

## Prothalamion

**Kindly refer Epithalamion for Author's details and more slip test 1**

The poem is often grouped with Spenser's poem about his own marriage, the Epithalamion.

Author- Spenser

Published in - 1596 along with second volume of *Fairie Queen*

Type - ode

About - The Betrothal of twin sisters; Lady Catherine and Lady Elizabeth

Daughters of Sir Edward Somerset, The earl of Worcester in 1596 with Henry Gilford and William Peter.

Place - Thames River

Form: Each of its 10 stanzas are 18 lines long; the final two lines of each stanza are a refrain

The first four lines are roughly in iambic pentameter. The first five lines form one unit, which looks almost like a quatrain in a Petrarchan sonnet is rhymed abbaa

The next five lines form another unit like a quatrain in a Shakespearean sonnet bcbcc.

The next unit of rhyme expands to six lines: ddedee

And the stanza closes with a rhyming couplet: ff

Prothalamion is a Spousal Verse in Honour of the Double Marriage of Lady Elizabeth and Lady Katherine Somerset daughters of Sir Edward Somerset, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Worcester with Henry Gilford and William Peter in 1596. It is one of the important poems of the Tudor period in England.

This poem is different from his own nuptial song, Epithalamion and is shorter, more pensive and almost sedate in its pace.

The poem begins with a description of the River Thames

Calm was the day and through the trembling air  
the sweet breathing Zephyrus did softly play.

The poet feels that the Thames has done justice to his nuptial song by "flowing softly" according to his request: "Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song".

T. S. Eliot quotes the line "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song" in his poem *The Waste Land*.

At the start of the poem, the speaker identifies himself as someone whose political ambitions have been frustrated.

The speaker describes himself as someone who has spent a "long fruitless stay / in prince's court."

Nature is thus positioned as a restorative space outside the drama of the courtly world. In contrast to the "empty shadows" of the speaker's political ambition, the natural world is precise and concrete. The speaker listing specific flowers in the second stanza that he and the nymphs encounter. The natural world is courteous and responsive to human needs. He details in stanza three how the river refuses to wet the swans' "silken feathers." When the speaker asks the Thames to "run softly, till I end my song," there is some reason to believe that the river might actually listen to him; unlike the world of politics, where his ambitions remain fruitless and useless, in nature the world actually responds to the speaker's desires.

The swans float down the Thames, the divide between the human and the natural realms loses its distinction. The swans serve as metaphors for Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, daughters of the Earl of Somerset.

## **Summary**

The poet walks along the banks of River Thames in London, the city he loves more to forget the worries of his personal life. He was completely frustrated with the job at the court and all he wanted some mental peace. The cool breeze, from west wind covered the heat of the sun by reflecting a shade of tender warmth. There are flowers everywhere and the birds chirp happily. The poet as a refrain requests the river to flow softly until he ends his song.

The poet happens to see a group of nymphs along the banks of the river. The nymphs are supernatural maidens known for their purity. Nymphs together prepared bouquets of flowers with primroses, white lilies, red roses, tulips, violets and daisies.

Two swans that swam across the river looked holy and whiter than Jupiter who disguised as a swan to win his love, Leda. These swans are shinier than Leda herself. The River Thames requests its waters not to dirty the sacred wings of the swan.

The nymphs were all dumb struck watching the swans swim across the river. Swans are usually assigned to drawing the chariot of Venus, the goddess of love. The white lilies are matched to the purity or virginity of the nymphs.

The nymphs prepare poises and a basket of flowers which look like bridal chamber adorned with flowers. The nymphs throw the flowers over the River Thames and birds on excitement of the upcoming wedding. They also prepare a wedding song. With all the fragrance of flowers, Thames exactly looked like the Peneus, the river of ancient fame flowing along the Temple and the Thessalian valley.

Spenser wishes the couple live forever with swans' contented heart and eternal bliss as these birds are the wonder of heaven. He also prays to Cupid and Venus to bless the couple with love and care lest they be dignity and a threat to immoral people.

The river Lee, with headquarters at Kent, flows with happiness on such an occasion. As the birds flew above the swans, the sight looked like moon, Cynthia shining above the stars.

Once the wedding starts at London, the poet begins to recollect his encounters at the mansion and the building where the wedding occurs.

The Earl of Essex's mighty castle the venue of the wedding. He was so chivalrous and served as a danger to foreign countries. His brave attack on Spain shot him to fame and entire Spain shook at his very name. Queen Elizabeth was so proud of him and he deserves to be celebrated with a poem.

The Earl of Sussex walked towards the river and he looked fresh with his lovely golden hair. He was accompanied by two brave, handsome and glorious young men. They resembled the Twins of Jupiter namely, Castor and Pollux. The men held the hands of the brides and their wedlock begun thereby.

Prothalamion is a Spenserian neologism, invented to signify a preliminary nuptial song. Like The Epithalamion, this poem is also set in pastoral settings, on the banks of river Thames. It employs a couplet at the end of the first stanza that is reworked in a

refrain at the end of each subsequent stanza. It also invokes pagan gods for the blessings to the newly wed couples.

In terms of time, it a little more than few hours of the morning unlike twenty four hours in Epithalamion.

## **Glossary**

**Villanelle-** a French verse form comprises 19 lines made up of five tercets (three-line stanzas) and a concluding quatrain.

**Ottava Rima-** The term ottavarima is Italian, as is this verse form, comprising eight-line stanzas rhymed abababcc.

**Sestina-** six-line stanzas – six of them in all – followed by a concluding three-line stanza.

**Rhyme Royal-**used by Geoffrey Chaucer for his long narrative poem Troilus and Criseyde, rhyme royal is very similar to ottavarima, except it's seven lines long rather than eight, and rhymed ababbcc. The verse form was later used by Tudor poets, such as Sir Thomas Wyatt.

**Heroic Couplet.** The 'heroic couplet' is the name given to rhyming couplets written in **iambic pentameter**. They're called 'heroic' because they were used in translations of epic poetry into English – poems about heroes from classical mythology.

**Blank Verse.** Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter

**Stichic verse** – It is a continuous run of lines of the same length and the same metre. Most narrative verse is written in such continuous lines. Lyric poetry, because it is closer to song, usually uses stanzas.

A **tercet**, sometimes also called a **triplet**, is a stanza with three lines of the same rhyme.

The **quatrain** is is a stanza comprising four lines of verse with various rhyme patterns. When written in iambic pentameter and rhyming abab it is called **heroic quatrain**:

The **ballad stanza** is a variant of the quatrain. Most commonly, lines of iambic tetrameter alternate with iambic trimeter also called **chevy-chase stanza** after one of the oldest poems written in this form. The rhyme scheme is usually abcb, sometimes also abab.

The **Spenserian stanza**, used by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, has nine lines rhyming ababbcbcc, the first eight lines are iambic pentameter, the last line is an alexandrine, which breaks the slight monotony of the pentameters and is often employed to emphasise a point.

The **sonnet** is a lyric poem of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter

The **Italian** or **Petrarchan** sonnet is divided into an **octave** or **octet** (eight lines) rhyming abbaabba and a sestet rhyming cdecde or some variation.

The **English** or **Shakespearean** sonnet usually falls into three **quatrains** and one final **couplet**. The rhyme pattern is most commonly abab cdcd efef gg.

The **limerick** is used mainly for nonsense verse. It consists of five lines, two longer ones (trimeter, one trochaic foot, two anapaests), two shorter ones (anapaestic dimeter) and another trimeter (one trochee, two anapaests).

### Slip test No. 3

1. Spenser's "Prothalamion" is called  
A) a spousal verse      B) a bridal verse      C) a spousal song      D) a bridal song
2. In Prothalamion, ..... is described by Spenser as "my most kyndly nurse".  
A) his wife      B) Queen Elizabeth.      C) London      D) muse
3. A 'Spousal Ode' privately printed in 1596 is  
A) Astrophel      B) Epithalamion      C) Prothalamion      D) Amoretti
4. Spenser's prothalamion is a marriage celebration, honouring the double weddings of the two daughters of:  
A) Spenser      B) Earl of Worcester      C) Pluto      D) Orpheus