

Shakespeare's sonnet 116

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Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 I chose this poem somewhat at random since I felt that the main point of this assignment was to read a poem and interpret it for ourselves with no influence from others. I think the most disputable, if not confusing, aspect of this poem to me was whom it was addressed to. It sounded to me like it was either self-reflection about what love is, or perhaps more likely advice to another person about love. I would like to discuss the structure of the poem for just a moment. It is a standard sonnet structure that is extremely common, especially among William Shakespeare's poems. It consists of three quatrains and a couplet to finish it off. I am not sure if that is the stone-cold definition of a sonnet, but it is nevertheless very common among these types of poems if not. I like the way that quatrains divide up poems to give them more order and separate different rhyme schemes. Excuse me if and when I sound ignorant, but I have never really liked poetry that did not have rhyme schemes. I think rhyming adds a whole other element to poetry, since poems are short, thoughtful, and expressive pieces of literature that, in my opinion, are more beautiful when they have little rhyme schemes in them. I respect the artistic elements of non-rhyming poetry, but I have never enjoyed it nearly as much. I digress. I will now discuss my full interpretation of the poem quatrain by quatrain. The first quatrain, " 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: " sets the tone for the rest of the poem. The first sentence, which extends from line one to two, I think means that he believes in true love between two people. He is saying that he does not want to ' admit impediments' or say anything bad about marriage, or the ceremonious

event of joining two 'true minds' together in a sense. He goes on to say, with the next two lines, that love is not really love that changes when it finds 'alteration'. I was sort of confused by this line at first because I asked myself, 'Does it really mean that love finds change?' I guess that makes sense in a weird way but I figured it would make more sense if it were meant to say when circumstances change, such as if suddenly there was a shortage of money or some type of problem and the two people grow apart a little bit. That explanation would also fit with the rest of the fourth line since that line is about the removal and bending of love. Bending to me sounds like it refers to one or both parties having an affair or something. The second quatrain is totally different to me in the way that Shakespeare expresses it. Suddenly, he gets very visual and metaphorical. It begins by saying, "O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark," and the footnote said that meant a Seamark or Landmark. Honestly I had to look that up, and every online analysis I saw agreed that it referred to a lighthouse, which makes sense because I knew that a tempest was a huge storm, and in the poem it says that the ever-fixed mark looked upon tempests but was never shaken. Anyway, Shakespeare is saying that love is the lighthouse that sees terrible things sometimes but also sees beautiful days, meaning that any relationship is going to have bad days but it will remain standing. He goes on to say that love is the "star to very wandering bark" and "whose worth's unknown". Does that mean to ask where love came from? Who is to say. The final quatrain continues with the same metaphorical nature of the second. It mainly has to do with time and how it effects love. He says that love is not time's fool, or 'plaything'. Basically, I think this means that time should not have any effect on love,

even though in many cases it does. Shakespeare refers to time as a person. He capitalizes the letter 't' in 'Time' and uses the possessive word 'his' when he says, "though rosy lips and cheeks/ Within his bending sickle's compass come." The final two lines are perhaps the most important of the poem because they really sum up what I think Shakespeare is trying to say. He says, "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks," —'his' referring to Time. So he is nailing down his point that real love does not change with time. Love is what it is, and there is no gray area. He even goes on to say that love bears itself out "even to the edge of doom", or Judgment Day as the side note refers to it. The couplet that concludes this sonnet serves as justification of his firm stance about what love actually is. He writes, "If this be error and upon me proved/ I never writ, nor no man ever loved." He is so adamant in his stance that he goes so far to say that if he is proven wrong, then no man ever really loved. That statement speaks for itself. It is the part right before that I found interesting: "I never writ". I could not decipher what exactly that meant. Does that mean that if it is proven that he is wrong, he would retract what he has written, or does it mean that if he is wrong, he would question existence itself. Is he so firm in his definition of love that if he is wrong we might as well forget everything we know? If I had to guess, I would say it is the former. In general, I think this is a very interesting, thoughtful, imaginative, yet convincing as Shakespeare's definition of the term 'love'.