

**SACRED HEART ENGLISH ACADEMY, (PGTRB, NET, SET)  
SALEM-7**

**Edmund Spenser: 1579-1596**

- ❖ Edmund Spenser was born in London in the year 1552, or possibly 1551.
- ❖ Charles Lamb calls Edmund Spenser 'the Poets' Poet'.
- ❖ Edmund Spenser was admired by John Milton, William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Alfred Lord Tennyson, and others.
- ❖ Among his contemporaries Walter Raleigh wrote a commendatory poem to *The Faerie Queene* in 1590, in which he claims to admire and value Spenser's work more so than any other in the English language.
- ❖ John Milton in his *Areopagitica* mentions "our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas".
- ❖ In the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope compared Spenser to "a mistress, whose faults we see, but love her with them all."
- ❖ At the same time, all the Elizabethans recognized him as 'the Prince of Poets.
- ❖ J.R. Lowell, estimating his influence on poets, says, "Spenser's mere manner had not so many imitations as Milton's but no other of our poets has given an impulse and in the right direction also to so many and so diverse minds; above all no other has given so many young souls a consciousness of their wings and a delight in the use of them"
- ❖ In July 1580, Spenser went to Ireland in service of the newly appointed Lord Deputy, Arthur Grey, 14th Baron Grey de Wilton.
- ❖ Spenser served under Lord Gray with Walter Raleigh at the Siege of Smerwick massacre.
- ❖ When Lord Grey was recalled to England, Spenser stayed on in Ireland, having acquired other official posts and lands in the Munster Plantation.
- ❖ Raleigh acquired other nearby Munster estates confiscated in the Second Desmond Rebellion.
- ❖ Some time between 1587 and 1589, Spenser acquired his main estate at Kilcolman, near Doneraile in North Cork.
- ❖ He later bought a second holding to the south, at Rennie, on a rock overlooking the river Blackwater in North Cork. Its ruins are still visible today.
- ❖ A short distance away grew a tree, locally known as "Spenser's Oak" until it was destroyed in a lightning strike in the 1960s.
- ❖ Local legend has it that he penned some of *The Faerie Queene* under this tree.

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- ❖ Edmund Spenser, who has the greatest lyric gift of any English poet in the two centuries since Chaucer, is a graduate of Cambridge and by inclination a humanist pedant.
- ❖ His inspiration comes largely from a desire to rival his classical and Renaissance predecessors.

*The Faerie Queene*

- ❖ Books I to III were first published in 1590
- ❖ It was republished in 1596 together with books IV to VI.
- ❖ *The Faerie Queene* was written for Elizabeth to read and was dedicated to her.
- ❖ The poem is dedicated to Elizabeth I who is represented in the poem as the Faerie Queene Gloriana, as well as the character Belphoebe.
- ❖ *The Faerie Queene* owes, in part, its central figure, **Arthur**, to a medieval writer, **Geoffrey of Monmouth**.
- ❖ In his *Prophetiae Merlini* ("Prophecies of Merlin"), **Geoffrey's** Merlin proclaims that the Saxons will rule over the Britons until the "Boar of Cornwall" (Arthur) again restores them to their rightful place as rulers.
- ❖ It is one of the longest poems in the English language and the origin of a verse form that came to be known as Spenserian stanza.

**Spenserian stanza:**

Each stanza contains nine lines in total: eight lines in iambic pentameter followed by a single 'alexandrine' line in iambic hexameter. The rhyme scheme of these lines is "ababbcbcc."

**Alexandrine**

In English, a 12-syllable iambic line adapted from French heroic verse.

An *Alexandrine* is a verse of iambic hexameter — i.e., a verse of six feet, each of which has the stress on the second beat.

A hexameter is a verse of six feet (Greek *hex*, "six").

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**Iamb**

A kind of metrical foot. An iamb (the adjective is "iambic") is **an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one.**

(Ex) To Strive, To seek, To find and not To yield.

- ❖ It is evident from these details that the poem is deeply rooted in national politics of the late 16th century, and many of its allusions must have been of far greater interest to contemporary readers than to any generation since. Spenser himself is a close witness of the struggles of the time.
- ❖ From 1580 he is employed in the English government of Ireland.
- ❖ In 1588 he becomes an 'undertaker' in the first **Elizabethan plantation**, receiving the forfeited Irish estate of Kilcolman Castle.  
Here he is visited in 1589 by **Walter Raleigh**, who is so impressed by Spenser's readings from *The Faerie Queene* that he persuades the poet to accompany him to London in the hope of interesting the real queen in it.  
Publication of the **first three books** in **1590** is followed by Elizabeth's awarding the poet, **in 1591, a pension of £50 a year.**
- ❖ **Spenser's original scheme is for twelve books, each consisting of an adventure on behalf of Gloriana by one of her knights.**
- ❖ In the event **he completes only six, the second group of three being published in 1596.**
- ❖ On a literal level, the poem follows several knights in an examination of several virtues, though it is primarily an allegorical work, and can be read on several levels of allegory, including as praise (or, later, criticism) of Queen Elizabeth I.
- ❖ In Spenser's "Letter of the Authors" he states that the entire epic poem is "cloudily enwrapped in Allegorical devises,"
- ❖ The aim of publishing *The Faerie Queene* was to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline".
- ❖ A letter written by Spenser to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1590 contains a preface for *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser describes the allegorical presentation of virtues through Arthurian knights in the mythical "Faerieland".

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- ❖ Presented as a preface to the epic in most published editions, this letter outlines plans for twenty-four books: twelve based each on a different knight who exemplified one of twelve "private virtues", and a possible twelve more centred on King Arthur displaying twelve "public virtues".
- ❖ Spenser names Aristotle as his source for these virtues, though the influences of Thomas Aquinas and the traditions of medieval allegory can be observed as well.
- ❖ In addition to the six virtues **Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy**, the *Letter to Raleigh* suggests that **Arthur** represents **the virtue of Magnificence**, which ("according to Aristotle and the rest") is "the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all"; and that the **Faerie Queene** herself represents **Glory (hence her name, Gloriana)**.
- ❖ **The unfinished seventh book** (*the Cantos of Mutability*) appears to have represented the **virtue of "constancy."**

**The framework of *The Faerie Queene***

- ❖ The framework of the poem is an allegory in praise of the Faerie Queene or Gloriana (Elizabeth I)
- ❖ The Red Cross knight (the Anglican Church) fights to protect the virgin Una (the true religion) against the wiles of many hostile characters including the deceitful Duessa (variously the Roman Catholic church or Mary Queen of Scots).

**Key Facts from *The Faerie Queene***

- ❖ **Book I**
  - Centered on **the virtue of Holiness** as embodied in the **Redcross Knight**.
  - **Redcross Knight** and his lady Una travel together as he fights the dragon Error, then separate as the **wizard Archimago** tricks the Redcross Knight in a dream to think that Una is unchaste.
  - After he leaves, the Redcross Knight meets Duessa, who feigns distress in order to entrap him. Duessa leads the Redcross Knight to captivity by the giant Orgoglio.
  - Meanwhile, **Una overcomes peril, meets Arthur**, and finally finds the Redcross Knight and rescues him from his capture, from Duessa, and from Despair.

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- **Una and Arthur help the Redcross Knight recover in the House of Holiness**, with the House's ruler Caelia and her three daughters joining them; there the Redcross Knight sees a vision of his future.
- He then returns Una to her parents' castle and rescues them from a dragon, and the two are betrothed after resisting Archimago one last time.

❖ **Book II**

- Centered on **the virtue of Temperance** as embodied in **Sir Guyon**, who is tempted by the fleeing Archimago into nearly attacking the Redcross Knight.
- Guyon discovers a woman killing herself out of grief for having her lover tempted and bewitched by the witch Acrasia and killed.
- Guyon swears a vow to avenge them and protect their child.
- Guyon on his quest starts and stops fighting several evil, rash, or tricked knights and meets Arthur.
- Finally, they come to Acrasia's Island and the Bower of Bliss, where Guyon resists temptations to violence, idleness, and lust. Guyon captures Acrasia in a net, destroys the Bower, and rescues those imprisoned there.

❖ **Book III**

- Centered on **the virtue of Chastity** as embodied in **Britomart, a lady knight**.
- Resting after the events of Book II, Guyon and Arthur meet Britomart, who wins a joust with Guyon.
- They separate as Arthur and Guyon leave to rescue Florimell, while Britomart rescues the Redcross Knight.
- Britomart reveals to the Redcross Knight that she is pursuing Sir Artegal because she is destined to marry him.
- The Redcross Knight defends Artegal and they meet Merlin, who explains more carefully Britomart's destiny to found the English monarchy.
- Britomart leaves and fights Sir Marinell. Arthur looks for Florimell, joined later by Sir Satyrane and Britomart, and they witness and resist sexual temptation.
- Britomart separates from them and meets Sir Scudamore, looking for his captured lady Amoret.
- Britomart alone is able to rescue Amoret from the wizard Busirane. Unfortunately, when they emerge from the castle Scudamore is gone. (The 1590 version with Books I-III depicts the lovers' happy reunion, but this was changed in the 1596 version which contained all six books)

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❖ **Book IV,**

- Titled “**The Legend of Cambell and Telamond or Of Friendship**”
- **Cambell’s companion in Book IV is actually named Triamond**, and the plot does not center on their friendship; the two men appear only briefly in the story.
- The book is largely a continuation of events begun in Book III.
- First, Scudamore is convinced by the hag Ate (discord) that Britomart has run off with Amoret and becomes jealous.
- A three-day tournament is then held by Satyrane, where Britomart beats Arthegal (both in disguise).
- Scudamore and Arthegal unite against Britomart, but when her helmet comes off in battle Arthegal falls in love with her.
- He surrenders, removes his helmet, and Britomart recognizes him as the man in the enchanted mirror. Arthegal pledges his love to her but must first leave and complete his quest. Scudamore, upon discovering Britomart’s gender, realizes his mistake and asks after his lady, but by this time Britomart has lost Amoret, and she and Scudamore embark together on a search for her.
- The reader discovers that Amoret was abducted by a savage man and is imprisoned in his cave.
- One day Amoret darts out past the savage and is rescued from him by the squire Timias and Belpheobe.
- Arthur then appears, offering his service as a knight to the lost woman. She accepts, and after a couple of trials on the way, Arthur and Amoret finally happen across Scudamore and Britomart. The two lovers are reunited.
- Wrapping up a different plotline from Book III, the recently recovered Marinel discovers Florimell suffering in Proteus’ dungeon.
- He returns home and becomes sick with love and pity.
- Eventually he confesses his feelings to his mother, and she pleads with Neptune to have the girl released, which the god grants.

❖ **Book V** is centred on **the virtue of Justice** as embodied in **Sir Artegal**.

❖ **Book VI** is centred on **the virtue of Courtesy** as embodied in **Sir Calidore**.