end of the poem. "Sonnet 116" fails to do that, returning instead to the rhyme of lines 2 and 4 (with a slight difference—"lov'd" instead of "love"). This return to the poem's earlier rhyme sound has several effects. First, it calls the reader's mind back to the poem's initial argument: that love does not change, even when faced with difficulty. Second, it reinforces that argument: just as love does not change, so too the poem resists novelty, returning to the same rhyme sounds at critical moments.

SPEAKER

Although the speaker of "Sonnet 116" refers to himself several times in the poem, the reader learns almost nothing about him—except that he is a person with strong ideas about love. Indeed, the reader cannot even be sure that *he* is the right pronoun for the speaker based on the available evidence in the poem. There is, however, a long tradition among scholars of reading Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as a semi-autobiographical text, in which the speaker recounts two love affairs, first with an aristocratic young man (the "fair youth") and later with a

mysterious woman, often referred to as the "dark lady."

If one reads "Sonnet 116" in the context of the full series, it becomes part of the complex—often tumultuous—relationship between the speaker and the young man. In that case, the poem is not only *about* love, it is also *part* of a relationship, a proclamation that the speaker makes in order to protect his relationship with the young man.

However, there is considerable controversy among scholars about whether it is appropriate to read Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as a sequence. It remains viable to interpret "Sonnet 116" outside of the context of the speaker's relationship with the young man, and instead as a passionate and grand statement about love in general.

SETTING

"Sonnet 116" provides little information about its setting. Though a reader may assume that the poem is set in Renaissance London, likely during the 1590s when Shakespeare wrote it, the poem itself resolutely refuses to allude to its location in time or space. (Of course, there are a few clues in the poem that it belongs to an earlier historical moment: for instance, sailors no longer rely on the stars to navigate; they use GPS!) The poem refuses to specify its setting because it seeks to make a general, universal statement about love—a statement which will always be true, in any setting. It presents itself stripped of setting so that any one might encounter the poem and apply it to their own life.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Sonnet 116" was most likely written in the 1590s, during a craze for sonnets. Though poets like Thomas Wyatt began to write sonnets in English in the 1530s and 1540s, the form did not become widely popular until the 1590s, after the posthumous publication of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil to Stella*.

This means that the sonnet arrived in England relatively late: by the time Wyatt began writing sonnets in the early sixteenth century, the form had been popular in Italy and France for several hundred years. The form thus came to English with baggage, in the forms of many tropes and clichés associated with it. For instance, sonnets were usually organized in long sequences—chains of many related poems which, in a certain light, would tell a story (usually a story of unrequited love). Almost all Renaissance sonnet sequences are narrated by a male speaker who is passionately in love with an unattainable woman—so much so that he seems on the verge of madness, out of control. Poets also often used nautical metaphors to express this state of semi-madness: describing themselves as doomed ships, whose captains were negligent or drunk or forgetful.

This context is evident in Shakespeare's poem, though he has worked to reverse them. Instead of describing a desperate, unrequited love, Shakespeare's speaker describes a union that binds together two willing participants in a long-term, stable union. And instead of an out-of-control ship, the speaker presents his readers in lines 5-8 images of safe, responsible navigation.

"Sonnet 116" is thus a poem that's highly self-conscious about its own literary context: it relies on the reader's knowledge of that context for some of its effect. The poem is all the more moving and beautiful because it refuses a tradition of desperate, unrequited love to instead depict what stable happiness might look like.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 1590s, when Shakespeare most likely wrote "Sonnet 116," were a time of relative peace and prosperity in English society. Queen Elizabeth—an imposing figure and a unifying force in the country—was at the height of her power. English forces had also recently defeated the Spanish Armada, substantially diminishing the threat of foreign invasion.

In this climate, English poets turned their attention to matters of the heart. Indeed, several of Shakespeare's most celebrated texts dealing with love belong to the decade, including *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It*.

However, this peaceful period was short lived: by 1603, Elizabeth had died and the crown had passed to the much less popular, much more divisive James I; by the 1640s, the country had descended into civil war. A poem like "Sonnet 116" is thus a document of a society in transition, descending into serious conflict—yet enjoying a final moment of peace and calm before the storm sets in.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "My Galley Charged With Forgetfulness" by Thomas Wyatt — Thomas Wyatt's poem "My Gallery Charged With Forgetfulness," whose tropes Shakespeare reworks in "Sonnet 116." (https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/my-galley-charged-forgetfulness)
- Patrick Stewart Reads "Sonnet 116" — Actor Patrick Stewart reads "Sonnet 116." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytwkXCVXj80)
- Linda Gregerson Introduces "Sonnet 116" — Contemporary poet Linda Gregerson introduces "Sonnet 116" for a general audience at the Atlantic magazine. (https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/poetry/

soundings/shakespeare.htm)

- Shakespeare's Accent: How Did the Bard Really Sound? — An interview with actor Ben Crystal, discussing how pronunciation has shifted between Shakespeare's time and our own, including a discussion of some of the rhymes in this poem. (https://www.npr.org/2012/03/24/149160526/shakespeares-accent-how-did-the-bard-really-sound)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE POEMS

- Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
- Sonnet 138: When my love swears that she is made of truth
- Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
- Sonnet 29: When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
- Sonnet 30: When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
- Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold

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