Amoretti XXX: My Love is like to ice, and I to

POEM TEXT

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 entreat?
Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
Is not allayed by her heart-frozen cold,
But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
And feel my flames augmented manifold?
What more miraculous thing may be told,
That fire, which all things melts, should harden ice,
And ice, which is congeal'd with senseless cold,
Should kindle fire by wonderful device?
Such is the power of love in gentle mind,
That it can alter all the course of kind.

SUMMARY

The woman I love is as cold as ice, and I am as warm and passionate as fire. So why, then, doesn't my burning desire thaw her coldness? Why does she become even more frozen when I ask her for her love? Or why doesn't my own burning desire lessen through contact with her cold, frozen heart? How is it that my love grows even hotter—so hot that my sweat boils and I feel consumed by burning flames that get bigger and bigger? Is there anything more miraculous than the fact that my desire—which should melt ice with its fiery heat—instead makes my beloved even colder toward me? And isn't it incredible that her ice, somehow, makes my fire burn even hotter? Love has such power, such influence over the human mind, that it can make elements act against the laws of nature.

THEMES

THE POWER OF LOVE

Edmund Spenser's "Amoretti XXX" is a poem about the relationship between love, desire, and disinterest. The speaker marvels, with clear frustration, at the fact that his burning passion for his beloved only makes her colder toward him, while her cool disinterest simply stokes the flames of his desire. Casting his own love as "fire" and his beloved's as "ice," the speaker tries to wrap his head around what feels like a natural impossibility: how can fire make ice colder, and ice make fire burn more brightly? To the speaker, the contrast between himself and his beloved is ultimately a testament to the power of love itself. Love is so "miraculous," he argues in the poem's end, that it can change the very laws of nature: like ice kindling fire, his beloved's coolness just makes the speaker's unrequited love grow stronger.

The speaker repeatedly describes himself as fiery and his lover as icy. He's "hot" with a passion for her that she coldly resists, meeting the "exceeding heat" of his love with indifference or rejection.

The speaker struggles to understand how this can be: he reasons that his heat should melt his lover's "ice," or else her "ice" should extinguish his "fire." In other words, his passion should bring him and his lover closer together: either she should warm to him, or his desire should cool so that their attitudes align.

Instead, the opposite happens: his beloved's coldness just makes his passion burn even hotter, in turn making her freeze even more solidly. It's as though they're trapped in a vicious cycle, their opposing desires feeding off each other.

Despite the seeming agony that this situation causes the speaker (who describes his sweat as "boiling" and depicts himself as engulfed in ever-growing, multiplying "flames"), by the poem's end his confusion is replaced by wonder at "the power of love." Love, he marvels, is a supreme, nature-altering force. He even compares his romantic situation to something "miraculous" (fire hardening ice; ice igniting fire). Ultimately, then, the speaker presents love as having the incredible power to fuel intense, even irrational passions.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

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 entreat?

In the first line of the poem, the speaker sets up an important contrast between himself and his beloved. Using a simile, he says that his beloved is "like to ice"—presumably meaning that she's cold, distant, and unwilling to "warm" to his love. By contrast, the speaker compares himself to "fire." This suggests

that the speaker is burning with desire for his beloved, consumed with lust and passion.

The two are opposites then, at least in terms of their attitudes toward each other. And by ending the first line with a colon, the speaker presents this opposition as the crux of the poem: the fact that he and his beloved are as different as "fire" and "ice" is what gives this sonnet its central conceit.

The speaker spends the following lines trying to understand *how* "ice" can make "fire" burn hotter—in other words, how his beloved's disinterest only makes his *own* desire stronger. How is it possible, he asks, that his "so hot desire" doesn't simply melt her "cold so great"? Note the repetition of the word "so" here, which emphasizes the division between the speaker and his beloved: her feelings are just as cold as his own are hot.

The speaker is clearly frustrated by this, expressing that he is "entreating" his beloved, or begging her, even though she only grows "harder" in her resolve, like ice growing harder as temperatures drop. By framing his thoughts as a rhetorical question, the speaker further captures his vexation and his amazement at his beloved's enduring coldness.

LINES 5-8

Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
Is not allayed by her heart-frozen cold,
But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
And feel my flames augmented manifold?

The speaker flips his question in the next quatrain. Rather than asking why his beloved grows colder in the face of his passion, he now asks why his *own* fire grows *hotter* in the face of her disinterest. In other words, the fact that his beloved is so cold just makes him want her more intensely!

The speaker refers to this intense desire as his "exceeding heat," which clearly consumes him—perhaps to the point of discomfort. When faced with "heart-frozen cold," one might logically assume that the speaker's love and lust would lessen—that this "heat" would diminish. However, his heat is "not allayed," the speaker complains; there's no relief. Instead, the speaker only burns hotter.

In fact, he describes a kind of inferno, with "boiling sweat" and "flames augmented manifold," or growing and engulfing him. These images create a sense of bodily passion, of physical lust: the speaker's body is metaphorically burning for his beloved.

Note how the intensity of the language in this quatrain seems to evoke the speaker's passion, with the assonance of "exceeding heat" and "frozen cold," plus the alliteration of the /b/, /m/, and /f/ sounds:

Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
Is not allayed by her heart-frozen cold,
But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
And feel my flames augmented manifold?

Importantly, the speaker doesn't just express his love through this metaphor of fire. He also stresses that his fire rages hotter in *response* to his beloved's "cold." Ice should dampen fire, and fire should melt ice, according to the laws of nature. The opposite is happening here, suggesting that there's something amazing, inexplicable, and maybe even uncanny about the relationship between these two individuals.

LINES 9-12

What more miraculous thing may be told,
That fire, which all things melts, should harden ice,
And ice, which is congeal'd with senseless cold,
Should kindle fire by wonderful device?

The speaker now poses a third and final question. Though phrased differently, this question essentially repeats the sentiments the speaker expressed in the poem's first and second quatrains. All of these questions, ultimately, prove rhetorical: the speaker isn't looking for answers, in other words. Rather, he's asking these questions to convey the incredible power of his love—to express amazement at how his beloved's "ice" kindles his own internal "fire."

According to the speaker, it's "miraculous," like something out of a myth or legend, that his beloved's "ice" grows harder (as in, even *more* solid) when confronted by his "fire." Usually, fire has the power to melt "all things." So why, the speaker asks, does his own fire just make his beloved *colder*, somehow more frozen? Ice, meanwhile, is water that's been "congeal'd," or solidified, by "senseless cold." So it's also "miraculous" that his beloved's "ice" causes his "fire" to "kindle" and burn hotter.

By portraying his relationship with his beloved as this clash of fire and ice, the speaker implies that his increasing passion is as inexplicable, indeed as miraculous, as elements acting against the laws of nature. His love is "wonderful," meaning awe-inspiring or incredible. The speaker's three, repetitive questions emphasize his incredulity, his disbelief at how intensely his passion burns when faced with cold, "senseless" ice—a word that suggests his beloved's utter lack of passion or feeling for him.

LINES 13-14

Such is the power of love in gentle mind,
That it can alter all the course of kind.

The poem's last two lines mark what's known as the sonnet's *volta*: that moment in the poem when the speaker responds to everything that's happened so far. Here, the speaker answers his own questions. After asking himself how it's possible that his love burns more brightly when his beloved remains so cold, the speaker concludes with a simple explanation: this strange and unnatural clash of elements, fire hardening ice and ice kindling fire, is all thanks to "the power of love," and more specifically the power that love has over a "gentle mind."

The words "gentle mind" here suggest the speaker's tender

heart may be unusually susceptible to love, which makes him burn with fierce desire. Like a mystical force causing miracles in nature, love can "alter the course of kind." In other words, love can make one cold, unloving person colder, even as it makes that person's lover burn with fiercer desire. Love can cause irrational yet inescapable feelings. Most of all, love is impossible to understand, seeming to overpower one's own mind.

This last couplet, coming after three consecutive quatrains, comprises the only decisive sentence of the poem. Each section before now has ended with a question mark; line 14, by contrast, ends with a firm period. As such, this last couplet presents a clean closure to the main problem of the poem: the speaker's struggle to understand his relationship with his beloved.

Again, the speaker's assonance and alliteration heighten the poem's language, the shared /awl/ and crisp /k/ sounds adding rhythmic emphasis to the poem's final moments:

> That it can alter all the course of kind.

In the end, the speaker might not be any closer to actually understanding *why* he adores his beloved. However, he identifies that love is so powerful, and so mysterious, that he may never fully understand it. This last line perhaps represents the speaker giving in, succumbing to the power of love, even if loving his beloved brings the speaker endless agony.

SYMBOLS

ICE

Throughout "Amoretti XXX," the speaker uses "ice" to symbolize his beloved's coldness and aloofness. Whereas the speaker burns like "fire" with his affection and desire, his beloved is cool and disinterested. All this icy imagery implies that the speaker's love is unrequited. Like ice, his beloved's heart is "frozen" and "cold." She doesn't warm to his advances, or "melt" when touched by his fire. This opposition between fire and ice is central to the poem: it's a contrast that maddens the speaker, who wants to soften his beloved—but he also seems to find her coldness strangely attractive, as it only makes his own fire burn hotter.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "ice"
- **Line 6:** "heart-frozen cold"
- **Lines 10-11:** "harden ice, / And ice, which is congeal'd with senseless cold"

FIRE

If his beloved is "ice," then the speaker, of course, is "fire"—ice's opposite. This fire symbolizes the burning intensity of the speaker's love. The speaker is consumed by desire, affection, lust; he wants his beloved to "melt," to accept his love and abandon her stubborn coldness. But she only grows colder, and that somehow makes the speaker "burn much more in boiling sweat," as if consumed by blazing flames. In other words, his beloved's disinterest makes the speaker's love more intense, until he feels like he's engulfed by fiery desire that he cannot escape.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "fire"
- **Line 5:** "exceeding heat"
- **Lines 7-8:** "burn much more in boiling sweat, / And feel my flames augmented manifold"
- **Line 10:** "fire"
- **Line 12:** "kindle fire"

POETIC DEVICES

SIMILE

The speaker uses a simile to open the poem and set up the contrast between himself and his beloved. In line 1, the speaker says, "My love is like to ice, and I to fire." In other words, the speaker's love burns hot inside him, like fire. His beloved, meanwhile, remains cool and disinterested, as cold as "ice."

This simile shapes everything that follows, establishing that this couple simply couldn't be more dissimilar in their affections. Ice and fire are incompatible: fire should either melt ice, or ice should snuff out fire. One would assume, then, that the speaker's passion would convince his beloved to be with him, or that her own resistance would put a damper on his desire.

Of course, that's not what happens in the poem! The speaker marvels at how his fiery passion only serves to push his beloved away, to make her even icier; that coldness, in turn, just stokes the flames of his love. Using a simile (which turns into an elaborate conceit by the poem's end) allows the speaker to visualize and relate the strange, frustrating, bewildering dynamic he perceives between himself and the object of his affections.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "My Love is like to ice, and I to fire:"

METAPHOR

The opening line's simile transforms into an elaborate extended metaphor (also known as a conceit) throughout the poem that

the speaker uses to convey the vast difference between him and his beloved. The speaker is "fire," while his beloved is "ice." In other words, the speaker's desire burns fiercely, even as (in fact, *because*) his beloved remains unloving and cold.

The speaker repeats this metaphor with variations throughout the poem, using different properties of "fire" and "ice" to refer to himself and his beloved. For example, the speaker continually refers to himself as "hot," "boiling," and burning. Meanwhile, his beloved is "heart-frozen," "congeal'd with senseless cold," and so forth.

This ongoing comparison makes the contrast between the speaker and his beloved particularly striking. With each repeated reference to "fire" and "ice," "hot" and "cold," the speaker seems more different from his beloved, who clearly doesn't reciprocate his fiery desire. As a result, by the end of the poem, the speaker's love seems truly "wonderful." It's incredible that her coldness can make the speaker's fire burn hotter, even while her ice grows only harder. This, the speaker claims, proves that love is all-powerful, capable of defying the laws of nature.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 2-4
- Lines 5-8
- Lines 10-12

ASSONANCE

There are a few moments of musical assonance throughout this sonnet. Alongside Spenser's use of end rhyme and an even meter, assonance makes the poem feel fluid and graceful.

In line 1, for example, the long /i/ sound repeats in "like," "ice," "I," and "fire." These words are also all stressed beats in the poem's meter; the whole sonnet is written in iambic pentameter, which means there are five poetic units known as iambs per line. An iamb consists of an unstressed beat followed by a stressed beat, making the rhythm of line 1 as follows:

> My Love is like to ice, and I to fire:

Assonance thus enhances the poem's iambic rhythm, making the forceful da-DUM stand out all the more clearly to the reader's ear.

It's also no coincidence that the words used to describe the speaker and his beloved share the same vowel sound: "fire" and "ice." This shared sound might subtly suggest that, even though the speaker and his beloved are opposites, these opposites are meant to be together—they attract!

Elsewhere, assonance simply adds emphasis to certain images, such as the speaker's "exceeding heat" or his beloved's "heart-frozen cold."

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "like," "ice," "I," "fire"
- **Line 2:** "cold so"
- **Line 3:** "not dissolved"
- **Line 5:** "exceeding heat"
- **Line 6:** "frozen cold"
- **Line 14:** "alter all"

ALLITERATION

Spenser uses alliteration much like he uses assonance: to draw readers' attention to certain images and phrases and to lend the poem a general sense of music and lyricism.

Some particularly striking moments of alliteration come in lines 7-8:

> But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
> And feel my flames augmented manifold?

Note how those loud, booming /b/ sounds, humming /m/ sounds, and muffled /f/ sounds elevate the speaker's language at this moment, lending the poem a feeling of vividness and intensity as the speaker describes feeling utterly consumed by ever-growing flames.

Later, the crisp, sharp /k/ sounds similarly add a feeling of linguistic intensity in the poem's last line:

> That it can alter all the course of kind.

These sounds ring out like a bell, perhaps evoking the speaker's confidence in the "power of love" to disrupt natural laws themselves.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Love," "like"
- **Line 6:** "her heart"
- **Line 7:** "But," "burn," "much more," "boiling"
- **Line 8:** "feel," "flames"
- **Line 14:** "can," "alter all," "course," "kind"

CAESURA

A few instances of caesura appear throughout the poem, beginning in line 1. Here, the speaker inserts a pause between descriptions of his beloved and himself: "My love is like to ice, and I to fire." This pause immediately sets him and his beloved apart; the poem's form emphasizes the dichotomy between "ice" and "fire" that persists throughout the poem.

The poem's other caesurae add to the poem's thoughtful, reasoning tone. The pauses after "fire," "melts," and "ice" in lines 10 and 11 suggest that the speaker is slowing down, trying to understand how fire and ice are acting against the laws of

nature:

> That fire, which all things melts, should harden ice,
> And ice, which is congeal'd with senseless cold,

Each pause contributes to a sense of measured, even-keeled reason: the speaker understands that fire is supposed to melt "all things," that ice is "congeal'd" with cold, and that through contact, these things ought to influence each other. This clear understanding, with its logical presentation, makes the speaker's revelation all the more "wonderful": in this case, fire somehow "harden[s] ice," and ice miraculously "kindle[s] fire." In other words, the speaker's calm and logical tone contrasts with the magical nature of his claim—that love defies the laws of nature and changes "the course of kind."

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "ice, and"
- **Line 10:** "fire, which," "melts, should"
- **Line 11:** "ice, which"

PARADOX

Spenser frames this sonnet around a central paradox. According to the speaker, he is "fire" and his beloved is "ice." Fire should *melt* ice; the speaker's burning passion should thaw his beloved's cold heart. Their respective levels of desire should, in theory, cancel each other out.

Yet, strangely, the opposite thing happens here: fire just makes ice even colder, while ice makes fire burn even more brightly. Metaphorically, the speaker is saying that his own desire makes his beloved less inclined to feel anything toward him, while her aloofness makes him want her even more.

To the speaker, this paradox thus represents the miraculous and incredible power of love. Love is so powerful that it can cause this bizarre contradiction, with ice kindling fire and fire hardening ice. In other words, love's power can disrupt nature itself, causing unexpected, seemingly impossible events to take place.

Where Paradox appears in the poem:

- Lines 2-4
- Lines 7-8
- Lines 10-12

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The poem's first three quatrains are built around three rhetorical questions. Within each, the speaker essentially asks the same thing: how is it possible that his burning desire only makes his beloved grow colder toward him—and how does her coldness make his love even stronger?

While the gist of each question is the same, the speaker does slightly vary the way he uses the poem's ice/fire metaphor. First, he asks how "her cold" is not "dissolved" under his "hot desire"—that is, how come she doesn't warm up when confronted with his burning passion. Next, he asks how his "exceeding heat" not only doesn't lessen when coming up against her "heart-frozen cold," but in fact gets *hotter*, until the speaker is engulfed in "flames." Finally, the speaker asks what could possibly be "more miraculous" than fire hardening ice and ice kindling fire.

The speaker's rhetorical questions create a sense of wonder and amazement. The speaker isn't looking for an answer. Rather, these rhetorical questions emphasize the *miraculousness* of his love, underscoring how love is difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand. Struck by a love so powerful it seems to defy nature itself, the speaker can only express awe, and perhaps a touch of frustration and confusion, at love's incredible potency.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- Lines 2-12

VOCABULARY

Entreat (Line 4) - To ask or plead. In this case, the speaker suggests he has begged his beloved to return his affections.

Exceeding (Line 5) - Great in amount or degree; here, suggesting that the speaker's love burns hot like an intense fire.

Allayed (Line 6) - Reduced, alleviated, or calmed.

Heart-frozen (Line 6) - Unloving or disinterested; lacking affection or warmth.

Augmented (Line 8) - Made larger; increased or expanded.

Manifold (Line 8) - Many times over; here, meaning the speaker's "flames" are multiplied, or increased to a great extent.

Congeal'd (Line 11) - Frozen solid; rigid and unmoving.

Wonderful (Line 12) - Incredible; astonishing.

Device (Line 12) - Technique or trick.

Gentle (Line 13) - Soft and tender. Here, "gentle" also means well-bred, belonging to a high social class.

Kind (Line 14) - Nature.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"My Love is like to ice, and I to fire" is a Spenserian sonnet. That means that it has 14 lines broken up into three quatrains, or four-line stanzas, and a final couplet, or two-line stanza. As is

the case for most sonnets, those quatrains pose a question or problem to which the poem's final couplet then responds. This moment is called the poem's turn or *volta*.

Readers might recognize that this is *also* the pattern for a Shakespearean or English sonnet. What's different here is the poem's interlocking rhyme scheme: certain rhymes cascade down throughout the quatrains, linking them together on the level of sound (more on that in the Rhyme Scheme section of this guide).

The quatrains are also linked thematically here: each consists of a rhetorical question in which the speaker asks how his burning desire makes his beloved grow colder, while her coldness only makes his love grow stronger.

With this repetition of both sound and content, it's like each quatrain, each question, is building on the one that came before, generating suspense and excitement throughout the poem. These three quatrains eventually culminate in the final couplet, in which the speaker answers his own question, remarking that it's "the power of love" that causes "fire" and "ice" to behave in such a remarkable way—in other words, to make opposites attract.

METER

Like most sonnets, "My Love is like to ice, and I to fire" is written in a meter called iambic pentameter. This means that each line contains five iambs, poetic units consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. Here are lines 1-2 as an example of this meter in action:

> My Love | is like | to ice, | and I | to fire:
> How comes | it then | that this | her cold | so great

Iambic pentameter is a very common meter in English-language poetry because it sounds a lot like the way people naturally talk. The sound of iambic pentameter is also frequently likened to a heartbeat (da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM), thus making it a fitting choice for romantic poetry like "Amoretti XXX," in which the speaker discusses his passionate and unrequited love for a woman as cold as "ice."

There are no notable deviations from iambic pentameter in this sonnet. Spenser sticks to the meter throughout the poem, creating a measured and even rhythm.

RHYME SCHEME

Like other Spenserian sonnets, this poem features the following rhyme scheme:

> ABAB BCBC CDCD EE

Rhymes alternate within the poem's quatrains, while the poem's final two lines form a neat rhyming couplet (technically something called a *heroic couplet*, because these lines are also written in iambic pentameter). Readers should also notice how each quatrain is "interlocked" with the next through repeating rhyme sounds. For example, "entreat" in the first quatrain rhymes with "heat" in the second. This interlocking helps the poem flow as one cohesive unit, with each quatrain building off the previous. This, in turn, increases the speaker's sense of excitement, wonder, and even bewilderment.

However, the final couplet stands alone: "mind" and "kind" don't rhyme with any of the other end rhymes in the poem. This distinction sets the couplet apart, which makes sense: the three quatrains—each consisting of a rhetorical question—culminate in one final answer about love's power.

SPEAKER

Readers might interpret the speaker of "My Love is like to ice, and I to fire" as being the poet, Edmund Spenser, himself. This poem, also known as "Amoretti XXX," was number 30 in a series of 89 sonnets that Spenser wrote about his courtship and marriage to Elizabeth Boyle.

Of course, readers don't have to take the speaker as Spenser to make sense of the poem. In fact, the speaker never actually tells readers much about himself (or herself) within the poem text. What readers do know is that the speaker is someone struggling with unrequited love: he has clearly expressed his affection for his beloved, but she has met his advances with cold, "ice"-like indifference, or perhaps outright rejection. Accordingly, the speaker here expresses a mix of desperation, passion, and amazement; he's amazed that his love remains so strong, and in fact *increasingly* strong, despite his beloved's coldness.

For this speaker, love manifests as a visceral, physical longing: a fire that consumes him with "flames" and "boiling sweat." The speaker's attitude shifts subtly throughout the poem, as his incredulity or frustration gives way to awe at "the power of love." Above all, the speaker believes that love is powerful enough to change the laws of nature—even though love also causes him agony at this stage of his relationship.

SETTING

Spenser's sonnet has no clear or defined setting. It's a timeless poem about love, which might describe an affair in Renaissance England—the setting of its original publication—as well as an affair in the contemporary world. That is, the poem itself does not give any indication of when or where it takes place.

Of course, Spenser published this poem as part of the "Amoretti" sequence in 1595, in London. Given that Spenser wrote the poem in reference to his own relationship with Elizabeth Boyle, readers can (but don't have to) interpret the poem's setting as Spenser's own society in early-modern England.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

The English Renaissance poet Edmund Spenser is best known for his epic poem "The Faerie Queene," which is generally read as an allegory about Queen Elizabeth I. This is also the poem in which Spenser invented his signature verse form, the Spenserian stanza.

"My Love is like to ice, and I to fire" is the 30th poem in Spenser's less famous 89-sonnet sequence titled "Amoretti," inspired by Spenser's relationship with his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle. While Spenser put an interesting twist on the sonnet form with his interlocking rhyme scheme (more on that in the Form and Rhyme Scheme sections of this guide), his themes were pretty common for the genre: sonnets got their start in the 13th century as poems about courtly love. The Italian poet Petrarch perfected the form in the 14th century, and Spenser at times follows the Petrarchan tradition of casting his beloved as a distant and cruel tormentor (in "Amoretti XXX," for instance, the speaker's beloved is "cold" and "heart-frozen" as "ice").

Despite their common themes, the "Amoretti" poems are also somewhat unique among Renaissance sonnet sequences because they culminate in marriage—making them the story of a successful love affair!

"Amoretti" came midway through Spenser's literary career. He published the sequence in 1595, in London, as part of a volume titled "Amoretti and Epithalamion. Written not long since by Edmunde Spenser." Along with the 89 sonnets of "Amoretti," the volume included an ode to Spenser's wife titled "Epithalamion." Today, six complete copies of this volume remain.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Spenser wrote this sonnet sequence about his relationship with Elizabeth Boyle. Spenser married Boyle in 1594, the same year that his first wife died. Boyle was Anglo-Irish and a relative of Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Cork. The "Amoretti" sequence describes the arc of her and Spenser's love affair, including moments of frustration and rejection (as in "My Love is like to ice, and I to fire") and their eventual marriage.

Spenser was, of course, also writing during the English Renaissance—a golden age of art and literature usually dated from the late 15th to the early 17th century. More specifically, he wrote during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a time of relative peace and prosperity, as well as of increasing literacy.

Spenser was actually living in Ireland when composing *Amoretti*, where he worked in service of the English government. (Ireland was then ruled by England.) He died in London in 1599.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Amoretti" Sonnet Cycle — Read more about "Amoretti," the sequence in which "My Love is like to ice, and I to fire" appears as number 30. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amoretti)
- The Sonnet Form — Learn more about the history of this famous poetic form, including the Spenserian variety. (https://poets.org/glossary/sonnet)
- Edmund Spenser Biography — Read up on Edmund Spenser's life and literary works. (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edmund-Spenser/The-Faerie-Queene-and-last-years)
- Love Poetry in Renaissance England — Spenser wasn't alone in writing about the passions of the heart. Learn more about Renaissance love poetry here. (https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/love-poetry-in-renaissance-england)
- "My Love is like to ice, and I to fire" Read Aloud — Listen to a recording of the sonnet. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA5rSVP_3_c)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER EDMUND SPENSER POEMS

- Prothalamion
- Sonnet 75: One day I wrote her name upon the strand

HOW TO CITE

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