

One Day I Wrote Her Name Upon The Strand—Edmund Spenser—An Explanatory Note

By

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This particular sonnet is sonnet number 75 in Spenser's sonnet sequence entitled *Amoretti*, a collection of 88 sonnets published in an octavo volume in 1595, though it may have been composed anytime between 1592 and 1594.

The *Amoretti* is a series of sonnets that records Spenser's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, his future wife. The choice of his title is drawn from contemporary Italian rather than the classical tradition. The word simply means 'love tokens'. Following the Petrarchan tradition, the poet idealises his lady love and comes to the conclusion that the only way he can immortalise his love is through his poetry. This idea links the sequence with the traditions of Dante and Petrarch. Petrarch's work, *Canzoniere*, which had begun in 1330s was an important model for describing the transfiguring emotion of love, and more especially the experience of loving. Here Spenser uses a similar theme but there is a witty tone of intellectual playfulness and a complex argument.

The poem opens with a reference to a stroll to a strand that the poet and his lady love had. The strand that is referred to in the first line of the poem is possibly the strand of Youghal, where Spenser often walked with Elizabeth Boyle and it was some such occasion like this that might have provided the inspiration for writing the sonnet. In the opening lines, the poet-lover behaves like any romantic suitor who is walking with his lady love on the sandy beach and writing her name on the sand. But sadly, the waves come and wash away the name. Again the poet makes a renewed effort, but again the tides devour his endeavour "and made my paynes his pray." Here, the tide, a symbol of inexorable time has been personified and is