



# **SONNET 75**

EDMUND SPENSER



## BIOGRAPHY



Edmund Spenser was one of the greatest poets of Elizabethan England, as evidenced by his masterwork, *The Faerie Queene*.

Edmund Spenser published his first important work, *The Shepheardes Calender* around 1580. He also worked for courtiers Robert Dudley and Arthur Lord Grey, deputy of Ireland. Spenser wrote most of his masterwork, *The Faerie Queene*, a multi-part epic poem which glorifies England and its language, in Ireland. The poem pleased Queen Elizabeth I, who gave Spenser a small pension for life.

*Sonnet 75* is one of many sonnets in the sonnet cycle, *Amoretti*. The group of sonnets was addressed to Spenser's second wife, Elizabeth Boyle, and describes his courtship and eventual marriage to her.



## SONNET 75

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



## STRUCTURE: SPENSERIAN SONNET

1

*Amoretti* is a sonnet cycle by Edmund Spenser.

Like other sonnets, Spenser's contain fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, meaning there are five iambic feet per line. However, his rhyme scheme and the manner in which he decided to divide these lines distinguish his form from the others.

2

The format is a typical 14-line sonnet.

Spenser links the ideas of each quatrain into a continuous thought, which is reflected in the rhyme scheme. The final couplet presents a different idea from the rest of the sonnet or comments on it in some way.

3

The rhyme scheme is *abab bcbc cdcd ee*.

"Amoretti" is derived from the Latin word, "Amor," referring to Cupid. Spenser's devotion to his future wife sets this sonnet sequence apart from his contemporaries' sonnets in that he wrote his true feelings toward a woman he truly loved.

## FIRST QUATRAIN

The waves serve as a metaphor for the cycle of life.

This metaphor refers to his writing as “prey” of the waves, which could infer that time is the predator.

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,  
But came the waves and washed it away:  
Again I wrote it with a second hand,  
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

The speaker's attempt to immortalize his love is erased by the tide, which symbolizes the transient nature of his attempts to woo his lady. Note also how the personification of the tide adds to the idea of life as prey.

Diction infers the difficulty of his expression.

## SECOND QUATRAIN

The dialogue allows the woman, the object of his love, a chance to be heard. Dialogue in a sonnet was unusual. It was also rare to have two points of view in a poem.

Vain man, said she, that doest in vain assay  
A mortal thing so to immortalize,  
For I myself shall like to this decay,  
And **eeek** my name be wiped out likewise.

"also"

The woman reminds the speaker that his actions are temporary, just as life is temporary.

The use of "vain" twice provides two distinct definitions.

## THIRD QUATRAIN

A classic volta (or turn) occurs when the speaker addresses his lady's concerns by explaining that immortality is possible.

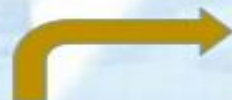


Not so (quoth I), let **baser** things **devise**  
To **die** in **dust**, but you shall live by fame:  
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,  
And in the **heavens** write your **glorious** name.



Alliteration of the "d" sound appears harsh, but this creates a more positive response when he explains that he will "eternalize" her.

The diction used with "baser" refers to lesser beings, which elevates his love as above all else.



Note how the choice of diction equates the woman with a god who resides in heaven. The diction used in reference to her is beautiful.



Death is personified here to stress how their love will remain immortal.



Where **w**henas **D**eath shall **a**ll the **w**orld subdue,  
Our **l**ove shall **l**ive, and **l**ater **l**ife renew.



The **a**bundance of **a**lliteration begins with the speaker's dialogue and grows in the final couplet to add authority to his claims of immortality.

This final couplet is also known as a Heroic Couplet because of the meter—iambic pentameter. Also, consider how the rhyme scheme reflects the movement of the waves.



THEME



Remember  
Shakespeare's  
*Sonnet 18*  
makes a similar  
claim.

Love is immortal  
through the  
poet's words.



*The Flowers That on  
The Banks...* by  
Margaret Clifford  
immortalizes the  
Countess of  
Cumberland.

