

# Analysis of sonnet 116 n

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Analysis of sonnet 116 by william shakespeare and sonnet 29 by edna st  
vincent millay Let me not to the marriage of true minds Let me not declare  
any reasons why two Admit impediments. Love is not love True-minded  
people should not be married. Love is not love Which alters when it  
alteration finds, Which changes when it finds a change in circumstances, Or  
bends with the remover to remove: Or bends from its firm stand even when  
a lover is unfaithful: O no! it is an ever-fixed mark Oh no! it is a lighthouse  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken; That sees storms but it never  
shaken; It is the star to every wandering bark, Love is the guiding north star  
to every lost ship, Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Whose value cannot be calculated, although its altitude can be measured.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Love is not at the mercy  
of Time, though physical beauty Within his bending sickle's compass come:  
Comes within the compass of his sickle. Love alters not with his brief hours  
and weeks, Love does not alter with hours and weeks, But bears it out even  
to the edge of doom.

But, rather, it endures until the last day of life. If this be error and upon me  
proved, If I am proved wrong about these thoughts on love I never writ, nor  
no man ever loved. Then I recant all that I have written, and no man has  
ever [truly] loved. Sonnet 116 is about love in its most ideal form. It is  
praising the glories of lovers who have come to each other freely, and enter  
into a relationship based on trust and understanding. The first four lines  
reveal the poet's pleasure in love that is constant and strong, and will not "  
alter when it alteration finds. The following lines proclaim that true love is  
indeed an " ever-fix'd mark" which will survive any crisis. In lines 7-8, the

poet claims that we may be able to measure love to some degree, but this does not mean we fully understand it. Love's actual worth cannot be known – it remains a mystery. The remaining lines of the third quatrain (9-12), reaffirm the perfect nature of love that is unshakeable throughout time and remains so " ev'n to the edge of doom", or death. In " Pity Me Not," Millay uses the cyclical forces of nature as a metaphor for her version of the cycle of love, a version that concludes a man's love for a woman always ends. Her comparison, however, becomes paradoxical as she moves from the rational mind to the emotional heart. The first stanza begins immediately with her rational comparisons of nature to love. In the first two lines she looks at the sunset and one is reminded of the warmth love brings to life. A warmth that naturally fades as love dies. Next, she moves to beauty and the aging process. Unfortunately as women get older, American society often considers their beauty lost just as flowers wither as winter approaches. Millay seems to assume that men cannot love if the woman has no beauty left. The waning of the moon" can easily refer to the loss of romance and passion, since moonlight is often considered a sensuous setting. Finally, " the ebbing of the tide" washes away any remnants of the romance. Passion's tide will only go lower and lower from this point. Millay finishes the octave directly tying love to nature. Up to this point, love has not been explicitly addressed. Finally, she gets to the thrust of the poem, " Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon, and you no longer look on love with me. " It is clear in this octave that Millay looks at the passing of love, the end of men's desire, as a natural part of life.

She seems resigned to it. She accepts it and declares, "Pity me not" the loss of these precious things, for there is nothing else which could happen. With the tone of the octave, she clearly does not sound so much as a "tormented lover" as she does someone who has become completely jaded to love altogether. The torment is long finished. As is common in many sonnets, the sestet introduces a new tone, a new twist to the narrative. In line 9, she tells us directly that she indeed has gone through these stages of love enough to become resigned to the inevitable: "This love I have known always: love is no more. It is with line 10 that the tone of the poem twists to something totally conflicting with the octave. Lines 10-12 all compare the ending of love to natural events that are clearly not cyclical or expected at all. Passages such as "the wide blossom which the wind assails" or "the great tide that treads the shifting shore strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales" reveal that she is not at all calm over the ending of love. The imagery throughout this section is violent.

It is as if she is the wide blossom assailed; that the shifting shore is her foundation, her emotions being eroded; that the wind is now no longer a natural, common wind but a gale! Probably the most effective word that demonstrates these bad feelings is "wreckage." The term is the only man-made noun in the entire poem, a term that is not natural at all. The vision of boats being mangled and ripped in a storm quickly comes to mind. She clearly seems to see herself as the "fresh wreckage" in the midst of a grand emotional storm. A question now arises in the reader's mind at the conclusion of line 12.

If the ending of love is rational and expected, why have this outburst of torture and torment? The couplet holds the answer. As typical in so many sonnets, the couplet ends with a surprise and a tying together of all the elements of the poem above it. In the octave Millay asks her readers not to pity her the ending of love, as it is simply a natural occurrence in her spoiled view. In the couplet she gets to the point of her real pain. " Pity me that the heart is slow to learn what the swift mind beholds at every turn. " Now she is clearly asking for sympathy. She knows that love will end.

She watches it happen time and time again around her, but she laments that she still feels pain in her heart. She feels she is smarter than that but still she succumbs to her emotions. Pity her her broken heart. Period. Thus, the octave is a representation of her mind, her rationalizing assumption that relationships cannot naturally work. The sestet's quatrain represents the pain, the emotional violence that still emerges despite all of her rationalizations. That revelation is the paradox. The ending of love is not cyclically expected as is the sunset or the waning of the moon — at least not in her heart where it matters the most. " Pity Me Not " was written in 1923, a period characterized by poets consistently examining their psyches. Edna St. Vincent Millay continued this study of her " worthlessness " throughout most of this time. Before 1923, she indeed lived through an amount of pain and sadness. That year, however, was not a time to be glum or depressed, for 1923 was clearly one of the most joyous, important years in her life. It was the year she married a rather wealthy man, finally finding love while freeing herself from financial responsibilities, allowing her to devote all of her time to her art.

It was the year she first became published in Europe, to a resounding success. It was also the year she won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry—only the second of its kind awarded (Atkins 93-147). No, 1923 was known as an exceptionally happy time for Millay, in her career and in romantic pursuits. Thus, the final paradox to be found in “Pity Me Not” is that she could, and did, find the love she thought she’d never find. The marriage lasted, disproving her theory that relationships naturally die.