

# [Shakespeare’s definition of love](https://assignbuster.com/shakespeares-definition-of-love/)

William Shakespeare puts forth his definition of what makes love true in his untitled sonnet beginning with “ Let me not to the marriage of true minds.” Shakespeare does not deny other views of love, but instead insists on a certain characteristic of love: love is rigid and crucial to endure life. With the very first line of the Sonnet, Shakespeare indirectly acknowledges there may be obstacles in true love: “ Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments,” (lines 1-2). By recognizing it is possible to have “ impediments” in a sound relationship, Shakespeare may be seeking to grab the attention of the audience by bringing forth a realistic love that is attainable. Additionally, marrying true “ minds” rather than merely two people suggest Shakespeare carefully picked “ minds” for a deeper meaning. It is possible the word “ minds” was used to illustrate the thought that goes behind true love. Without thought, a person would be more primitive, and with primal instincts come physical urges and desires. Shakespeare’s word selection proposes love is more than physical, it is reasoned through. The next part of the Shakespeare’s sonnet expresses the unyielding characteristic of love. The line “ Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds,” (lines 2-3) creates a sense of stability for love since Shakespeare argues love is false if it changes with a change in situation. Shakespeare continues on to say love is not true if it “ bends with the remover to remove,” (line 4). Shakespeare describes love as strong and rigid. Shakespeare describes true love as stubborn in a way. The lack of flexibility he brings up could contradict the analogy Sophocles creates in his play Antigone about the arrogant actions of Creon: “ You’ve seen trees by a raging winter torrent / How many sway with the flood and salvage every twig, / But not the stubborn—they’re ripped out, roots and all / Bend or break,”(lines 797-800). By contrasting the nature of love to the personality of Creon, Shakespeare creates distinction between the stubbornness of love and other embodiments of stubbornness. Shakespeare even appears to mirror the work Sophocles in the next section of his sonnet. Instead of the inhibiting nature of stubbornness set forth in Antigone, Shakespeare makes the stubbornness of love encouraging. Shakespeare writes “[Love] looks on tempests and is never shaken,” (line 6) which means love withstands troubled times – the opposite fate of the rigid trees Sophocles describes. The line also stands out for its change in meter. The line breaks away from the iambic pentameter form of a sonnet by ending the line with an anapest. The inclusion of an extra unstressed syllable could emphasize steadfastness as important to the overall meaning of love. Shakespeare continues on to metaphorically compare love to the North Star: “[Love] is the star to every wandering bark, / Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken”(lines 7-8). Shakespeare considers love a guide for all barks (metaphorically people) through life. The comparisons between the North Star persist because the guidance they give is priceless, whether it be the successful navigation by a ship’s captain or happy life with a loved one. A caesura divides the ideas that the worth of love is unknown, from the suggestion that love can still be measured. The North Star can be measured to determine position, while love can be measured to determine its magnitude through actions that express affection. The next section of the sonnet describes love’s ability to stand time when other aspect of life cannot. Shakespeare states that love does not break down over time like beauty. “ Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his binding sickle’s compass come,”(lines 9-10). By stating true love does not fade with beauty, Shakespeare considers true love to be more than just attraction to looks because love is deeper than the shallowness of appearance. Time becomes analogous to death and his sickle that creeps in over time. The sharp, cutting sounds made by the alliteration “ sickle’s compass come,” seems to cut through the line as time cuts away at physical appearance of human beings until beauty, and eventually life, is lost – yet love remains. Love remains much longer than “ his brief hours and weeks,”(line 11); it resists change until the end of the world, or as Shakespeare puts it:” bears out until the edge of doom,”(line 12). The last of the series of quatrains ends without rhyme on the word “ doom.” Leaving the end of the quatrain open without rhyme indicates it may be unfinished. Shakespeare may be suggesting that true love is eternal even beyond Doomsday with this lack of closure. The ending couplet acts to reinforce Shakespeare’s ideas by daring others to find what he says false. If he is proved wrong, Shakespeare is willing to admit “[He] never writ. And Man never loved.” (line 14) He is so sure of his definition of true love, that he compares it to the success of his own work. Some may see this as boastful, but he truly believes that there is no way he can be wrong and if he is, then everything he’s ever written is false since he based it off his interpretation of love. Furthermore, if Shakespeare is proven wrong about love, then he insists man do not love but instead have different feelings for their significant other since the classification of love does not fit his observations. Shakespeare is able to play merit to his advantage in order to persuade his audience as a closing argument. There are many forms of affection, but for Shakespeare the only true form of love has very distinct qualities. True love can withstand the tests of time, whether it is a small fight or a change in the way one’s lover looks. Love can also help one navigate through life by helping make hard decisions. To Shakespeare, true is real and attainable because it has been attained in the past. “[Let me not to the marriage of true minds]” defines what love is to Shakespeare and shares his experience for others to learn from.