



Let me not to the marriage of true minds

*This sonnet is a celebration of real love, which never alters although it grows deeper.
Only this kind of feeling can oppose time and defeat its deterministic laws.*

William Shakespeare
Sonnet CXVI
(1609)

Let me not¹ to the marriage of true minds²
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove³.

- 5 O no, it is an ever-fixéd⁴ mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star⁵ to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken⁶.

- 10 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come⁷,
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom⁸:

If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

- 1 Let me not. Non sia mai che io.
2 true minds. Animi costanti.
3 bends ... remove. Tende a cambiare quando l'altro si allontana.
4 ever-fixéd. Sempre fisso.
5 the star. Riferimento alla stella polare che governa ogni rotta.
6 although ... taken. Sebbene se ne conosca la distanza.
7 Within ... come. Cadranno sotto la sua curva falce.
8 bears ... doom. Resiste fino al giorno del giudizio.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the poem and find the words which mean the following.

- 1 obstacles
- 2 changes
- 3 object, indication, position or direction
- 4 moving, travelling
- 5 vessel
- 6 value
- 7 short
- 8 demonstrated

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the poem again and correct the following statements.

- 1 The poet thinks that any marriage may admit impediment.
- 2 Even the greatest love changes.
- 3 The troubles of life overcome love.
- 4 Love needs a guide to survive.
- 5 Time spoils love by changing its features.
- 6 The poet thinks he is mistaken.

**> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT****3 POINT** out the features of the Shakespearean sonnet in the poem.

- 1 Layout:
- 2 Rhyme scheme:
- 3 Turning point:

4 FIND examples of the following devices.

- 1 Inversion.
- 2 Alliteration.
- 3 Enjambement.
- 4 Repetition.

5 CONSIDER the beginning of the poem.**1** Tick as appropriate.

- ☐ It introduces the reader right in the middle of the poet's argument.
- ☐ It provides a preparation to the poet's argument.
- ☐ It anticipates the conclusion of the argument.

2 This kind of opening gives the sonnet the quality of

- A a lyrical expression of the poet's feelings.
- B a dramatic monologue.

6 SAY what kind of sentences prevail in the poem. Are they used to state or to deny? Underline all the examples in the text and rephrase them in your own words.

- A Negative.
- B Positive.
- C Interrogative.
- D Exclamation.

7 COMPLETE the table below with the metaphors used to present love and their connotation. Then answer the question below.

Metaphor	Connotation

What semantic area does the poet draw upon?

8 HOW is Time personified in the third stanza? Tick as appropriate and justify your answer. Then answer the question below.

- ☐ Through the use of capital letter.
- ☐ Through the use of verbs referring to human action.
- ☐ Through the use of adjectives defining human qualities.

What attributes is Time given?

9 FOCUS on the couplet and decide what its function is.

- A It contrasts with the argument of the previous lines.
- B It introduces a new argument.
- C It closes the argument as a sort of epigram.

10 TRY to explain what Shakespeare means by 'the marriage of true minds'.



➤ COMPETENCE: FINDING AND UNDERSTANDING LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

11 COMPARE the treatment of time in this sonnet with that in Sonnet XVIII (→ T11). What is identified as the antagonist of Time in each poem?

12 READ the following lines by the Latin poet Catullo (87-54 BC). Try to rephrase them in English. Then discuss similarities and differences with the poem by Shakespeare.

Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam

Vere, quantum a me Lesbia amata mea es.

*Nulla fides ullo fuit unquam foedere tanta,
quanta in amore tuo ex parte reperta mea est.*

13 READ the poem *Song* by the metaphysical poet John Donne (→ 2.7) and compare the two poems as regards:

- 1 the opening;
- 2 the imagery;
- 3 the treatment of the theme;
- 4 the poet's attitude.

➤ COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

14 DISCUSS. Do you think 'the marriage of true minds' really exists? Is it easier to identify it with the idea of love or that of friendship? Do you like the images Shakespeare used to define love? What is your idea of true love? Create your own metaphor/s and write it/them down. Share your work with the rest of the class.