

Poetry
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Lecture No. 13
Edmund Spenser (1552-1559)

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Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)



- Historical Context
- Literary Context
- Poet's Poet
- Spenserian sonnet
- *Amoretti* (1595)
- Two Sonnets
- 67. "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace"
- 75. "One day I wrote her name upon the strand"



We are going to discuss two of the sonnets of Edmund Spenser, a proper Elizabethan poet like Sidney. We will begin with certain points about the historical context and the literary context in which Spenser wrote his poems. We will try to understand why Charles Lamb called Spenser, "The Poet's Poet." We will examine what this Spenserian sonnet is, by which Spenser was able to create a name for himself. The sonnet sequence that we are examining in our lecture is "Amoretti." It was published in 1595.

We have selected two sonnets, Sonnet No. 67, "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace," Sonnet No.75, "One day I wrote her name upon the strand." Let us go ahead.

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Historical Context



- Exploration and conquest of the New World by Sir Walter Raleigh and others
- Queen Elizabeth as the self-fashioned bride and monarch of England (1558-1603)
- Defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588
- Constant conflict with the Irish people
- Poet-courtiers as ambassadors and officers of the Queen or her deputies in different parts of England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the Continent



Spenser wrote at a time when Queen Elizabeth was ruling England. That was a time of exploration and conquest of the New World as represented by another courtier of this time, Sir Walter Raleigh. He was, that is, Walter Raleigh was a good friend of Edmund Spenser. Queen Elizabeth fashioned herself as a bride and monarch of England between 1558 and 1603.

It was a time of jubilation as English Naval Power was at its height. It was able to defeat the Spanish Armada in 1588. Though the constant conflict with people in Ireland and others did not subside completely. There were many poet courtiers as ambassadors and officers of the queen or her deputies in different parts of England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and many other parts, including the Continent.

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Literary Context



- An urgent need for an epic in English
- Strong advocates for the use of English in literary writings: Richard Mulcaster and Roger Ascham
- Educational outreach for commoners like Shakespeare, Spenser, Drayton, Daniel, etc.
- Protestantism and English developed together
- A competitive environment of patronage and compulsion to make a living



Let us see the literary context in which Spenser was writing his poems. There was an urgent need for writings in English. There were many strong advocates for the use of English in literal writings. For example, we have two great humanists, Richard Mulcaster and Roger Ascham. As the educational outreach for commoners like Shakespeare, Spenser, Drayton, Daniel and others was easily available. Many young people took writing seriously.

We also must notice that, the rise of Protestantism and the rise of English go together. Actually, they developed together, because translating the Bible into English for the common use of the people, particularly for people with various viewpoints about the way in which they have to worship, that really was a great motivation for English to spread, education to spread to large parts of England.

There was a competitive environment for patronage as well. Poets, writers and many others had to make a living by the support from patrons.

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Spenser, the Poet's Poet



- Charles Lamb's praise for Spenser
- Sensuousness and mellifluousness of poetry
- Influenced every other great English poet
- Elevated English literature to the level of European literature by his epic poem *The Fairie Queene* (1590-96), Six Books
- Mourned and celebrated Sidney in *Astrophel* (1591)
- One of the four pillars of English poetic tradition:
 - Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton



As we mentioned earlier, Spenser is known as the “Poet's Poet.” This epithet was given to him by Charles Lamb, the 19th century essayist, poet, critic, even dramatist ever since then, he is fondly called the poet's poet. Spenser is remarkable for these two qualities: sensuousness, mellifluousness of poetry. We could see the images very clearly. We could feel the ideas, feelings in his poems very clearly. And also, we could see the smooth flow, the musical flow of language in his poetry.

Such a great poet, naturally influenced every other English poet, whether they are great or small, every one of them who wanted to write poetry, vividly, picturesquely has always been influenced by Spenser. A notable example is Keats and many others. Spenser by his own contribution of a great epic, elevated English literature to the level of European literature.

His epic poem is *The Fairy Queen* published in 1590 and also in 1596. That is, he wrote 3 books first, and then next 3 books. He planned 12 books, but he could write only 6 books in his lifetime. So, it is an incomplete epic poem, even then, it could add value, weightage to English poetry. For his friend Sidney, Spenser wrote his elegy *Astrophel*, and mourned his death and also celebrated the great Renaissance man, Sidney.

Such a great writer is considered to be one of the 4 pillars of English Poetic tradition. Who are these 4? Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. Without these great writers, these 4 poets, English poetry has no foundation. Every great poet owes something to these 4 great poets of England.

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Spenserian Sonnet



- Three types of sonnet in English
 - The Italian or Petrarchan sonnet
 - The English or Shakespearean sonnet
 - The Spenserian Sonnet
- Octave and sestet with a volta in between
- Rhyme scheme with an interlocking rhyming pattern:
 - ABAB BCBC CDCD EE
 - Three quatrains and a couplet



What is this Spenserian sonnet? We have already seen this Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. We also noted the Shakespearean Sonnet or English Sonnet. Now, we come to the Spenserian sonnet, the sonnet written by Edmund Spenser. In his sonnets, Spenser used an octave and sestet. He also used a volta in between, but interestingly, he had a rhyme scheme, which interlocked with every other sentence. So, you can see the rhyme scheme like this ABAB-first quatrain. When the next quatrain begins, it begins with the end of the first quatrain. So, BCBC. And again, the third one starts with C, CDCD. And the last couplet ends separately. So, on the whole, a Spenserian sonnet has this rhyme scheme, and it has three quatrains and a couplet.

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Amoretti (1595)



- Italian title: a little Cupid
- A unique sonnet sequence ending in marriage; with three parts
 - 89 sonnets
 - Anacreontics and
 - *Epithalamion* – marriage song for his love and second wife Elizabeth Boyle



Amoretti is a sonnet sequence that Edmund Spenser wrote. Amoretti actually means, a little Cupid in Italian language. Obviously, Cupid refers to the God of Love. This is a poem about love. So, its natural that we have a title like Amoretti. This is a unique sonnet sequence, ending in marriage. It has 3 parts. First, it has 89 sonnets. Next, it has Anacreontics. What is this Anacreontics? Anacreon was a Greek poet. He wrote poems in a certain way. So, modelling on the poetry of Anacreon, Spenser wrote a few poems and put them together in this volume. He also had another poem called Epithalamion. It is a marriage song for his love and his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle. Unlike all other Elizabethan sonneteers, Spenser was one exception, where he could celebrate fulfilled love in a sonnet sequence.

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Two Sonnets



➤67. "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace"

An unusual poem of reciprocal love in the form of a hunter and a deer without the common negative connotation of the image of hunting

➤75. "One day I wrote her name upon the strand"

An extraordinary poem about the power of poetry to achieve immortality for the beloved and for the poet



We have selected 2 sonnets from the collection Amoretti for our discussion. The first sonnet is No. 67, "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace." It is an unusual poem of reciprocal love in the form of a hunter and a deer without the common negative connotation of the image of hunting. And the second sonnet is No. 75, "One day I wrote her name upon the strand." Again, this is an extraordinary poem about the power of poetry to achieve immortality for the beloved and for the poet.

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Sonnet 67



- Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace A
Seeing the game from him escapt away, B
Sits downe to rest him in some shady place, A
With panting hounds beguiled of their pray: B
5. So after long pursuit and vaine assay, B
When I all weary had the chace forsooke, C
The gentle deare returnd the selfe-same way, B
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brooke. C
There she beholding me with mylder looke, C
10. Sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide: D
Till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke, D
And with her owne goodwill hir ffirmely tyde. D
Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld D
So goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld. D



Here is a sonnet 67.

- “Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace A
Seeing the game from him escapt away, B
Sits downe to rest him in some shady place, A
With panting hounds beguiled of their pray: B
5. So after long pursuit and vaine assay, B
When I all weary had the chace forsooke, C
The gentle deare returnd the selfe-same way, B
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brooke. C
There she beholding me with mylder looke, C
10. Sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide: D
Till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke, C
And with her owne goodwill her ffirmely tyde. D
Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld, E
So goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld. E

We have the rhyme scheme also along with this poem. You can see the colour coding of chace, away, place, pray, assay, forsook, way and the rest.

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Sonnet 67 in Modern English

Like as a huntsman after weary chase,
Seeing the game from him escap'd away,
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,
With panting hounds beguiled of their prey:
So after long pursuit and vain assay,
When I all weary had the chase forsook,
The gentle deer return'd the self-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook.
There she beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide:
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,
And with her own goodwill her firmly tied.
Strange thing, me seem'd, to see a beast so wild,
So goodly won, with her own will beguil'd.



The previous version of the poem that we read may look somewhat strange. Now, we have it in modern English. This was actually a problem in Elizabethan English. And even for us, the kind of strange spelling and things like that is still a problem. But here we have this poem in modern English.

Like as a huntsman after weary Chase,
Seeing the game from him escap'd away,
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,
With panting hounds beguiled of their prey:
So after long pursuit and vain assay,
When I all weary had the chase forsook,
The gentle deer return'd the self-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook.
There she beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide:

Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,

And with her own goodwill her family tied.

Strange thing, me seem'd, to see a beast so wild,

So goodly won, with her own will beguil'd.

Wherever some changes have occurred, you see them in underlining, like, down, chase, vain, forsook, these words have been modernized for us to understand easily.

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Thematic Contrast

- Hunter and game: lover and beloved
- A game of hunting of the game
- Fearful and fearless lady
- Gentle deer; mild look; wild beast
- The love of the speaker and the desire of the beloved
- Whose 'voice' is prominent?
- How can the speaker hunt his beloved?
- The passion and purpose are at odds.
- Free will and Predestination of the lady



The thematic contrast that we see in this poem is that of “Hunter and a Game.” That is, the lover and the beloved. It is a game of hunting of the game. That is, the deer that the poet indicates a little later. We have a hunter interested in hunting a deer. We also have that deer with reference to the lady as a fearless and also fearful lady. These two contrasting ideas of fear and fearless is noticed in the lady. On the one hand, we have a gentle deer with a mild look. On the other hand, we also have a wild beast within the same deer and also within the same lady. The love of the speaker and the desire of the beloved, these two things are brought into this poem so successfully. Now, we have a question to ask. Whose voice is prominent in this poem? Is it the voice of the speaker or is it the voice of the lady? Or if it is the voice of the lady through the speaker, how does he convey the voice of the lady in this poem?

We can also ask a question, “How can the speaker hunt his own Beloved?” Actually, the passion and the purpose: the passion of loving and the purpose of hunting, they are at odds

with each other. We also have another dimension to look at. The contrast is very clear here that is on the one hand, we have this free will of this lady. On the other hand, we have something like predestination. We can ask a question like, “Was the lady destined to love this poet or speaker and marry him or did the lady choose the poet or the speaker on her own and marry him or agreed to marry him?” So, this question of choice and fate, we have in this poem.

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Poetic Devices



- **Epic simile:** Lyke as so lines 1-8 (octave) for an epic love in sonnet form
- **Metaphor:** Pursuit of love as hunter and prey
- **Alliteration:** Sits some shady; panting pray; thinking thirst; trembling tooke; Strange seemd see; fly fearlesse; wonne with her owne will
- **Repetition:** beguiled/ beguyld; owne (2)
- **Transferred epithet:** weary chace
- **Pun:** weary chace; weary had the chace; thirst



There are interesting poetic devices in this poem if you look at them carefully. What we notice, something very interesting in this poem is, a metaphor is encased in an Epic simile. That is why, that is how the poem begins, “Lyke as...” The first two quatrains deal with this epic simile and also the metaphor within these 8 lines. Maybe, Spenser indicates that the use of epic simile means or refers to the kind of epic love that he has for his lady that is Elizabeth Boyle.

When we see the metaphor indicating the pursuit of love as hunter and prey, we notice some disturbance, but then the poem ends softly, smoothly, mellifluously, with concord, with harmony. This harmony and disharmony, these are all brought to us through alliteration and also repetition. We have many alliterations in this poem, “Sits some shady; panting pray; thinking thirst; trembling took; strange seemd see; fly fearlesse; wonne with her owne will”.

We also have repetitions in the case of beguiled/ beguyld and owne. This deception, self-deception, how do we look at it is an interesting case. We also have transferred epithet in weary chace, the chase itself is not weary, it is the hunter who is weary. We may also see the

pun that is play with words. On the one hand, we have weary chace, and the same weary is used in a different way in another phrase, “weary had the chace.”

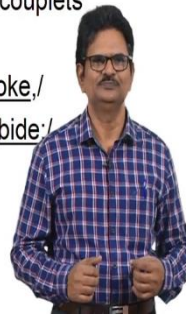
Similarly, the word “thirst,” thirst for water or thirst for love or thirst for consummation, that is marriage. These are all referred to in the context of the love between the speaker and the lady.

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Structure, Rhyme, and Rhythm



- Three quatrains and a couplet
- Quatrains are linked by couplets; BB, CC
- Every couplet has some function
- **Rhyme scheme:** ABAB BCBC CDCD EE – 3 couplets
- **Rhythm:** a linking couplet, lines 8-9
There she beholdding me with mylder looke,/
Sought not to fly,/ but fearelesse still did bide:/
- **Caesura:** between fly and but



Let us examine the structure, rhyme and rhythm in this poem. We have 3 quatrains and a couplet. That quatrains are linked by couplets. 2 couplets we have, 1 is BB, another is CC. And these couplets have some function of connecting one idea with another, one emotion with another, one image with another. The rhyme scheme goes like this ABAB BCBC CDCD, and EE. So, on the whole we have 3 couplets in this sonnet. The rhythm can be noticed in the couplet that we have given as an example:

“There she beholdding me with mylder looke, /

Sought not to fly, / but fearelesse still did bide:/

We have this iambic rhythm. There she beholdding me with mylder looke, / Sought not to fly, / but fearelesse still did bide:/ The caesura, that is a pause comes between “fly” and “but” in the last sentence, the last line that we have quoted from this poem.

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Overall Impression



- The poem captures the picture of a love chase ending smoothly.
- No impediment prevents the lady from accepting the speaker.
- Spenser creates a whole scene in 14 lines, displaying his sensuousness and mellifluousness.
- Perhaps Spenser did not write for the sake of the fashion of sonnet writing but for his own passion.
- Does the pursuit succeed when patience reigns supreme?



The overall impression that we have from this poem is this. The poem captures the picture of a love chase ending smoothly, successfully. No impediment prevents the lady from accepting the speaker. The lady initially tries to run away from the scene, but then she comes back although she wants to drink from a nearby brook. Spenser creates a whole scene in 14 lines, displaying his characteristic sensuousness and mellifluousness.

Perhaps, Spenser did not write his sonnet for the sake of fashion of sonnet writing at the time, but to express his own love for his beloved Elizabeth Boyle. Perhaps, we can end the discussion of this poem with a question, “Does the pursuit succeed when patience reigns supreme?” We have to remember, Spenser waited patiently because he was tired, that is the point was tired, the hunter was tired, he was waiting, and the lady came on her own.

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Sonnet 75

One day I wrote her name upon the strand, A
But came the waves and washed it away: B
Again I wrote it with a second hand, A
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey. B
5. "Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay, B
A mortal thing so to immortalize; C
For I myself shall like to this decay, B
And eke my name be wiped out likewise." C
"Not so," (quod I) "let baser things devise C
10. To die in dust, but you shall live by fame: D
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize, C
And in the heavens write your glorious name: D
Where whenas death shall all the world subdue, E
Our love shall live, and later life renew." E



We are moving on to the next poem that we have for discussion that is Sonnet 75. This is again a very interesting poem we can easily relate to.

"One day I wrote her name upon the strand, A
But came the waves and washed it away: B
Again I wrote it with a second hand, A
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey. B
5. "Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay, B
A mortal thing so to immortalize; C
For I myself shall like to this decay, B
And eke my name to be wiped out likewise." C
"Not so," (quod I) "let baser things devise C
10. To die in dust, but you shall live by fame: D
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize, C
And in the heavens write your glorious name: D
Whereas whenas death shall all the world subdue, E

Our love shall live, and later life **renew**.”

E

We see the rhyme scheme here on my right. We also have the couplets highlighted in red colour; prey - assay, likewise - devise, subdue and renew. We have underlined some words which are repeated several times.

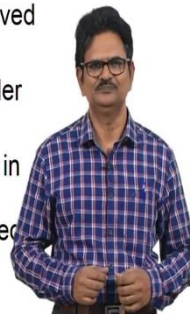
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Thematic Contrast



• Mortality and immortality

- How can a mortal being subject to death can become immortal?
- A common element of the sonnet sequence and poetry in general
- The waves may remove the name of the beloved from the shore.
- The lady may accept her mortality and consider the proud poet's attempt vain.
- But the poet promises to immortalize his lady in his poetry and claims that death can subdue everything except his love expressed/described in his verse.



What is the thematic contrast that we have in this poem? The major contrast is between mortality and immortality. When we write the name or something on the seashore, the waves come and erase whatever we write immediately. That is the common occurrence that we have in this mortal life. The intention to write something on the shore says that we want to capture this evanescent life, ephemeral life, at least for a while for us to see the beauty of writing our own name on the shore, we want to see.

So, the poem deals with this great question for all human beings, “How can a mortal being subject to death can become immortal?” This is actually a common element of the sonnet sequence and poetry in general. The waves may remove the name of the beloved from the shore, no one can escape that. The lady accepts it actually, and tells the poet, she may accept her mortality and consider the proud poet's attempt, a vain attempt, a useless attempt. But then the poet will not accept the mortal condition of human beings.

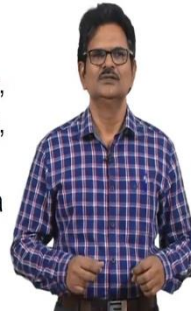
The poet promises to immortalize this lady in his poetry, and claims that death can subdue everything; death can conquer everything in the world except his love expressed or described in his verse for the lady that he loves.

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Poetic Devices



- **Conceit:** to immortalize the beloved through poetry
- **Repetition:** wrote (2) name (3), came (2), vain (2)
- **Alliteration:** waves and washed; pains his prey; die in dust; verse your virtues; Our love shall live, and later life renew.”
- **Hyperbaton:**
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,
My verse shall **eternize** your rare virtues,
- **Dialogue:** speaker and beloved
- **Narrative:** a simple story developed through a conceit



A number of poetic devices have been employed in this poem to convey this idea of achieving immortality in poetry. Achieving immortality through poetry, is a conceit that Elizabethan poets or Italian poets are aware of. It is a common one. And we also have repetition in words like wrote, name, came, and vain.

If you see the number of repetitions, you will see name is repeated several times. Probably drawing our attention to keeping our name alive after our death. Again, alliteration contributes to this effort in immortalizing something mortal: waves and washed; pains his prey; die in dust; verse your virtues; “Our love shall live, and later life renew.” One hyperbaton that we have in this poem is this, “My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,” this is the line that we have in the poem. But if we rewrite in our normal English, we will see like this, “My verse shall eternize your rare virtues.” But if you write a sentence like this in a poem, it will lose its charm, particularly in this context for the sake of rhyming with another line. And also, we can notice in this poem about the different or strange use of “eternize.”

We have a dialogue between the speaker and the beloved. Although we have this dialogue, the whole scene is captured in the form of a narrative. It is a simple story that has been developed through a conceit, a common conceit of achieving immortality through poetry.

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Structure, Rhyme, and Rhythm



- Three quatrains and a couplet
- Quatrains are linked by couplets.
- Every couplet has some function
- **Rhyme scheme:** ABAB BCBC CDCD EE
- **Rhythm:** a linking couplet, lines 4-5
But came the tide, and made my pains his **prey**.
“Vain man,” said she, “that dost in vain **assay**.”
- **Masculine rhyme:** fame and name in lines 10 and 12
- **Dialogue:** the voice of the lady



Now, let us see the structure, rhyme and rhythm. There are 3 quatrains and a couplet. And the quatrains are combined or interlinked through the couplets. The couplets have some function mainly to interconnect and also to emphasize the images which are used in the poem. The rhyme scheme is ABAB BCBC CDCD and EE. We can see the linking couplet and also the rhythm in lines 4 and 5 here:

“But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

“Vain man,” said she, “that dost in vain assay.”

Within these two lines, we can see the rhyming couplet, and also, we can see the pauses within the second line, “vain man,” said she, that dost in vain assay. We also observed a masculine rhyme in the case of ‘fame’ and ‘name’ in lines 10 and 12. And through the dialogue, we get to know the voice of the lady.

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Overall Impression



- The poet takes us to a shore to inscribe his beloved's name.
- He picturizes the **scene of writing** vividly, the speciality of Spenser that has endured his readers.
- The scene of writing is also a **scene of fighting** for immortality.
- It is the **rite of writing** that is the right pursuit for the poet.
- Is writing then a ritualistic attempt to ward off death permanently in this impermanent world?



On the whole, we see that the poet takes us to a shore to inscribe his beloved's name. He picturises the scene of writing vividly, the speciality of Spenser that has endured his readers. The scene of writing is also a scene of fighting for immortality. It is a rite of writing that is the right pursuit for the poet. We have a question to ponder over, “Is writing then a ritualistic attempt to ward off death permanently in this impermanent world?”

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Summary



- Historical Context
- Literary Context
- Poet's Poet
- Spenserian sonnet
- *Amoretti* (1595)
- Two Sonnets
 - 67. “Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace”
 - 75. “One day I wrote her name upon the strand”



Thus, we see the historical context and the literary context, in which the poet's poet Spenser wrote his sonnet sequence using a special form of sonnet called Spenserian sonnet in *Amoretti*, published in 1595 from which we have chosen 2 sonnets, No. 67, “Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace,” and No. 75, “One day I wrote her name upon the strand.”

Spenser has contributed to English poetry through his sonnets and sonnet sequence apart from his main contribution, *The Fairy Queen*, the epic poem, one of the earliest epic poems in English language. Thank you. We have some references as usual.

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References



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If possible, you could look into them. Enjoy reading Spenser's sonnets. Thank you.