

Edmund Spenser's Amoretti

Edmund Spenser was one of the greatest poets of the English Renaissance. He was born in London in the year 1552 or 1553 (little is known about his birth) and died in London on 13th January 1599, and was buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. He is recognized as one of the premier craftsmen of nascent Modern English verse, and is often considered one of the greatest poets in the English language.

Spenser published his first volume of poetry, *The Shepheardes Calender* in 1579, dedicating it to the poet Sir Philip Sidney. His masterpiece is the epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*, which was written in honor of Queen Elizabeth 1 and in celebration of the Tudor dynasty. The first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1590, and a second set of three books were published in 1596. Spenser originally indicated that he intended the poem to consist of twelve books, although it remained incomplete. Spenser published numerous relatively short poems, almost all of which consider love or sorrow. Among these poems *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, *Fowre Hymns*, *Complaints poems*, *Amoretti sonnets*, *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion* etc. are worth mentioning.

Amoretti is a sonnet cycle written by Edmund Spenser. It is a series of 89 love sonnets dedicated to Elizabeth Boyle, the lady of his dreams whom he pursues and eventually marries in 1594. The term '*amoretti*' is literally defined as 'little loves' or 'little cupids'.

The tradition of writing a sequence of many sonnets, based on the *Petrarchan* model, was initiated in English by Sir Philip Sidney in *Astrophel and Stella* in 1580. It is a prolonged argument by the speaker, Astrophel, aimed at overcoming his mistress's indifference and chastity. The same tradition was followed by Spenser, in his *Amoretti*, who employs similar arguments, though it ends with the possibility that the lovers will unite and eventually marry.

Amoretti was first published in 1595 in London by William Ponsonby. It was printed as part of a volume entitled *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*. The volume included the sequence of 89 sonnets, and *Epithalamion*, a marriage ode celebrating his marriage to Elizabeth Boyle after what appears to have been an impassioned courtship in 1594. The volume memorializes Spenser's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, a young, well-born Anglo-Irish woman, and the couple's wedding on June 11, 1594. In the sonnets of *Amoretti* Spenser succeeds in 'immortalizing the name of his bride to be...' by devices of word play.

In these cycles of sonnets Spenser chronicles the progress of his love for his beloved 'Elizabeth Boyle'. Up until Sonnet 63, the sonnets primarily focus on the frustration of unreturned romantic desires. The speaker is in an almost constant state of emotional turmoil and frustrated hopes. His beloved refuses to look favorably upon his suit, so his reaction ranges from despairing self-deprecation to angry outburst against her stubbornness. In Sonnet 63,

the *Amoretti* undergoes a drastic change in tone. The long-sought beloved has acceded to the speaker's request, making her his fiancée. Hence the sonnets that follow Sonnet 63 celebrate the happiness of love shared between two people - Spenser and Elizabeth, as well as celebrating divine love. However, Sonnet 86 marks some mischief maker's intervention which brings misunderstanding and separation between the lovers. Sonnets 87 through 89 dwell upon the speaker's misery at being separated from his beloved, but there is an implied expectation that they will, eventually, be reunited. And this is followed by the *Epithalamion*, where the courtship finally ends in marriage.

The frustration of unrequited love is a common theme in the Elizabethan sonnets; however, the celebration of successful love is largely a deviation from the typical themes. In addition, Spenser focuses on courtship and the power dynamic in successful relationships, particularly portraying that women want to have the authority in a romantic relationship. Moreover, he discusses true beauty and the ways in which writing poetry can immortalize things that otherwise cannot be immortalized.

So far structure is concerned Spenser's sonnet shows great originality in metre and style. Spenser follows the form of English sonnet with certain innovations: the first line of the second quatrain rhymes with the last line of the first stanza, and the first line of the third quatrain rhymes with the last line of the second stanza, making a rhyme scheme of abab bcbc cdcd ee. This variety of sonnet is named as Spenserian sonnet. The interlocking rhyme scheme of the Spenserian sonnet provides a more distinct connectivity between the quatrains compared to the English sonnet.

The *Amoretti* sonnets carry clearer note of personal feelings compared to what can be found in the usual complementary series. Here, Spenser expresses his thoughts with facility, grace and neatness. They avoid all obscurity and possess a simplicity that is always enchanting. Each sonnet is an independent poem itself, and the whole of *Amoretti* seems to have lyric-ness.

In spite of being innovative, subtle and skillful craftsmanship, *Amoretti* has been largely overlooked and unappreciated by critics, who see it as inferior to other major Renaissance sonnet sequences in the Petrarchan tradition. In addition, it has been overshadowed by Spenser's other famous works, most notably *The Faerie Queene*, his allegorical masterpiece.

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