

PRÁCTICA 3. EDMUND SPENSER

3.1. SONNET LXXV from *AMORETTI*

One day I wrote her name vpon the strand,
but came the waues and washed it away:
agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
but came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.
“Vayne man”, sayd she, “that doest in vaine assay,
a mortall thing so to immortalize.
for I my selue shall lyke to this decay,
and eek my name bee wyped out lykewize”.
“Not so”, (quod I) “let baser things deuize,
to dy in dust, but you shall liue by fame:
my verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
and in the heuens wryte your glorious name.
Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
our loue shall liue, and later life renew”.

QUESTIONS

1. How many characters are there in this poem?
2. Who is the I voice and the addressee?
3. What is the key issue of the sonnet?
4. How are the main ideas presented?
5. What conventions does the poet use?

3.1.1. ANALYSING A TEXT COMMENTARY (Spenser, LXXV). Analyse this commentary and answer the questions below:

This sonnet was written by Edmund Spenser and it is included in his sonnets sequence called "Amoretti", which is considered one of the most famous and notable of Elizabethan sonnets sequences.

The **main concern** of the poem is the passing of time. The theme of love is also treated in the poem. The I voice is the lover who is addressing the poem to his beloved lady.

According to its **content**, the poem has **three parts**. The **first** one coincides with the first stanza in which the first couple of lines are parallel and similar to the second one in content and form. This part consists of an introduction of the situation with an objective description. In the very first line, the I voice and the lady are already present. The beginning gives the impression that he is going to tell a beautiful story. Later on, the sea is seen as a devouring force which is hungry and is eating all the I voice's works and efforts. It is compared to an irrational entity as it does not pay attention to people's behaviour.

From then on, there is a dialogue between the lady and the I voice. The **second part** consists of the lady's utterance. She does not seem very pleased as the first word which she refers to him with is "vaine man". The expression "mortal thing" may mean different concepts like love, her name, herself, life... She simply accepts what is going to happen. She is very aware of her "mortality". She will die and her name will be forgotten. There is no hope neither future for her.

Then, the third and **final part** consists of his answer. He replies to her arguing against her ideas. According to him, she is much better than other things and she will live forever because of fame. He is going to make her famous. Line 11 is the key of the poem as it gives the solution. He cannot make her physically immortal, however her virtues will live forever through poetry. The solution is the immortalizing power of poetry.

The I voice seems very sure about what he is going to do. His poetry is going to live forever and, therefore, the lady's name as well. Love is going to defeat death, an issue very much liked by sonneteers at the time.

Regarding the content **structure**, the author follows the Italian sonnet tradition as the first eight lines state a problem while the last six ones resolve the problem in question reaching the conclusion mentioned just above.

Nevertheless, its **form** is the typical one of English or Spenserian sonnet because, first of all, each line has ten syllables instead of eleven and, secondly, the rhyme is composed of seven different ones; it is as follows ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Lines are grouped in three quatrains and a final couplet.

Finally, we could **relate** this poem to the Shakespeare's Sonnet XVIII. Both poems coincide in the main concern: the passing of time and the immortalizing power of poetry. The form is also similar. Both of them follow the English distinctive sonnet pattern.

3.1.2. Analyse this commentary and answer the following questions:

1. Do you think this is a correct commentary?
2. What aspects do you think the author has overlooked?
3. What are the mistakes you find in the commentary?
4. What issues do you think she has commented well?
5. What would you have added to her commentary?
6. In what ways do you think the commentary can be improved?
7. What mark would you give to this commentary?

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3.2. SONNET LXXV from *AMORETTI*

Of this worlds Theatre in which we stay,
My love lyke the Spectator ydly sits
Beholding me that all the pageants play,
Disguysing diversly my troubled wits.
Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,
And mask in myrth lyke to a Comedy:
Soone after when my joy to sorrow flits,
I waile and make my woes a Tragedy.
Yet she beholding me with constant eye,
Delights not in my merth nor rues my smart:
But when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry
She laughes, and hardens evermore her hart.
What then can move her? if not merth nor mone,
She is no woman, but a sencelesse stone.

QUESTIONS

1. How many characters are there in this poem?
2. Who is the I voice and the addressee?
3. What is the key issue of the sonnet?
4. How are the main ideas presented?
5. What conventions does the poet use?

3.2.1. ANALYSING A TEXT COMMENTARY (Spenser, LIV). Analyse this commentary and answer the questions below:

This poem is a sonnet whose writer was Edmund Spenser. It is included in the sonnet sequence called *Amoretti*, which is one of the most notable of Elizabethan sonnet sequences. It is considered among the most important sonnet sequences in the 17th century.

The **main concern** of the poem is love. The **I voice** is the lover who tries to show his love for his **beloved lady**. However, she does not seem to correspond him. It turns out an unrequited love in the end. The **addressee** could also be readers as the I voice has the need to let us know about his feelings; a situation he cannot cope with.

In the first stanza, we already find the main concern, the I voice, and the beloved lady. The first line may mean that everything is a stage and everybody could be a player. People adopt different roles or perform different characters as they grow old. The I voice is going to play; a performance on the stage and the only spectator is going to be the lady. As the word *ydly* suggests, she is sitting probably bored. Maybe, so many lovers have already appeared on the stage before him that she is tired.

She is watching him playing different roles. Unfortunately, he is so tense and nervous that he does not know what to do. In addition, the comparison with theatre is very appropriate here because anybody who is in love with somebody else tries to be perfect playing a role like in theatre. A very important fact in relation to this matter is that if the audience is not pleased, it would be one of the worst things for an actor.

The I voice sometimes plays in a comedy and, suddenly, he turns into a tragedy, changing from happiness to sorrow.

From line 9 onwards, new ideas are introduced. The I voice goes on explaining her reactions. He is interpreting them as something cruel. Actually, she is responding but she is unmoving. One reason for this which he maybe has not taken into account is that he is unable to convey his real feelings. The actor is not playing well. She is having the opposite reaction to what his intention was. As her reaction is not what he expected, he becomes very upset. The tone of his anger increases through the poem.

In conclusion, we can see a childish I voice here. He cannot admit that he is not good enough or that she does not love him.

From my point of view, the main concern is unrequited love as in many other poems of the period. However, this poem deals with this topic in a different way. I like the idea of comparing the fact of loving as a performance in theatre with an actor as lover and a spectator as the beloved lady. It is a beautiful metaphor. I have enjoyed reading this poem several times and analysing it.

3.2.2. Analyse this commentary and answer the following questions:

1. Do you think this is a correct commentary?
2. What aspects do you think the author has overlooked?
3. What are the mistakes you find in the commentary?
4. What issues do you think she has commented well?
5. What would you have added to her commentary?
6. In what ways do you think the commentary can be improved?
7. What mark would you give to this commentary?