



Edmund Spenser is characterized by Charles Lamb as **'the Poets' Poet'**, while all the Elizabethans acclaimed him as **'the Prince of Poets.'** This is because Spenser's poetic faculty was unique; in the sense that it had excelled the poetic faculty of every other poet of England. Fluency is a quality found in the poetry of Spenser.

Spenser is also regarded as the **Second Father of English Poetry**, right after Geoffrey Chaucer. His work remained untouched by common people as his poetry was understandable only by scholars who were proficient in Greek and Latin could grasp the scholarly ideas in his poetry.

Learned and Well Versed in Literature

Spenser is a learned man, well-versed in literature and Mythology of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in literature of his own age. Spenser has read widely of ancient literature and in his own works reference to Ovid, Homer, Aristo, Ronsard, Petrarch, Tasso, etc. are frequent. No one, therefore, can hope to understand and enjoy the poetry of Spenser who is not familiar with

- (1) The classical mythology**
- (2) Classical literature**
- (3) Pastoral tradition of Greece and Rome, and**
- (4) The philosophy of Aristotle and Plato.**

Noble Conception of Poetry

Spenser believed that poetry was a divine gift bestowed upon a few favoured mortals. It could not be had by labours or learning, but was the result of celestial inspirations. Poetry was the language of the gods, and men could not be its interpreters unless:

'They were consecrated from their birth and dedicated to this ministry' (Renwick).

It is this high sense of his vocation which differentiates Spenser from other poets, and makes him the leader, and the prince of poets. Spenser was truly an inspired poet, and a source of inspiration for others.

A Patriotic Poet

The age of Spenser was an age of intense patriotism. In war, traffic and exploration, England could already hold her own with the nations of the world. Chaucer, no doubt, had written great poetry, but he could not equal the performance of the great conventional poets, both ancient and modern. This was Spenser's mission and he performed it successfully. He set out to endow England with poetry great in kind, in style, in thought. He showed the world that Modern England was capable of poetry as great as that of any other age and country, that he had her share of poetic power, of art and learning.

Structure of the Spenserian stanza and Sonnet

Spenser used a distinctive verse form, called the Spenserian stanza, in several works, including *The Faerie Queene*. The stanza's main meter is iambic pentameter with a final line in iambic hexameter (having six feet or stresses, known as an Alexandrine), and the rhyme scheme is ababbcbcc.

The Spenserian sonnet is based on a fusion of elements of both the Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet. It is similar to the Shakespearean sonnet in the sense that its set up is based more on the 3 quatrains and a couplet.

Services to English Versification

Spenser's services to English style, diction and versification are innumerable. He demonstrated that the English language was as capable of subtlety and emotion as any that boasted of their magnificence. In his age the English language and grammar was still in a flux and as Renwick points out:

'He treated the English language as if it belonged to him and not he to it'.

He coined new words, imported many from France and Italy, and saved many an obsolete word from oblivion. In order to further increase the vocabulary, he used terms of hunting and hawking, of seamanship, of art, of archery, of armory, and of law and philosophy.

Ben Jonson objected to Spenser's language when he said he '**writ no language**'. The purists like the learned Ben, have called his language a '**gallimaufry of hotchpotch of all other speeches**'. He made English language very flexible, effective and forceful.

He interchanged parts of speech, made one word do the service of another, freely dropped prepositions and thus imparted to the English language a rare flexibility and beauty. He is truly the poet-maker, one who inspired others to achieve greatness in the field.

It is concluded that Spenser's greatest contribution to English versification is the Spenserian stanza. It has been admired by countless critics and imitated by all poets, both great and small, since its introduction.

J.R. Lowell says:

'The services which Spenser did to our literature by his exquisite sense of harmony is incalculable'.