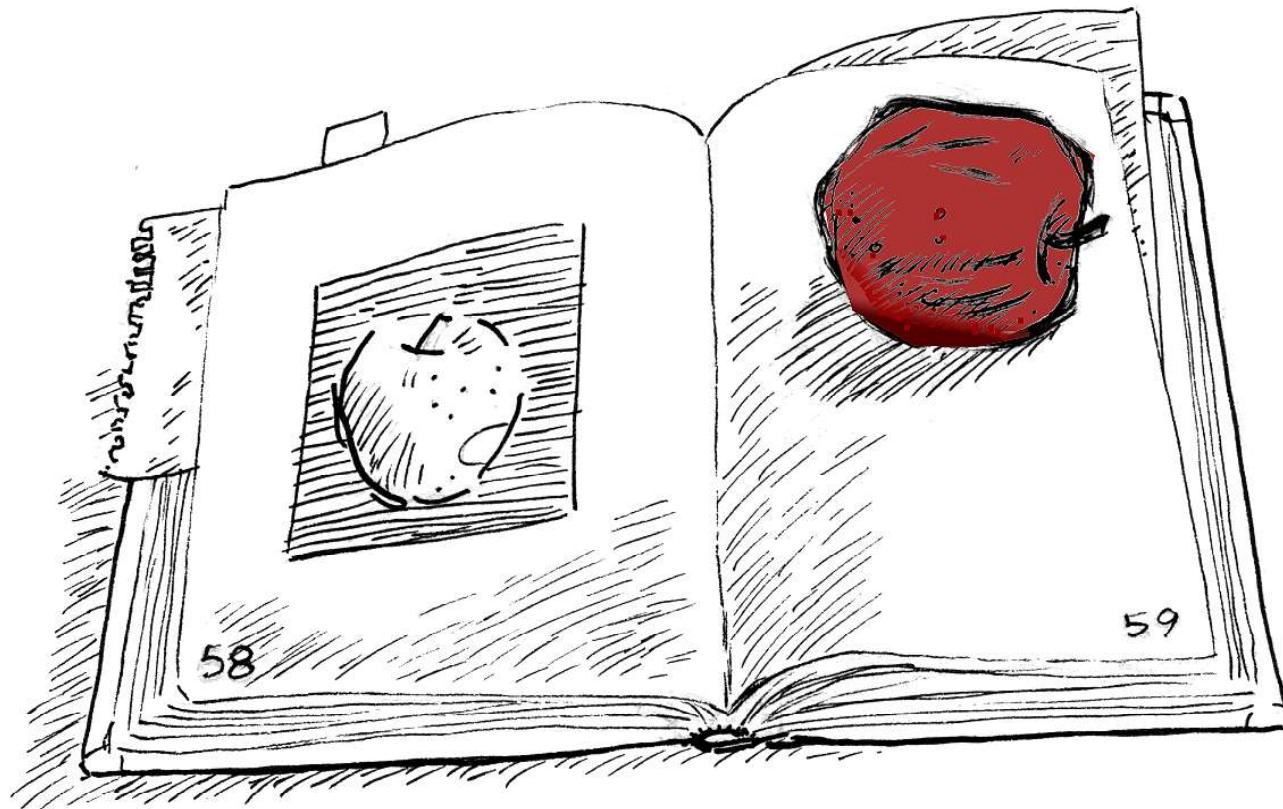


# Sonnets

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# *Spenserian Sonnet Form*

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## **Spenserian Sonnet**

This form was created by Edmund Spenser (1552 — 1599).

- It combines the Italian form with the English, following the three quatrains and couplet concept from the English.
- His rhyme scheme follows a modification of Italian version:

*italian* :        ABAB / ABAB / CDC / CDC

*spencerian* :    ABAB / BCBC / CDCD/ EE

- Likewise he divides the poem into three sections:
  - > statement of the problem, as a thesis; the opening quatrain is usually one sentence
  - > exploration of the problem in the resulting octave
  - > solution appears in the ending couplet

# Spenserian Sonnet Form

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**Emund Spenser** (1552 – 1599)

from *Amoretti* || **IX**

*thesis:  
problem  
established*

Long while I sought to what I might compare  
Those powerful eyes, which lighten my dark sight,  
Yet find I nought on earth to which I dare  
Resemble th' image of their goodly light.

*Rhyme scheme* || *Meter*

**A**      **5**

**B**      **5.5**

**A**      **5**

**B**      **5**

Not to the sun, for they do shine by night;

**B**      **5**

Nor to the moon, for they are changed never;

**C**      **5**

*problem  
discussed  
in following  
octave.*

Nor to the stars, for they have purer sight;

**B**      **5**

Nor to the fire, for they consume not ever;

**C**      **5.5 / (6?)**

*(octave ends/sestet begins; Spenser blurs the two together)*

Nor to the lightning, for they still persevere;

**C**      **5.5**

Nor to the diamond, for they are more tender;

**D**      **5.5**

Nor unto crystal, far nought may them sever;

**C**      **5.5**

Nor unto glass, such baseness might offend her;

**D**      **5.5**

*problem  
resolved  
in couplet*

Then to the Maker self they likest be,

**E**      **5**

Whose light doth lighten all that here we see.

**E**      **5**

*English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology.* Richard S. Sylvester, ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1974. Print.

# *Spenserian Sonnet Form*

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Notice the emphasis in line 4 on the word “sight.” With it falling as the extra half foot, it is subconsciously stressed in the reader’s mind. This correlates with the theme of wanting to describe his Beloved’s eyes, which blind him with love.

With his new formula, in this particular case the octave establishes a hierarchy of icons, beginning with major elements first, the celestial objects, then works its way down to earthly elements, in descending order:

sun

moon

stars

fire

lightning

diamond

crystal

glass

# *Spenserian Sonnet Form*

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- He likewise twists all the negatives into positives, all the while complimenting his Beloved's eyes.
- To force this idea, he utilizes a technique called **caesura**, which is a pause in natural speaking — which does not interfere with meter. Here, the caesura's represent an intake of breath.
- In Spenser's case, he employed this trick in the structure of the list itself, breaking between the inferior model and the perfection of the eyes.
- The resolution couplet transforms what appears to be obvious failure to assertion of positive: only God could be equal to her eyes. The Poet reaches salvation through his Beloved.

*Positive closure is obtained.*

# Spenserian Sonnet Form

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75

One day I wrote her name upon the strand<sup>1</sup>,  
But came the waves and washed it away:  
Agayne I wrote it with a second hand<sup>2</sup>,  
But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray<sup>3</sup>  
Vayne man, sayd she, that doest in vaine assay<sup>4</sup>,  
A mortall thing so to immortalize,  
For I my selve shall lyke to this decay,  
And eek<sup>5</sup> my name bee wyped out lykewize.  
Not so, (quod<sup>6</sup> I) let baser things devize<sup>7</sup>  
To dy in dust, but you shall live by fame:  
My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,  
And in the hevens wryte your glorious name.  
Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,  
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

1. shore
2. a second time
3. prey
4. attempt
5. also
6. quoth
7. devise (plan)
8. *What does the beloved accuse the poet of doing?*  
*Why does she call him vain?*  
*How does he respond?*
9. *What overall mood does the speaker express?*