

Amoretti 75

During the Elizabethan age, love sonnets traditionally told the story of men in love with unattainable women. However, Spenser's sonnets from his sonnet sequence "Amoretti" defy the general pessimism and give an optimistic look at love. In fact, his "Sonnet 75" shows such optimism that his persona, after a realization in the poem, claims that his love will be immortal through verse. "Sonnet 75" stands as a successful sonnet because it presents an optimistic view on love through graphic imagery and a realistic story. Spenser takes the success of the work a step further because he uses form, rhyme, personification, and alliteration to mirror the imagery and story of his Elizabethan sonnet.

Spencer's sonnet contains three quatrains and a couplet. The form of each part plays an important role in creating the story of the poem. The first quatrain contains a physical description of the strand. In this description, Spenser includes the image of the tide washing away the persona's lover's name. This image propels the rest of the poem. The second quatrain contains the dialogue of the lover as she responds to the distress of the persona. She declares that he seems foolish for trying to make a "mortall thing so to immortalize" (6). The third quatrain contains his returning dialogue where he makes the claim that he wants to immortalize their love through verse. The final couplet magnifies his claim, as the persona concludes optimistically and drastically that death will kill all things but their love. By using each piece of the form of the sonnet to play a role in the story of the sonnet, Spenser fully utilizes the form of the Spenserian sonnet. Spenser's skillful use of form mirrors the steps that would take place if a man were to contemplate spiritual and physical love due to waves washing away a lover's name.

The complex rhyme scheme of this sonnet is a unique pattern frequently used by Spenser. The rhyme scheme is ABAB BCBC CDCD EE. By having the rhyme of the final line of each quatrain also be the rhyme of the leading line in the next quatrain, Spenser links all the quatrains of the sonnet. This skillful linking also mirrors the imagery he creates. Like the rhythmic pattern of the tide washing up on the ocean and then pulling away with some of the wave, Spenser's new rhyme schemes "wash" in while retaining some of the old rhyme scheme. Spenser's rhyme scheme imaginatively ties in with the imagery of the poem.

In the final line of the first quatrain, Spenser personifies the tide as a predator. He says, "But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray" (4) which shows that the persona feels the tide preys on his pain by forcefully attacking his love's name. By creating this metaphor, Spenser shows the desperation of his persona as he watches the representation of his love disappear by the vicious hands of nature. The personification is also the first time in the sonnet where the persona's opinion is included. Up until the final line of the quatrain, it only contains a physical description of the strand, but after the personification, the sonnet includes the feelings of the persona as he searches for a way to eternalize his love. This use of personification is important because it shows that Spenser could utilize multiple literary techniques within the restrictive iambic pentameter of the sonnet form.

Throughout the poem, Spenser uses alliteration to create sounds representative of the imagery in his poem. In the second line of his poem, Spenser creates alliteration when he

says "waves and washed in away". The repetition of the "w" sound creates a sound similar to the actual washing of waves. Later in the poem, Spenser writes, "my paynes his pray" (4) where the repetition of the "p" sound, which is a cacophonous sound, mirrors the difficulty the persona feels. Spenser uses alliteration to tie in the words and phrases he uses to further connect the poem with the imagery.

What distinguishes Spenser's poem from earlier poetry is the personal note it strikes. The poet places himself in the centre of the poem, telling us about his personal situation, emotions and convictions. Such poetry, which expresses the poet's emotions, is called lyric. Lyric poetry became very popular in Spenser's time, the Renaissance, because people began to be interested in the individual. In the Middle Ages man was seen as a part of a community. In the sixteenth century he came to be seen as an individual, unlike every other man. This individualism is reflected in Elizabethan poetry, of which Edmund Spenser is one of the greatest representatives.

In this sonnet, addressed to his wife, Spenser claims to give her immortality in his verse. He does so by starting from a very ordinary, very charming incident that may occur any day in summer by the seaside. The situation is therefore a general one, but Spenser handles it in such a way as to make it intimately personal. His imagination creates a picture of tender young love through the conversation between his lady and himself, absorbed in each other, against the background of the eternal sea. He would like to preserve this experience for ever, but the waves wipe out her name just as cruel time destroys every man-made thing. Nevertheless he feels confident that he is able to immortalize his love by a different kind of writing, his poetry, no matter how short life on earth may be. At the same time the writing of the lady's name, which is the central image of the poem, is transferred from earth to heaven. Love, poetry and religious belief are closely associated.

Technically, Spenser's poetry is at a very high level. He uses simple words so skillfully that they create a complete, harmonious picture. After the action of the first quatrain he switches to the dialogue in the second and third, to conclude with the couplet which summarizes the theme of the sonnet. Spenser's perfect handling of vowels and the wavelike rhythm of his poem can only be appreciated when the sonnet is read aloud so as to bring out its melody. His frequent use of alliteration binds the poem together.

"Sonnet 75" represents a successful Elizabethan sonnet with an optimistic view of love, but Spenser takes the success a step further by employing various literary techniques that accentuate the story and imagery of his sonnet. His skillful use of form, rhyme, personification, and alliteration all contribute to the tight construction of this sonnet. By creating "Sonnet 75", Spenser immortalized love through verse, while showing his readers the skillful workings of his hand.