Sonnet 75: One day I wrote her name upon the

POEM TEXT

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," (quod 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 whenas death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew."

SUMMARY

One day I wrote my beloved's name in the sand on the shore, but the waves rolled in and erased it. So I wrote it a second time, but when the tide came in it just ate up all my hard work again. "You're being silly and prideful," my beloved told me, "in your futile attempts to make something mortal last forever. I'm going to die and decay one day, and, just as the ocean erases my name from the shore, everything about me will disappear." "That's not true," I replied. "Less noble things can plan to die and disappear, but you're going to live forever through fame. My poetry will immortalize your incredible goodness and write your magnificent name in the heavens. Even when death has come for the entire world, our love will live on forever."

THEMES

THE IMMORTALIZING POWER OF POETRY

"Sonnet 75" is a poem about the power of poetry itself. The poem's speaker wants his beloved to be remembered forever, even as she argues that such notions are vain and pointless; she's a human being, and as such her name and memory will one day disappear along with her mortal body. The speaker, however, believes that her beauty and virtue deserve everlasting fame, and that he has the ability to immortalize her, to grant her a kind of triumph over death, through his poetry.

Despite the speaker's deep admiration for his beloved, the poem makes it clear that she is subject to the inevitable passage of time. The fact that the speaker repeatedly writes his beloved's name "upon the strand" (or shore) only for the ocean to quickly wash it away suggests that time's passage is relentless. The image of her name disappearing from the strand also suggests how fleeting people's marks are upon the world; after her death, time will remove all proof of her ever having lived.

The beloved dismisses the speaker's attempts as mere hubris (that is, pride), insisting that because she is a mortal, she will someday die, and that nothing the speaker does can change this simple fact. She argues that people aren't meant to live forever, and that her name will disappear from history just as the ocean keeps washing the speaker's writing from the sand.

While the speaker acknowledges that lesser mortal things will indeed die and all traces of them will disappear, he insists that his beloved's admirable and virtuous name deserves to live forever—and that it will, through his poetry. The speaker says only "baser things," or things with no real value, should be forgotten, but his beloved deserves to be "eternized." In other words, the speaker thinks his love is too important, too rare and precious, to be forgotten, and so he will use his poetry to capture it for all time. His beloved will "live by fame," the speaker says, meaning that through the power of poetry her name will be remembered by generations to come. In this way, their love will live forever, "renewing" each time someone reads this very poem.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washed it away:

The speaker writes his beloved's name on the "strand" (a.k.a. the seashore), but the ocean waves come and wash it away. The imagery of these opening two lines is simple, concise, and effective: the waves here symbolize the passage of time, which will one day "wash away" the memory of the speaker's beloved.

Right away, the speaker also hints that the poem will be about *poetry* itself: it isn't just the beloved's name that's washed away, but the speaker's *writing*.

Not surprisingly, then, these lines are particularly poetic! They're packed with consonance, alliteration, and assonance:

> One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
> But came the waves and washed it away:

Note how long /ay/, /m/, and /w/ sounds heighten the speaker's language. This poem isn't casual or conversational, all these sonic devices suggest, but rather carefully crafted to be both musical and memorable. The pull of the long /ay/ sounds pulls readers forward, just as the waves are pulled toward the shore. The air-filled whoosh of the /w/ sounds, meanwhile, evokes the rush of the waves lapping against the shore.

Typical for a sonnet, the meter here is iambic pentameter (meaning that each line is made up of five iambs, poetic feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable). Take the second line:

> One day | I wrote | her name | upon | the strand,
> But came | the waves | and wash- | ed it | away

Note that some readers might scan the first foot as a spondee ("One day"), but such a variation is minor. In Spenser's day, the word "washed" would also be manipulated into being pronounced as a two-syllable word in order to maintain the poem's rhythm ("washéd").

Iambic pentameter immediately gives the poem a feeling of structure, not to mention a very noticeable rhythm, and announces that this is a poem with a capital "P." In other words, this is a poem that is very aware of being a poem.

LINES 3-4

> *Again I wrote it with a second hand,*
> *But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.*

The speaker writes his beloved name again with the exact same result. Lines 3-4 use parallelism (thematically and grammatically echoing lines 1-2) to illustrate the idea that time can't be stopped. Death is as inevitable as the coming waves, and the speaker's efforts to commemorate his love seem futile in comparison to time's ability to erase all traces of a human life.

The speaker personifies the tide as a predator looking to gobble up the speaker's hard work (his "pains"):

- Remember that the tide here represents the passage of time, and the "name upon the strand" represents the speaker's beloved herself as well as her memory.
- Time, then, is like a hunter, looking to "prey" on, or devour, all memory of the speaker's beloved.

The phrase "second hand" not only describes the repetitive nature of the speaker's task, but also calls to mind the ticking hands of a clock and suggests that the pressures of time hang over the speaker's writing.

Consonance, alliteration, and assonance continue to drive the poem's rhythm, alongside its steady meter and rhyme. Take line 4, which is in perfect iambic pentameter:

> But came | the tide | and made | my pains | his prey.

Notice how the /ay/ assonance repeats from lines 1-2, always falling on stressed beats and make the rhythm feel all the more propulsive–pulling readers through the line just as the tide moves toward the shore:

> But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

The alliteration of "pains" and "prey," meanwhile, connects the speakers work to its destruction; human efforts are doomed to be devoured by time.

LINES 5-8

> *"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."*

The speaker's beloved enters the poem directly in the second quatrain. She calls him a "Vain man" and says that his attempts to immortalize "a mortal thing" (i.e., a person) are futile; she will disappear just as surely as her name will be erased from the shore. Unlike the speaker, the beloved seems reconciled to the fact of her own eventual "decay," and she chalks his concern for her memory up to vanity and pride.

The speaker's beloved uses antanaclasis in line 5, repeated the word "vain" twice but with a different meaning each time:

> "Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay,

The first "vain" refers to the speaker's vanity: his pride, hubris, and overabundance of confidence in his own abilities. The second "vain" refers to the futility of the speaker's attempts, which are done are *in vain*. In other words, they're doomed to fail. Antanaclasis not only draws attention to the word "vain" in its different meanings, but also gives the reader a sense of the beloved's personality: she is witty and quite comfortable poking fun at her lover's grand ambitions!

Her use of polyptoton (with the repetition of a root word in "mortal" and "immortalize" and "like" and "likewise") serves a similar purpose. It again draws attention to the beloved's cleverness, while also emphasizing the opposing ideas at play in the poem: mortality and immortality, being forgotten and being remembered.

The beloved's speech is just as filled with consonance and

assonance as her partner's. The long /i/ sounds and sharp /k/ sound of lines 7-8, for example, add a feeling of forceful confidence to her argument:

> For I myself shall like to this decay,
> And eke my name be wiped out likewise."

Finally, the beloved uses a simile to illustrate her argument: she is doomed die and disappear, to be "wiped out" just like her name is erased by the tide.

LINES 9-10

> *"Not so," (quod I) "let baser things devise*
> *To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:*

After line 8 comes the poem's *volta*, or turn: the point in a sonnet when the speaker responds to everything that's come before. In response to the beloved's assertion that she will someday die and disappear just like her name from the seashore, the speaker says that "baser things" can "devise to die in dust," but that she "shall live by fame."

In other words, the speaker *agrees* with his beloved that the most things that live and die will be forgotten in time—but in his mind, she is above this "base," or lowly, reality. He thinks that she is important enough to deserve everlasting fame: her memory will live on even when her body has ceased to exist.

Line 9 is the only clearly enjambed line in the whole poem—the only line without an implied pause at its end. Combined with the heavy alliteration and assonance of "devise / To die in dust," the enjambment creates a momentary sense of the speaker getting carried away by his feelings. There's a strong sense of momentum here, the speaker easily and quickly rejecting all those "baser things" so that he can focus on what matters: preserving his beloved through "fame."

LINES 11-12

> *My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,*
> *And in the heavens write your glorious name:*

The speaker goes on to discuss his plans for making his beloved famous. He says his poetry will "eternize" his beloved's "virtues," which he describes as "rare," or uncommon. In other words, he will capture in verse the things that make her special and worthy of being remembered.

Through poetry, he will "write [her] glorious name" across the sky. The word "glorious" suggests the degree of feeling he has toward her: she is wonderful, magnificent, worthy of all praise. The fact that he will write her name in "the heavens" indicates the magnitude of his ambitions: he wants her name to be remembered for all eternity. It also suggests superiority, as if people will need to look up to see her.

Consonance, alliteration, and assonance continue to elevate the speaker's language and remind readers that this here poem is just that: a *poem*. The shared sounds of "verse" and "virtues" make the speaker's praise of both his beloved and his own poetry all the more emphatic. The /v/ sound then gets picked up in "heavens" while the /r/ sound echoes throughout both lines:

> My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,
> And in the heavens write your glorious name:

The intensity of sound in these lines echoes the speaker's ambitious energy. It's as if he's infusing his beloved's life into the poem through the power of sound.

LINES 13-14

> *Where whenas death shall all the world subdue,*
> *Our love shall live, and later life renew."*

In the poem's final couplet, the speaker wraps up his argument. He's already established that he's recording his beloved's "virtues" in "verse." Now he adds that this means that even after death has come for him and his beloved, their love will live on and be "renewed" through the reading of this poem. As if to prove his point, the poem packs a memorable punch in its final lines.

This particular kind of couplet is called a "heroic couplet," which just means that it consists of two lines of iambic pentameter with a final, conclusive end rhyme:

> Where when- | as death | shall all | the world |
> subdue,
> Our love | shall live | and la- | ter life | renew.

The mixture of that steady da-DUM beat combined with the quick one-two punch of the end rhyme basically announces :"This is it! Pay attention!"

These last lines are also particularly memorable because of the prevalence of consonance, alliteration, and assonance. Take the many gentle /l/ and /w/ sounds, which give the final line a pleasing, lilting cadence:

> Where whenas death shall all the world subdue,
> Our love shall live, and later life renew."

Going out on such a sonically pleasant note suggests the speaker's renewed belief in his own ability to immortalize his beloved and their shared love through his poetry.

SYMBOLS

THE TIDE/WAVES

Waves and the tide in general symbolize life's the passage of time. Just as waves erode the shoreline

and erase all evidence of the speaker's writing, time destroys human beings and erases all evidence their lives.

The speaker writes his beloved's name on the seashore because he wants to sing her praises and have her be remembered, but the waves come wash away his efforts. He repeats this process, but to no avail: the tide comes back and again erases his work. This will just keep happening, the poem suggests; waves will never stop lapping the shoreline, meaning that the speaker's attempts to leave evidence of his beloved behind are futile.

The passage of time, it follows, is just as ceaseless and inevitable: the speaker can't stop death from approaching, nor can he stop time from erases traces of his beloved's life on earth.

Such waves/tide symbolism was common concern in Elizabethan poetry; poets were thinking not only of the memorability of their subjects, but also of their own work and the legacy of English literature in generally. Shakespeare, for example, explored the same theme and used waves as a symbol of passing time in his "Sonnet 60."

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** "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."

POETIC DEVICES

SIMILE

The speaker uses a simile in lines 7-8, comparing the way that ocean washing away the beloved's name from the shore to the way that time inevitably erodes all memory of people's lives.

The poem opens with the speaker writing his beloved's name "upon the strand," and the waves coming and undoing the speaker's work. The speaker's beloved, meanwhile, insists that the speaker's efforts are futile because she's mortal and thus "shall like to this decay."

The simile indicates that the beloved is making a comparison between her own eventual demise and the disappearance of her name from the strand: one day, she, like her written name, will be erased from the world. Her body will be eaten up by time just as surely as the speaker's writing is eaten up by the powerful ocean waves.

In fact, she goes on, all traces of her time on earth will one day disappear altogether. Everything her name stands for will eventually be "wiped out likewise": her life, her legacy, and any memory of her whatsoever will disappear as easily as words written in sand.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 7-8:** "For I myself shall like to this decay, / And eke my name be wiped out likewise."

ANTANACLASIS

Antanaclasis appears in the fifth line of the poem, with the repetition of the word "vain":

> "Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay,

In its first use, the word vain means excessive pride; in the second, it means futile, or ineffectual. Essentially, the beloved is saying that the speaker is being silly by writing her name in the sand, where the waves will obviously come and wash it away. There's no use in trying to preserve her name, the beloved insists, because she's mortal and thus will one day die.

While this moment in the poem refers directly to the speaker writing in the sand, the beloved might also be talking about the speaker's writing more generally—that is, saying that he thinks a little too highly of his *poetic* abilities, and that ultimately *any* attempts to immortalize her through writing are a waste of time. Either way, the use of antanaclasis draws attention to the relationship between the speaker's vanity—what the beloved perceives as an overabundance of confidence in his abilities—and the futility of his attempts to make her live forever. In other words, only a very prideful person would attempt something so unrealistic.

Using antanaclasis also adds rhythm to the poem: the line *sounds* more noteworthy and more clever because of the repeated word with its variant meanings. Combined with other repetitive elements such as polyptoton (which appears in the following line with the words "mortal" and "immortal") and alliteration throughout, antanaclasis simply makes for a much more memorable poem.

It also gives the reader a sense of the beloved's personality: this is no tongue-tied or demure lady, but rather someone who feels comfortable wittily calling out the speaker's grand ambitions. There is a sense of playfulness between them; the speaker doesn't seem to be hurt or peeved by her assertion that he's perhaps a little too impressed with himself. There's also a sense of intellectual camaraderie: the beloved's use of pun (which antanaclasis is a form of) and her frank consideration of her own eventual demise matches the speaker's own playful use of language and serious thoughts.

Where Antanaclasis appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "Vain," "vain"

POLYPTOTON

Polyptoton, like the poem's use of antanaclasis and alliteration, adds to the poem's rhythm and memorability. This specific form of repetition also draws attention to the *contrast* between two words that share the same root. For instance, in line 6, "mortal" and "immortalize" point in opposite directions: death and eternity.

Polyptoton also helps to build the sense of an argument being made: it creates a logical thread that pulls the reader from one line to the next. This happens in lines 7 and 8 with the repetition of the same root in "like" and "likewise." The poet might have chosen to just write "too" instead of "likewise," but the word "likewise" creates a stronger sense of repetition and reinforces the sense of *building logic* behind the comparison the beloved is making.

In the final line of the poem, polyptoton again appears with the use of the words "live" and "life." This is important in a poem that is about conquering death through the power of poetry. Where the penultimate line acknowledges that death eventually comes for everyone, the last line makes an exception: the person captured by the poet's verse will attain a kind of eternal life. The repetition of words related to living emphasizes this triumph, and also makes the last line of the poem even stronger and more memorable: even if the reader remembers nothing else of the poem, they will probably think about that last couplet for a long time to come—which is exactly the speaker's point!

Where Polyptoton appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "mortal," "immortalize"
- **Line 7:** "like"
- **Line 8:** "likewise"
- **Line 14:** "live," "life"

CONSONANCE

This poem is bursting at the seams with consonance, not to mention alliteration and assonance! All this repeated sound imbues the poem with rich musicality and texture. The reader is encouraged to enunciate and relish each and every word—which makes sense in a poem that is interested in the power of poetry itself.

Consonance can also draw readers' attention to certain words and the thematic ideas behind them. The smattering of sibilance in lines 5-7, for instance, adds a playful, teasing hiss to the beloved's witty insights:

> "Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay,

Shortly thereafter, the hard /k/ sounds of "like," "decay," and "eke" add a biting sharpness to the beloved's insistence that she's a mortal being and thus must one day die.

Sometimes consonance combines with alliteration and or assonance to make lines feeling even more musical and memorable, as in line 11:

> My verse your virtues rare shall eternize

All this sonic repetition makes the speaker's declaration feel all the more powerful and poetic—which again makes sense given that in this line he's boasting about the power of poetry to immortalize his beloved's virtue.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "waves," "washed," "away"
- **Line 3:** "second hand"
- **Line 4:** "came," "tide," "made my," "pains," "prey"
- **Line 5:** "Vain man," "said," "dost," "in vain," "assay"
- **Line 6:** "mortal," "immortalize"
- **Line 7:** "myself," "like," "decay"
- **Line 8:** "eke," "my name," "wiped," "likewise"
- **Line 9:** "devise"
- **Line 10:** "die," "dust"
- **Line 11:** "verse your virtues rare," "eternize"
- **Line 12:** "heavens"
- **Line 13:** "Where whenas," "shall all," "world"
- **Line 14:** "love shall live," "later life"

ALLITERATION

Like consonance, alliteration helps build rhythm and creates moments of emphasis in this poem. In the second line, for example, the repeated /w/ sound of "waves," "washed," and "away" (which counts as alliteration because the shared sound falls at the start of a stressed syllable, "away") evoke the relentless pull of the tides. The assonance of long /ay/ sounds in "came," "waves," and "away" adds to the effect, imbuing the line with a strong rhythm that's suggests the sound of waves beating up against the shore.

Later, in lines 10-11, alliteration and assonance again combine in the phrase "devise / To die in dust." The repeated sounds make the phrase feel all the more emphatic, and reflect the firmness with which the speaker rejects "baser" things.

Alliteration can also create thematic connections between words, as with "verse" and "virtues" in line 11. The sound of the word "virtues" is literally contained in the word "verse," which reflects the speaker's idea that his poetry with immortalize his beloved's good nature.

Finally, the /l/ sounds in line 14 link "love" to everlasting "life," emphasizing the idea that the speaker's relationship will never die.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “waves,” “washed,” “away”
- **Line 4:** “made my,” “pains,” “prey”
- **Line 6:** “mortal,” “immortalize”
- **Line 9:** “devise”
- **Line 10:** “die,” “dust”
- **Line 11:** “verse,” “virtues”
- **Line 13:** “Where whenas,” “world”
- **Line 14:** “love,” “live,” “later life”

ASSONANCE

Assonance works alongside consonance and alliteration to form connections between words, add to the musicality of the poem, and draw attention to certain ideas. For example, the poem's first half is filled with assonance of the long /ay/ sound: :

> One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
> But came the waves and washed it away:
> [...]
> But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.
> "Vain man," said she, "that dost in vain assay,

This intense assonance creates a very noticeable rhythm and music in the poem. It evokes the insistent pull of the tides, and connects this pull—which symbolizes the passage of time—to the speaker's "vain" attempts to make his beloved immortal.

Later in the poem, long /i/ sounds again fill lines with a feeling of inescapable rhythm and emphasis. Take lines 7-10:

> For I myself shall like to this decay,
> And eke my name be wiped out likewise."
> "Not so," (quod I) "let baser things devise
> To die [...]

The assonance helps pull readers through the poem and elevates its language—making it sound distinctly *poetic*.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “day,” “name”
- **Line 2:** “came,” “waves,” “away”
- **Line 4:** “came,” “made,” “pains,” “prey”
- **Line 5:** “Vain,” “vain assay”
- **Line 7:** “I myself,” “like”
- **Line 8:** “my,” “wiped,” “likewise”
- **Line 9:** “I,” “devise”
- **Line 10:** “die”
- **Line 11:** “verse,” “virtues,” “eternize”
- **Line 12:** “your glorious”

PARALLELISM

The poem uses parallelism to illustrate time's ceaseless passage. The poem begins with the speaker writing his beloved's name on the seashore, a gesture that speaks to his desire for his lover to be remembered. The speaker wishes for others to know that his love existed, but the ocean tide repeatedly erases all evidence of his work:

> 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.

The parallel grammatical structure of lines 2 and 4 allow for slight variation in the language ("waves" vs. "tide," "washed it away" vs. "made my pains his prey"), but the idea remains consistent: time is a powerful and destructive force. No matter how many times the speaker writes his beloved' name on the shore, the ocean will keep returning to wash it away.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** “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.”

PERSONIFICATION

The poem personifies the ocean tide, casting it as a kind of hunter or predator who seeks to devour the speaker's "pains"—that is, his attempts to make his beloved eternally famous. The tide symbolizes time itself, and the tide's personification thus conveys the speaker's feelings toward the passage of time: the speaker dreads the idea of his beloved someday being forgotten, and therefore thinks of the ocean/time as a hostile entity, a hunter out to destroy people.

Time is the villain in the poem, which allows the speaker—and the poetry he writes—to become the hero. Personifying time thus makes the speaker's profession seem all the more brave and noble; the poet becomes a warrior standing up to a hungry monster.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** “But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.”

VOCABULARY

Vain () - In its first use ("vain man"), "vain" means excessive pride. In its second ("that dost in vain assay"), it means that the speaker's attempts are futile and ineffective.

strand (Line 1) - The seashore or beach.

Dost (Line 5) - An archaic or old-fashioned way of saying "do"

(or in this case "does").

Assay (Line 5) - Attempt.

like to this (Line 7) - Similarly.

Eke (Line 8) - When this poem was written, "eke" would have meant "also."

Quod (Line 9) - An archaic way of saying "said."

Baser (Line 9) - Lower or less noble.

devise (Line 9) - To plan or to conceive of something.

Eternize (Line 11) - Make eternal.

Whenas (Line 13) - An archaic way of saying "when."

Subdue (Line 13) - To overcome, quieten, or defeat.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem takes the form of a Spenserian sonnet, which is something of a cross between the traditional English (or Shakespearean) sonnet and an Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet.

Like an English sonnet, this poem's 14 lines can be broken into three quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet. Its rhyme scheme differs from an English sonnet, however (more on that in the Rhyme Scheme section of this guide).

The Spenserian sonnet, like most sonnets, contains a *volta*, in which the speaker responds in some whatever issue or dilemma the first part of the poem has established. In this case, the arrival of the volta in line 9 is made more obvious by virtue of the fact that there is a literal debate happening between two people. The "problem" presented in the sonnet's octave, or first eight lines, is the fact that the speaker's beloved is mortal, and thus subject to the passage of time. The last six lines of the poem (the sestet) act as a rebuttal to the beloved's assertion that the speaker's efforts to immortalize her are in vain.

METER

"Sonnet 75" is written in iambic pentameter, meaning that each line contains five iambs: feet with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM). Take the first line for example:

One day | I wrote | her name | upon | the strand

Iambic pentameter is the stander meter for sonnets, and gives the poem its pleasing cadence. The rhythm is generally pretty steady throughout; the speaker seems quite in control of his "verse," which makes sense given that he's using this poem to immortalize his beloved.

There are a few places where the reader might be inclined to think that Spenser missed a beat, such as in the second line, which on a first scan appears to only have nine syllables. However, in Spenser's day, it was not uncommon to pronounce the word with two syllables: "washéd."

Line 5 begins with an *actual* deviation from the meter, opening with a spondee instead of an iamb:

"Vain man," | said she, | "that dost | in vain | assay

The spondee (a foot made up of two stressed syllables in a row) stands out. It deliberately interrupts the smooth rhythm of the poem, and draws attention to the fact that the beloved isn't just in the speaker's mind: she exists as an actual, separate person in the world with thoughts and opinions of her own. Note the end of her speech:

And eke | my name | be wip- | ed out | likewise."

The beloved's speech ends with another spondee, so that these forceful feet bookend her opinion and emphasize the fact that she disagrees with the speaker.

RHYME SCHEME

This poem follows the specific rhyme scheme associated with the Spenserian sonnet:

ABABBCBCCDCDEE

This rhyme scheme is more complex than that traditionally associated with English sonnets because of its linked nature: rather than each quatrain containing its own *separate* pattern, the pattern moved *across* quatrains, almost like thread stitching up a seam: the final rhyme of the first quatrain is "prey," which then rhymes with the very next line ("assay").

The poem is also filled with assonance that echoes the end rhymes and makes things sound all the more musical and poetic. Note, for example, all the long /ay/ sounds of lines 1-5, which not coincidentally chime with the three B end rhymes in these lines.

Of course, the most important rhyme in the poem is in its final couplet. This kind of couplet (rhyming lines of iambic pentameter) is known as a heroic couplet, and, as that title suggests, it concludes things on a powerful note. The words "subdue" and "renew" underline the poem's central concern: despite death being able to "subdue" the whole world, the love between the speaker and his beloved with "renew" every time someone reads this poem. The firm rhyme makes this final pronouncement all the more confident and memorable.

SPEAKER

While the speaker of a poem doesn't always overlap with the poet, in this case it's safe to say that the speaker is Spenser himself, or at least some version of him. All the sonnets in

Amoretti, including this one, were written for his wife, Elizabeth Boyle. So when the speaker says that he "wrote her name upon the strand" or that "in the heavens" he'll write her "glorious name," he's specifically referring to the name Emily Boyle. Very little is known about Boyle outside of Spenser's poems, so one might say that Spenser succeeded in keeping her name alive!

Spenser not only wanted to commemorate his wife's character; he also wanted England to have a great national literature on par with that of the Italians and the Greeks. This sense of ambition is evident in the poem when the speaker says that his beloved "shall live by fame" and that his verse "shall eternize" her virtues. Regardless of whether one thinks of the speaker as Spenser himself or as an anonymous lover of someone who will eventually die, the important thing is that the speaker is someone who understands the lasting value of poetry: its ability to preserve in language something that would otherwise be forgotten.

SETTING

The poem takes place on "the strand," which is just another word for the shore: the place where a beach meets the sea. The speaker uses the waves to symbolize life's movements and the passage of time, but the waves themselves are also literal: they roll in with the tide and wash away the name that the speaker has written in the sand. This simple act—writing a loved one's name in the sand—speaks to the very ordinary scene that prompted the speaker's grand ambitions to immortalize his beloved in poetry. In the end, this is just a man and a woman sitting on the shore enjoying each other's company, and not wanting this beautiful moment or their love to end.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Sonnet 75" was published as part of Spenser's *Amoretti*, a cycle of 89 love sonnets that Edmund Spenser wrote for his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle, in 1595. The sonnets depict Spenser's courtship of Boyle, which took place over the course of three months in the spring of 1594. It was published alongside *The Epithalamion*, which Spenser wrote as an ode to Boyle on their wedding day, in a single volume. Scholars have suggested that Spenser wrote one sonnet per day while courting Boyle, thus explaining the cycle's obsession with the passage of time.

Spenser wrote during the English Renaissance, a time when English poets revisited in classical languages and ideals while also playing with new forms and techniques. Modern English poetry got its start during this intense period of revival and experimentation, which also saw increases in literacy and publishing and thus expanded the reach and impact that poets had on society.

Many poets of Spenser's time grappled with the question of artistic legacy, and, in turn, wrote poetry about the power of poetry itself. William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 60," for example, also uses the tide to represent the passage of time, and repeatedly praised poetry's ability to immortalize its subjects in his work. "Sonnet 18" (which famously begins, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") is another of Shakespeare's poems that explores a theme almost identical to that of "Sonnet 75."

Spenser, for his part, hoped to create a renowned national literature for England similar to that of Italy, which was the cultural epicenter of Europe at the time. *The Faerie Queen*, his most famous work and the first epic poem to be written in modern English, was in part an attempt to put English poetry on the map, so to speak. Along with his contemporary such as Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, and, of course, Shakespeare, Spenser did indeed contribute to the formation of an internationally recognized literature.

One of, if not *the* most famous forms in poetry is the sonnet, which began in Italy and was perfected by the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca in the 1300s. English poets eventually developed their twist on the form, which would go on to be widely known as the Shakespearean sonnet (given that no English poet is more famous for their use of this form than Shakespeare!). Spenser, however, developed his *own* sonnet form that was something of a blend of the Italian and English versions but with a different, and arguably more complicated, rhyme scheme. Like most Renaissance sonnets, however, Spenser's usually dealt with matters of the heart.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Spenser lived during the reign of Elizabeth I, the last Tudor monarch to rule over England. At the time, there wasn't a career path for someone who wanted to write poetry. One of the few ways to earn a living as a poet (not to mention find an audience) was to find patronage through the royal court. By dedicating work to someone with social status and wealth, a poet might gain employment or even the opportunity to marry into a more prominent family.

Unsurprisingly, then, Spenser spent much of his life attempting to gain favor in the Queen's court. While Spenser's early attempts were unsuccessful, his friendship with fellow poet Sir Walter Raleigh would turn out to be extremely beneficial for Spenser. Raleigh showed great interest in Spenser's work and eventually helped him publish the first three books of his epic poem, *The Faerie Queen*. He also arranged for Spenser to go to England and read from the poem to Queen Elizabeth in person.

This proved advantageous when the Queen expressed delight at the poem and afforded Spenser a pension of 50 pounds a year, an amount that was unheard of for a poet at that time. Thanks to this change in fortune, Spenser became one of the best known and influential poets of the Renaissance and of English poetry in general.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Introduction to the English Renaissance — An introduction to the cultural and literary changes occurring during the time of Spenser's England. (https://www.britannica.com/art/English-literature/The-Renaissance-period-1550-1660)
- Edmund Spenser's Life and Work — Learn more about the poet at the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/edmund-spenser)
- Amoretti III: The Sovereign Beauty — Another of Spenser's Amoretti poems, written for his wife Elizabeth Boyle. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45184/amoretti-iii-the-sovereign-beauty)
- A Reading of the Poem — Listen to a recording of "Sonnet 75" read by Jordan Harling. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5LPt38te0g)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER EDMUND SPENSER POEMS

- Prothalamion

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Mottram, Darla. "*Sonnet 75: One day I wrote her name upon the strand.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Jan 2021. Web. 4 Mar 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Mottram, Darla. "*Sonnet 75: One day I wrote her name upon the strand.*" LitCharts LLC, January 29, 2021. Retrieved March 4, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/edmund-spenser/sonnet-75-one-day-i-wrote-her-name-upon-the-strand.