

# Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

English 425  
Fall 2010

MWF 1:30PM – 2:20PM, Oddfellows 206

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Office Hours: MW 11:30AM – 1:00PM; Tu/Th 2:00PM – 4:00PM;  
By Appointment

In 1590, Edmund Spenser published the first part of *The Faerie Queene*, one of the most ambitious works of literature in the English language. He set out to catalog the human experience, exploring the nature of virtue and vice through a complex, allegorical narrative that drew upon Christian doctrine, classical mythology and philosophy, Arthurian legend, and humanist learning — all as part of his goal to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.” Although Spenser did not fulfill his initial plan for twelve books of verse, he created one of the most complete portraits of his age, a veritable encyclopedia of Renaissance thought and art written in beautiful and exquisitely crafted poetry.

The complexity of Spenser's poem and its great symbolic depth have made it one of the pillars of English literature. Queen Elizabeth awarded the poet an annual pension for his work, and many of the greatest writers of his and later ages, including Shakespeare, Milton, and Keats, openly admired and imitated Spenser. *The Faerie Queene's* legacy continues today: in *The Chronicles of Narnia* C.S. Lewis drew upon Spenser's allegorical style and subject matter, and the influence of Spenser's poem can be found in everything from modern fantasy and sword-and-sorcery novels to videogames such as *World of Warcraft*.

The semester will be devoted to the close and careful study of the poem. *The Faerie Queene* invites its readers to ask questions of it, to explore its complex allegory and discover how it creates meaning. We will pay special attention to Spenser's language and style, discussing how the work's unique form creates a complex and dense narrative. We will also consider *The Faerie Queene* in its political, cultural, and aesthetic contexts, looking at Spenser's commentaries on the religious controversies of his day, his critique of courtly life, and his adaptation of Renaissance poetic traditions into a unique style. Ultimately, our reading will be guided by our questions, using the challenges posed by the work to help us understand it. Why does Spenser craft a narrative filled with violence and monstrous creatures to communicate a message of spiritual virtue? How does Spenser combine classical and Christian values, and do they conflict with one another? Why does Spenser dedicate his poem to Queen Elizabeth but then so boldly criticize her policies and court? Why does the poem remain unfinished, and what does its non-ending mean? And finally, does Spenser fulfill his goal of teaching his readers virtue? These and other issues will lead us in our journey through Spenser's strange and wonderful poem, along with this piece of advice Spenser offers to one of his knights:

**“Be bold, be bold, and everywhere Be bold ...”**



## Books

### Required

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*. Edited by Tom Roche. Penguin Classics, 1979. (ISBN: 9780140422078)  
(Alternate versions are acceptable)

### Recommended

Elizabeth Heale, *"The Faerie Queene": A Reader's Guide*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Cambridge University Press, 1999. (ISBN: 9780521654685)

You will also have various handouts to read throughout the semester. They will be available on Sakai.

## Grades and Other Class policies

- Discussion Leader & in-class activities: 10% (Dates TBD)
- Short Essay 1 (Close Reading of 1 Stanza): 10% (Due 9/17)
- Short Essay 2 (Close Reading of 1 Canto): 15% (Due 11/1)
- Presentation: 10% (Dates TBD)
- Article Review: 10% (Due 10/15)
- Annotated Bibliography: 15% (Due 11/22)
- Final Essay: 30% (Due 12/13)

Active participation in class discussion and activities is essential for your success and the success of the class as a whole. So, attendance and class participation are mandatory. You should come to class every day prepared and excited to engage with the material and your fellow students. Each student will be responsible for leading class discussion at least once during the semester.

The majority of your grade will be determined by your work on three essays. The first two essays will test your ability to closely read and interpret a passage from the text. The third essay will be a longer analysis of some aspect of *The Faerie Queene* supported by research.

Three assignments will help you prepare for your final essay. First, a presentation on a historical/cultural issue relevant to Spenser and his work. Second, a detailed review of a scholarly article on Spenser and/or *The Faerie Queene*. And third, an annotated bibliography discussing a minimum of five scholarly sources and their applicability to your analysis.

Each student is allowed 3 unexcused absence without penalty, with each additional unexcused absence incurring a 3% penalty to your final grade. Medical, college-related, and religious absences will be excused only with proper documentation, and advance notice is greatly preferred. All students are responsible for making up any missed work; in-class assignments missed for unexcused absences cannot be made up.

Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

## Daily Syllabus

*This schedule is subject to change with reasonable notice.*

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
F 8/27	Introduction to Spenser & <i>FQ</i> .
M 8/30	“A Letter of the Authors”; “Proem” to Book 1 Horace, <i>On the Art of Poetry</i> ; “Allegory”
W 9/1	Book 1, Canto 1 Philip Sidney, from <i>Defense of Poesy</i>
F 9/3	Book 1, Canto 2 George Puttenham, “Of figures and figurative speeches” Paul Kristeller, “The Humanist Movement”
M 9/6	Book 1, Cantos 3-4 “The Thirty-Nine Articles”
W 9/8	Book 1, Cantos 5-6
F 9/10	Book 1, Cantos 7-8 Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “Witchcraft”
M 9/13	Book 1, Cantos 9-11 St. Augustine, from <i>The City of God</i>
W 9/15	Book 1, Canto 12; Book 2, Canto 1 Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> Book 1
F 9/17	<b>Short Essay 1 Due</b> Book 2, Cantos 2-3
M 9/20	Book 2, Cantos 4-6 Noga Arikha, “Ancient Insights” on the Passions & Humours
W 9/22	Book 2, Cantos 7-8 Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> Book 7
F 9/24	No Class
M 9/27	Book 2, Cantos 9-11 Susan James, “The Passions and the Good Life”
W 9/29	Book 2, Canto 12; Book 3, Canto 1 Elizabeth I, Select speeches

F 10/1	Book 3, Canto 2 Select sonnets by Petrarch, Sidney, Spenser, & Shakespeare
M 10/4	Book 3, Cantos 3-4 Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described"
W 10/6	Book 3, Canto 5-6 Plato, from <i>The Symposium</i>
F 10/8	Book 3, Cantos 7-8 Marsilio Ficino, "Five Questions Concerning the Mind"
<b>10/9-10/12</b>	<b>FALL BREAK – No Class.</b>
W 10/13	Book 3, Cantos 9-10
F 10/15	<b>Article Review Due</b> Book 3, Canto 11
M 10/18	Book 3, Canto 12 Linda Gregerson, "Sexual Politics"; Raymond Waddington, "Rewriting the World, Rewriting the Body"
W 10/20	Book 4, Cantos 1-2 Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> Book 8
F 10/22	Book 4, Cantos 3-5 Montaigne, "On Affectionate Relationships"
M 10/25	Book 4, Cantos 6-8
W 10/27	Book 4, Cantos 9-10
F 10/29	Book 4, Cantos 11-12
M 11/1	<b>Short Essay 2 Due</b> Book 5, Cantos 1-2 Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> Book 5
W 11/3	Book 5, Cantos 3-4
F 11/5	Book 5, Cantos 5-6 Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "Gender and Power"
M 11/8	Book 5, Cantos 7-9
W 11/10	Book 5, Cantos 10-11 Spenser, "A View of the Present State of Ireland"
F 11/12	No Class

M 11/15	Book 5, Canto 12; Book 6, Cantos 1-2 Catherine Bates, "Literature and the Court"
W 11/17	Book 6, Cantos 3-4 Gary Waller, "The Construction of a Literary Life"
F 11/19	Book 6, Cantos 5-6
M 11/22	<b>Annotated Bibliography Due</b> Book 6, Cantos 5-6
<b>11/24-28</b>	<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK – No Class.</b>
M 11/29	Book 6, Cantos 7-8 Theocritus, Idylls 1, 3
W 12/1	Book 6, Cantos 9-10 Theocritus, Idyll 16; Virgil, Eclogues 4, 10
F 12/3	Book 6, Cantos 11-12 Spenser, "Januarye" & "December"
M 12/6	Mutabilitie Cantos Spenser, <i>Theatre for Worldlings</i> "Epigrams 1-7"; Spenser, "Aprill"
W 12/8	Mutabilitie Cantos Spenser, <i>Theatre for Worldlings</i> "Sonets 1-15"
<b>M 12/13</b>	<b>7PM: Final Essay Due</b>

