



**Discipline 1
Semester 2**

Paper 3: British Poetry and Drama - 14th to 17th century

Lesson :Edmund Spenser: Selections from Amoretti

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Edmund Spenser

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:EdmundSpenser.jpg>

“Heare lyes

(expecting the Second comminge of our Saviour Christ Jesus)

the body of Edmond Spenser the Prince of Poets

in his tyme whose Divine Spirrit needs noe othir witnesse

then the works which He left behinde him.”

- Edmund Spenser’s Epitaph

His Life and Career:

Edmund Spenser can be legitimately claimed as one of the most significant Elizabethan non-dramatic poets. One of the founding figures of modern English literature, Spenser's origins are rather obscure. It has been widely assumed that he was born in London to a weaver/journeyman named John Spenser and a woman named Elizabeth. The church records or parish details that would have been of much assistance to literary historians trying to locate his exact date of birth, or the locality where he was born, have in all likelihood been lost in the Great Fire of 1666. The year 1552 is generally accepted as the probable date of his birth. In the January of 1599, Spenser died in Westminster and the cause of his death remains unknown. However, one is inclined to believe, as one of the earliest researchers of Spenser studies had mentioned, that Spenser is better known for his literary productions than his personal life, despite all the speculations around it. His Westminster memorial honoured him with the epithet "the Prince of Poets".

Spenser was not born into a noble family but despite his humble origins he managed to fashion himself into a man who gradually, but steadily, ascended into the higher rungs of the Elizabethan society. His ascent was fairly remarkable considering the acute class-consciousness of the early modern culture of his age. Apart from stimulating his career as a poet, his humanist education facilitated his professional entry into the bureaucratic circles of England. During his years at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, while he was pursuing his university degree there, Spenser developed a close intellectual bond with some of Cambridge's most distinguished students, including Gabriel Harvey. Another self-made man, Harvey's pursuits, literary talents and prowess must have left a profound impression on Spenser. They encouraged and promoted each other's works and the publication of the series of letters that they had written to each other provided them with an opportunity to showcase their talents and gain patronage. One of Spenser's greatest works, *The Shepheardes Calender*, includes sections that indicate towards the intimate homosocial bond that the two had shared.

It is important to keep in mind that Spenser was writing in an age that was in a way contouring the growth of the English language. In his treatise, *An Apology for Poetry* (published 1595), one of the earliest writings of literary criticism, Sir Philip Sidney had argued that poetry was without doubt indispensable to the creation of a literary and national identity and had asked for a neoclassical vernacular poetry. Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* seems to have responded to this very call. The twelve eclogues or lyric poems, each corresponding to a month of a year, that constitute this work explore not only a startling range of topics and poetic forms but also demonstrates the

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multiplicity of possibilities of the use of the vernacular, English, as a literary language. This debut collection launched Spenser's literary career and has remained a classic ever since.

Spenser had fashioned the 'Epistle' to *The Shepheardes Calender* in a manner that reminds one of the great tradition of the literary ancients like Virgil as well as the fairly recent poets like Petrarch and Marot. When it comes to the variety of meters as well as content and style, Spenser's works clearly mark a departure from the poets mentioned above. Spenser's magnum opus *The Faerie Queen*, a heroic poem dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, is highly evocative of Virgil's *The Aenied* written during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus. Spenser's eclogues were quite clearly influenced by Virgil's *Eclogues* but his more personal poems depart from his Virgilian style. In one of the following sections in this commentary, we shall explore his radical move away from the Petrarchan sonnetting tradition in detail.

Unlike Shakespeare who had prospered financially and gained prominence by working in the theatre, Spenser could not depend upon his poetic talents to earn a comfortable living, specifically because in the case of poetry, the unpredictability of courtly patronage and unsteady sponsorship might have affected him. Such instability was neither desirable nor welcome and Spenser chose to develop a career where his education in humanities ensured steady employment as a secretary or an administrator. His literary career, in fact, complimented his bureaucratic occupation rather well as it was situated in the political sphere of influence and patronage. Through Harvey, he had found employment under Robert Dudley, later the Earl of Leicester, who held a powerful political position in the Elizabethan court. Spenser had held several secretaryships including a significant position as a private secretary (Lord Deputy) to the Lord Grey de Wilton in colonial Ireland. Spenser's writing on the colonial enterprise, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, reveals an almost genocidal thrust in his inflammatory arguments supporting the subjugation of the Irish. It had not been published in his lifetime because of the provocative content and but is indicative of Spenser's administrative inclinations that unapologetically called for a categorical obliteration of Irish culture and customs.

In the October of 1579 Spenser had married Maccabaeus Chylde, his first wife and later, in 1594, Spenser married his second wife, a well-born young Anglo-Irish woman, Elizabeth Boyle. The *Amoretti and Epithalamion* sonnet cycle (published in 1595) was written in order to immortalize his courtship of Elizabeth and their marriage or as he put it:

"Not so, quoth I, let baser things devise

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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."

Amoretti, Sonnet 75 (lines 9-12)

Socio-political conditions of his age:

The Elizabethan Age was one of great flux and the political climate was charged with various factors including rapid spread of Protestantism throughout the English nation and beyond. This section intends to introduce the political context within which one can possibly place Spenser and his literary productions. Spenser's investment in the Elizabethan polity is quite clear from some of his letters and treatises but the influence of the social and political fabric on his poetry is in no way negligible. The sixteenth century shaped Spenser's aesthetic in a significant manner and our understanding of it is crucial to our appreciation of his poetry.

England's birthing into the Elizabethan Age was fraught with several issues; most significantly the acceptance of a female monarch. Henry VIII, the second monarch of the Tudor dynasty, known for his role in the drastic break from the Roman Catholic Church, was the father of Elizabeth I. He had tried desperately for a male offspring since he harboured the belief that none of his daughters would be able to consolidate the Tudor dynasty. Fearful as he might have been about the fate of his kingdom, the reigns were eventually handed over to his illegitimate daughter Elizabeth in 1558 after the brief reign of his son, Edward VI and later by Mary I. Elizabeth successfully displaced Mary and established her legendary rule as the monarch that had been glorified by the royal as well as the literary circuit. One of her key political moves was the re-establishment of the Church of England, of which she became the Supreme Governor. Yet again, the papal policies lost their authority to the supremacy of the English monarch.



Elizabeth I in the coronation robes

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth_I_in_coronation_robes.jpg

She had been urged by some of her closest confidants, including Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, to adopt a militant Protestant position but she refused to be swayed by such councillors. Elizabeth was moderately disposed towards the non-Protestant communities in England despite the several assassination plots and conspiracies that plagued her rule.

Elizabeth I, the fifth and the last monarch of the Tudor dynasty, was sometimes called "Gloriana" or "the Virgin Queen". After her ascension to the throne at the age of 25, it was a commonly held belief that she would eventually marry in order to continue the Tudor line. However, regardless of all speculations, Elizabeth never married. Although there were several suitors over the ages, Elizabeth rejected all of them under some or the other pretext. Gradually the cult of the "Virgin Queen" began to take roots in the cultural imagination of the English nation, where the ultimate repository of power remained forever unattached to a companion, but was nevertheless venerated for her refusal. For quite a while, Elizabeth had been interested in her childhood friend Robert Dudley, to the extent that a likelihood of marriage arose, provided Dudley's wife moved out of the picture. Elizabeth's consideration of Dudley as a potential husband was met with clear opposition from several quarters and she had to eventually let go of the possibility.

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Elizabethan England had a complicated relationship with France and Spain and very often wars and invasions seemed eminent. Elizabeth's unmarried status was time and again exploited as it attracted suitors from other nations. Such negotiations over Elizabeth's



**Elizabeth and her favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, c. 1575.
Pair of stamp-sized miniatures by Nicholas Hilliard.**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth_and_Leicester_miniatures_by_Hilliard.png

"natural" body seem to have played an intrinsic role in the foreign policy of her nation and the Queen herself contributed to it. Such plans of political alliances through marriage had been prepared in order to secure a stable position for England with respect to any international force that threatened her shores. Elizabeth successfully took advantage of her celibate status in order to position herself firmly into the public imagination as a self-sacrificing political head who had taken a vow of chastity with the intention of dedicating her life to public service. John N. King notes that despite her vow, Elizabeth had entered into a symbolic marriage with England as her husband. What seems even more incredible is the manner in which she had been able to circumnavigate the issues of her illegitimate birth, masculine supremacy and the patriarchal system by employing her chastity as a symbol of her superiority and political excellence. Poetry of this age indicates how this propaganda had caught the imagination of the people and the poets who wrote verses exalting and idolizing the Virgin Queen.

Spenser was one such poet who wrote numerous verses dedicated to the Queen and contributed to the growing cult, in his works we also find a subtle critique of the way Elizabeth approached her relationship with the courtiers who revered her. He might have constantly referred to her as the "Glorious Emprise" but his relationship with his monarch was quite ambivalent at best. It is undeniable that Elizabeth's monastic celibacy was a political act but it was especially so because of the celebration of the woman

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dissociated from erotic love was popular in this age. While she was constantly the centre of everybody's devotion and the focal point of multiple desires, Elizabeth was nevertheless quite distanced from the desiring male subjects.



The Procession Picture, c. 1600, a well-known work showing Elizabeth I borne along by her courtiers.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Peake_the_elder

Elizabeth had, perhaps, governed the way she had because she was constantly surrounded by a coterie of male courtiers who were restlessly looking for some token of appreciation from their female monarch. The structure of her court required of her to encourage such courtiers and their confessions and pleas of reciprocation, partially to ensure that such devotion towards the royal head might not find other channels. Her precarious position could have been threatened if male courtiers who might have perceived her maidenly chastity as a sign of political or social deficiency and apparent vulnerability. Although an active recipient of their attentions and accommodative of their concentration, it was indispensable on Elizabeth's part not yield to anyone's affections or reciprocate, but to carefully withhold her sentiments, wave off any such interest and under no circumstances oblige.

Stephen Greenblatt has suggested that this image of the Queen might have in actuality been quite beyond the control of the imperial forces and the cultural forces of the times might have popularized such an image. According to Louis Adrian Montrose

this image of the monarch, floating in the cultural imagination, also engendered a strong possibility of the subversion of the royal propaganda and independent fashioning of the symbol. He notes that "such fashioning and such manipulation were reciprocal processes engaging the efforts of the queen and her government from above and Elizabethan subjects from below." The status of this quasi-idolatrous cult is one to be reckoned with since this directly engaged with the poetry of the courtiers. The Queen fit the Petrarchan coding of the cruel mistress, alternatively the ruthless female tyrant, quite well.

Renaissance self-fashioning and the Courtier-poet:

The Renaissance court was a space for the expression of one's identity and a place for the channelized articulation of desires political and social. Ambitious male courtiers vied for the attentions of the monarch and the generosity of their patron. Sycophancy was a fashionable and widely accepted way of gaining a footing in the court. However, the courtier was required to have a certain degree of cultural acquisition in order to attain access to this elite circle. The courtier was expected to have a warrior spirit, a way with words, a composed bearing and a considerable knowledge of humanities. It was necessary for him to conduct himself in a certain manner and dress according to the conventions of his class. Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, published in Italy in 1528 has been seen as a definitive account of the requirements of the Renaissance court. Translated by Thomas Hoby, the English edition was published in 1561. This text had been widely acclaimed as the authoritative courtesy book of the 16th century, an instruction manual guiding prospective courtiers in the direction of gathering appropriate cultural merits and social graces.

In his seminal study, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt had introduced the term "self-fashioning" to indicate towards the active process of constructing one's identity and public self in accordance with the prescribed requirements of the society. In the Renaissance times, the nobility were required to conduct themselves in a socially acceptable manner and carefully craft their public personas. The courtiers along with the noblemen of the court practiced self-fashioning and projected a carefully sculpted image. The courtiers were expected to exude sprezzatura, i.e. a degree of nonchalance with respect to their creative performances. It was not uncommon for the nobility to be forever ready with a rhyme or a sonnet to share with the courtly audience. Castiglione's courtier's relationship with his master was one where the courtier was expected to be inspired by his master and follow his choice of attire and mannerism. Ideally, however, it was also his responsibility to advise his master on important diplomatic matters, aware of his own individual political role.

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In the early Tudor age, courtiers had a significant amount of access to the King's "privy chambers" where they could interact with the male monarch with a considerable degree of intimacy. Natalie Mears's study illustrates how this changed when Elizabeth ascended the throne. The male courtiers could no longer approach the monarch as privately or advise her on political matters. Though the likes of the Earl of Leicester did exist and exercise a degree of influence, the power of the nobility did diminish and factionalism was still rampant. Mears notes that "privy chamber model" that significant during Henry VIII's reign no longer held a central role, primarily due to the attitudes towards gender in the Elizabethan Age. Surrounded by her women in her privy chamber, Elizabeth refused to allow the female chamber members from holding an advisory role.

David J. Baker has suggested that the queen and her court were "engaged in a game of 'courtship'" where the men positioned themselves as lovesick devotees of the female monarch and wrote verses extolling her qualities and virtues. Politicians and the seeking her patronage had to pretend to be in love with Elizabeth in order to gain political mileage. The extensive conversation between the courtier-poets and Elizabeth was often in highly eroticized language but this just a prelude to the implicit and accepted impossibility of any romantic engagement with the queen. These "suitors" were quite aware of the certainty of being turned down by the "Virgin Queen" but the intention of this activity was to be in the good graces of the monarch. This also allowed the subjects to voice their dissatisfactions with her approach and the Elizabethan polity could make their criticisms known.

It is important to note that this was not done in an overt manner but the subtleties of language and the available poetic forms were employed in order to articulate requests and complaints. Elizabeth was approached as the archetypal Petrarchan mistress, virtuous and chaste but always aloof and distant, unyielding in her affections, seemingly above reproach but nevertheless glorious. Spenser, too, had carefully and somewhat successfully inserted himself in such a political contract using his poetry to address Elizabeth and yet critique her and *The Faerie Queen* provides several evidences of this.

The Queen's Two Bodies?

Montrose has suggested that Spenser's poetry assisted in the reconfiguration of the poet's association with the British monarch. The representational forms that aided the production of what he calls the "Elizabethan political imaginary" are pervasive in Spenser's oeuvre. Right from the moment Elizabeth had been crowned, it had become

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rather clear that debates around gender and sexuality would dominate her reign. Before she had ascended the throne, there were tracts in circulation that clearly condemned women and their "nature". In Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, one can unmistakably locate instances where there are men threatened by powerful women, vicious or virtuous, but intimidating and influential nonetheless. This does provide insight into the anxieties about the female monarch and the sense of emasculation that the courtiers might have felt during her reign.

In *The King's Two Bodies*, E. Kantorowicz had traced the progress of the initial bifurcation of the Church's unity into the spiritual "mystical body of Christ" and the administrative body of the Church or "corpus mysticism". Later on, the Church came to be perceived as a representation of the human congregation with the pope positioned in the manner of a king. What followed was the idea that the Church represented the mystical body of God and not Christ. Therefore, it was believed that the Church represented the authority of God. This understanding of the relationship between the human polity and the head was eventually extended to the relationship between the king and his state. Kantorowicz suggests that with the dawning of the Tudor Age, "the king in his body politic is incorporated with his subjects, and they with him." Like the bishops married to the Church under every obligation to be faithful, the monarch (king) too was expected to be sworn into fidelity with his kingdom (subjects). The monarch was the head of the realm and the realm was the body of the monarch. It was claimed that not only did the monarch have "two bodies" i.e. the king's "natural body" and the "body politic" that he was a part of and united with, but also two lives, i.e., his "natural life" and his "civil and political life". It must be kept in mind that such an understanding of the monarchical presence was accepted with respect to the king. In the case of Elizabeth, it had given rise to complications due to gender politics. In "The Letter of the Authors" (1590), addressed to Raleigh, we find Spenser articulating a similar understanding:

"[i]n that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe."

Here, Elizabeth is perceived as the Queen, the monarch and concomitantly as a beautiful and chaste woman. In the political realm of the state, Elizabeth was the authority invested with power to reign and this authority had a providential source but

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her male subjects, by virtue of their political talents had a considerable role to play in the governance of the nation as a whole. In the *Amoretti* cycle, the sonnet 74 speaks of three "Elizabeths", the poet's mother, his beloved and his Queen. We will later study how Spenser had perhaps appropriated *Amoretti* in order to express his politico-sexual understanding of the "cult of the Virgin Queene" which reveals his ideological positioning with respect to Elizabeth's presence as the chaste monarch. Here we find the conflation of the "civic and political body" of the sovereign and the virgin "natural body" of "Gloriana".

The Petrarchan tradition and Spenser's sonneteering:

Sonnets were not the only kind of love lyrics written in the Elizabethan Age but the form had become central to the courtly life. The sonnet is a poetic form that had originated in Italy and was widely employed in Renaissance England. According to conventions, a sonnet is a poem that typically consists of fourteen lines and it follows a strict rhyme scheme. Variations in the rhyme scheme and meter led to the creation of diverse sonneteering traditions.

Amorous poetry had become a vehicle for expression which was encouraged by the unmarried, chaste monarch. Petrarch was one of the most widely appreciated sonneteers of the Italian Renaissance. His sonnets dedicated to his love interest, Laura, stimulated the legacy of what is now recognized as Petrarchism. Petrarchism can be defined as a way of writing love poetry that is inspired by Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Quite characteristically, the mistress in such poems would be eulogized for her beauty and nature and the kind of love she would inspire in the poet. However, she would forever be out of his reach. The poet would constantly register his yearning and disappointment through his words but nevertheless be assured of the fact that the mistress would never be his. Courtly love-poetry in the Petrarchan fashion was derived from the chivalric tradition of free love and faithlessness. Petrarchism was integral to the new style of cultural refinement that had spread throughout Europe. In Castiglione's *The Courtier*, the dialogue between the nobles reveals the attitude towards love in the Renaissance period. The Renaissance doctrine of Neo-Platonic love was central to the poetic productions of the age. While a usual poem of chivalric tradition would entail the submission to base sexual urges of the human body, Neo-Platonic love would insist on the celebration of love governed by reason and not overwhelming passion. Neo-Platonism would urge the

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lovers to enter into holy matrimony and not be swayed by the base desires of the physical body.

In Petrarchan sonnets i.e. the sonnets composed by Petrarch and those written in imitation of his style, the main theme would be the lover's sufferings, the lady-love's physical beauty and cold-heartedness and a passion that would sweep reason aside. The Petrarchan conceits and literary conventions were widely drawn upon by succeeding sonneteers, especially the ones in the Elizabethan court. Elizabeth's times had brought about some semblance of stability in England and literary productions flourished under her patronage. The sonnet form was introduced in England by Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey in the 16th century. Their poetry was sometimes not only inspired by Petrarch's works but were often translations of his sonnets with a changed metrical pattern. Petrarch's sonnets were written in iambic pentameter while there were variations of it, for example Sidney who had employed the iambic hexameter for his verses in *Astrophil and Stella*.

It is important to note that though the sonnet form had been introduced in England in the early part of the 16th century, it was Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* that had created the vogue of writing sonnets. The English form of the sonnet had not really come to being until Sidney had used it to demonstrate the potential of the vernacular for literary productions. Paul N. Siegel writes that "Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* is the dramatic representation of the conflict within a man who passionately desires a married woman- a conflict which is finally resolved by his mastering his passion and turning his mind from earthly love to the love of God." Sidney's work was steeped in an understanding of the Petrarchan traditions and Arthur F. Marotti notes that Sidney was the first Englishman to have used a Petrarchan model to mediate between the "socio-economic or socio-political desires and the constraints of the established order." Sidney's use of the sonnet elevated the position of the form and established it as a socially and culturally respectable endeavour.

Spenser, on the other hand, did utilize Petrarchan conceits and conventions but his sonnets were motivated towards a different, more Neo-Platonic, end. Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Gascoigne and Drayton are probably the most widely appreciated sonnet writers of the Elizabethan Age. It is not surprising that Spenser's sonnet cycle is underappreciated since it was radically different from that of the others. Spenser had not followed the conventions of courtly-love poetry as closely as Sidney had. Running counter to the established form has its own merits and the *Amoretti* cycle can be seen as one of the representative works of the age. The transformation of the political into the amorous, a signature move used by Sidney, was followed by Spenser as well.

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The Petrarchan sonnet structure, the most commonly used one, typically included two parts- the octave consisting of the first 8 lines and the sestet which consisted the last 6 lines of the sonnet. The first two quatrains formed the question or the argument or proposition and the sestet which led to a resolution. The ninth line, i.e. the first line of the sestet, indicated towards a turn or a "volta" in the tonal quality of the sonnet where it would move towards the resolution to the argument. The Petrarchan octave followed the *a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a* rhyme scheme and the sestet would follow either *c-d-e-c-d-e* or the *c-d-c-c-d-c* rhyme scheme. Shakespeare, one of the most famous practitioners of the sonnet form, employed the *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g* to realize some marvellous effects. As opposed to this, Spenser elected to use the *a-b-a-b, b-c-b-c, c-d-c-d, e-e* rhyme scheme that departed quite radically from both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean (or what is widely accepted as the English sonneteering style) traditions. In his sonnets, the three quatrains and the couplet were not divided into the argument/dilemma and resolution division that is exhibited by the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets. The interlocked rhyme scheme is fundamentally different from the dominant sonneteering techniques of the age.

In a typical sonnet sequence, the Petrarchan mistress, who would under no condition submit to the erotic longings of the poetic persona, would be the locus of desire not dissimilar from queen who was the locus of attention for the courtier-poet desirous of political patronage. Elizabeth was infamous for her indecisive nature which was central to her political dealings with her courtiers. She encouraged competition among them and shrewdly manipulated the contenders for her attentions. In Spenser's sonnets we can find traces of dissatisfaction with the female monarch and a nuanced effort to subvert the dynamic between the courtier-poet and the female sovereign by transposing the real and symbolic presence of Elizabeth onto a more accessible and ordinary love interest.

Amoretti:

The *Amoretti* (Italian for Cupids) cycle was first published in 1595, a year after his marriage to Elizabeth Boyle. *Amoretti* along with his marriage poem, *Epithalamium* were published in a single octavo by William Ponsonby, along with Anacreontic sections and an envoy, titled "*Amoretti and Epithalamium. Written not long since by Edmonde Spenser*". These poems have been widely recognized as his tribute to Elizabeth Boyle but can hardly be studied in isolation from the socio-political conditions of the age. The 89 sonnets in this cycle records a diverse range of sentiments and emotions of the husband-to-be. Unlike Sidney who had concealed the lady's identity under the name

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'Stella', Spenser makes no qualms about disclosing his love-interest's name and deliberately does not fictionalize it.

It begins with the characteristic Petrarchan style of relating the sufferings of the abject, unhappy lover. However, it moves steadily towards a thematic resolution of the lover's dilemma and sonnets 67 and 68 marks a change in the mood of the cycle. It is desirable to see the cycle as a whole and also appraise the individual sonnets for their content and intrinsic worth in isolation. The sonnets following 68 suggest the fulfilment of the poet's desires, i.e. the lady's acquiescence to his repeated pleas for reciprocation. The mood of the cycle transforms and so do the dynamics between the beloved and the poet. Anne L. Prescott has suggested that *Amoretti* is "loosely Neo-Platonic" in nature. This cycle reveals just how acquainted Spenser was with the dominant strain of Petrarchism in the poetry of his age. He not only does he use the Petrarchan discourse but actively subverts the tradition. While the lover in nearly all of such sonnets sequences longs for a sexually unavailable mistress, in Spenser the love is eventually leads to a wedding that is described in *Epithalamium*. According to Prescott, "Spenser's innovation was to dedicate an entire sequence to a woman he could honourably win." There is indication in the cycle that Spenser intended it to correspond with the liturgical year and this lends a religious dimension to the sonnet sequence. The 89 sonnets correspond directly with the daily and sequential order of the prescribed scriptural readings so much so that the final structure of *Amoretti* and *Epithalamium* have been read as liturgico-poetic artefacts. Spenser's initial intention was to bring to sonnet sequence to a closure with sonnet 75 in order to maintain the liturgical framework as with 75 he would have concluded directly with the Sunday after the Easter celebrations. However, he did go on to write another fourteen sonnets that alter the readers' appraisal of the cycle.

Although the *Amoretti* cycle had initially been assessed as a "personalized outpouring of neo-Platonic idealism that is to be clearly differentiated from the fraught, difficult, degenerate world of the court" as Catherine Bates puts it, it is now studied in the wider and multifaceted matrix of the public sphere. It also expresses the sentiments of the idealist neo-Platonist for whom the beauty of the lady is a manifestation of God. While in the Petrarchan tradition, the survival of dialogue was dependent on the continual dismissal of the lover's requests, in Spenser's world view there existed a possibility of harmony that the lovers might in due course enjoy in the sacred bond of matrimony.

Let us now look at sonnets prescribed in this course in detail:

Sonnet 57

SWEET warrior! when shall I have peace with you
High time it is this war now ended were
Which I no longer can endure to sue,
Ne your incessant batt'ry more to bear:
So weak my powers, so sore my wounds, appear,
That wonder is how I should live a jot,
Seeing my heart through-lanced everywhere
With thousand arrows, which your eyes have shot:
Yet shoot ye sharply still, and spare me not,
But glory think to make these cruel stours,
Ye cruel one! what glory can be got,
In slaying him that would live gladly yours!
Make peace therefore, and grant me timely grace,
That all my wounds will heal in little space.

Military imagery dominates this sonnet that begins with a distinctive Petrarchan conceit. In the previous sonnet, the beloved had been compared to a 'Tyger' and here she is presented as a "warrior", an expression that points towards Spenser's relationship with military culture. The lover-figure seems to be writhing in pain because of the beloved's probable negligence or dismissal. The "warrior" lady, although "sweet" seems to be punishing the lover with her customary rejection. The Petrarchan mistress quite clearly has an upper-hand here and by the every virtue of her power to resist and not succumb to the lover's demands.

The lover seems to be in a rather abject state and appears to have been viscerally injured by her. Weakened by this, he admits being ready to submit without any coercion. The sonnet gives the impression that the beloved constant failure to accept him ("incessant batt'ry") and her indifference has left the lover in a dismal state where he feels that his heart has been wounded and pierced "with thousand arrows". These arrows constantly shot by her eyes have defeated the lover who has now taken recourse to pleading for mercy. However, she requests that she goes on shoot at him and not release him from this violent interaction, suggesting that even reproach seem quite welcome to him. He points out that it is a futile exercise for her to endeavour to kill him

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since he had already submitted himself to her authority. The suitor is equally relentless in his endeavour to win his beloved's good graces and love. Her mere refusal to accept his proposal is seen as an act of war where the man is at the losing end, although his repeated attempts to woo her with his words in the preceding sonnets can be seen in a similar light.

In the concluding couplet, Boyle's suitor appears to beg her for some relief, hoping that she would grant him with some sign of assent. Weary of the battles he has had to wage, the lover looks forward to a period of peace in order to retire from the war and allow his wounds to heal. The military imagery that has been used here can be found in several of the sonnets in this sequence. In the first quatrain from Sonnet 9 has been quoted below we can observe a remarkable similarity in the kind of imagery that has been employed to express the lover's distress.

"Dayly when I do seeke and sew for peace,
And hostages doe offer for my truth:
she cruell warriour doth her selfe address,
to battell, and the weary war renew'th."

Amoretti, Sonnet 9 (lines 1-4)

The suitor and his love interest are engaged in this battle throughout what has been claimed as the first segment of the cycle. The distinctive element in this cycle is that the first segment consists primarily of the lover's suits and the beloved inevitable rejection and then there is turn in the winds when the beloved finally accepts the suitor's offer and the succeeding sonnet explore the multiple facets of love, apart from rejection and loss. What is interesting to note in *Amoretti* is the way in which Spenser investigates the apparent inequalities that plague lovers. While in a majority of these sonnets the chaste and virtuous lady seems to hold the reins and a dominant position, the moment she accepts the suitor's proposal, she appears to have lost the upper hand. Gradually, as we will find in the sonnets after Sonnet 62, the male lover gains the dominant position in the relationship. In *Amoretti*, one can locate the various stages of domination and submission that the couple pass through which ultimately leads to the submission of the woman to the patriarchal discourse and the institution of marriage that fixes her position vis-a-vis her lover/husband.

This game of courtship has a startling resonance given the socio-political times in which Spenser was writing, especially because of the marital status of Queen Elizabeth.

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The chaste "Virgin Queen" had to be "courted" in order to gain her favours. And as we have come to realise in one of the preceding sections in this commentary, Elizabeth was one who bestow her graces upon her courtiers strategically and after much deliberation. It is perhaps the royal cult of virginity that is being challenged out here.

In *The Faerie Queen*, Spenser's poetic ideal was the figure of the warrior woman, Britomart, who is personification of Chastity. Britomart is seen fighting all odds and even releasing vanquished men from the clutches of the Amazonian Queen Radigund who is projected as a rather malevolent character. Britomart is projected as Spenser's ideal since she, as opposed to the eternally virgin huntress Belphoebe (remember how Spenser had likened Elizabeth to Belphoebe?), ultimately does submit to a patriarchal structure by submitting to her lover. One is bound to realize this very work, that might have been examined as a simple composition of a "complaint" sonnet, does have larger overtones interrelated with the socio-political dynamics that Spenser had observed and drawn from.

In the next sonnet, given below, we shall witness Spenser's usage of Ovidian myths and also study the way in which he had employed them in order to comment upon the marital status of the Queen.

Sonnet 67

Like as a huntsman after weary chase,
Seeing the game from him escap'd away,
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,
With panting hounds beguiled of their prey:
So, after long pursuit and vain assay,
When I all weary had the chase forsook,
The gentle deer returned the self-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook:
There she, beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide;
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,
And with her own goodwill her firmly tied.
Strange thing, me seemed, to see a beast so wild,
So goodly won, with her own will beguil'd.

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The imagery and theme of hunting that had been established in some of the preceding sonnets has been continued here. Here, Spenser puns on dear/deer and hart/heart to have the desired effect. Michelle M. Sauer has noted that "in the first few lines, the hunting simile- "Lyke as a huntsman"- is converted to a metaphor with the pun on the word *deare*." Hunting metaphors were not uncommon in the love poetry of the age but in this sonnet, Spenser has adapted this convention only to alter it. While in the previous sonnets, the beloved was the one to be likened to a "warrior", here the lady-love is positioned as a doe that had escaped the clutches of the hunter.

It is interesting to note that although the hunter is not powerful enough to have captured the doe, it is the doe ("gentle dear") that returns to the huntsman and willingly submits to the hunter whom she had once eluded. The huntsman persona insists that it was the prey that had readily surrendered to him and that he never had to exercise any force to capture it. There seems to be a suggestion that the "deare" had been enraptured by the huntsman which explains this rather odd behaviour. The hunter, nevertheless, is quite pleased with the fact that she (deer/mistress) had give in freely i.e. submitted to the sexual mastery of her captor.



<http://www.google.co.in/imgres?biw=1360&bih=624&tbm=isch&tbnid=6Rr-THOYEs13AM%3A&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tumblr.com%2Ftagged%2Fwhite->

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<http://www.englishliterature.com/2019/01/01/Edmund-Spenser-Amoretti-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60-61-62-63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70-71-72-73-74-75-76-77-78-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-96-97-98-99-100-101-102-103-104-105-106-107-108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-116-117-118-119-120-121-122-123-124-125-126-127-128-129-130-131-132-133-134-135-136-137-138-139-140-141-142-143-144-145-146-147-148-149-150-151-152-153-154-155-156-157-158-159-160-161-162-163-164-165-166-167-168-169-170-171-172-173-174-175-176-177-178-179-180-181-182-183-184-185-186-187-188-189-190-191-192-193-194-195-196-197-198-199-200-201-202-203-204-205-206-207-208-209-210-211-212-213-214-215-216-217-218-219-220-221-222-223-224-225-226-227-228-229-230-231-232-233-234-235-236-237-238-239-240-241-242-243-244-245-246-247-248-249-250-251-252-253-254-255-256-257-258-259-260-261-262-263-264-265-266-267-268-269-270-271-272-273-274-275-276-277-278-279-280-281-282-283-284-285-286-287-288-289-290-291-292-293-294-295-296-297-298-299-300-301-302-303-304-305-306-307-308-309-310-311-312-313-314-315-316-317-318-319-320-321-322-323-324-325-326-327-328-329-330-331-332-333-334-335-336-337-338-339-340-341-342-343-344-345-346-347-348-349-350-351-352-353-354-355-356-357-358-359-360-361-362-363-364-365-366-367-368-369-370-371-372-373-374-375-376-377-378-379-380-381-382-383-384-385-386-387-388-389-390-391-392-393-394-395-396-397-398-399-400-401-402-403-404-405-406-407-408-409-410-411-412-413-414-415-416-417-418-419-420-421-422-423-424-425-426-427-428-429-430-431-432-433-434-435-436-437-438-439-440-441-442-443-444-445-446-447-448-449-450-451-452-453-454-455-456-457-458-459-460-461-462-463-464-465-466-467-468-469-470-471-472-473-474-475-476-477-478-479-480-481-482-483-484-485-486-487-488-489-490-491-492-493-494-495-496-497-498-499-500-501-502-503-504-505-506-507-508-509-510-511-512-513-514-515-516-517-518-519-520-521-522-523-524-525-526-527-528-529-530-531-532-533-534-535-536-537-538-539-540-541-542-543-544-545-546-547-548-549-550-551-552-553-554-555-556-557-558-559-560-561-562-563-564-565-566-567-568-569-570-571-572-573-574-575-576-577-578-579-580-581-582-583-584-585-586-587-588-589-590-591-592-593-594-595-596-597-598-599-600-601-602-603-604-605-606-607-608-609-610-611-612-613-614-615-616-617-618-619-620-621-622-623-624-625-626-627-628-629-630-631-632-633-634-635-636-637-638-639-640-641-642-643-644-645-646-647-648-649-650-651-652-653-654-655-656-657-658-659-660-661-662-663-664-665-666-667-668-669-670-671-672-673-674-675-676-677-678-679-680-681-682-683-684-685-686-687-688-689-690-691-692-693-694-695-696-697-698-699-700-701-702-703-704-705-706-707-708-709-710-711-712-713-714-715-716-717-718-719-720-721-722-723-724-725-726-727-728-729-730-731-732-733-734-735-736-737-738-739-740-741-742-743-744-745-746-747-748-749-750-751-752-753-754-755-756-757-758-759-760-761-762-763-764-765-766-767-768-769-770-771-772-773-774-775-776-777-778-779-780-781-782-783-784-785-786-787-788-789-790-791-792-793-794-795-796-797-798-799-800-801-802-803-804-805-806-807-808-809-810-811-812-813-814-815-816-817-818-819-820-821-822-823-824-825-826-827-828-829-830-831-832-833-834-835-836-837-838-839-840-841-842-843-844-845-846-847-848-849-850-851-852-853-854-855-856-857-858-859-860-861-862-863-864-865-866-867-868-869-870-871-872-873-874-875-876-877-878-879-880-881-882-883-884-885-886-887-888-889-890-891-892-893-894-895-896-897-898-899-900-901-902-903-904-905-906-907-908-909-910-911-912-913-914-915-916-917-918-919-920-921-922-923-924-925-926-927-928-929-930-931-932-933-934-935-936-937-938-939-940-941-942-943-944-945-946-947-948-949-950-951-952-953-954-955-956-957-958-959-960-961-962-963-964-965-966-967-968-969-970-971-972-973-974-975-976-977-978-979-980-981-982-983-984-985-986-987-988-989-990-991-992-993-994-995-996-997-998-999-1000>

Prescott has suggested that the deer does so "beguil'd" by 'her owne will' (which could mean sexual desire, even genitalia) and only after the lover has stopped his rhetorical posturing, hard work, reproaches and badgering." It can be proposed that the deer here is equated to the hunter and therefore the deer, by extension the woman, has been given far more agency than the other women who have been subjects of a similar conceit. The huntsman is baffled precisely because he cannot figure whether he was the one who had been hunted all this while. This sonnet has been positioned in the liturgical year on the evening before Easter and when traditionally Psalm 42, a psalm of spring, would be sung and the resonance of his is found in the imagery used here. The images of "thirst" and "brooke" indicate towards it and the movement of the deer back to the hunter parallels Christ's willing movement towards the Cross.

This sonnet echoes one that had been composed by Petrarch, "Una Candida Cerva", The White Doe, which had been translated by Wyatt in the Elizabethan Age. It has been quoted below:

A White Doe

A pure-white doe in an emerald glade
Appeared to me, with two antlers of gold,
Between two streams, under a laurel's shade,
At sunrise, in the season's bitter cold.
Her sight was so suavely merciless
That I left work to follow her at leisure,
Like the miser who looking for his treasure
Sweetens with that delight his bitterness.
Around her lovely neck, "Do not touch me"
Was written with topaz and diamond stone,
"My Caesar's will has been to make me free."
Already toward noon had climbed the sun,
My weary eyes were not sated to see,

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When I fell in the stream and she was gone.

Canzoniere, 190

If we study this poem carefully, we shall be able to trace the similarities as well as the dissimilarities between the two works. While Spenser's fascinating doe eludes the hunter only to return, Petrarch's disappears, never to be seen again. The Petrarchan mistress is forever elusive and untameable but Spenser's "beast so wild" is readily tamed by the suitor. In *The Faerie Queen*, the Queen had been compared to the daughter of the moon-goddess Diana, the virgin huntress Belphoebe who is a prominent figure in the book. Spenser had actively drawn from Ovidian myths but had revised and employed them to suit his purpose. Montrose has suggested that "By shadowing the queen's natural body in the persona of the virtuous and beautiful Belphoebe, Spenser appropriates the eroticized virginity in which the charismatic personal power of the queen was vested." In the Ovidian tale Actaeon had been punished by Diana as he had seen her naked while he was hunting. He had been transformed into a deer so that he would be hunted by his own hounds, thus be at the receiving end of his own predatory sexual fantasy. Spenser transforms this myth in his sonnet and the Actaeon/lover/predator enjoys absolute supremacy.

In this sonnet, quite clearly, the woman is not necessarily the huntress but the hunted. Montrose has also proposed that "Elizabeth's male subjects occasionally indulged in psycho-sexual fantasies of dominating their female sovereign", a tendency that is visible here. While Sonnet 57 was more of a complaint poem about emotional failure and disappointment, 67 is evidently not of a similar nature. Catherine Bates has noted that it was a familiar belief in Renaissance England that marriage as an institution had the potential of channelizing dangerous sexual appetites and creating order in the society. The *Amoretti* and *Epithalamium* collection engages directly with this understanding where the abject male suitor eventually gains his beloved's hand in marriage and assumes a position of power and authority over the woman. *Epithalamium* suggests a kind of closure where male dominance has been established, unchallenged.

In any Petrarchan scenario, the play of dominance and manipulation was a common feature where the poet-lover would complain, badger and beg for the lady's attentions. Spenser, the courtier-poet engaged in the elaborate game of "courtship" and "courtiership", takes it to another level altogether in *Epithalamium* where he seems to have mustered the audacity to get the "lovers" married. However, it must be noted that these sonnets are ostensibly dedicated exclusively to his bride-to-be/wife, Elizabeth Boyle and not Queen Elizabeth. In sonnet 73, we come across the earliest mention of his

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beloved's name and it is in sonnet 74 that we first come to receive the startling revelation that Spenser's mother, beloved and sovereign share the name Elizabeth. Let us now look at sonnet 75.

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 dost in vain assay
A mortal thing so to immortalize;
For I myself shall like to this decay,
And eke 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, when as death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

In this sonnet, in an effort to immortalize his beloved name, the lover writes her name "upon the strand" and despite repeated efforts, the waves wash his words away. This indicates towards the fleeting nature of time where nothing can be held on to for a considerable period. His attempts prompt the mistress, scornful of his labours, to remind him that she was a creature mortal and like the name on the beach, she too would be washed away by the inclemency of time. It should be noted that in the two sonnets that immediately precede 75, the mistress's name, Elizabeth had been penned down. Catherine Bates has suggested that like "Raleigh in The Ocean's Love to Cynthia, Spenser's lover scratches the name of the beloved in the sand as an emblem of the fleetingness of love." The lover goes on to say that, his verses would preserve her for all eternity and his poetic versification of her life and times would outlive everything that is prone to decay, including her material body. Fame would preserve her for all eternity. When compared to Petrarch or Wyatt, one sees that Spenser refuses to reflect upon a dead beloved who is simply preserved in memory. He does not mourn the loss of a life but unlike the Italian innamorati mourning for the dearly departed lady-loves, he

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ventriloquizes the beloved. This is a kind of control that male poet exercises but he nevertheless allows her some space to articulate herself in a complex and gendered space.

Spenser's assertion that the lady "shall liue by fame" resonates Ovid's similar claim that even if the human body is subject to death, his verses would make him immortal. Kenneth J. Larson had suggested that "The Ovidean echoes confirm that Spenser was here imitating the locus classicus of poetic conclusions and his final lines asserting that the betrothed will finally enjoy a marriage in heaven ("and later life renew") is an appropriate conclusion for a period of betrothal in which marriage is seen as persisting in the world to come.

If we take a look at Shakespeare's sonnet 55, we will find a lot of thematic similarity between the two sonnets. Here is a short section from sonnet 55.

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.

Sonnet 55, lines (1-4)

This first quatrain reveals the poet's conviction that his sonnet would be able to conserve his beloved's memory in ways that memorials and monuments would not succeed in doing. While sonnet 74 celebrates the poet's three loves (the three Elizabeths) mother, beloved and monarch, sonnet 75 can be appraised as a move towards preserving all the three women who quite strangely share an identical name. It should also be noted that Queen Elizabeth had deliberately attempted to fashion these three roles for herself with respect to her courtiers and her subjects. It is as if Spenser could perceive his private life only when it was mediated by the court-life of the Elizabethan Age. (One may also look up the recitation of this poem at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMoR9rDeuqc>)

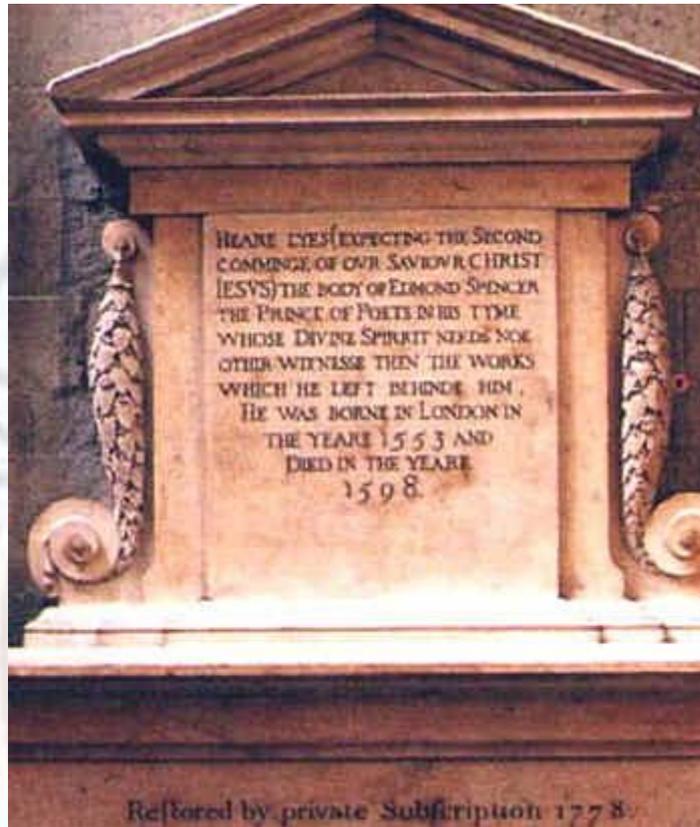
Spenser was a poet who was indisputably deeply engaged in the socio-political world of the court and his poetry certainly reflects the relationship. Spenser's sonnets might have not been as much appreciated as that of his contemporaries but his distinctive use and departure from Petrarchism should not be underestimated. In a highly gendered world, Spenser does seem to have employed the socially accepted norms as his own. Although ostensibly in absolute awe of his Queen, he does not refrain from sometimes undercutting her authority. His sonnets are remarkable works that are

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A Brief Timeline

1552	The probable date of Spenser's birth.
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not only steeped in Elizabethan culture but they also challenge the literary conventions of his day and age.



Spenser's memorial at Westminster Abbey

<http://www.google.co.in/imgres?biw=1360&bih=624&tbn=isch&tbnid=Bq38NZkcuJbasM%3A&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.poetsgraves.co.uk%2Fspenser.htm&docid=UccOgSndBvxxZM&imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.poetsgraves.co.uk%2Fimages%2Fspenserredmund.jpeg&w=350&h=413&ei=Gd8WU8m3LIKRrQev8YCgBQ&zoom=1&ved=0CFwQhBwwBA&iact=rc&dur=248&page=1&start=0&ndsp=2>

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1561-69	Spenser had joined the Merchant Taylors' School and was taught by their famous headmaster, Robert Mulcaster.
1569-73	He was at Pembroke College where he had found friends in people like Harvey. Spenser graduated from Pembroke in 1673 with a Bachelor of Arts degree.
1573-76	Spenser spent these years in Cambridge studying for his Master of Arts degree and graduated in the year 1576.
1578	Spenser served as secretary to John Young, Bishop of Rochester, in Kent.
1579	Married his first wife Maccabaeus Chylde. Spenser was accepted into the employment of the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, and was living in Leicester House. Publication of <i>The Shepheardes Calender</i> .
1580	Spenser-Harvey correspondence was entered into the Stationers' Register.
1580	Spenser was appointed secretary to Arthur, fourteenth Lord Grey de Wilton. He left England to take up office as Lord Deputy of Ireland. There he went on military expeditions with Grey and fought the Papal forces. Later, he returned to Dublin.
1581	Spenser was appointed clerk of the Chancery for Faculties in Dublin.
1582	Grey recalled and consequently Spenser discharged from his secretaryship.
1588	Spenser occupied Kilcolman, although the royal grant was yet to be official.
1589	Official confirmation of Spenser's right to Kilcolman and its 3,028 acres.
1590	Spenser writes his Letter of the Authors, to Sir Walter Raleigh.
1590	The Faerie Queene, Books I-III, published in London
1591	Spenser was granted a life pension of £50 per annum by Elizabeth. He completed <i>Colin clouts come home againe</i> while at Kilcolman.
1594	Spenser began serving as Queen's Justice for County Cork. His married Elizabeth Boyle.
1595	Publication of <i>Amoretti and Epithalamion, Colin clouts come home againe, and Astrophel</i> .
1596	Publication of the first six books of <i>The Faerie Queene, Fowre Hymnes, Prothalamion</i>
1597	Spenser acquired Renny in south Cork, on behalf of his son Peregrine.
1598	Spenser was designated the Sheriff of Cork. Kilcolman was sacked and Spenser and his family had to flee to the city of Cork. His prose tract, A View of the Present State of Ireland was entered in the Stationer's Register.

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1599	Spenser died in Westminster.
1609	<i>The Faerie Queen</i> was published along with the <i>Mutabilitie</i> cantos.

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