



By William Shakespeare

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Word Meanings

The following two common words are used in a different sense in the poem. Guess what they mean

bark compass

Answer:

Bark: Ship

Compass: Time range

Understanding the Poem

1. 'Constancy' is the theme of the poem. Indicate the words, phrases and images that suggest the theme.

Answer: Constancy is not just the theme of the poem but also it is the most important thing in any and every relationship. In the poem, there are many such phrases that express this quality. A few of the expressions are listed below.

1. Love is not love which alters
2. Love is not love which ... bends
3. It is an ever-fixed mark
4. Never shaken
5. Love's not time's fool

2. Why do you think the poet has used so many 'negatives' to make his statement?

Answer: "Negatives" are an effective tool to prove one's point. It highlights the other side of the coin to bring home the positive points of the statement very effectively. In this case the poet puts forward all the negative aspects that love is taken for, and then argues that love is something permanent and beyond physical beauty.

3. What does the line 'I never writ, nor no man ever loved' imply?

Answer: It implies that if the poet is proved wrong about these thoughts on love, then he will recant all that he has written, and no man has ever loved.

4. Love is presented as the subject or the doer of actions in the poem. Why do you think the poet has used this form rather than involving human agents?

Answer: It is not surprising that Shakespeare has chosen love as the subject and has not involved human agents. The reason for his choice is obvious and it the underlying theme of the poem, the fickle nature of humans. However, the love, and eternal being, is constant. Hence, the poet when talked of all the qualities that love embodies and should be sans of, he chose love itself and not a human, whose emotions and sentiments undergo frequent changes. Shakespeare should be appreciated for his understanding of human nature and thus a wise decision made by him in his composition.

5. Explain the phrases.

a. his bending sickle's compass

b. Time's fool

Answer:

(a) Compass is considered as a symbol of eternity. However, in the poem, it represents the change that a relationship goes through as it grows, old and less intense. How a man's love for his young beloved grows less as he gave value to beauty over the spiritual love. Though the love never dies, the physical beauty of a lover may fade and withers as it falls to time's compass' sickle.

(b) Shakespeare says that love is not at the mercy of time. True love is ageless. No matter how old a human grows, with it love grows; though the physical beauty falls prey to time's sickle. It is the constancy that holds two people in a relationship together.

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