

Sonnet 34

(Amoretti)

By

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AMORETTI: SONNET 34
BY EDMUND SPENSER

Original Text

Paraphrase

Lyke as a ship that through the Ocean wyde
by conduct of some star doth make her way,
 whenas a storme hath dimd her trusty guyde,
 out of her course doth wander far astray:
 So I whose star, that wont with her bright ray
 me to direct, with cloudes is overcast,
 doe wander now in darknesse and dismay,
 through hidden perils round about me plast.
 Yet hope I well, that when this storme is past
 my Helice the lodestar of my lyfe
 will shine again, and looke on me at last,
 with lovely light to cleare my cloudy grief.
 Till then I wander carefull comfortlesse,
 in secret sorow and sad pensivenesse.

Like as a ship, that through the ocean wide,
 By conduct of some star, doth make her way,
 Whenas a storm hath dimmed her trusty guide,
 Out of her course doth wander far astray:
 So I, whose star, that wont with her bright ray
 Me to direct, with clouds is overcast,
 Do wander now, in darkness and dismay,
 Through hidden perils round about me placed;
 Yet hope I well that, when this storm is past,
 My Helice, the loadstar of my life,
 Will shine again, and look on me at last,
 With lovely light to clear my cloudy grief.
 Till then I wander careful, comfortless,
 In secret sorrow, and sad pensiveness.

About Amoretti

Amoretti is a sonnet cycle written by Edmund Spenser in the 16th century. The cycle describes his courtship and eventual marriage to Elizabeth Boyle.

Amoretti was first published in 1595 in London by William Ponsonby. It was printed as part of a volume entitled *Amoretti and Epithalamion. Written not long since by Edmund Spenser*. The volume included the sequence of 89 sonnets, along with a series of short poems called *Anacreontics and Epithalamion*, a public poetic celebration of marriage. Only six complete copies remain today, including one at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. and one at Oxford's Bodleian Library. "The volume memorializes Spenser's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, a young, well-born Anglo-Irish woman, and the couple's wedding on June 11, 1594". In the sonnets of Amoretti Spenser succeeds in "immortalizing the name of his bride to be ... by devices of word play".

Amoretti has been largely overlooked and unappreciated by critics, who see it as inferior to other major Renaissance sonnet sequences in the Petrarchan tradition. In addition, it has been overshadowed by Spenser's other works, most notably *The Faerie Queene*, his epic allegorical masterpiece. C. S. Lewis, among the most important twentieth-century Spenser scholars, said that "Spenser was not one of the great sonneteers". However, other critics consider Spenser's sonnets to be innovative and to express a range of tones and emotions, and are much more skillful and subtle than generally recognized.

Write a critical analysis and summary of the sonnet "Amoretti 34" by Edmund Spenser.

Answer:

A look at "Amoretti 33" helps to orient "Amoretti 34" in the ongoing love story of Edmund for Elizabeth. Critics agree that Edmund Spenser is chronicling his own--sometimes fruitless--pursuit of the love of Elizabeth. Bear in mind that Edmund Spenser had been married and had two children by his first wife, so there was a great age difference between Spenser and Elizabeth. Since she was reputed a beauty of a noble spirit and good heart, she had suitors her own age for Spenser to compete against for her affections.

"Amoretti 33" expresses Spenser's grief that his unrequited (unreturned) affection for and attachment to Elizabeth was driving him to distraction, as the saying goes. He bemoans that he is failing Queen Elizabeth by not being able to concentrate on writing *The Faerie Queene*. He says his wits are troubled by a tedious "fit" of a proud woman who spoils his spirit. He ends by declaring he must cease his writing until he has won her or until someone lends him another heart ("brest") to get along with.

In "Amoretti 34" things are not much better. He starts out with a ship at sea that cannot navigate by the stars because clouds of a storm have blocked the sight of them, so it has gone "out of [its] course" and "doth wander far astray." The oppositional turn at the concatenated lines 4-5 (astray-ray) is that he turns from the metaphoric ship to himself, thus explaining it by saying that he has also lost his way because Elizabeth's metaphoric light is covered with clouds of a storm and so he wanders in "darknesse and dismay" with perils blasting around him.

The oppositional turn of the second concatenated rhyme in lines 8-9 (plast-past) is that Spenser turns from expressing despair to expressing hope that when the storm is past Elizabeth--the "lodestar" of his life":

will shine again, and looke on me at last,
with louely light to cleare my cloudy grief,

Spenser states in the final rhyming couplet in Lines 13 and 14 that until his lodestar is out of her stormy disquietude, he will wander full of care ("carefull") and without comfort, with a sorrow that he keeps to himself while doing sad penance ("pensiuenesse"). Obviously, Spenser did something to cause a great rift in whatever uneasy friendship he had with Elizabeth--uneasy because of his love and her indifference--and he is remorseful, repentant, lost and longing.

The structure is the Spenserian sonnet structure of three quatrains and a rhyming couplet, all equaling 14 sonnet lines, linked with concatenation at lines 4-5 and 8-9. Concatenation is the rhyming scheme Spenser used

in most of the amorette. The advantage to concatenation is that (1) the quatrains can be linked by subject matter and topic and (2) the oppositional turns that take place at the concatenated lines add emotional tension and psychological revelation to the sonnets.

The rhyme scheme is the Spenserian sonnet scheme of ababbcbccdcdee with concatenation at lines 4-5 and 8-9. Concatenation allows the subjects and topics to link and the rhymes to link as b is repeated in the second quatrain and c is repeated in the third quatrain. Other sonnet forms require separate subjects and separate rhyme schemes (abab cdcd efef gg).

Edmund Spenser's Sonnet 34, one of the Amorette group of sonnets describing the poet's courtship and eventual marriage to Elizabeth Boyle, follows the conventional Petrarchan metaphor of lost love compared to a storm-tossed, un navigated ship. The poet's "star" whose "bright ray" had guided him in the past is now "with cloudes...overcast." His only hope in the midst of "darknesse and dismay" is that his "lodestar," the Polaris of his life will "with lovely light" shine upon him again and restore him to happiness. In the meantime, however, the poet, full of "sad pensiveness," must wander in misery.

The poet, undergoing a bout of depression clearly likens himself to a ship that "out of her course doth wander far astray." (4) What particularly occasioned this emotional state is difficult to determine, unless it arose as a result of the normal stresses of married life. Regardless, the poet anticipates the coming release from his woe when his wife, "the lodestar of my life, will shine again, and look on me at last." (10-11) The poet addresses his wife as "my Helice" (10). This name the Greeks gave to the constellation which *turns around* Polaris. It is significant that the poet does not identify the light of his life *with* the Pole Star. Like him, she also 'turns around' it. It may be that this metaphor is the key to the poet's self-knowledge: He has had these emotional storms before and he will have them again. Today may be "overcast" (9), but soon the clouds will lift and clear, and once again he will know the "lovely light" (12) from his dear wife. C'est la vie.

What are some special features of the Amorette sonnets by Edmund Spenser?

Answer:

One of the most intriguing aspects of Edmund Spenser's sonnet sequence known as Amorette is that the male lover is actually successful in winning the affection of the female beloved. In many other sonnets of the Renaissance, self-absorbed males try to win the affections of reluctant females and are usually unsuccessful. The women seem to sense that the men are selfishly motivated, desiring the women mainly as sexual objects. In other words, the women seem to intuit that the men do not truly love them but instead feel mere lust for them. The men treat the women as simple objects of self-centered desire. It is not surprising, then, that the males usually do not win the women.

In Spenser's sonnet sequence, however, true love – in the deepest senses of that term – actually does win out. By the final third of the sequence, the male lover has come to love the truly valuable aspects of his beloved: her character, her mind, her spirit, her soul. In other words, he comes to love her in a deeply Christian sense of the word "love." This change is especially obvious in sonnet 68, in which the speaker reveals that he has his priorities right (at least from a Renaissance Christian perspective): first asks for God's love; then he expresses love of God; then he suggests that all humans should love another as God has taught them to love; and then, finally, he expresses love for his own beloved. In other words, the poem suggests that we should first love God, then love others in a godly way, and then love one particular person as God would want us to love that person.

Precisely because the female beloved realizes that the male is now offering her true, genuine love, she gives him such love in return. In fact, because he values her fully as a beautiful human being (not merely as a woman with a beautiful body), the female beloved in this series of poems is actually allowed to speak, as we see, for example, in sonnet 75. Women rarely get to speak for themselves in other Renaissance sonnets. We also see her spiritual beauty – especially her humility – in that same poem. Meanwhile, in sonnet 79, the male speaker shows that he understands that the truly beautiful aspect of his beloved is her mind, her reason, her soul (the qualities that link her most intimately with God). For once, a male speaker in Renaissance sonnets seems to express genuine love, not mere lust. No wonder, then, that he is successful in winning the woman he has been pursuing.