

5. Poetry and love

William Shakespeare

Sonnet 17 (1609) 15

Sonnet 17 is the last of the 'Procreation Sonnets' dedicated to the Fair Youth and inviting the addressee to have children; in the next sonnet, Shakespeare will begin to praise the Youth's beauty and start viewing his own poetry as a tribute to the young man.

Who will believe my verse in time to come,
 If it were fill'd¹ with your most high deserts?
 Though yet Heaven knows it is but as a tomb
 Which hides your life and shows not half your parts.

5 If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
 And in fresh numbers² number all your graces,
 The age to come would say, 'This poet lies,
 Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces.'

10 So should my papers yellow'd with their age,
 Be scorn'd like old men of less truth than tongue,
 And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage³
 And stretched metre⁴ of an antique song:

But were some child of yours alive that time,
 You should live twice, – in it and in my rhyme.

1. **fill'd**: filled
2. **in fresh numbers**: in successive new poems
3. **a poet's rage**: the product of poetical enthusiasm
4. **stretched metre**: mere inflated words

Edmund Spenser

Sonnet 30 (1595) 16

Already famous for *The Shepherd's Calendar*, the Elizabethan courtier Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) published *Amoretti* in 1595. It is a collection of sonnets, following the Petrarchan model *Il Canzoniere*, of which 88 are dedicated to his second wife, E. Boyle. The conventional plot includes the poet's unrequited courtship, the lady's consent and finally the wedding.

My love is like to ice, and I to fire:
 How comes it then that this her cold so great
 Is not dissolved through my so hot desire,
 But harder grows the more I her entreat¹?
 5 Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
 Is not allayed² by her heart-frozen cold,
 But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
 And feel my flames augmented manifold³?
 What more miraculous thing may be told,
 10 That fire, which all things melts, should harden ice⁴,
 And ice, which is congeal'd with senseless cold,
 Should kindle⁵ fire by wonderful⁶ device?
 Such is the power of love in gentle mind,
 That it can alter all the course of kind.



1. **entreat:** pray
2. **allayed:** diminished, calmed
3. **manifold:** many times
4. **should harden ice:** the paradox is made clear through an unnatural process
5. **kindle:** make greater
6. **wonderful:** here, surprising, unnatural