

Edmund Spenser
Selections from
The Faerie Queene

Read by **John Moffatt**



1	The Faerie Queene – Dedication	4:04
2	The First Book Canto I Verse I – The Red Cross Knight <i>The Faerie Queene is holding her annual feast. On each of its twelve days, a knight sallies forth upon a virtuous quest. The Red Cross Knight, accompanied by Una (or, Truth) must slay the monster, Error. This being accomplished, the knight is deceived by the wizard Archimago into believing his lady Una to be unchaste.</i>	8:02
3	Verse XIV – ‘But full of fire and greedy hardiment’	7:26
4	Verse XXVIII – ‘Then mounted he upon his Steede againe’	10:47
5	Verse XLVII – ‘Thus, well instructed, to their worke they haste;’	5:15
6	Canto II Verse I – The Lady Fidessa <i>The Red Cross Knight abandons Una; alone, he defeats the Sarazin knight ‘Sans Foy’, and undertakes to protect the lady Fidessa, unaware of her true nature. They hear the sad tale of Fradubio and Fraelissa, imprisoned in the form of trees by the evil enchantress, Duessa.</i>	6:38
7	Verse XII – ‘But he, the knight whose semblaunt he did beare’	4:15
8	Verse XX – ‘The Lady, when she saw her champion fall’	5:33
9	Verse XXX – ‘Faire seemely pleasance each to other makes’	9:16
10	Canto III Verse I – The Abduction of Una <i>Una, sadly seeking her Red Cross Knight, is met by a fierce lion. Her grief and beauty convert his rage to pitying devotion. Together they encounter Archimago, disguised as the Red Cross Knight; but his true identity is revealed in a combat with the knight ‘Sans Loy’, who cruelly slays the lion and carries away the distraught Una.</i>	5:47

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- 11 **Verse X** – ‘Long she thus traveled through deserts wyde’ 8:24
- 12 **Verse XXVI** – ‘Ere long he came where Una traveled slow’ 4:06
- 13 **Verse XXXIII** ‘They had not ridden far, when they might see...’ 6:37
- 14 **Canto IX Verse XXXIII** – The Cave of Despair 5:41
After many adventures, the Red Cross Knight, restored to his Lady Una but weakened by pain and remorse, approaches the Cave, having been warned by Trevisan that he will be tempted by Despair’s subtle and persuasive words to end his life.
- 15 **Verse XLII** ‘Is not his deed, whatever thing is donne’ 7:27
- 16 **Canto XI Verse I** – The fight with the dragon and its sequel 7:58
The Red Cross Knight, accompanied by Una, confronts his greatest challenge: to slay the Dragon which lays waste his lady’s land. In so doing, he proves his worth, and so may wed his beloved.
- 17 **Verse XV** ‘So dreadfully he towards him did pass’ 9:22
- 18 **Verse XXXIII** ‘The morrow next gan earely to appear’ 9:02
- 19 **Verse L** – ‘When gentle Una saw the second call’ 3:27
- 20 **Canto XII Verse II** – ‘Scarsely had Phoebus in the glooming East’ 6:10
- 21 **Verse XXI** – ‘Then forth he called that his daughter fayre’ 4:05
- 22 **The Second Book Canto VII Verse XXI** – The Cave of Mammon 5:54
The knight of Temperance, Sir Guyon must fight against all manner of excess. Led by Mammon, Guyon enters his Cave, where figures representing passionate extremes sit, day and night consumed by their own emotions.

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- 23 **Verse XXXI** – ‘They forward passe; ne Guyon yet spoke word’ 1:32
- 24 **Canto IX Verse XLVII** – The Powers of the Mind 6:16
Guyon and Prince Arthur are bent on rescuing Alma, the Soul, who is beset by the vices and passions which dwell in her body. In the Mind lie three great chambers, belonging to Imagination, Judgement and Memory.
- 25 **Canto XII Verse LXIX** – The Bower of Bliss 6:09
Guyon, guided by the Palmer (or, Pilgrim), is led to the Bower of Bliss, the heart of sensual pleasure, ruled over by Acrasia, whose temptations he must resist. Then he may bind her, and destroy her Bower.
- 26 **Verse LXXIX** – The young man, sleeping by her, seemed to be’ 5:05
- 27 **The Third Book Canto VII Verse XXX** – ‘The Garden of Adonis’ 5:16
*The female knight, Britomart, must guide the noble Scudamour to a true understanding of Love and Chastity.
Venus, goddess of love, presides over the garden named after her lost lover, Adonis.
Therein lie the seedbeds of all living things, self generating,
and from which stock the world of nature is replenished.*
- 28 **Verse XXXIX** – ‘Great enemy to it, and to all the rest’ 5:23
- 29 **Canto XII Verse I** – The Masque of Cupid 5:05
Britomart witnesses the the Masque of Cupid, observing its strange, disturbing pageant, but remaining uncorrupted. Cupid follows in the rear of his procession, delighting in the sin and misery which lust will inevitably breed.
- 30 **Verse X** – ‘Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad’ 4:59
- 31 **Verse XIX** – ‘After all these there marcht a most faire Dame’ 4:45

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- 32 The Fourth Book Canto VI Verse I** – Scudamour, Arthegall and Britomart 6:17
Scudamour is furious at Britomart’s seeming abduction of his true love, Amoret. Uniting with Arthegall, who represents justice and order, the pair encounter Britomart in deadly combat. The fight is watched by her anxious nurse, Glaucé. Scudamour is unhorsed, but Arthegall, striking off her helm, discovers their error: Britomart is a woman. Arthegall and Britomart recognise each other as true loves; but Scudamour still mourns the disappearance of his Amoret.
- 33 Verse XI** – ‘But Arthegall, beholding his mischance’ 6:58
- 34 Verse XXIV** – ‘Which when Scudamour, who now abrayd’ 10:08
- 35 The Fifth Book Canto II Verse XXX** – Arthegall and the Giant 7:49
- 36 Verse XLIV** – ‘Therewith the Giant much abashed sayd’ 5:49
- 37 The Seventh Book Canto VII** – The Masque of the Seasons and Months 9:30
The pageant of the seasons shows the unavoidable power of Mutability: all that lives must change, and die.
- 38 Canto VIII** – Nature’s reply to Mutability 2:21
The poet recalls to himself the solace of eternity: all must change, and pass away, but God and His Heaven shall live for ever.

Total time: 3:58:55

THE FAERIE QVEENE.

Disposēd into twelue books,
Fashioning
XII. Morall vertues.



LONDON
Printed for William Ponsonbie.
1 5 9 0.

Edmund Spenser

The Faerie Queene

The Faerie Queene, the triumphant culmination of Edmund Spenser's poetic work, dates from the 1590s. It belongs, therefore, to the late Elizabethan age, and is indeed a celebration of both the great queen herself and of 'Glory in general'.

The poem is a kind of allegorical epic, planned and executed on a huge scale, although never finished. Spenser is a conscious imitator of his predecessors – Ariosto, the early 16th century Italian author of *Orlando Furioso*, and (for example) Virgil – and he seeks to create an English epic which will 'overgo' these earlier models. The six Books (each divided into twelve cantos) are intended to represent certain qualities, expressed in the adventures of twelve knights who must each undertake a particular mission on the successive days of the queen's annual feast. These exploits are all essentially allegorical, so that *The Faerie Queene* may be read on two levels, the simpler being one of chivalrous enterprise, and the more

complex embodying a variety of ideas or qualities which were important to the writer and to the courtly values of the age. Spenser employs a medieval setting for the more picturesque carrying out of this intention.

Book I explores the question of religious truth: Spenser here promotes the Anglican Church, symbolised by the Red Cross Knight of Holiness, who fights on behalf of his lady, Una. Book II advances the cause of Temperance, or moderation: amongst his deeds, Sir Guyon must destroy the Bower of Bliss, where sensuality reigns supreme. Book III develops the idea of Chastity through the characters of Britomart and Belphoebe, while Book IV focuses on Friendship in the persons of Scudamour and Amoret, amongst others. Book V narrates the achievements of Arthegall, the Knight of Justice. Spenser here includes interpretation of topical events such as the execution of Mary Queen of Scots and the recent troubles in Ireland under the

governorship of Lord Grey of Wilton. Book VI recounts the adventures of Sir Calidore, who personifies Courtesy.

While *The Faerie Queene* is a representation of 'Gloriana' – and 'Glory' – Prince Arthur, borrowed from the 'matter of Britain', features intermittently as the symbol of what Spenser calls 'magnificence', but what we might term 'magnanimity' or even the Chaucerian 'gentillesse'. Spenser makes life difficult for his readers by plunging into the action without introduction, a device true to the epic tradition ('in medias res') but somewhat confusing in a complex allegory. Perhaps this is not very important: what is memorable about *The Faerie Queene* is primarily the exquisiteness of Spenser's language and his ability to conjure scenes which are both picturesque (even grotesque, on occasion) and movingly based on a strongly-felt moral vision. The self-conscious archaism of the style (vaguely Chaucerian) often succeeds splendidly, even if at times it may jar. Of special interest is the brilliant control and manipulation of the 'Spenserian stanza', devised for this poem: Spenser adds a ninth, longer line to the preceding eight. We therefore have eight

pentameters and one hexameter (or 'alexandrine'). This last line is used to sum up, crystallise or counterpoint what has gone before. Keats was much later to make splendid use of the stanza in his *The Eve of St Agnes*.

Edmund Spenser, born into a relatively modest family, was nevertheless probably connected to the Spensers of Althorp. Educated at Merchant Taylors' School and Cambridge, he soon became a friend of Sir Philip Sidney and obtained employment as secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton. Spenser went with Grey to Ireland, eventually acquiring Kilcolman Castle in Co. Cork where he busied himself with *The Faerie Queene*. He married Elizabeth Boyle in 1594; the exquisite *Epithalamion* was composed for their wedding. The Irish troubles of 1598 saw the destruction of his home and his return to London, where he died a poor man in 1599.

NOTES ON THE SELECTION

Book I, Cantos I-III

Holiness (the Red Cross Knight) encounters evil, or error, in various forms. His lady Una's parents, representing mankind, are in thrall to 'the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil' (Revelation xx 2). In Canto I the Knight kills the monster Error, but he is then tricked by the wizard Archimago into thinking his lady unchaste: the pair are therefore parted, and Cantos II and III recount their separate adventures.

Canto IX includes the brilliant episode of the Cave of Despair, in which the Knight is exposed to the persuasive, self-destructive allure of Despair – which is, of course, intrinsically sinful. Because the Knight is by now weakened by pain and remorse, the idea of yielding to suicide has a certain appeal.

Cantos XI and XII provide the climax of Book I. In defeating the Dragon – a conflict described with almost grotesque vividness by Spenser – the Knight earns the right to wed his lady.

Book II, Canto VII Sir Guyon is led by Mammon into the cave which bears his name. Here the knight sees a succession of

figures who are eaten up by the excess of their passionate obsessions.

Canto IX Alma (the Soul) must be rescued by Sir Guyon and Prince Arthur from the sensual desires which dwell in her body, here represented by a castle, at the top of which is a turret housing the Mind. Three great chambers lie within this turret: they belong to Imagination, Judgement and Memory.

Canto XII Sir Guyon, now guided by the Palmer (or Pilgrim), is led to the Bower of Bliss. In another of the great set-piece episodes of *The Faerie Queene*, Sir Guyon must resist the temptations laid out before him, then bind Acrasia, who rules this realm, and finally destroy the Bower.

Book III, Canto VI Spenser introduces a female knight, Britomart. She is disguised, and is thus thought by those who encounter her to be a man. Her task is to guide the noble Scudamour to a true understanding of Love and Chastity. As part of this process, Spenser describes to us the Garden of Adonis. This belongs to Venus, Goddess of Love, and is named after her lover. Within the Garden lie the seedbeds of all living things: from this stock nature is constantly replenished.

Canto XII features another of Spenser's pageant or masque episodes. Here Britomart witnesses the Masque of Cupid, a procession in which 'love's spoyles are exprest': in other words, the destructive effects of unconsidered and uncontrolled physical passion are displayed. At the rear of his procession rides Cupid himself, delighting in the sin and misery he breeds.

Book IV, Canto VI Britomart seems to have abducted Scudamour's beloved Amoret. In his rage Scudamour meets Arthegall: uniting, they successively encounter Britomart in deadly fight. Scudamour is unhorsed, but Arthegall eventually succeeds in overcoming Britomart. When he strikes off her helm he discovers Britomart's true nature; the pair immediately recognise each other as their true loves, leaving Scudamour still mourning the disappearance of Amoret.

Book V, Canto II The Giant presumes to set the world to rights, thus blasphemously attempting to usurp the power of God. Spenser here alludes to civil disobedience, glancing especially at troubles in Ireland, and so defending the status quo. Arthegall exposes the fallacies in the Giant's intentions; then Talus the Iron Man casts

down and destroys the foolish Giant, before sternly rebuking the discontented people of that land.

Book VI, Canto X Sir Calidore, the champion of Courtesy, pauses in his quest of the Blatant Beast to sample a life of pastoral ease. Spenser here indulges a favourite convention, introducing Colin Clout the shepherd and praising the simple life. Sir Calidore is privileged to witness the Dance of the Three Muses upon the Hill of the Graces.

Book VII, Canto VII In another beautiful pageant, Spenser shows us the passage of the seasons. The Masque of the Seasons and the Months demonstrates the unavoidable power of Mutability: all that lives must change, and die.

Canto VIII In 'Nature's Reply to Mutability' the poet recalls to himself the solace of eternity: all earthly things are transitory, but God and His heaven shall live for ever.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside



As one that inly mourn'd; so was she sad,
And heavy sate upon her palfrey slow;
Seemèd in heart some hidden care she had;
And by her in a line a milk-white lamb she lad.

BOOK I, CANTO I, VERSE IV.



And he himself, long gazing thereupon,
At last fell humbly down upon his knee,
And of his wonder made religion,
Weening some heavenly goddess he did see.

BOOK IV, CANTO VI, VERSE XXII.

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Cover picture: *Una and the Lion*, 1782, by George Stubbs (1724-1806).
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Edmund Spenser The Faerie Queene

Read by **John Moffatt**

This remarkable poem, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I, was Spenser's finest achievement: the first epic poem in modern English, *The Faerie Queene* combines dramatic narratives of chivalrous adventure with exquisite and picturesque episodes of pageantry. At the same time, Spenser is expounding a deeply-felt allegory of the eternal struggle between Truth and Error.



John Moffatt's distinguished theatre career encompasses two hundred roles across the UK, forty-two major London productions and two Broadway appearances. He played Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at the Open Air Theatre, Regents Park, appeared in Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hedda Gabler* and in *Married Love* directed by Joan Plowright. Film credits include *Prick Up Your Ears*, and he has been seen on UK TV in productions as varied as *Love in a Cold Climate* and *Maigret*. He also reads Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* for Naxos AudioBooks and appears as Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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