

SONNET 116 AND THE MANHUNT – LINKS

- Both of these poems discuss similar subject matter and come to the same conclusion despite there being over 500 years between the times that they were written.
- Both poems deal with the subject of the nature of true love, particularly in married relationships.
- Shakespeare describes what he thinks true love within a marriage should be like: Simon Armitage shows the reality of a very modern relationship and the love of the couple in it.
- Both poems share the same overall vision of what true love is like.

Structure of the poems

- Shakespeare used the form of the sonnet for all of his love poems and this one is no exception.
- His ideas about what love should be like are condensed into the fourteen line structure, making his choices of language and use of metaphors important ways to get across ideas to the reader accurately.
- Both poems use rhyme and rhythm to create poems that are both visually and aurally pleasing to the audience.
- In Shakespeare's poem he uses the structure of three quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet – 3 groups of four lines followed by a couplet – whereas Armitage uses the simpler form of rhyming couplets throughout his 26 line poem.
- The rhyme and rhythm of both poems gives them a melodic nature that lends itself to being read aloud.
- The original version of the sonnet – “sonnetti”- Italian for “little song”, is reflected in Shakespeare's sonnets, which in turn have influenced the writing of love poems for centuries since.

Analysis

- Shakespeare begins the sonnet with a bold statement about the nature of marriage:

“let me not to the marriage of true minds”

In this line Shakespeare is letting the reader know that true love is based on something more cerebral than simply physical appearances or lust. He believed that love should be, above all about mutual understanding, respect and intellectual equality: hence the “marriage” – or bringing together – of two suitably matched individuals .

- It appears that in the first instance Armitage disagrees with Shakespeare’s idea, however, it is soon clear that he believes that whatever comes after the enjoyment of the couple’s first physical encounter since Eddie’s return that is most important. Hence, Armitage goes on to discuss Laura and Eddie’s relationship in terms of emotional, rather than physical connection, just as Shakespeare does in his poem.

- Armitage begins with:

“after passionate nights and intimate days...”

The preposition “after” is the important part of the line as it indicates when the important part of their relationship is considered and that is after their physical reunion.

- In his poem Shakespeare goes on to express the idea that love lasts even when some aspect of the relationship has changed:

“which alters not when it alteration finds”

This corresponds to Armitage’s idea that true love does not change despite the changing of circumstances – Eddie’s return from battle with life-changing injuries.

Laura is still trying to love and understand her husband despite his injuries.

- Shakespeare reinforces this idea by writing that true love cannot be blown off course or removed by any third party – other person. This is usually someone else who becomes romantically entangled with one or other of the couple. However, in Laura and Eddie’s case it is the injuries that he has suffered: despite the fact that they are now a part of Eddie’s life, and inextricably linked, therefore, to his relationship with Laura. She will not stop loving him because someone else has tried to change him:

“bend with the remover to remove”

- The person here who has tried to alter the relationship and become part of their lives is the soldier who fired the bullet at Eddie – trying to destroy his life and his relationship as well.
- In the second quatrain of his poem Shakespeare begins to tell the reader what love actually is:

“it is an ever fixed mark”

We interpret this as meaning that love within a marriage is a permanent arrangement. He uses the idea of a “mark” on a person which sounds as though it is a physical mark that indicates the person is married – maybe a wedding ring that is always worn as a symbol of marriage. In the same way Eddie’s scars are permanent and will only fade as he is loved and cared for by Laura.

- A further idea about love that Shakespeare puts forward is that it will survive any storm that life throws at it. He uses the dramatic idea of a “tempest” to describe the storm – at sea- as something particularly violent, unexpected and difficult to survive. This, in turn is exactly what Eddie has been through his own “tempest” has been his injuries and the physical and mental effect they have had on him. Laura’s love, however will survive this tempest, just as Shakespeare said true love would.
- The metaphor used by Shakespeare that follows on from the tempest also fits in with the struggle for survival of Eddie and Laura’s relationship. When describing love Shakespeare writes:
“it is the star to every “wand’ring bark.”
 A “wand’ring bark” is a ship that is lost at sea and is using the North of ‘Pole’ star to navigate by. The star is the symbol of love in the poem and the “wand’ring bark” can easily be viewed as Laura and Eddie’s relationship. Thus’ the connection between the two poems develops and grows more intricate. This point also indicates to the reader the highly complex nature of love.
- The idea of the immeasurable nature of love features in both poems. Shakespeare actually states that we may think we can measure the distance of the North Star from the earth, but actually cannot be absolutely sure of it: in the same way we may think we can measure love but cannot really. This idea is presented in Armitage’s poem as the love between the two as being impossible to measure – they

probably thought they knew the strength of their affection before Eddie's injuries but, in fact, they were wrong.

- Shakespeare continues to write about the true and lasting nature of love when he personifies both love and time to create the image of a battle between the two, which ordinarily would be won by time. Time is love's enemy. Age and decay will affect everyone but love will outlast these physical signs of beauty if it is "true" love:

"Love's not Time's fool"

Here Shakespeare is using the idea that time will make a fool out of love by causing physical decay. However, this is not true as love will survive the ravages of time and endure into old age.

- Shakespeare extends his image of Time as Love's enemy by presenting the idea that time does not just consist of brief amounts but will last until "the edge of doom" or judgement day – after death. Shakespeare is clearly telling the reader that love will also last as long as this. Armitage also plays with the idea of death in his poem, and in fact has described it as a kind of memorial himself. Eddie himself does not die in the poem but a part of him has died clearly, and so this relationship is proof that love will last beyond death, even though it may not be full physical death here.
- Armitage is also very conscious of the effects of time on love in his poem but in a slightly different way. He imagines that time is the healer of the relationship and only with the passage of time will Laura and Eddie's relationship begin to develop. The phrase "only then" is repeatedly used at the start of some of the couplets, reminding the reader that in this case time is not love's enemy but its friend, helping the relationship to heal. The final line of the poem refers to time and its effect on their relationship:

"Then, and only then did I come close"

Using Laura's voice, Armitage acknowledges that it has taken time for her to rediscover her closeness to Eddie. It also indicates that their relationship is not the same as it was before – and perhaps never will be – but they will strive to rediscover the love they had for each other.

- His final couplet is where he speaks directly to the reader to say that if he is wrong about love all of his writing is worthless and that, in fact, no man has ever been in love.
- There are some worthwhile and interesting links to be made between the language used in the two poems. Shakespeare's use of phrases is connected to the changing state of love – **"bends with the remover"**, **"alters when it alteration"**, **"within his bending"**. These phrases can be compared to the phrases used by Armitage to describe the physical damage inflicted on Eddie: **"blown hinge"**, **"fractured rudder"**, **"grazed heart"**. Both poets are thinking about the changes in the relationship.
- The titles of the two poems are important for different reasons. The original full title of Armitage's poem was Laura's story – The manhunt and is a very intimate and personal reaction to the injuries inflicted on Eddie, as witnessed by Simon Armitage. He was asked to produce a documentary for Channel Four, which explored the link between the physical injuries of soldiers and the effect of them on their mental state. The poem was a result of his meeting with Laura and Eddie and is a tribute to the strength of their relationship. Shakespeare's poem is number 116 out of 154 sonnets he wrote during his career. It is a much more general look at the theory of true love and what Shakespeare imagined it to be like. It is not specifically about any couple or individual and so, is much less personal than The Manhunt.