

Edmund Spenser - Prothalamion and Epithalamion

About the author

Author- Edmund Spenser

Born - 1552

Died - 1599 (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**

Studied 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 and because **he enjoyed "the pure artistry of his craft"** so much. He was **admired by John Milton, William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, 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 the tradition in his *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.

He was one of the **members of the Wilton Circle** Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, Sir John Davies, and Abraham Fraunce.

If Chaucer is called the "Father of English Poetry" **"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 is called Alexandrine.**

Works

The Shepherdes Calender was his first major poetic work, published in 1579 under the pseudonym "Immerito"

The Eclogues Complaints Containing sundrie small Poemes of the Worlds Vanitie is published in 1591 contains **nine poems**

1. "The Ruines of Time"
2. "The Teares of the Muses"
3. "Virgil's Gnat"
4. "Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubberds Tale"
5. "Ruines of Rome: by Bellay"
6. "Muiopotmos, or the Fate of the Butterflie"
7. "Visions of the Worlds Vanitie"
8. "The Visions of Bellay"
9. "The Visions of Petrarch"

Axiochus, a translation of a pseudo-Platonic dialogue from Ancient Greek -1592

Daphnaïda- An Elegy upon the death of vertuous Douglas Howard, Daughter and heire of Henry Lord Howard 159

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

Four Hymns

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

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

Farie Queene and Shepherd's calendar are called English Virgil

Contemporizes

Thomas Wyatt

Earl of surrey

Philip Sydney

Shakespeare

Prothalamion

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

About the work

Author- Spenser

Published in **1596 along with second volume of Farie Queen**

Type - ode

About - Prothalamion is a *Spousall Verse in Honour of the Betrothal of Double Marriage of **Ladie Elizabeth and Ladie Katherine Somerset** daughters of **Sir Edward Somerset, the 4th Earl of Worcester** with **Henry Gilford and William Peter** in **1596***. It is one of the important poems of the **Tudor period in England**.

Place - Thames River

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

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 speaker identifies himself, at the start of the poem 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.” (in Ireland)

In contrast to the “empty shadows” of the speaker’s political ambition, the natural world is precise and concrete. 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 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".

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

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

Summary

- The poet walks along the banks of **River Thames in London. He loves London** city 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 sees 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 to decorate their bridegrooms on their wedding day.
- The Thames exactly looked like with all the fragrance of flowers, **the Peneus, the river of ancient fame** flowing along the **Temple and the Thessalian valley**.
- 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.
- Spenser wishes the couple to 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 in 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 is 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 were so intelligent and well-made that they seemed **like Zeus's sons**,

Castor and Pollock. In Greek mythology, **Castor and Pollock became stars, part of the constellation Gemini.** The men held the hands of the brides and their wedlock begun thereby.

- They will get married the scheduled time, and that wedding day is not far away: please be quiet, river Thames, until I finish my poem.

- 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.

- It is a little more than few hours of the morning unlike twenty four hours in Epithalamion in terms of time.