

Epithalamion

Author- Edmund Spenser

Born - 1552

Died - 13 January 1599

He was **buried in Westminster abbey (Poet's corner) beside Chaucer**. His coffin was **carried to his grave to Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey by other poets**, and they **threw many pens and pieces of poetry into his grave with many tears**.

Age - Chaucer – **Reformation** - period

Period (kings) - **Queen Elizabeth and Edward-VI**

the Tudor dynasty and Elizabeth

Studies at- Cambridge

Post held -**Worked in Ireland as Secretary to Lord Grey de Wilson**

Comments

Charles Lamb called him as poet's poet because of the very high quality of his poetry. He **enjoyed "the pure artistry of his craft"** so much.

He was **admired by John Milton, William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Alfred Tennyson**.

John Milton in his *Areopagitica* mentions "our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas" in the eighteenth century.

Alexander Pope compared Spenser to "a mistress, whose faults we see, but love her with them all."

Ben Jonson makes remarks in his critical work **Timber or Discoveries: "Spencer, in affecting the Ancients writ no language"**

Critics take a **dim view of Spenser, archaisms, and antiquarian tastes in literature**.

Shakespeare might not achieve if Spenser had not lived, Spenser had been **his master in English, Brother, Englishman and Friend the Gentle bard**

Spenser may rightly be called the " Second Father of English Poetry

Introduced- **Spenserian stanza – a b a b b c b c c (Nine lines the last ninth line has twelve syllables. It is called Alexandrine.**

Works

Amoretti : This book was the **collection of eighty nine Petrarchan Sonnets – published in 1595.**

Epithalamion : Spenser composed this poem in **the honour of his own marriage published in 1595.**

The Faerie Queene : It was **an allegorical poem**. Its first three books were published in 1589 and second three books in 1596. The main character of the book was Prince Arthur who married to Gloriana in the end of the book.

Colin Clout's Come Home Again-Pastoral poem

Prothalamion : A spousal verse - 1596

'The Shepherd Calendar': The Shepherds Calendar was published in **1579** and **dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney** consists of **12 pastoral poems or Eclogues, one for each month of the year**. The work reveals how carefully Spenser had studied the pastoral practice of Theocritus, Virgil, and others.

Astrophel - **an elegy on the death of his friend, Sir Philip Sidney**

The Ruins of Time',

'The Tears of Muses',

'Mother Hubbard's Tale' and

'The Ruins of Rome'.

A prose work : A view of the Present state of Ireland.

FarieQueene and Shepherd's calendar are called **English Virgil**

Contemporizes

Thomas Wyatt

Earl of surrey

Philip Sydney

Shakespeare

Epithalamion

About the work

Author- **Edmund Spenser**

Published in - It was **first published in 1595** in London by William Ponsonby as part of **a volume *Amoretti and Epithalamion***.

Other title - **Marriage song-wedding hymn, Nuptial song**

Type - **ode**

About - His **Marriage with his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle on June 11th 1594**

Duration -One day

Narrator- Poet, Spenser

River - Mulla

Hilcomlake

Occasion -Elizabeth Boyle's Marriage with him

Day - June 11, 1594

Structure of the poem

Epithalamion follows a **rhyme a scheme of ABABCC, DEDEFF** except the 15th stanza.

Epithalamion is written in an English adaptation of the irregular stanza of the Italian canzone.

The canzone is a **lyric poem** with words and music sung together **often in praise of love or beauty, originated in medieval Italy and France and usually consisting of hendecasyllabic lines with end-rhyme.**

There are **24 stanzas and 433 lines in the poem.** There are 365 longer lines and 68 shorter lines. The **365 longer lines represent the year leading up to Spenser's wedding day.**

The poem starts at midnight of the day of the wedding. The **24 stanzas represent the 24 hours in a day and the 365 longer lines represent every day in a year.** Spenser's wedding is one day; **the first 16 stanzas are the day time and the last 8 are the night time,** and the relationship with Boyle has been occurring for a year.

The term, **Epithalamion** literally means the 'bridal chamber'. It is an ode written to commemorate the nuptials of Spenser and his bride.

The poem **draws together the universal and the temporal, the idea of love that is divine and transcendental with a more earthly, sensual love.** Spenser borrowed **Greek mythology from Musaeus, a legendary Greek Poet.**

Epithalamion offers a rich tapestry of sensual imagery borrowed from classical legends and myths from Christian ideas and beliefs and local folklore.

The Title **Epithalamion was derived from Greek** (Epi-Near; thalamus- the bridal chamber) literally, a song near the bridal chamber - any song of nuptial celebration.

The poem has approximately five movements, in terms of dramatic action.

The first 8 stanzas set out the poems purpose, its means of accomplishing it and the pastoral setting of the event; the next five stanzas eulogise his beloved's beauty as she wakes up, is adorned and then enters the church for the wedding and the wedding itself; the next four stanzas are about the celebrations after the wedding and the poet-bridegroom's impatience to be alone with his bride; the final eight stanzas express the poet-bridegroom's fears and anxieties and then seek the blessings of all the Gods for their union.

Summary

The **song begins before dawn** and progresses through the wedding ceremony and into the consummation night of the newlywed couple. Throughout the poem, the **speaker marks time by referencing the physical movements of the wedding party, the positions of the sun and other celestial bodies, and the light and darkness that fill the day.** "The woods shall to me answer and my Echo ring", suggests the **circle of time.** The element of time is central to the crafting of the poem.

Spenser requests the 'Heralds of Hymen' to sing and enchant and invite the Sun to shine and remind his bride to wake up. He invites the Nymphs of river Mullla and refers to the potential of Trout and the strength of Pike. He proclaims **the prized possession of a bride as being her chastity.**

Spenser invokes the Muses to lay aside those sorrowful complaints and come with garlands on their heads to inspire him to sing for his love as once **Orpheus did for his bride.** He will sing to himself and the woods will answer him and echo his words.

The Poet asks **the Muses to awake before sunrise, go to his beloved's bower and wake her up.** Hymen, God of marriage has long been ready for his masque with many bachelors. Let them awake the bride and adorn her in rich robes. **He calls the sun, Light giving lampe.** The Muses should bring with them **nymphs of local rivers, forests and the sea. They should bring a garland of lilies and roses bound with a blue silk ribbon for his fair love.**

The poet then calls upon the nymphs of the river Mulla, the river that flows across the poet's estate in Ireland. He also prays the mountain nymphs who **protect the deer from the wolves** by shooting silver arrows at the wolves, to be present so that they might help adorn her and sing to her.

Dawn, rosy morning has now left her lover Tithonous' the Greek legend. The guardian spirits of various natural objects stand for the local merchants and fisherman's daughters and the sun god makes his appearance.

The birds all sing his love's praises; **the lark sings Morning Prayer; the thrush, the thrustle, the ouzel and the redbreast all sing together harmoniously.** They sing of joy and happiness and the poet wants his dear love to sleep no more, wake up and await her mate and listen to the bird's love songs.

The **bride is now awoken, her eyes covered with sleep, shine bright like stars.** They are **brighter than Hesperus, the evening star.**

The poet calls upon the daughters of delight to dress her but first the hours, the children of Day and Night. The three graces, hand-maidens of goddess of love adorned her by **singing to Venus, God of love.**

He calls upon the young boys who attend the groom to freshen themselves. **The poet begs the sun, the father of the Muse grant his prayer to shine bright but not too warm.**

Now the procession starts to the church. **Hymen Hymenaeus is sung by the minstrels at the festivities.**

The Minstrels, travelling composer, player and singer of songs and ballads in the Middle Ages play loud music on the pipe tabor and crowd most harmoniously. The damsels, full of joy, smite their timbrels and dance and sing so that the on-lookers are quite enraptured. The boys run up and down shouting 'Hymen to Hymen' and the on-lookers take up the cry and praise her beauty.

The bride comes along **with dignity and modesty.** She is **fair like Phoebe a morning star rising from the east.** She looks **like an angel, clothed all in white.** Her **long hair looks like a golden mantle made of golden wire and sprinkled with pearls and flowers.**

She is **crowned with a green garland and she looks like a maiden queen.**

The poet asks the maidens of the place if **they had ever seen such a fair sweet, lovely creature adorned with the grace of beauty and virtue.** Spenser's bride is first a "maydenQueene," then her neck is like a "marble towre" the lips of his bride are "lykecherryes charming men to byte," her breast like a "bowle of creameuncruded." She is such a fair maiden with **blue eyes, white forehead, blushing cheeks, red lips, white neck,** so honourable and chaste, never before seen. The virgins being lost in appreciation of her many virtues, the poet asks them not to forget their singing.

The poet tells them that **they would admire her more if they could see her inward beauty, the beauty of her spirit. Love, chastity, faith, womanliness, honour and modesty dwell in her.**

The poet calls for the church doors to be opened and the doors and pillars to be adorned so that his love may be received with due honour.

The bride enters the temple with such reverence that the ladies present may learn from her how to humble their pride when they enter a holy place.

The ceremony is over. The bride is to be brought home in joy and jollity. It is the happiest day for the groom. It will always be holy to him. He wants **everyone to be feasted. Bacchus, God of wine** and of revelry, should be crowned with wine and Hymen with garlands. The graces are invited to dance while the maidens sing.

The poet wants the young men of the town to leave **their work as it is a holiday, and to ring the bells. He regrets that he has chosen the longest day in the year for his wedding day.** The night will be the shortest in the year because **June 11 St. Barnaba's day was the longest day of the year in the old style.**

The poet calls on the damsels to stop their dancing and singing and brings the bride to her bower and let her lie in bed covered with lilies and violets, beneath silk curtains, perfumed sheets and coverlets. She lies there waiting for her husband in proud humility as Maia to be taken by Jove. The poet wishes the damsels to leave her alone.

Glossary

Orpheus: an incomparable singer, musician and poet.

Eccho - a nymph who loved Narcissus and pined away till only her voice remained (Her love was not returned)

Nymphs - In Greek legend the guardian spirits of various natural objects. Here they stand for the coal merchants and fisherman's daughters.

Mulla - the river that flows across the poet's estate in Ireland.

Trout - Fish, closely related to the salmon

Pikes - Genus of fresh water fish.

Phoebus - an epithet of Apollo, the Sun God. Here used in the feminine gender.

Aeolus - the Greek God of Wind

Merchant's daughter: According to Van Winkle, this as a reference to the friends of Elizabeth Boyle."

Fayre hours - The 'horai' or hours were the daughters of Day and Night.

Cyprian Queen - Venus; Cyprus was famous for the worship of Venus.

Tymbrels: a musical instrument

Bacchus - God of wine and of revelry

Fairest planet: the Sun

Tyred steeds - wearied horses

Maia - a sky goddess, joined in love with Zee. They are sometimes called mountain nymphs.

Muses

Spenser calls on the Muses to help him in his artistic endeavors on this special day. Greek muses are the goddesses that inspire great artistic works such as the works of Homer or Hesiod.

"Ye learned sisters which have oftentimes Beene to me ayding, others to adorne:"

Spenser compares his love to that of Orpheus. Orpheus was a legendary musician and poet.

Nymphs

Nymphs were the spirits of natural objects such as trees, rivers, and clouds that animate nature and the land.

"Bring with you all the Nymphes that you can heare Both of the rivers and the forrests greene: And of the sea that neighbours to her neare, Al with gay girlands goodly welbeseene."

Phoebus

Phoebus is another name for the god Apollo. Apollo was the god of music, poetry, truth, and, relevant to the poem, the sun, as the day has begun with the sun rising.

"All ready to her silver coche to clyme, And Phoebus gins to shew his glorious hed."

Hesperus

Hesperus is the evening star in Greek mythology. The day is ending and Hesperus is making an appearance.

"With darksome cloud, now shew theyr goodly beames More bright then Hesperus his head doth rere."

Cyprian Queene and Venus

The "Cyprian Queen" is term for Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sex, and beauty. She is also referred to as Venus in Roman Mythology.

Phoebe

Phoebe was associated with the Moon in mythology. The moon is rising signaling the end of the day. Elizabeth is compared to Phoebe as she walks down the aisle.

"Loe where she comes along with portly pace Lyke Phoebe from her chamber of the East, Arysing forth to run her mighty race,"

Bacchus and the Graces

In Roman Mythology, Bacchus was a god of wine, festivals, and is associated with fertility, his Greek equivalent was Dionysus. The Graces, goddesses of charm, beauty, and grace are mentioned in association with Bacchus and Venus, connecting them to both the festive nature of the wedding and the preparation of the bride.

Hebe

Hebe is the Goddess of youth and the patron of the brides, logically connecting her to the events of a wedding and the fertility that ideally follows.

"And thou farye Hebe, and thou Hymen free, Grant that is may so be. Til which we cease your further prayse to sing, Ne any woods shall answer, nor your Eccho ring."

Mavis is dialect for a song thrush. There are many birds singing to mates in this stanza, and it comes out to the tune of the couples wedding song.

"The merry Larkehirmattins sings aloft, The thrush replies, the Mavis descant playes,"

James Lambert wrote about how the poem connected to the Protestant Reform of the time "Spenser's Epithalamion reflects this communal joy as it narrates a public celebration of marriage, and does so in song and psalmic refrains.

Slip test No.2

1. _____ was the first Sonnet Sequence in English.
A) Edmund Spenser's Amoretti B) Philip Sidney's Astrophel and Stella
C) Samuel Daniel's Delia D) Michael Drayton's Idea's Mirror
2. Edmund Spenser's Colin Clout's Come Home Again is a fine example of:
A) carpe diem B) sonnet sequence
C) georgic poetry D) pastoral eclogue
3. Which statement(s) below on the Spenserian stanza is/are accurate?
I. A quatrain, unrhymed, but alliterative
II. A stanza of four lines in iambic pentameter
III. An eight-line stanza in iambic pentameter followed by a ninth in six iambic feet
IV. An eight-line stanza with six use of figurative language. Iambic feet followed by a ninth in iambic pentameter
A) I and II B) II C) III D) IV
4. A Spenserian stanza has
A) four iambic pentameters B) six iambic pentameters
C) eight iambic pentameters D) ten iambic pentameters
5. Which of the following facts is NOT true of Spenser?
A) He is a kind of English Homer, telling stories of heroic confrontations.
B) He fashioned an original verse form : The Spenserian Stanza.
C) He opposed England's break with the Roman Catholic Church.
D) He is a Christian poet.
6. The love poem of Spenser is
A) L'Allegro B) Epithalamion C) Il Penseroso D) Astrophel and Stella
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9. Who has been happily called the "Poet's poet"?

- A : Bacon B: Sidney C:Chaucer D:Spenser

10. Spenser was buried beside _____ in West Minister Abbey.

- A) Shakespeare B) Lamb C) Chaucer D) Sydney

11. In Spenser's stanza, the last ninth line has twelve syllables. It is called

- A) Alexandrine B) Parabola C) Retrain D) Quatrain

12. Epithalamion is a / an

- A) Elegy B) Marriage Hymn C) Ballad D) Epic

13. Spenser's "Epithalamion" is a wedding-song in the long tradition of epithalamia and is written in an English adaptation of the irregular stanza of the Italian _____.

- A) terzarima B) ottavarima C) canzone D) sestina

14. Aeolus is the Greek God of

- A) Thunder B) Sea C) Wind D) Wine

15. On which date did Spenser marry Elizabeth Boyle?

- A) 25th June B) 11th June C) 19th June D) 12th June

16. Which statement is not true of 'Epithalamion'?

The poem, Epithalamion is:

- A) An ode B) About the poet's wedding day
C) A musical and visual celebration D) Ends with fears of ill omen

17. _____ is the God of wine.

- A : Zeus B : Hymen C : Thalia D : Bacchus

18. Spenser's Epithalamion was written for his wedding to his young bride Elizabeth Boyle. How many lines does the poem consist of ?

- A : 26 B : 365 C : 367 D) 24

19. Edmund Spenser's Epithalamion is a carefully structured poem carrying _____ corresponding to the _____

- A) twelve stanzas; months of the year
B) three hundred and sixty five lines; days of the year
C) fourteen stanzas; two week-long bridal ceremonies
D) eleven stanzas; eleventh month, November

20. 'Epithalamium' is a

- A. song of mourning B. song of eulogy
C. nuptial song D. funeral song