
Unit -2 □ Spenser: Amoretti, Prothalamion. The Faerie Queene

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2.1 □ Objectives

1. To introduce you to areas you need to negotiate for a better understanding of a few Spenserian and Shakespearean poems.
2. To acquaint you with Edmund Spenser and help you to understand, analyze and appreciate some of his poems namely, 2 sonnets from his *Amoretti*, a stanza from his *Prothalcunion* and 2 excerpts from *The Faerie Queene*.
3. To acquaint you with William Shakespeare as a poet and help you to understand, analyze and appreciate 6 Shakespearean Sonnets.
4. To increase your awareness of some of the more modern responses to these 'old' verses.

2.2 □ Introduction:

This Section takes a close look at some poems of Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616), easily two of the greatest and most popular poets not just of their age but of all times. As Spenser was an Elizabethan poet and Shakespeare's career as a poet was confined more or less to the Age of Elizabeth, you do need to know a little about the period in general and some factors/aspects in particular.

2.3 □ Edmund Spenser : Life and Works

Born in or near 1552, Edmund Spenser was perhaps the son of John Spenser of East Smithfield in London, though this relationship is far from certain. Edmund Spenser's education and educational achievements have been well documented. He began writing sonnets when he was at Cambridge and later along with Philip Sidney and a few others formed the literary club *Areopagus*. In 1579 he began writing his masterpiece, *The Faerie Queene*. By 1580 Edmund Spenser had a definite political identity as well. It was Raleigh who, after reading through Spenser's draft of *The Faerie Queene*, encouraged the poet to join him on a trip to London. In 1590, Raleigh presented the celebrated poet to the Queen and this meeting and the court patronage thereafter boosted his poetic career. His close association with Leicester and Essex too yielded results. Spenser married Elizabeth Boyle in 1594. By 1596 most of Spenser's work was completed. Soon after, misfortune struck the Spenser family and his castle was burnt, forcing him to flee. His final home was London and he died there on a Saturday in January 1599 'for lack of bread', according to Ben Jonson. To pay their tribute to him, poets carried his coffin and threw their verses and pens into his grave. Edmund Spenser lies close to Geoffrey Chaucer in Westminster Abbey.

Some of Edmund Spenser's best known works are *The Shepherd's Calendar*, *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, *The Faerie Queene*, *Prothalamion*, short *Hymns* etc. *View of the Present State of Ireland* is his controversial prose work.

Influences

Many poets of great renown have unknowingly contributed to the making of this "prince of poets". Humanist education had already introduced Spenser to Homer, Cato, Caesar, Horace, Lucan, Cicero, Erasmus, and Vives. To Plato and Aristotle Spenser owes his concept of Perfection and Justice. For the idea of Beauty being synonymous with Truth, Spenser had to turn to Plato and Pico della Mirandola. *The Faerie Queene* is a strong reminder of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Ariosto, Tasso, Ronsard and Boiardo to name a few. Let us not forget the influence of the Bible, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the *Bestiaries* as well as that of the anonymous writers of *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Geoffrey Chaucer about whom he writes, "thine own spirit, which doth in me survive". John Erskine Hankins considers Francesco Piccolomini a very strong influence on Spenser, especially in *The Faerie Queene*.

2.4 □ Background

The Elizabethan Age (1558-1603)

As is evident from the name, this is the period in British history when Queen Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII, was at the helm of affairs. After some turbulence and religious unrest, England, in her Age, witnessed unprecedented mobility and transformation and perhaps the "most impressive surge forward" to emerge as a powerful nation, second to none. She shaped itself into a "mercantile, industrialized Protestant country". No age, as you are aware, is quite without its anxieties but notwithstanding disturbances and bloodshed, England's military power, maritime success, explorations, colonization, strengthening economic system aroused such fervour that to the Elizabethans, theirs was a "brave new world", a world that was on its way to becoming truly 'modern'.

2.5 □ The Renaissance and The Reformation

The impact of two highly complex movements, the Renaissance or "rebirth" and the Reformation (led by Martin Luther), on the culture of this nation as a whole, one may say, was tremendous. Though the movements were not confined to this Age, I must mention a few of the features for they will be of help in your understanding of the two poets. Renaissance England (arbitrarily said to have stretched from More's *Utopia* to Milton) witnessed the steady rise of the vernacular and the development as well as the enrichment of the English language. Increasing literacy and "intellectual interests" sent the young to Universities and many of them took to writing eagerly and instinctively. In fact, the "first

demonstration of England's literary power was in poetry." Manuscripts were widely circulated among the "literati in courtly society" and the printing press made texts available. The humanists or classical scholars of the Renaissance directed attention towards Greek and Roman literature, a veritable treasure-house for all ambitious writers who not only studied the masters carefully but also imitated their style. Translations of the classics into the vernacular made them more accessible to readers.

Another important feature was increasing individualism, fuelled by the Renaissance as well as the Reformation. It was a "man-centred" world so to say and the Renaissance man was the "complete man" with a spirit of adventure, dynamism and optimism and the desire to live life to the fullest by striving, seeking and achieving. The Reformation, a religious movement that advocated a direct interaction between man and God, "sought a return to the Scriptures" and demanded strict piety and engagement in theological discussions. The many translations of the Bible and the bulk of religious writings bear evidence to this urge. However, the Reformation had once been closely related to Nationalism when England as a nation had been expected to break away from the Roman Catholic Church. These two movements, with certain basic similarities as well as broad differences, shaped both England and the English in the Elizabeth Age.

2.6 □ Women : History and Poetry

As seven of the eleven poems in your Syllabus are directly/indirectly on or about women, it is imperative for you to have some idea of the social position of "the lady" of the Renaissance.

It was no privilege to have been born -a woman in-the Elizabethan Age even though the Age was named after one. How many of today's women, I wonder, can even think of existing in comfortable homes with no voice, no identity and no legal rights' over money and property after marriage? The Elizabethan lady could. She had to. Not for nothing did Joan Kelly question, "Did women have a Renaissance?"

The Elizabethan Age frowned on and at female freedom and did not spare either the English Queen or Mary Queen of Scots. Men like John Knox and Giovanni Correr stated with vehemence, "it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire over man" (*Is! Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous regiment of Women*, 1558), or lashed out, "to govern states is not the business of women". So England's Queen had to announce before her troops at Tilbury, "...I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England".

But within the aristocratic families in particular, men ruled unchallenged, their authority endorsed by the Church, by Elizabethan society as well as by Bible. In that fiercely patriarchal set up, daughters were their fathers' property, to be disposed of at will. Remember

Portia and the caskets left by her father in *The Merchant of Venice*? Thereafter in her husband's home a woman was expected to justify her existence by being a good wife—docile, submissive, obedient, virtuous and, of course, silent. A vocal woman was suspect. Read Spenser's *Epithalamion* which publicly celebrates the poet's achievement in fashioning his proud mistress into a humble, virtuous Christian wife. Still most women of the Age had to look upon marriage and child-rearing as their only vocation and only a few like the Queen, the Countess of Pembroke, and Elizabeth Gary went ahead and wrote verses and plays like their male counterparts. But let me mention that Gary's play *The Tragedy of Miriam* (the central issue was a woman's right to speak) was neither performed on the public stage nor did it carry the female playwright's name on the title page for obvious reasons.

It was in such an Age and within such a society that, in their poems, Philip Sidney Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel chose to place women on a pedestal and to woo her with the ardour of a devotee and thereafter wait patiently and endlessly for one kind word or a single tender glance from her. Hear Spenser professes in *Amoretti* VII that if the lady looks "askew" he dies "as one with lightning fired". The lady of the Sonnet was indeed empowered to captivate her man (at times men) and reduce him to sighs and tears by refusing to reciprocate his love and adoration. So there is Sidney appealing to his Stella in Sonnet LIX :

Deere, why make you more of a dog then me?
If he doe loue, I burne, I burne in loue;

and Daniel, as though in agreement, laments, "Fair is my love, and cruel as she's fair".

Of the many influences, secular as well as religious (the Cult of Virgin Mary), the medieval courtly love tradition may be considered an important factor influencing these English poets in fashioning their sonnets. It was "a doctrine about love between the sexes, including an elaborate code governing the aristocratic lovers" and it demanded that the lover played the worshipper and the lady deified, as it were, basked in such attention and adulation. The desire for physical intimacy was subservient to the enrichment of the mind and the spirit. For such a lady the lover did peak and pine, sigh and cry. Just look at the yawning gap between fact and fiction. So when you read Elizabethan sonnets idealizing women, do spare a thought for the lady of the Renaissance for whom there was little respite from male domination and suppression.

2.7 □ Sonnets

Eight of the eleven prescribed poems are Sonnets and it is thus essential for you to learn more about the Sonnet tradition, recurrent themes, structure etc. Do refer to this section when you take up individual Sonnets for study.

(a) Sonnet Tradition

A WITLESS gallant a young wench that wooed
(Yet his dul! spirit her not one jot could move),
Entreated me, as e'er I wished his good,
To write him but one sonnet to his love;

These four lines from Michael Drayton's *Idea* (Sonnet 21) fixes the Sonnet as a lover's weapon. The formula is as follows: If you happen to fall in love write a sonnet, idealize your mistress, deify her if you can and then wait for results with hope and expectations. (For a female-voiced 'complaint' read *A Lover's Complaint* attributed to Daniel). In a way Sidney's ardour for Penelope (Stella) set the trend and with great zeal poets began to write about unrequited love, and sigh, like a furnace as Shakespeare says, and yearn for a mistress, both indifferent and uncaring. In Elizabethan England such sonnets generally came in groups or sequences (*Astrophel and Stella* (108 sonnets), *Amoretti* (88) *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (154), and with no sustained narrative.

While writing *Loving in Truth* Sidney may have rebuked himself with the lines, " 'Fool', said my Muse to me, 'look into thy heart and write' ", but when it actually came to writing most sonneteers, Sidney included, looked into the works of their predecessors and contemporaries more keenly and attentively than into their own "hearts". Alighieri Dante (1265-1321) and Francesco Petrarca or Petrarch (1304-74) of Italy have been the strongest influence on sonnet writers of Elizabethan England. Once two enterprising Englishmen, Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard Surrey, introduced England to this form of personal poetry in the early sixteenth century and, to quote Tillyard, "let the Renaissance into English verse", sonneteering became a fashion, as it were, with almost every poet in the country writing, borrowing, imitating, plagiarizing as and when required. If Dante had a Beatrice as the subject of his Sonnets and Petrarch his Laura, the English poets could not lag far behind. Surrey's lady Elizabeth appears in his verses as "fair Geraldine", Penelope Devereux is Sidney's Stella, Elizabeth Boyle is Spenser's mistress and so on. For the present I have omitted the name of William Shakespeare, that too quite deliberately.

2.8 □ Themes

Your reading of these Sonnets will make you sense the two poets' preoccupation with Love and Time, the former constructive, capable of rejuvenating and the latter destructive, eager to deface and erase.

(!) Love:

Much of Sonnet writing of the Elizabethan Age amounts to composing love poems addressing one closest to the lover-poet's heart. In the Sonnet Sequence of Spenser and the W.H. Sonnets of Shakespeare we do expect and we do find an addressee/addressees

demanding special attention and inspiring the poets to reveal their feelings (sincere or feigned) with unrestrained ardour, sometimes at the expense of dignity and self-respect. Spenser stoops before a woman he eventually marries but Shakespeare's warm feelings for a "lovely boy" and passionate appeals to him raise disturbing questions even if one keeps in mind the cult of 'male friendship' during the Renaissance. Issues get more complicated in the Dark Lady Sonnets. Here Shakespeare conventional love verses involving a man and his lady. He displays feelings which refuse to be patterned and are strikingly different from those of his many predecessors and contemporary sonneteers.

(ii) Time

Derek Traversi says, "Renaissance, feeling regarded Time as the enemy and solvent of personal experience, which it wears remorselessly into insensibility". Whatever is rooted in Time will be destroyed by Time. No other calculation/equation works. The tussle is between the belief that Time is both patterned and controlled by God and the realization that Time rolls on with an energy of its own and is thus totally and absolutely unpredictable and unstoppable. Both Spenser and Shakespeare show intense awareness of Time's intentions and dark threats.

Ageing, though a part of life, has always been difficult to accept. Medical literature supports Shakespeare's division of "masculine identity into youth and age." Thomas Elyot, for example, in *The Castell of Helth*, categorizes the 60-upward stage as "age decrepit," which lasts "until the last tyme of life". Old age has been further divided into three parts, "green", "middle" and "decrepit". The calculation does little to cheer the spirit for what is youth but just a few speeding years to be followed by "sable hair" and a second childhood, "*sans* everything". So in many of Spenser and Shakespeare's sonnets, one does hear "Time's winged chariot hurrying near".-Ironically, Man's success in freeing himself from his dependence on the Sun by measuring Time and splitting it into units, has made him most painfully aware of the passage of Time and also of his own mortality.

However, what does not allow a pall of gloom to settle over these poems is the poets' resolve to accept Time's challenge and prepare their defence accordingly. After Ovid, they look upon their own verses as effective antidotes because their powerful lines can, they assert, eternalize their lovers. Love too is changeless they claim-; it fortifies lovers to withstand Time's blows.

2.9 □ Sonnet Structure

You are well aware of the fact that a Sonnet is a powerful 14-lined poem (See paper III Module 10 Unit 59.1) that was brought into England from Italy. English poets, including Spenser and Shakespeare, experimented with the theme and the structure of the sonnet and

one of the major changes, as you know, has been to replace the Petrarchan model with the English. Petrarch's *octave* (8-line grouping, rhyming *abba abba*) and *sestet* (grouping of the 6 final lines rhyming *cde cde/cd cd cd* etc.) have been substituted successfully a 4+4+4+2 division i.e. 3 quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet. The metre, iarr pentameter in this case, has been retained but not the *volte* or turn after line 8. Spenser's rhyme scheme, more often than not, is ABAB BCBC, CDCD, EE while Shakespeare more comfortable with the ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG rhyme scheme of Surrey, not *c* used it regularly but also perfected it.

Before I begin the next Section on Edmund Spenser which is to be followed another on William Shakespeare, I wish to mention that for a better understanding individual poems as well as general topics, you may have to turn back to this Unit as when required. Please note that numbers within brackets indicate Sonnet numbers.

2.10 □ Text : *Amoretti*

Amoretti is Edmund Spenser's Sonnet Sequence consisting of 88 love poems (! we count Sonnet 35 which appears a second time as Sonnet 83), printed along with *Epithalamion* in 1595. It is preceded by an appeal to Sir Robert Needhamknight.

The Text

2.10.1 Sonnet IX

LONG-WHILE I sought to what I might compare
those powerful eyes, which lighten my dark spright,
yet find I nought on earth to which I dare
resemble th' image of their goodly light.
Not to the Sun: for they do shine by night;
nor to the Moone: for they are changed never;
nor to the Stars: for they have purer sight;
nor to the fire: for they consume not ever;
Nor to the lightning: for they still persevere;
nor to the Diamond: for they are more tender;
nor unto Crystal: for nought may them sever;
nor unto glass: such baseness might offend her;
Then to the Maker self they likest be,
whose light doth lighten all that here we see.

Explanation

The lover finds it difficult, if not impossible, to describe the beauty and the sparkle of

his lady's bright eyes which have the power not only to captivate his heart and elevate his spirit but also to light up the whole world. These "powerful eyes" have no peers and there is nothing on earth which is even remotely comparable to them and their "goodly light". They surpass the Sun because they do shine brightly even at night, they are superior to the Moon as well because they are steadfast. The stars twinkle but with the aid of borrowed light whereas the lady's eyes "have purer sight". Though bright and warm, the lady's eyes are not as murderous as Fire because they do not "consume" and destroy as fire does. They are not comparable to lightning, diamond, crystal and glass. The lightning flashes and is gone before one can cry 'Behold' but the light in the lady's eyes continues to shine. The eyes are gentle, tender and not as hard as sparkling diamonds or crystals. The mistress, he is certain, will take offence if her eyes are compared to base glass. Finally the poet looks beyond the Earth as he realizes that her eyes have been created by the Creator with infinite care and are like His which "lighten" up all that human eyes can see.

Critical Analysis

Amoretti is a "fictionalized" version of Spenser's own courtship of his second wife Elizabeth Boyle and each Sonnet in the sequence corresponds to one of the days preceding Spenser's second marriage on the eleventh of June 1594. An interesting mixture of personal emotions and conventional and formulaic utterances, *Amoretti* reminds the reader of Dante's *Vita nuova* and Petrarch's sonnets celebrating their love for Beatrice and Laura respectively. *Amoretti* has been described by Alan Sinfield as an "unprecedented puritan humanist adaptation of the sonnet sequence to a relationship which ends in marriage". And this is its basic difference with the other Sequences where to love is to lose and lament.

This is otherwise a conventional love poem in the courtly tradition with the man deifying his lady. Spenser uses a series of comparisons to convey to his readers not just the extraordinary quality of two beautiful eyes but also the intensity of his emotion as well as the depth of his feelings for a woman in whose eyes he sees the reflection of the Creator. To Neoplatonists, Petrarch's attraction for Laura is more man's yearning for the Good/ God. Spenser's love for his lady too demands a similar interpretation and the artistic intertwining of strands romantic and earthly as well as religious/spiritual does support the claim that Spenser's love sonnets have ties with Christian liturgy.

Some readers may want to question and gauge the sincerity of Spenser's feelings for his lady. Is he actually enamoured of his lady's bright eyes, we wonder, or is this a simple case of borrowing because in *Astrophel, and Stella* (1580-4), for instance, Sidney too finds in Stella's eyes "beames so bright" and Drayton's lady's "sacred eyes" (55) too disperse their rays "with...sovereign grace" (43)?

Did such high praise, showered at random and showered indiscriminately, so exhaust Shakespeare that he could not but give himself and his readers some respite from this

cloying sweetness by assuring them in his own poem, “My mistresses’ eyes are nothing like the Sun” (130)? But, let us remember, Shakespeare in the Sonnets is not necessarily the only Shakespeare. Turn to *Romeo and Juliet* to hear Romeo say that Juliet’s eyes are sharper than twenty swords. Spenser’s mistress’ eyes are gentle in Sonnet IX but in Sonnet X they flash fire causing “huge massacres”. As you read on you will find more of such contradictory statements but they need not worry you unduly for you are to keep-in mind the fact that all these sonnets, termed personal poems and often looked upon as keys that unlock the poets’ heart, are no more than end results of some vigorous intellectual exercise.

Form : Language and Style

The simplicity of style and language of Sonnet IX matches the professed sincerity of the lover and the depth of his feelings. Rhetoric, often associated with pretence and insincerity, has been sparingly used. Sonnet IX is based on a series of comparisons but each is so simple and direct that there is no chance of the meaning getting buried under a morass of words. Spenser has chosen some of the brightest objects ranging from the Sun to glass so that his readers are left in no doubt about the sparkle and warmth of two precious eyes. Verbosity has been avoided and the practice has paid rich dividends. Here the use of Anaphora is particularly effective. The repeated use of the “nor” at the beginning of 8 lines indicates the poet’s firm conviction.

This is a Spenserian sonnet hence the octave and the sestet have been replaced by three quatrains through which thoughts and ideas roll and in the couplet they reach a definite conclusion. The rhyme scheme is abab, bcbc, cccc, dd. obviously different from the others.

Word Notes

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Long..compare | It is a difficult comparison to make and the poet requires time. |
| 2. Lighten...spright | The eyes have the power to purify and illuminate. In Sonnet XVI too Spenser writes about the ‘fair eyes’ of his “love’s immortal light”. |
| 3. Nought | nothing |
| 4. Not...Sun | Note the tonal difference between this expression and the first line of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130. |
| 5. fon.never | The reference is to the waxing and the waning of the moon. |
| 7. consume-ever | The lady’s eyes do not destroy. |
| 8. Nor to..persever | Once again the poet lays emphasis on constancy as opposed to restlessness and changeability. |
| 10. more tender | gentler and softer. |
| 11. Crystal | transparent natural object like quartz. |

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 12. Such..her | The lady's integrity is beyond question and the eyes cannot be compared to anything suggestive of slightest baseness like glass. |
| 13. Then..be | The lady assu'mes divine proportions and is one with her Maker or God. |
| 14. whose..see | God's Grace illuminates the world. |

Conclusion

Spenser's tone in *Amoretti* IX is restrained as in the lady's eyes the lover sees gentleness and benevolence. Here she is not one about whom he could complain (as in Sonnet 20) that:

.....her foot she in my neck doth place,
and tread my life down in the lowly floor.

The poet is at peace in Sonnet IX reminding readers that unlike his peers he wooed and won.

2.10.2 Sonnet LXXV (75)

I have deliberately retained the archaic spellings in this Sonnet. It would do well to compare it with Sonnet IX where the spellings have been modernized.

The Text

ONE day I wrote her name upon the strand,
but came the waues and washed it away:
agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
but came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.
Vayne man, sayd she, that doest in vaine assay,
a mortal! thing so to immortalize,
for I my selue shall lyke to this decay,
and eek my name bee wyped out lykewize.
Not so, (quod I) let baser things deuize,
to dy in dust, but you shall Hue by fame:
my verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
and in the heuens wryte your glorious name.
Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
our lou'e shall Hue, and later life renew.

Explanation

The poet and his beloved are by the sea and she watches him write her name painstakingly on the sand again and again as the waves keep rolling on and washing it away.

The lady rebukes him mildly for not facing facts and making vain attempts to immortalize what is transient and 'impermanent. She speaks words of wisdom and reminds him of the inevitable that is to come. Just as her name is being callously wiped off by the tide (standing for Time), so will she eventually be erased by Time's relentless hand. Suddenly with firm confidence and conviction the poet assures her that baser things may face destruction but she will remain alive in the memories of men. His verse will eternalize her. Death will claim others but will fail to efface the lovers as they will live on mainly on the strength of their love for each other as well as on that of his verse, his powerful lines.

Critical Analysis

Sonnet 75 begins as a conventional love poem with a somewhat disturbed lover as the main speaker. The note of dejection with which the Sonnet begins is a strong reminder of human helplessness before the all-powerful Time. Perhaps more sensitive than ordinary men, poets feel the pains of their mortality more sharply and react more strongly. However, in most Sonnets mistress' are lovingly addressed, grievances are voiced meekly and appeals are made passionately but with little or no response from the other side. But this is one instance where the lady of the Renaissance has been considerably vocal and intelligently so. The lady-love understands his disappointment and cautions him wisely. Her logic is perfect, her vision clear. Death is inevitable and it is but human vanity, amounting to sheer folly, to even dream of an escape. In this context what deserves special attention is the unexpected absence of bitterness and pessimism even when human limitation is spelt out in no uncertain terms. Time has neither been condemned as a tyrant nor has its authority been accepted timidly. The lady has not even been so cautioned :

Make haste therefore sweet love, whilst it is its prime,
for none can call again the passed time.

(*Amoretti* LXX)

Instead confidence and conviction arm the poet, as it were, to fight an apparently unequal battle and that too with dignity. Death is not for them, the lover assures, for he holds the key to immortality. "My verse your vertues rare shall eternize", declares the poet. Names written on sand have but a short life, but no tide can sweep away his verse. It may escape notice that Spenser marks only the lowly as Time's victim. By 'baser things' has he meant all who are of inferior status or all who have not been ennobled by love? This is followed by the assertion that their love is beyond Time's reach. Lines 13 and 14 affirm that Time can touch no more than the corporal frame while love and marriage are eternal and may be cherished ever in Heaven.

Do remember to turn to this Sonnet when you read Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 and 116 (in your syllabus) for what has been claimed in *Amoretti* 75 has been separately proclaimed in these two—the permanence of verse in 55 and the stability of love in 16.

Form : Language and Style

In spite of the use of archaic words and spellings Sonnet LXXV makes easy reading. The sonnet opens in the smooth and easy manner of a simple narrative and our interest is arrested at once by the dramatic beginning, “ONE day I wrote her name upon the strand”. Later the tone becomes conversational. There is no unnecessary ornamentation that can detract attention from the central issue of mortality/immortality. The word ‘dust’ with its Biblical implication indicates human nothingness. Only occasionally does Spenser play with words. Read line 4 and note the use of two ‘vains’. Note the use of archaic words such as “eek” and “quod”. Spenser’s use of alliteration in this sonnet is also to be marked, so also his use of the V and T which adds softness to the verse as a whole to match the mellow mood.

The ‘story’ of Sonnet 75 unfolds itself through 3 quatrains and is concluded in the couplet. Spenser’s perfect handling of vowels and the wavelike rhythm of his poem can only be appreciated when the sonnet is read aloud. Note the rhyme scheme abab bcbc cd ee, distinctly different from the Petrarchan.

Word Notes

1. strand portion of the sea-shore that lies between tide marks.
2. waues waves ..
3. agayne ... hand. wrote the name a second time or wrote it again.
4. tyde tide.
 made...pray the tide like a beast of prey ruins his work.
5. Vayne conceited.
 Vaine..assay The word has been used to mean fruitless. (Note the difference in spelling and meaning between ‘vayne’ and vaine)
7. selue self,
8. eek also.
 eek..lykewize The Lady says that in the same way one day she too .will be erased.
9. quod said,
 deuize talk
 let baser.deuize the desire to die and be wiped off should be in the minds of the lowly

10. dy in dust to return to the dust from where we have sprung into existence,
 liue by fame: to be remembered having gained fame.
11. vertues..eternize the rare qualities will be made immortal
12. heuens heavens,
 wryte write.
13. whenas when.
- death..subdew death will conquer all.
14. our.renew Their love will be intouched by Death and will give them a
 fresh lease of life.

2.10.3 Conclusion

New historicists focus on the play of power in Spenser's sonnets. The lover is the humble vassal enslaved by the lady's beauty, charm and grace and the Lady, in turn, has been empowered to captivate infirm men. men with frail hearts and so torment them that they cannot but call her:

...more cruel and more salvage wild,
 then either Lion or the Lioness.:
 shames not to be with guiltless blood defiled... *Amoretti XX*

Alexander Dunlop finds it profitable to read Amoretti as "a dramatization of the process of learning to love". By stages the lover-poet progresses from a state of normal human ignorance to a state of relative wisdom concerning love. With experience the lover gains maturity. In the Amoretti Spenser has attempted a binding of elements of the neoplatonic tradition to a sixteenth century Protestant framework. Gary Waller contends that this Sonnet Sequence sets out "a pattern of desire that leads not to frustration and defeat but to marriage and mutual submission to God's will."

2.11 □ Text: Prothalamion

A Spousal Verse made by

Edm. Spenser.

IN HONOVR OF THE DOV-
 ble mariage of the two Honorable & vertuous
 Ladies, the Ladie Elizabeth and the Ladie {Catherine
 Somerset. Daughters to the Right Honourable the
 Earle of Worcester and espoused to the two worthie

Gentlemen M. *Henry Gilford*, and
M. *William Peter Esquyers*.

+
+++++
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AT LONDON.

Printed for *William Ponsonby*.
1596.

Edmund Spenser's last complete published poem *Prothalamion* is preceded by this dedication indicating the occasion of the poem, the date and the purpose. *Prothalamion* literally stands for a song in honour of a wedding.

The Poem

One morning the poet chances to see beautiful nymphs gathering flowers for the fast-approaching Bridal day. Soon he sees two beautiful swans, white and radiant, coming down the Lee. The nymphs welcome the birds with flowers and one sings a lovely song wishing them endless peace and prosperity. The swans, unparalleled in their beauty, float gracefully till they reach "mery London" where they turn into "faire brides" promised to two noble lords.

The Text

2.11.1 Sonnet III

With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe,
Come softly swimming downe along the Lee;
Two fairer Birds I yet did neuer see:
The snow which doth the top of *Pindus* strew,
Did neuer whiter shew,
Nor Jove himselfe when he a Swan would be
For loue of *Leda*, whiter did appeare:
Yet *Leda* was they say as white as he,
Yet not so white as these, nor nothing neare;
So purely white they were,
That euen the gentle streame, the which them bare,
Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare
To wet their silken feathers, least they might
Soyle their fair plumes with water not so fayre,
And mar their beauties bright.
That shone as heauens light,

Against their Brydale day, which was not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

Explanation

On a beautiful and “calme” day the poet suddenly witnesses a heavenly scene. Even as he stares wonder-struck at a “Flocke of nymphs”, he notices two beautiful swans “softly swimming” down the Lee. The poet stares spellbound as their white feathers, whiter than the snow on the top of mount Pindus, glitter in the sunlight, the birds’ feathers seem whiter than the feathers of the Swan in whose shape Jove had approached the Spartan queen Leda, beautiful and as fair-skinned as Jove himself. Such is the pristine whiteness of the feathers that the gentle stream, so it seems to the poet, forbids the waves to touch and wet their “silken feathers” lest they mar their flawless fairness. The touch of the ‘unclean’ waters can defile the feathers that shine as bright as heaven’s own light. The bridal day is not too far away and the poet entreats the sweet Thames to flow gently till he ends his song.

Critical Analysis

In the words of Harry Berger Jr. this spousal verse is “itself a celebration, a progress or water-fete in honour of the double betrothal”. In Prothalamion, a descriptive poem, Spenser succeeds in nearly transporting his readers to the bank of the Thames to stand with him and watch a glorious sight. As you know, celebrating occasions such as a betrothal, a wedding, or perhaps a birth in verse was quite a common practice in Spenser’s time and, unlike Shakespeare, poets identified the object of their felicitation. Thus Spenser’s spousal verse, preceded by the names of the dedicatee, has indeed immortalized men and women who would have otherwise passed into oblivion.

The third stanza concerns itself entirely with the swans’ beauty and stateliness, both beyond compare. As in Amoretti IX, here too Spenser relies heavily on a series of comparisons to make it a real experience for the readers. The fairness of the swans’ plumes, it is obvious symbolizes purity and chastity. Hence the birds (which turn into brides) have been made whiter than Leda, violated and defiled. Was it Spenser’s way of pleasing the ladies and the lords by presenting the brides as innocent and angelic virgins? Possibly.

Mark the reference to Jove and Leda. Allusions to the Ovidian myths of Leda and the swan and to the Virgilian myth of Venus and her swans show Spenser presenting himself as “an Orphic poet serving a national ideal of wedded love.” Words such as “For loue of Leda” bring to mind the love tale of the two legendary figures and the romance and the impending marriage of two lovely ladies with two handsome young lords.

Scholars find it satisfying to compare Spenser’s *Epithalamion and Prothalamion* much to the letter’s disadvantage. In *Epithalamion*, celebrating Spenser’s own marriage, Selincourt finds a “magic union of the lover’s passion with deep religious feeling.” *Prothalamion* lacks this depth but there is evidence of the typical Spenserian blending of romantic love and reverence.

Some readers do hear a pronounced elegiac note in *Prothalamion*. They argue that if one “allows ‘brydale day’ a second meaning” and reads it as the “final bridal of soul in eternity,” the elegiac note can be explained. The poet’s plea that the river should flow slowly is also his request to Time to slow its pace. Even on such a festive occasion, the footsteps of Time do not go unheard.

If you take a close look at the ten stanzas of the poem you will find the line, “Sweete *Themmes* runne softly till I end my Song” being repeated at the end of every stanza. This is preceded by the line “Against their Brydale day, which was not long”, though with a few variations. Together this may be termed a “refrain” which is generally used in ballads or in songs and appears at the end of each stanza. “The woods shall to me answer and my Eccho ring”, for instance, is the refrain in *Epithalamion*. Let me mention that the refrain of *Prothalamion* was later used obliquely T.S. Eliot in *The Wasteland* where the gentle Thames is muddy and polluted.

Form : Language and Style

Like most of Spenser’s poems, *Prothalamion* is easy to read. Note once more the use of the V and T sounus which has helped Spenser to make the fleecy softness of the swans and the gentleness of their movement on the Lee near-palpable. Assonance and alliteration have heightened the musical effect, for let us not forget that this is a wedding song and in the seventh stanza there is a song within a song. Scholars hold that when it comes to detailing and describing an object strand by strand, the plumes of the swans in this case, Spenser comes close to Botticelli.

The third Stanza like the rest of the poem has eighteen lines and line 9-18 are in rhyming couplets. Alternate lines rhyme in the first 8 lines.

Word Notes

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Swannes
goodly hewe | archaic (old) spelling of ‘Swans’,
of beautiful colour. |
| 2. downe | down. |
| 3. fairer..seen | the poet has never seen birds to white and beautiful. |
| 4. Pindus | a mountain in Greece. |
| 5. shew | show. |
| 6. Jove | a poetical equivalent of Jupiter, the supreme God of the Romans. |
| 7. Leda | wife of Tyndareus, King of Sparta. A smitten Jove approached her as a swan and she bore him Castor, Pollux and Helen. |

7-8		The feathers have been compared to snow suggesting whiteness as well as softness.
9.	neare	near, closer.
11.	euen	even.
12.	foule	foul
	billows	waves.
14.	soyle NPv	soil, to dirty, make unclean.
	fayre	fair.
16.	hauens	heavens.
17.	AgainsL.day	in preparation of the bridal day.
18.	sweete..softly	The poet entreats the sweet Thames to run or flow gently. Time cannot be stopped, the poet can only request it to slacken its pace.

2.11.2 Conclusion

Prothalamion, notwithstanding its pictorial beauty, is definitely not one of Spenser's greatest creations. Modern readers are critical of Spenser's omission of the human predicament in his spousal verse. In *The Man in my Head with a Gun*, the South African poet Wendy Woodward makes a pointed comment :

Spenser's Prothalamion
takes little account of how
she was feeling...

Spenser's *Prothalamion* bypasses issues of serious import. Moreover, having found their voice, after de-colonization non-European readers, have taken a strong exception to Spenser's excessive emphasis on whiteness. Why should beauty, chastity, purity be suggested only by white, the European colour? This question disturbs a section of the readers of *Prothalamion*. Spenser would want us to remember that he belonged to an age where whiteness/fairness was a sign of true femininity and the Queen too whitened herself further for more reasons than one. Still the feeling lingers.

2.12 □ The Faerie Queene

If Spenser is to many a "prince of poets", as great in English as Virgil in Latin, the credit goes largely to his magnum opus *The Faerie Queene*. In November 1589 the printer received the first three books and they were entered in the Stationers' Register in December. According to Amoretti SQ, the poet completed the second instalment (Books IV-VI)

shortly before his marriage but they were printed only in 1596. The book has been very judiciously dedicated to the “most mighty and magnificent Emperesse Elizabeth by her “most humble servant: Ed Spenser.”

2.12.1 Plan of *The Faerie Queene*

The plan for this work of epical proportions was expounded in an introductory letter written by the author to Sir Walter Raleigh. He had most ambitiously planned twenty-four books (only six were written), each of the first twelve concentrating on the adventures of one of the Queen’s knights on the twelve successive days of her annual festival. Holding the strands together are Gloriana and King Arthur. As each book deals with a separate adventure, almost complete in itself, *The Faerie Queene* remains more episodic than a single narrative. Yet the stories do diverge from “a common centre”. It is Gloriana’s court from where the action begins and to it all return. Read *The Faerie Queene* and note the existing similarities between a few of these adventures and some in the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *the Adventures of Sindbad the Sailor* and *Hatim Tai*.

In which slot do we place this poem, so encyclopaedic in design? As told to Raleigh, the poem has been written to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline” and Spenser did declare, “Fierce warres and faithful loves shall moralize my song”. Read carefully and you will agree that *The Faerie Queene* is epical, it is a tale of chivalry, a religious and educational treatise, an allegory etc. and all of these. However, Gary Waller would like to describe the poem as “primarily, a patriotic, Protestant epic”.

2.12.2 Allegory

An allegory as you know is “a figurative narrative or description conveying a veiled moral meaning”. Some of the most well-known allegories in English Literature you are aware are *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Faerie Queene* and John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. In Spenser’s most ambitious work, we may say with Milton, “More is meant than meets the ear”. *The Faerie Queene* may tell of knights and damsels, of wars and loves, of heroism and deceit but the heroes are “concepts and universals” and their encounters may be seen as the eternal clash between Good and Evil, between Virtue and Vice, between the holy and the unholy. *The Faerie Queene* is a moral allegory “charged with the subtlest moral significance”. In Book I you are made aware of constant clashes between the English Reformed Church -which claims to be the true one, and the “false” Church of Rome. Una’s parents, some hold, stand for the primitive church of Jerusalem. The Red Cross Knight represents the Anglican Church and holiness, Duessa is falsehood and Archimago hypocrisy. Sir Guyon is Temperance, Artegall symbolizes Justice, Lucifera and Orgoglio, despite controversies, stand for Pride. The fall of the Red Cross Knight and his ultimate victory symbolizes Christ’s death on the Cross, the Resurrection, and the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil. Their rescuer is Arthur representing

Magnificence. Hence despite romantic adventures, weddings and jublations, the reader is expected to remain aware of these personifications and symbols which in turn take this Renaissance poem closer to “a medieval allegory”. Even the names have been “composed according to a certain allegorical rationale”. For instance, Belphoebe is the “beautiful, pure one”, Gloriana is Glory.

Let us also remember that Edmund Spenser was an Elizabethan aware of Court intrigues, sensitive political/religious issues, clashes and encounters. So we may look for political allusions and also find them easily. In Gloriana, Belphoebe, Britomart, for instance, there is Queen Elizabeth I. The wicked Duessa understandably stands for the Roman Catholic Church in Book I and then for Mary Queen of Scots in the fifth book. Arthur is sometimes Sidney, sometimes Leicester. Upton and Craik have identified Sir Guyon with Essex and Archimago with the Pope. Allegorical references have been made to many more historical events such as the defeat of the Spaniards in the Netherlands, the Spanish Armada, the English occupation of Ireland and the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Canto X of Book II contains a chronicle of British monarchs ranging from Brut to Elizabeth I. Not for nothing has *The Faerie Queene* been termed a *public* poem like *A Mirror for Magistrates*.

The facts stated-should give you some idea of the topicality as well as universality of this poem on which much of Edmund Spenser’s fame rests. We readers may legitimately claim that in *The Faerie Queene* one does find a text beyond the text. But as Hazlitt has assured, you may read Spenser’s poem and enjoy it without meddling with the allegory.

2.12.3 Excerpt I

The first excerpt is from *The Faerie Queene* Book I. George, the Red Cross Knight, bound to serve the Queen of the Fairies for six years, succeeds in his mission of slaying a dragon who had Una’s father’s kingdom in its clutches. Quite naturally the king offers Una’s hand in marriage. The union of the Knight and Una is a bonding of Holiness and Truth for the spiritual deliverance and salvation of the human race. But even after marriage Saint George must continue to serve the Fairy Queen for duty has to be discharged and loyalty to the Queen has to be exhibited. The excerpt below is from Canto IX and we see Arthur in conversation with the Red Cross Knight and Una.

The Text

CANTO IX (13-17)

For-wearied with my sports, I did alight
From loftie steed, and downe to sleepe me layd;
The verdant gras my couch did goodly dight,
And pillow was my helmet faire displayd:

Whiles every sence the humour sweet embayd.
And slombring soft my hart did steale away,
Me seemed, by my side a royall Mayd
Her daintie limbes full softly down did lay:
So faire a creature yet saw never sunny day.

Most goodly glee and lovely blandishment
She to me made, and bad me love her deare,
For dearely sure her love was to me bent,
As when just time expired should appeare.
But whether dreames delude, or true it were,
Was never hart so ravisht with delight,
Ne living man like words did ever heare,
As she to me delivered all thatnight;
And at her parting said, She Queene of Faeries hight.

When I awoke, and found her place devoyd,
And nought but pressed gras, where she had lyen,
I sorrowed all so much, as earst I joyd,
And washed all her place with watry eyen.
From that day forth I lov'd that face divine;
From that day forth I cast in carefull mind,
To seeke her out with labour, and long tyne?
And never vow to rest, till her \ fmcj)
Nine monethes I see^e in vaine yet ni'll that vow unbind.

Thus as he spake, his visage wexed pale,
And chaunge of hew great passion did bewray;
Yet still he strove to clbke his inward bale,
And hide the Smoke, that did his fire display,
Till gentle Una thus to him gan say;
O happy Queene of Faeries, that hast found
Mongst many, one that with his prowesse may
Defend thine honour, and thy foes confound:
True Loves are often sown, but seldom grow on ground,

Thine, O then, said the gentle Redcrosse knight,
Next to that Ladies love, shall be the place,
O fairest virgin, full of heavenly light,
Whose wondrous faith, exceeding earthly race,
Was firmest fixt in mine extremest case.
And you, my Lord, the Patrone of my life,
Of that great Queene may well gaine worthy grace:

For onely worthy you through prowes priefe
Yf living man mote worthy be, to be her liefe.

Explanation

13. An exhausted King Arthur dismounts to lie down on the soft grass, his helmet serving as a pillow. Sleep steals away his senses and robs him of the iron control that he always has over his heart and feelings. In a strange dream-vision he sees at his side a royal maid, exquisitely beautiful.

14. She gladdens his heart by her vows of love and entreats him to love her just as intensely as she loves him. Arthur is not too certain whether it is reality or just a misleading dream which deceives and deludes. What he knows for certain is that no human heart has ever been filled with such pleasure and joy as his nor has any human ear ever heard such wonderful words as he has. All night the lady whispers words of love but only while bidding farewell she discloses that she is the 'Faerie Queene'.

15. When Arthur wakes up the next morning he realizes that the lady has disappeared. Only the flattened grass bearing the imprint of her body tells of her presence the night before. Arthur now grieves just as much as he had rejoiced. The tears from his eyes wash "all her place". He is so enamoured of the Faerie Queene that he resolves to seek his beloved. He vows not to rest till his mission is successfully completed and for the past nine months he has been searching, but in vain.

16. Even as Arthur speaks, his countenance turns pale. Yet the King makes all possible efforts to veil his feelings and the fire smouldering within. It is then that the gentle Una hails the Fairy Queen as one of the happiest on earth as she has found such a true knight, so powerful and gallant in deeds and so firm and constant in love and allegiance. She laments that the earth has not too many genuine lovers to show even though many may wish to lay claim to the epithet.

17. Ashamed of his past infirmity and failure, the Red Cross Knight speaks aloud to set Una's mind at rest. He promises to give her the second place in his heart, next only to the fairy queen, since loyalty and allegiance bind him to the sovereign. He vows to discharge his bounden duty to Gloriana as well as to Una whose parents he must rescue. The Knight then addresses Arthur, "the patron of his life", and prays for his success in his quest for the Queen because Arthur alone is the worthiest knight, the only one who can hope to be the Fairy Queen's chosen one.

Critical Analysis.

This excerpt introduces you to Arthur and makes you aware of his relationship with the Fairy Queen who has given her name to the poem. Arthur has met the Fairy Queen in a dream or a vision which is not to be taken lightly for a poet like Spenser had to be

aware of the significance of such dream-visions in literature of the Middle Ages. Remember some of the important dreaming males—Chaucer’s Troilus and Chaunticleer? Their dreams are disturbing, unpleasant, hostile. But Arthur’s is pleasant and beneficial to Mankind because with it begins a mission that ultimately ensures the destruction of Evil.

These stanzas unfortunately say nothing about Arthur’s impressive personality and exemplary valour save what is implied in the lines describing the exhausted hero who jumps down from his “loftie steede”. Here Arthur is a romantic figure, a lover smitten by a lady who has visited him in his dream. He thus does not talk of his conquests in these stanzas instead, like any distressed lover, gives full expression to his feelings for a lady who once did whisper words of love in his ears. The mighty Arthur too pales into an ordinary lover sighing for his lady-love.

Arthur’s love for the Fairy Queen is one of the central motifs of the poem and it is said that the whole poem may be described “as an allegorical expansion of Arthur’s quest”. In abstract terms this is “the quest of Eros for the heavenly beauty, and as such it can find no fulfilment in any good short of the highest of all, good itself.”

Due to the attention Arthur demands, readers may overlook Una. She is seen consoling Arthur in his grief, but mark her words. She is mildly upbraiding the Red Cross Knight for his infirmity. Spenser’s women like Shakespeare’s do have a voice that demands attention. Thus here the lady’s rebuke yields results and the Red Cross Knight gains control over himself. His words too are significant for they raise the issue of allegiance and duty and confirm that nothing, no emotion, can be more important than loyalty to the Sovereign. This should have gladdened the heart of Spenser’s own Queen.

This excerpt, as you see, involves three virtuous characters of the First Book and Gloriana makes her presence felt. So, you ought to know a little about them.

2.12.4 Notes

Gloriana

Gloriana is the fairy queen and all actions begin from her court and end with her knights completing their mission successfully. She appears to Arthur in a dream and he sets out to seek her. Since Gloriana is Queen Elizabeth I, Arthur should remind one of Leicester.

Arthur

I am sure you are familiar with the name of Arthur, the King of Britain. It is believed that there was some chieftain of the 5th or 6th century who later on became famous in literature as Arthur, the head of a galaxy of knights, unparalleled in prowess and virtue. To Geoffrey of Monmouth goes the credit of making Arthur such a popular figure and in his; *Historia Regum Britanniae* Arthur appears as a dashing romantic hero. To the Elizabethans Arthur was perhaps the ruler of England and his world, the “unified Britain”. In Spenser’s

poem too Arthur is Magnificence. It is believed that his diamond shield suggests that he is God's representative on earth.,As we are now concerned with Books I and II, it would do well to remember that in the former Arthur is "the instrument of divine grace" while in the latter he is "the symbol of magnanimity".

The Red Cross Knight

The Red Cross Knight has been identified as Saint George and the Anglican Church. Spenser describes him in Canto I as a "Gentle Knight" clad in "mightie armes and silver shielde" and on his breast he bore a "bloudie Crosse". He is also the champion of Holiness. This Knight, undoubtedly gallant and virtuous, has human lapses and fails on a number of occasions. He falls prey to Archimago's deceit but his ultimate triumph with the help of Arthur, "symbol of the ardor and art of God's Grace", and Una or Truth and Holiness, signifies moral victory attained through external aid and inner strength and resolve. The Red Cross Knight-Arthur relationship signifies concord and harmony.

Una

Spenser describes Una in Canto I as a "lovely Ladie", "pure and innocent" as the lamb that walks by her side. She faces innumerable problems that endanger her person as well as her honour. No weakling, Una braces herself up to face challenges of the fiercest nature. She guides the Knight and leads him into the House of Holiness. This beautiful damsel is no weakling. She can lead Arthur and show him Orgoglio's castle. The beautiful and virtuous Una stands for true religion and Truth.

Form : Language and Style

Spenser's diction is "decorative" but the style is both "familiar and easy", rather too easy according to modern readers. C. S. Lewis defends the poet stating that he belongs to "an older narrative school" and has in view men "who have settled down to hear a long story." Spenser's language occupies a position between Chaucer's and Shakespeare's. As P.J. Alpers put it, Spenser's pictorial description "renders real visual experience". The weary Arthur and the beautiful Fairy Queen seem to come alive through his description. The use of archaic words aids in re-creating the colourful past. Note the abundance of the V and T sounds in the first stanza in particular and they do create a soporific effect.

Spenserian Stanza

Edmund Spenser has given his name to the stanza in which he has written this poem. Look at the stanzas carefully and you will be struck by the uniformity. It is said to be an improvement on Ariosto's *ottava rima* or the eight-line stanza and bears resemblance to Chaucer's verse form used in the "*Monk's Tale*". Each stanza comprises eight five-foot iambic lines but the ninth has six feet and is an alexandrine. As you must have guessed alexandrine' does have a connection with Alexander the Great. Some French verses of

the 12th and 13th century on this Greek King were written in this metre and the name has stuck to it. The rhyme scheme of the Spenserian stanza is ababbcbcc. You will find Thomson, Keats, Shelley and others using the Spenserian Stanza in their poems.

Word Notes

Stanza 13

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. Forwearied | exhausted. |
| 2. loftie steed | magnificent horse. |
| sleep, .layd | overcome by sleep. |
| 3. verdant gras | lush green grass. |
| dight | deck, adorn. |
| 4. fayre | fairy |
| sence | sense. |
| humour..embayd | soft and sweet sleep embalmed or bathed. |
| 5. slombring. | slumb ing. |
| 7. royall Mayd | royal maid i.e. Gloriana. |

Stanza 14

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. blandishment | coaxing, soft and gentle manner of speaking to get the work done. |
| 4. when-expired | in due course. |
| 5. dreames...delude | dreams do mislead and deceive. |
| 6. never..delight | never was a heart so full of joy. |
| 7. like wordes | such words, similar words. |
| 9. hight | was called. |

Stanza 15

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. devoyd | devoid. |
| 2. lyen | Jain. |
| 3. earst | a short time ago, lately. |
| 4. watry eyen | watery eyes, tears or eyes filled with tears. |
| 5. divyne | divine. |
| 7. with labour tyne | with effort but in vain. |

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 8. never., fynd | vowed never to give up or rest before finding her. |
| 9. nyne monethes | nine months. |
| ni'll | 'ne will' meaning 'will (I) not. |
| yet ni'll.unbynd | yet will I not break the vow. |

Stanza 16

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. visage..pale | inner turmoil leaves its mark on the face which has turned pale. |
| 2. And., bewray | the change of facial colour betrays his intense feelings. |
| 3. strove..bale | tries to conceal his intense feelings, the fire within him. |
| 6. fownd | found. |
| 7. prowessse | bravery, exceptional ability. |
| 8. confownd | confound. |
| 9. True loves..grownd | True lovers, steadfast and loyal are rarely to be seen in this world. It is said that this is Una's veiled rebuke to make her knight conscious of his failings. |

Stanza 17

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 2-3. Next-virgin | In the Knight's heart Una's place will be second only to Gloriana, indicating the importance of Duty. |
| 5. in my...case | when my fortune was at its worst. |
| 6. And..life | This refers to King Arthur as well as to the Earl of Leicester. |
| 7. Queene | Gloriana and Elizabeth I. |
| 8. priefe | proved. |
| 9. liefie | dear, beloved. |
| 8-9.Foronely..liefie | You are the only one worthy of her. Scholars believe that this is as much about Arthur and Gloriana as about Queen Elizabeth I and her intended marriage to the Earl of Leicester |

2.12.5 Excerpt II

BOOK II

The Second book of *The Faerie Queene* focuses on the adventures of Sir Guyon, the Knight of Temperance, commissioned by the Fairy Queen. This book with its twelve cantos tells of Guyon's many encounters including one with the two wicked brothers Pyrochles

and Cymochles. A victim of Archimago and Duessa's deceit he is also on the verge of attacking the Red Cross Knight. One of his greatest feats is the destruction of the Bower of Acrasia who turns men into beasts after using them to "feed" her "luste". As he has the great Arthur by his side, Guyon finally triumphs.

The Text

The Bower of Bliss

CANTO XII (70-75)

EftSoones they heard a most melodious sound,
Of all that mote delight a daintie eare,
Such as altonce might not on living ground,
Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was, for wight, which did it heare,
To read, what manner musicke that mote bee:
For all that pleasing is to living care,
Was there consorted in one harmonie,
Birdes, voyces, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade,
Their notes unto the voyce attempred sweet;
Th' Angelicall soft trembling voyces made
To th'instruments divine response meet:
The silver sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmure of the waters fall:
The waters fall with difference discreet.
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call:
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.

There, whence that music seemed heard to be,
Was the fair witch herself now soliciting,
With a new lover, whome through sorcery
And witchcraft, she from far did thither bring;
There she had him now laid slumbering,
In secret shade, after long wanton joys.
Whilst round about them pleasantly did sing
Many fair ladies and lascivious boys,
That ever mixt their song with light licentious toys.

And all that while, right over him she hung
With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight,

As seeking medicine, whence she was stung,
Or greedy depasturing delight;
And oft inclining down with kisses light,
For fear of waking him, his lips bedewd,
And through his humid eyes did suck his spright,
Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;
Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rued.

The whiles some one did chant this lovely lay:
Ah see, who so fair thing doest fain to see,
In springing flower the image of thy day;
Ah see the virgin rose, how sweetly she
Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty,
That fairer seems, the less ye see her may;
Lo see soon after, how more bold and free
Her bared bosom she doth broad display;
Lo see soon after, how she fades, and falls away.

So passeth, in the passing of a day,
Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower,
Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
That erst was sought to deck both bed and bower,
Of many a ladie, and many a paramour:
Gather therefore the rose, whilst yet is prime
For soon comes age that will her pride deflower:
Gather the rose of love, whilst yet is time.
Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime

Explanation

70. Soon Sir Guyon and his companion hear a melodious sound, most pleasing to the ear and befitting the location, a Paradise on earth. Such is the sweetness of the song that it seems as though birds' song, human voice, instruments, the warbling of streams, the blowing of the breeze, in fact all that is melodious and pleasing in nature as well as in art, have harmonized to create an extraordinary effect.

71. The happy birds hidden in the shade sing sweetly and the music mingles softly with the soft voices of men and women and the notes of the musical instruments within the bower. The sharp and sweet note of the instruments are in complete harmony with the deep sound of the waterfalls, suggesting a mixture of the bass and the tremolo. The notes that rise and fall seem to match the gentle music of the wind.

72. In the Bower from where the music flows, lies the "fair witch" comforting her new lover whom she has entrapped and brought to her garden. There she has placed him, sound

asleep after “long wanton joys” or sensual pleasures. As the witch lies in gay abandon, round them sing many beautiful ladies and lustful boys who indulge in licentious activities and sensual enjoyment as well.

73. As the young man sleeps on defenceless and vulnerable, the witch peers into his face and her false eyes are fixed on him as if seeking comfort and solace for the wounded heart. It appears as though she has received love wounds and is appealing to the lover for a balm. Every now and then she bends down to moisten his lips with soft kisses and in the process sucks, as it were, his spirit and soul through his moistened eyes, “depasturing” or devouring delight. Quite drunk with sensual pleasures, the lascivious witch sighs softly as if to pretend that she cares and pities the young man.

74. Just then some one begins to sing a sweet song calling all who wish to enjoy so lovely a sight. She draws attention towards the blossoming rose as untouched as a virgin and wants the listeners to see how like a coy maiden she shyly begins to open her petals. Her undisclosed beauty is breath-taking. Soon with the passage of time the petals open in full glory and the full-blown rose holds herself up to view boldly like a maiden in full bloom. Unfortunately, soon it is past its prime and as Nature wills, it wilts and fades away.

75. The singer cautions. It is not within our power to stop the movement of Time and hour by hour we move towards our end. The rose that is in full glory adorning the bed and the bower of ladies and their lovers withers away and so does youth. Therefore one must make the most of one’s young age, gather flowers i.e. enjoy life to the fullest while youth still lingers on because soon old age will creep in to begin the process of decay and destruction. The advice to lovers is to make most of the time and enjoy life to the fullest and to give and receive love with equal passion.

Critical Analysis

Sir Guyon and the Palmer enter the enchantress Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss. The two men have the feeling of having set foot in “the most dainty Paradise on ground” (Stanza 58) after having seen the whirlpool of Decay as well as a “host” of “huge sea monsters”. The Bower of Bliss is a delight to the senses. Here vines intertwine wantonly to form an arch, inviting people to taste “their luscious wine”. It would do well to remember that the more sensual the description the stronger is the suggestion that this is not a bower of “bliss” offering pure and heavenly happiness. It is a false paradise, a golden snare that makes escape impossible. It is Acrasia’s bower, a prison. This is “a parody of Eden”, harbouring deceit, treachery and falsehood and here destruction instead of regeneration is the way of life. Like the House of Pride, the Bower is “insubstantial”. Any reading of the Bower of Bliss should make us aware of Spenser’s debt to Ariosto and Tasso and the gardens of Alcina and Armida in *Orlando Furioso* and *Gerusalemme Liberata* respectively. Little wonder that Spenser’s poem has been labelled a “learned poem”.

With her wiles and smiles Acrasia is a dangerous predator. She robs men of their good sense, corrupts their minds and casts a spell leaving them as degraded and base as the men who Circe transformed into swines. In Acrasia's bower there is no metamorphosis (physical change) only a conquest of the mind, Marsilio Ficino speaks of "Venus," who "drains her victim, little by little..." "To lure her victims into the bower, Acrasia "a comely dame" dresses in clothes "fowle disordered" and "vnmeet for woman hed". (54) The New Lover, her latest victim, is Verdant and Acrasia's enslaving of this young man suggests the sapping of youth and vitality. The tearing down of the Bower may also be explained as the "soul ridding itself of its subservience to sexual excitement" and thereafter channelizing impulses judiciously.

In striking contrast to the falsehood and lechery is the lovely lay which in a distorted way spells out a truth, the truth about impermanence and mutability. Do read Spenser's fragment on Mutability. The *philosophical* content of this song matches the life led within the bower and the Epicurean delights offered therein. The Carpe diem theory (see note), it must be said, has been propagated with greater zeal than in Horace. Note that the entire emphasis here is on physical enjoyment. Do not miss the veiled threat as the singer warns and cautions the listeners about the pace at which relentless Time flies.

The *Bower of Bliss*, a critic's delight, has over the years been read, re-read re-valued and re-interpreted. Questions raised are many in number. Is Guyon a Christian destroying a pagan bower with uncontrolled religious fervour or is he pleasing a monarch by destroying an alien culture and retaining his own cultural superiority? Has the destruction of the Bower been prompted by the feelings with which Troy was set on fire or Lanka reduced to ashes in the *Ramayana*, a feeling dangerously close to either envy at the Others' opulence or pure sadism? Is it that the male feels uncertain and uncomfortable in the presence of a woman exuding great confidence and power? Acrasia embodies sexual power and her enslavement of young men in her victory in a gender war. Or is it that female authority is to be despised in general and tolerated only when, like Britomart, women slip into male costume? If so, then why did the knights in the poem and Edmund Spenser in England accept Gloriana/Elizabeth I's supremacy to meekly, prompting many like Marx to decry the blatant display of servility? The questions are too many.

Elizabeth was England's queen and "Elizabeth Tudor", Leonard Tennenhouse rightly claims, "knew how to display her power as a queen". The portrait of the female monarch on her throne with the Pope at her feet as well as the Ditchley portrait showing her standing on the map of England confirm, as it were, her determination to prove her supremacy despite her gender. Her authority had to be accepted but this allegiance could in no way force a Spenserian Knight, Gloriana's "servant", to be the vassal of any representative of a different culture. The 'Other', distanced from the self, has to be hounded by the *superiors* and destroyed ruthlessly, rendering reconstruction impossible. Thus the Bower, an alien land with an alien culture, is destroyed with a ruthlessness not becoming Temperance.

Stephen Greenblatt reads into this book the “European response to the native cultures of the New World, the English colonial struggle in Ireland and the Reformation attack on images”. It is the beauty and opulence of Acrasia’s domain that *bedazzles* the knight just as Indian treasures affected the English. See how racism rears its ugly head. Acrasia’s ‘depasturing’ suggests cannibalism, and the pleasures of the Bower, the drugged sleep of Verdant, are all suggestive of the West’s own reading of Eastern/Indian pleasures which they are happy to label as Epicureanism. Eroticism in the *Epithalamion* is acceptable but not in Acrasia’s Bower. This is a misreading, if not a deliberate misunderstanding, of cultures other than European. But it must have been highly satisfying for Spenser’s English readers to ‘witness’ their Knight’s through destruction of another civilization, which, as if by common consent, has been presented as alien, unholy and repulsive.

Notes

Sir Guyon

Sri Guyon is yet another gallant knight commissioned by Gloriana and he destroys Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss. He is Temperance or the golden mean. As he is a Saviour figure and does release men from the witch’s spell he has been called a new Adam redeeming man and releasing him from Satan’s clutches. However, Sir Guyon is not invincible. His temporary slip indicates that Sir Guyon has his natural limitations like all mortals. Like the Red Cross Knight he too requires Arthur’s help to tide over difficulties.

Acrasia

Against Una’s spiritual beauty we may place Acrasia’s sensuous looks, satisfying the eye and raising carnal desires in men. In this Book Acrasia is *thefemme fatale*, a ‘fatal’ woman, who makes it her mission to destroy men by luring them into her clutches. Kin to Circe (Homer), Alcina (Ariosto) and Armida (Tasso), Spenser’s Acrasia is dangerous. The enchantress is responsible for the death of the noble Sir Mordant (who represents the weakness of our physical or “fleshly” nature). She is intemperance and her name in Greek suggests want of self-control or moderation. This beautiful enchantress, Cymochles’ wife, who lives in the Bower of Bliss, a jewel on a floating island in a lake or a gulf, knows how to play love games to perfection. Unlike Alcina and Armida, Acrasia is more vibrant in a negative sense. She sweats, sighs, kisses and depastures. Her Indian siblings are the lovely sorceresses who fall before Sindbad and Hatim Tai. Acrasia should remind you also of the beautiful lady who leaves knights haggard and woebegone in Keats’ *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Acrasia’s imprisonment has also been read as a parallel to the incarceration of Mary by Queen Elizabeth.

Carpe Diem

Don’t trust tomorrow’s bough
For fruit, Pluck this, her, now.

This is a translation of the concluding lines of Ode I. xi of the Roman poet Quintus Horatius Raccus better known as Horace. The last line of the original reads, “carpe diem quam minimum credula postero” of which the words *carpe diem* concern us directly. It means “seize the day” and lays stress on life’s impermanence and the pressing need to make the best of the present and enjoy the pleasures of life while still there is time. So in *Amoretti* the poet urges his love to take Time “by the forelock”. “Gather ye rosebuds, while ye may”, urges Robert Herrick as if in acknowledgement of this urge. You may also read Andrew Marvell’s *To his Coy Mistress* and Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. Since this philosophy is to a large extent Epicurean, many hold it as an obstacle to salvation.

Form : Language and Style

Spenser has often been likened to a Rubens and a Botticelli. The Bower exists. Every bud, every leaf and flower seems palpable and Acrasia comes alive with her sensual beauty. Spenser’s description of the golden ivy seems to anticipate Baroque sculpture and architecture. Very rightly has it been said that reading these stanzas is like watching a colour film to the sound of soft and soothing music. Once again you will see the artistic use of the ‘s’ and T sounds in Stanzas 70-71 where the poet concentrates on music, natural and man-made. Read Lord Tennyson’s *The Lotos Eaters* and as you take a trip into that land of sleep and inaction, you will be strongly reminded of Edmund Spenser. As always, Spenser has relied heavily on assonance and alliteration for that lilting music of his verse. Note the use of archaic words like “eftsoones”, “wight” and the power behind that one verb “depasturing”. Mark the words “bared bosom”, the decking of bed and bower all suggesting sensuality.

You have already been told about the Spenserian Stanza which has been used in this excerpt as well.

Conclusion

The Faerie Queene is “Art become a work or’ State”. It is more than a poem, it is a part of Elizabethan Culture. Spenser’s masterpiece is dedicated “to the praise of the Queen, her Court and the cultural practices by which the Elizabethan regime established and maintained its power”. In the excerpts selected for your study you have before you much that was venerated in the age—loyalty, valour, holiness as well as all that was decried and received public censure. A moral and a political allegory. *The Faerie Queene* stretches across the Age and beyond, beyond boundaries of space and time to be read and admired as a fascinating as well as a great poem.

Word Notes

Stanza 70

- | | |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Eftsoones | soon, soon after, forthwith. |
| they | Sir Guyon and his squire, the Palmer. |
| 2. mote | may, might, must. |
| 5. wight | human being, person. |
| 8. consorted | united, combined. |

Stanza 71

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 2. attempted | brought into harmony. |
| 4. response | response. |
| 6. base | evil, bass or deep-toned. |
| 7. waters...discreet | water cascades with moderate variations. |
| 9. warbling | singing. |

Stanza 72

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. whence | from where |
| 2. fair Witch | Acrasia |
| solacing | comforting. |
| 3. new Lover | Verdant. The word 'new' shows that Acrasia is used to changing her lovers. |
| sorcery | witchcraft, |
| 4. thither | there, |
| 5. a-slumbering | sleeping, |
| 6. wanton joys | sensual pleasures. |
| 8. many fair, .boys | there were many beautiful women and lustful boys. Cf. Marlowe's <i>Edward II</i> Act 1. |
| 9. licentious toys | playthings, equally wanton and sensual. |

Stanza 73

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 3. seeking...stung | as though looking for a cure, to heal where she had been stung, |
| 4. greedily..delight | eagerly and hungrily consuming as cattle graze and devour. |

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 6. bedewed | moistened, wetted .as if with dewdrops |
| 7. spright | spirit. |
| 8. pleasure lewd | sensual and vulgar enjoyment |
| 9. rued | pitied, regretted. |

Stanza 74

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. chant..lay | sang this lovely song. |
| 3. springing flower | flowers born in spring. |
| 4. Virgin Rose | The rose is untouched and innocent. |
| 5. bashful | shy and modest. |
| 9. Lo see..falls away | See how quickly her beauty fades and the flower withers. |

Stanza 75

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. So passeth | Time flows on in this manner. |
| 2. Of mortal...flower | step by step from our infancy (bud) we pass into youth and reach our prime. |
| 3. No more..decay | there is no more hope of development once decay (old age) sets in. |
| 4. erst | also spelt as earst meaning just a while ago, a short time back. |
| deck | decorate. |
| 5. Paramour | Lover. |
| 6. Gather..Rose | enjoy life to the fullest. Rose stands for pleasures of life. |
| whilest...prime | while there is time and one is young and capable of experiencing life's pleasures. |
| 7. age..deflower | Like a vandal old age will destroy our beauty, our pride and leave us as mere shadows of our former self. |
| 8. Gather.love | Love and experience love's joys while there is time i.e. while you are still young. |
| 9. Whilest...crime | so that the lover may be loved just as much as he loves and with equal passion. |

2.12.6 Books I and II

It may be of interest to note a few similarities and differences when we read the two

books together. Both the books are “based on adventures that require prowess and moral courage and the two heroes, the Red Cross Knight and Sir Guyon, triumph though with a little support from the great Arthur. Women demand and deserve attention in both the books and Spenser introduces us to the good, the bad as well as the ugly. Against the lovely and virtuous Una is Duessa whose ugliness is exposed (Did Coleridge remember Spenser’s lines while writing *Christabel* wherein Geraldine bares her bosom and it is a sight to dream of and not to tell?) and in Block II there is the enchanting Acrasia whose beauty masks inner ugliness.

Of Book I it has been said that it is God-centred and the other Man-centred. While the former concerns itself more with morality and integrity, the latter focuses on the natural man, weak and fallible, slave to calls of the flesh. However, the Red Cross Knight too has yielded to earthly pleasures in Book 1 and scholars like A. C. Hamilton are of the opinion that by “destroying the Bower of Bliss, Guyon overthrows all those forces by which the Red Cross Knight falls into sin.”

Edmund Spenser : Views

In the twentieth century this ‘prince of poets’ ran the risk of being dismissed as “the author of dead monuments with no relevance to a literary living tradition.” Fortunately for the poet, both C. S. Lewis and I. A. Richards have argued that reading Spenser is “like living” and growing “in mental health”. If Stephen Greenblatt treats Spenser’s texts as “distant historical” objects that maintain its distance from modern readers. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield read them as part of “an ongoing struggle”. Post-colonial criticism, as mentioned, is at times rather harsh on Spenser. Scholars still debate and dispute, opinions still remain divided, but the arguments/counter-arguments testify that far from showing signs of sinking into oblivion, Spenser continues to attract critical attention and in the process continues to be read.

2.13 □ Questions

1. Comment on Spenser’s handling of the theme of Love and Time in the poems selected for study.
2. What idea do you form of Spenser’s Lady and the poet’s attitude towards her from your reading of the *Amoretti* Sonnets?
3. Assess Spenser as a pictorial artist with, special reference to the excerpts from *Prothalamion* and *The Faerie Queene*.
4. Comment on Spenser’s portrayal of women in his poems.

5. Attempt a comparative study of the two excerpts from *The Faerie Queene*.
6. Comment on Spenser's art of characterization.
7. "*The Faerie Queene* is enjoyable both as a poem of adventure and as an allegory". Discuss.
8. Attempt a critical analysis of any one of Spenser's poems.
9. "Spenser's poems are often in praise of Beauty and Virtue". Discuss with special reference to the five Spenserian poems included in your syllabus.
10. Attempt a comparative study of the Spenserian and Shakespearean sonnets.

2.14 □ Reference

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