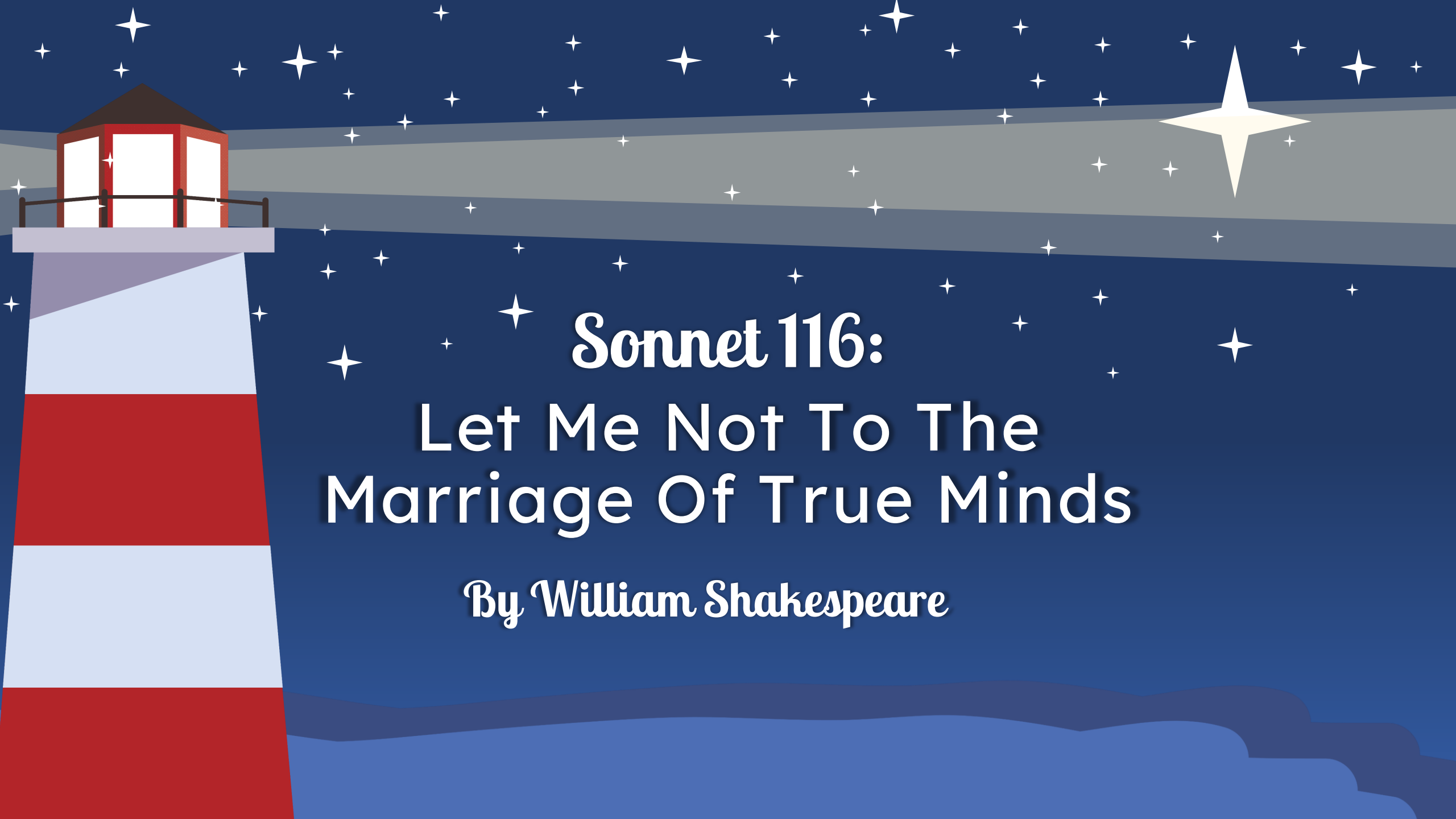


Sonnet 116:

Let Me Not To The  
Marriage Of True  
Minds

By William Shakespeare



*Sonnet 116:*  
Let Me Not To The  
Marriage Of True Minds

*By William Shakespeare*

Quatrain 1  
Quatrain 2  
Quatrain 3  
Couplet

1. Let me not to the marriage of true minds **a**
2. Admit impediments. Love is not love **b**
3. Which alters when it alteration finds, **a**
4. Or bends with the remover to remove: **b**
5. O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark, **c**
6. That looks on tempests and is never shaken; **d**
7. It is the star to every wandering bark, **c**
8. Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. **d**
9. Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks **e**
10. Within his bending sickle's compass come; **f**
11. Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, **e**
12. But bears it out even to the edge of doom. **f**
13. If this be error and upon me proved, **g**
14. I never writ, nor no man ever loved. **g**

# Structure

This is an Elizabethan/ Shakespearean sonnet.

It contains 14 lines

The poem is separated into three quatrains (4 lines each) and ends with a rhyming couplet (2 lines).

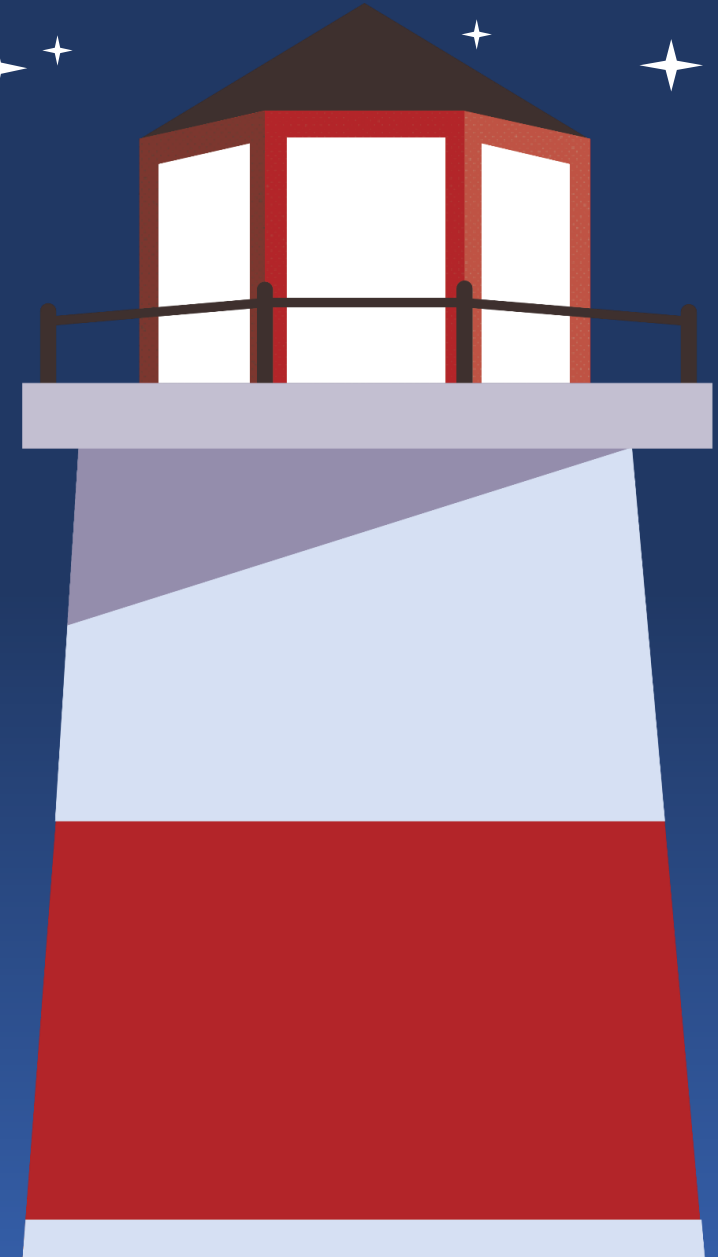
The rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg.

It is written in iambic pentameter

The overall tone is confident



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



Nothing can get in the way of people who are united and have real emotional connection. People who have true minds share the same beliefs, values and ideas. They may be close friends or family members, not only lovers.

The speaker says they don't want to accept that anything can come between two people who truly love each other.

Emotional connection (a non-physical relationship) – real love

don't allow me to

union, unity, bond

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Accept/agree

obstacles or flaws that can get in the way

constant, faithful, unchanging, truthful

Admit impediments. Love is not love

Changes

A change

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Weakens

a person who tries to take love away

Or bends with the remover to remove:

The poet believes that if love changes or weakens then it is NOT true love.

By repeating words the poet emphasises that true love never changes, no matter what happens.

True love does not change when circumstances change. True love stays constant and stable. It does not weaken when there are difficult times, or a loved one does not seem to love anymore.

Indicates how strongly the poet rejects the idea that anything can change true love.

In the 1st metaphor the poet says that true love is an 'ever-fixed mark', perhaps like a lighthouse. It stays shining and constant as a guide even during the worst storms ("tempests"). This metaphor tells us that true love is faithful and steady and will help you to manage even the worst of life's problems.

Metaphor 1

O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,

permanent, unchanging marker

storms, challenges

Moved or disrupted

That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

Metaphor 2

Direction or guide

Lost or purposeless ship

It is the star to every wandering bark,

Refers to the North Star - used by captains to steer a ship in the right direction (it is constant, always in the same place in the sky).

value

Measured

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

True love is constant, never changes. It can be trusted to guide you through life, like the North Star guides a ship lost at sea.

The position of a star can be measured, but we cannot know its worth or value (its importance). In the same way, the value of true love cannot be measured, so its worth is "unknown", even though it gives us direction and meaning in life.

The use of a capital letter in “Time” tells us that this is personification, that Time is a person. Shakespeare is writing about time as if it is a man, so he writes “his” not “its”.

The speaker says that love is not a servant that has to obey Time’s rules. Even though Time destroys youth and beauty (cuts down “rosy lips and cheeks” with his “sickle”), love does not change when time passes.

Servant or slave

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

A tool used to cut long grass    Range or direction

Within his bending sickle’s compass come;

changes

Short

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

Perseveres/ lasts

End of the world/ the end of time/ death

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

The poet says that love will last forever, even until the end of the world (“the edge of doom”).

The tone is scornful of Time’s “brief hours and weeks” because true love is not affected by time. Scornful- an expression of disgust towards something or someone who is unworthy.



Death or the grim reaper is also referred to as “Father Time”. He carries a sickle to harvest people, just like a farm worker cuts grass with a sickle. He destroys youth and beauty so people become old.

The tone of the rhyming couplet is persuasive. The poet or speaker wants to persuade the reader to agree with his views about true love.



Incorrect or wrong

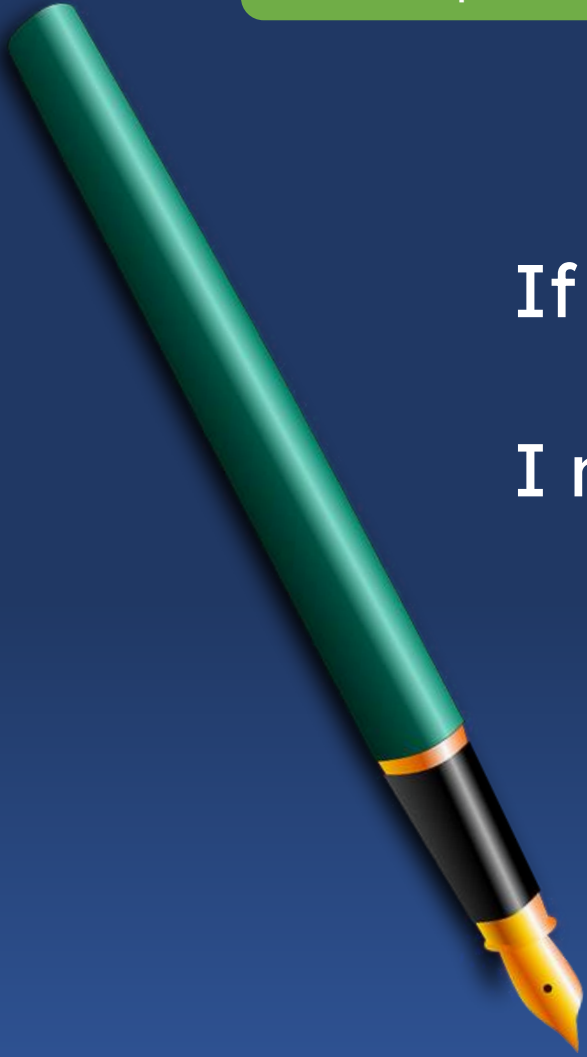
If this be error and upon me proved,

wrote

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

The speaker says that if anyone can prove that his views of love are wrong then it would mean that he didn't write anything and that no one has ever loved anyone.

This is a clever argument to end the poem with because we all know that Shakespeare has written – we are studying one of his poems right now – and of course people have loved before, and so what he says about love must be correct.





# Modern translation

I won't admit that anything could come between two people who truly love each other. Love that changes when things happen is not true love, if it becomes weak when someone tries to take it away then it is not true love either. It is constant forever like a lighthouse that stands strong in storms and is never shaken by them. It is like the North star that guides lost ships: we can calculate how far away it is but we can't measure its worth or value. Love doesn't depend on Time, although we lose our youth and beauty and eventually pass away. Love doesn't change as time passes by it lasts even after death. If I'm wrong about this then I've never written anything and no person has ever loved anyone.

# Summary

In quatrain 1, the poet tells us what love is NOT. Love is not fickle or changeable, it is not removable.

- Does not have obstacles or flaws “admit impediments”.
- Does not change when situations change “alter when it alteration finds”.
- Does not bend or weaken when someone tries to take it away “with the remover to remove”.

In quatrain 2, the poet suggests what love is. He uses metaphors based on ships and sailing to tell us what love really is. It is stable and permanent. It gives us guidance and direction.

In quatrain 3, the poet tells us that such love is timeless – it cannot be measured and lasts to the end of the world. The passing of time has no effect on true love.

In the rhyming couplet, he makes a clever argument to end the poem and prove that what he says about love must be true.

Themes include: Time, love, and the nature of relationships.

# Questions & Answers

1. Complete the following sentence:

This is a typical (1.1) Elizabethan ✓ sonnet because of the three (1.2) quatrains ✓  
and the (1.3) couplet ✓ that rhymes. (3)

2. Quote a word in the first line which has connotations of love and unity. (1)

“marriage” ✓

3. Refer to the following words in line 1 (“...the marriage of true minds”). To what do these words refer? (2)

The union / joining together ✓ of people who have a real emotional connection. ✓

4. Refer to lines 2-4 (“love is not love... the remover to remove”). Using your own words, explain the meaning of these lines. (2)

True love does not change/ is constant ✓ when circumstances change/ when difficulties arise/ when people change or try to take the love away. ✓

5. Choose the correct answer to complete the following sentence.

In line 5, the words “O, no ...” show that the speaker is ...

A uncertain.

B arrogant.

C doubtful.

D convinced ✓

(1)

6. Refer to line 7 (“It is the star to every wand’ring bark”). Give the literal meaning of the underlined words. (1)

A ship that is lost/moving aimlessly or with no direction ✓

7. Is the following statement TRUE or FALSE? Quote three consecutive words to support your answer. It is impossible to measure the value of love. (2)

True. ✓ “whose worth’s unknown” ✓

8. Refer to the following words in line 9 (“Love is not Time’s fool”). Identify the figure of speech used here. (1)

Personification ✓

9. Refer to lines 13 and 14 (“If this be ... man ever loved”). How does the poet use the last two lines to make his argument on true love convincing? (2)

If what he says about love is not true, then it is also true that he did not write this poem. However, you are reading what he has written. Therefore, he did write this poem and therefore what he says about love is true. ✓✓

10. Do you agree with the speaker’s view of love? Explain your answer. (2)

Yes, I agree with the poet that love can last forever. People who really love each other can overcome any problems. ✓✓