

## Chapter 1

### William Shakespeare and his poem “Let Me Not To the Marriage of True Minds”

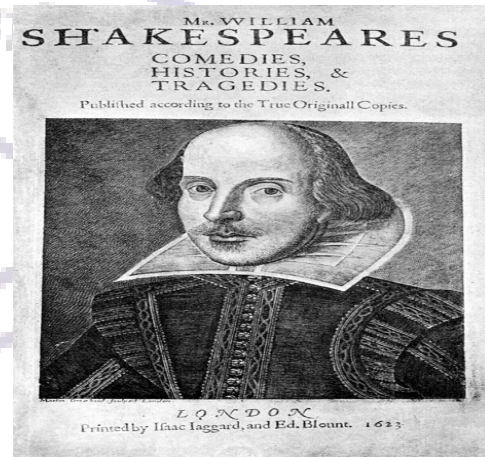
In this chapter we will learn:

- A brief outline of life of William Shakespeare and his poetic excellence
- Historical background, origin and nature of a Sonnet as a literary genre
- Theme, summary and explanation of Shakespeare’s sonnet “Let Me not to the Marriage of True Minds”

Text of poem:

#### Let Me Not To the Marriage of True Minds

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.  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me prov'd,  
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.



#### About William Shakespeare:

**William Shakespeare**, byname **Bard of Avon** or **Swan of Avon**, (baptized April 26, 1564, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England—died April 23, 1616, Stratford-upon-Avon), was English poet, dramatist, and actor often called the English national poet and considered by many to be the greatest dramatist of all time. His birthday is celebrated on 23 April. His father, John Shakespeare, was a burgess of the borough, who in 1565 was chosen an alderman and in 1568 bailiff (the position corresponding to mayor, before the grant of a further charter to Stratford in 1664). He was engaged in various kinds of trade and appears to have suffered some fluctuations in prosperity. His mother, Mary Arden of Warwickshire, came from an ancient family and was the heiress to some land. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, when he was 18. They had three children: Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet who died at the age of 11. There is some dispute about how many plays Shakespeare wrote. The general consensus is 37 including Macbeth, King Lear, Othello, Hamlet, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, The Tempest and Cymbeline. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets.

### **Sonnet as a poetic form and literary genre:**

A sonnet is a popular classical poetic form that has compelled poets for centuries. Traditionally, the sonnet is a fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes, and adhering to a tightly structured thematic organization. The name is taken from the Italian word '*sonetto*', which means "a little sound or song." Two sonnet forms provide the models from which all other sonnets are formed: the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean.

#### ***Petrarchan Sonnet***

The first and most common sonnet is the Petrarchan, or Italian. Named after one of its greatest practitioners, the Italian poet Petrarch, the Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two stanzas, the octave (the first eight lines) followed by the answering sestet (the final six lines). The tightly woven rhyme scheme, abba, abba, cdecde or cdcdcd, is suited for the rhyme-rich Italian language, though there are many fine examples in English. Since the Petrarchan presents an argument, observation, question, or some other answerable charge in the octave, a turn, or volta, occurs between the eighth and ninth lines. This turn marks a shift in the direction of the foregoing argument or narrative, turning the sestet into the vehicle for the counterargument, clarification, or whatever answer the octave demands.

Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced the Petrarchan sonnet to England in the early sixteenth century. His famed translations of Petrarch's sonnets, as well as his own sonnets, drew fast attention to the form. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, a contemporary of Wyatt's, whose own translations of Petrarch are considered more faithful to the original though less fine to the ear, modified the Petrarchan, thus establishing the structure that became known as the Shakespearean sonnet. This structure has been noted to lend itself much better to the comparatively rhyme-poor English language.

#### ***Shakespearean Sonnet***

The second major type of sonnet, the Shakespearean, or English sonnet, follows a different set of rules. Here, three quatrains and a couplet follow this rhyme scheme: abab, cdcd, efef, gg. The couplet plays a pivotal role, usually arriving in the form of a conclusion, amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas, often creating an epiphanic quality to the end. In Sonnet 130 of William Shakespeare's epic sonnet cycle, the first twelve lines compare the speaker's mistress unfavorably with nature's beauties, but the concluding couplet swerves in a surprising direction.

#### ***Variations on the Sonnet Form***

John Milton's Italian-patterned sonnets (later known as "Miltonic" sonnets) added several important refinements to the form. Milton freed the sonnet from its typical incarnation in a sequence of sonnets, writing the occasional sonnet that often expressed interior, self-directed concerns. He also took liberties with the turn, allowing the octave to run into the sestet as needed. Both of these qualities can be seen in "When I Consider How My Light is Spent."

The Spenserian sonnet, invented by sixteenth century English poet Edmund Spenser, cribbs its structure from the Shakespearean—three quatrains and a couplet—but employs a series of "couplet links" between quatrains, as revealed in the rhyme scheme: abab, bcba, cdcd, ee. The Spenserian sonnet, through the interweaving of the quatrains, implicitly reorganized the Shakespearean sonnet into couplets, reminiscent of the Petrarchan. One reason was to reduce the often excessive final couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet, putting less pressure on it to resolve the foregoing argument, observation, or question.

### **Theme of the poem:**

While this sonnet is clumped in with the other Shakespearean sonnets that are assumed to be dedicated to an unknown young man in Shakespeare's life, this poem does not seem to directly address anyone. In fact, *Sonnet 116* seems to be the speaker's—in this case, perhaps Shakespeare—ruminations on true love by comparing "what it is" with "what is not" and giving different practical illustrations.

### **Summary and explanation of the poem:**

In the first line of first quatrain Shakespeare uses the metaphor of marriage to compare it to true, real love. He says that there is no reason why two people who truly love should not be together; nothing should stand in their way. Perhaps he is speaking about his feelings for the unknown young man for whom the sonnet is written. Shakespeare continues with his thought that true love conquers all. In further lines of first quatrain, the speaker tells the reader that if love changes, it is not truly love because if it changes, or if someone tries to "remove" it, nothing will change it. Love does not stop just because something is altered and hence true and real love lasts forever.

The second quatrain of *Sonnet 116* begins with some vivid and beautiful imagery, and it continues with the final thought pondered in the first quatrain. Now that Shakespeare has established in the first quatrain what love is not—fleeting and ever-changing—he can now tell us what love is. Shakespeare tells his readers that love is something that does not shift, change, or move; it is constant and it can face even the most harrowing of storms, or tempests without being shaken. It can be argued here that Shakespeare decides to personify love; since it is something that is intangible and not something that can be defeated by something tangible, such as a storm. In the next line, Shakespeare uses the metaphor of the North Star to discuss love. To Shakespeare, love is the star that guides every ship on the water, and while it is priceless, it can be measured. These two lines are interesting and worth noting. Shakespeare concedes that love's worth is not known, but he says it can be measured through time and actions. With that thought, the second quatrain ends.

The third quatrain parallels the first, and Shakespeare returns to telling his readers what love is not. Shakespeare personifies time as a person and stresses on it by capitalizing it. He brings a resemblance of time with Death. He says that love is not the fool of time. One's rosy lips and cheeks will certainly pale with age, as "his bending sickle's compass come." Shakespeare's diction is important here, particularly with his use of the word "sickle." We are assured here that Death will certainly come, but that will not stop love. It may kill the lover, but the love itself is eternal. This thought is continued in the lines eleven and twelve, the final two lines of the third

quatrain where he says that that love does not change over the course of time; instead, it continues on even after the world has ended (“the edge of doom”).

Shakespeare uses lines thirteen and fourteen, the final couplet of the sonnet to assert just how truly he believes that love is everlasting and conquers all. Shakespeare tells his reader that if someone proves he is wrong about love, he will accept that he never wrote the following words and no man ever loved. He is adamant about this, and his tough words are what strengthen the sonnet itself. The speaker and poet himself are convinced that love is real, true and everlasting.

### **Critical analysis:**

The title of the poem is very denotative. Shakespeare employs figure of speech ‘alliteration’ to emphasize his thought of true love in the phrases, such as, ‘alters when it alteration finds’ and ‘bends with the remover to remove’. Shakespeare’s metaphorical expressions in the poem ‘the marriage of true minds’, ‘ever-fixed mark’, ‘star to every wand’ring bark’, ‘Time’s fool’, ‘bending sickle’s compass’, ‘rosy lips and cheeks’ and ‘brief hours and weeks’ make it suggestive and classical. The natural and physical imagery of ‘tempests’, ‘star’, ‘wandering bark’, ‘sickle’, ‘compass’ highlight the abstractness of the true love. The time denoting clauses, ‘Time’s fool’, ‘brief hours and weeks’ and ‘edge of doom’ brings atemporal texture in the pervading thought. Although the language and diction of the poem are metaphorical, it is lucid and soothing to ear. The contrast of thoughts created in the quatrain as well as in the phrases, such as, ‘alters when it alteration’ and ‘the remover to remove’ provide the poem uniqueness. Its rhyme scheme is abab, cdcd, efef, gg (three quatrains and one concluding couplet).

**Word and its meaning:** 1. impediments- obstructions, hindrances 2. alters- changes 3. alteration- option, choice 4. tempests- storm 5. wandering- rambling, erratic 6. bark- a sailing ship with many masts 7. Time’s fool- slave of time 8. sickle- an edge tool for cutting grass and crops 9. doom- an unpleasant or disastrous destiny

Questions to be handled:

- What is basic nature of ‘true love’ according to Shakespeare?
- Write a critical appreciation of Sonnet 116: ‘Let Me not to the Marriage of True Minds’.
- Discuss Shakespeare as a sonneteer with special reference of Sonnet 116.

\*\*\*\*\*