



The
ELFIN KNIGHT

Book II of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

Updated and annotated by
Toby J. Sumpter

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ntroduction

Edmund Spenser is an unsung hero in Christian literature. Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare seem to get their time, but Spenser's has been a long time in coming. And with good reason, I might add, for I suspect he is far too Christian for our modern taste buds.

I first read *The Faerie Queene* in college, where I stumbled through the archaic vocabulary, arbitrary spellings, and metrical lines, and gathered a confused and rather tangled impression of the six stories in Spenser's epic. Upon learning that Spenser had intended to write twelve books, I sighed with relief. But when I began teaching medieval literature for Atlas School a couple of years later, I included Book I of *The Faerie Queene* in the form of Roy Maynard's *Fierce Wars and Faithful Loves* (Canon Press, 1999). This decision was made because it was literature that we *ought* to read, but it certainly wasn't the case that I was looking forward to it. I was teaching a group of boys ranging in age from eight to thirteen, and I warned them that the task would be difficult but rewarding (I silently hoped). However, those six weeks were some of the most rewarding weeks I have ever spent with a class. We read aloud, discussed, acted out, and drew pictures of Spenser's tale of the Redcross Knight. At the close of those weeks, it had become obvious that we had all loved the world of Faerie Land, and we were anxious to return. And thus with a bit of arranging and rearranging, I decided that we would also read Book II. It was then that I began searching for another version like Maynard's that might bridge the Elizabethan world to ours with updated spellings, definitions of archaic vocabulary, and helpful explanations along the way. When time ran short and only one out-of-print copy could be procured that *almost* fit the bill, I decided to make one myself.

It was once again a time of enchantment and adventure, and when I mention *The Faerie Queene* now, my students' faces brighten and their eyes

are keen. They've regularly asked when we're going to do more and which book we'll do next. The older students have even asked to read the text in its original setting. They've been to Faerie Land, and they're willing to work even harder if it means another ride through the wilds of Spenser's imagination.

But I said that Spenser was too Christian—what of that? Spenser is too Christian in at least three glorious respects. First, Spenser is not a sentimentalist or a prude. Another way to say it is that he is not a gnostic. Moderns—Christians and non-Christians alike—have come to believe that this world is a necessary evil, but Spenser glories in the wildness and creativity of our triune God. He describes creation with exuberance and awe. He is not afraid to portray the truly gruesome nature of unchecked fury, the artificial appeals of sexual debauchery, and the physical glories of courage, beauty, and judgment.

Secondly, Spenser's world is a Faerie Land, a waterfall in which what we perceive as reality plunges into the pool of imagination. In the post-Enlightenment world, imagination and fairy tale have been looked upon with thick suspicion, particularly and most unfortunately in the Christian Church. Here, at the center of the world, where God's love has been so wildly creative, restoring a people to Himself, it is here where creativity and imagination have been so undervalued. But Spenser knew that the world God made *is* a Faerie Land and that the Scriptures are a true and lively fairy tale. And it is in this Faerie Land where true religion and theology take place, coming out of the hands and lips of courageous knights and fair maidens. In other words, because the world is supernatural and magic, it is full of meaning, brimming with symbolism. And just as the Apostle Paul looks back at the story of Abraham and sees an allegory of the Christian Church in Sarah and Isaac (Gal. 4:22–31), so too Spenser sees all of life and history teeming with symbolism, allegory, and typology. Jesus says we ought to see *Him* on every page of the Old Testament (Lk. 24:25–27), and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is practice in growing up into the wisdom of faith. *The Faerie Queene* is a rich allegory where names are full of meaning, and the story constantly begs for readers full of faith and imagination.

Lastly, Spenser was far more Christian than we, in that he was a poet, and *The Faerie Queene* is an epic poem. Not only has modernity sought to strip us of the joy of imagination, but it has no less than relegated the world of poetry to an irrelevant aristocracy, to a dark and dusty closet on a shelf below the bowling shoes. But the world God made is far more beautiful than our dry and humorless encyclopedias. God's spoken and written word is full of poetry and drama, narrative, and rhythm. As we read Spenser, may we recover a love for well-crafted speech and lyrical poetry, and may our words and the words of our students and children grow to more fully echo His, and may there come a day when mere speech is awkward, and it's somehow more comfortable to sing.

THE SECOND BOOKE OF THE FAERIE QVEENE.
 Contayning
 THE LEGEND OF SIR GYON.
 OR
 OF TEMPERAUNCE.¹

Right well I wote° most mighty Soueraine,	<i>know</i>
That all this famous antique history,	
Of some th'abundance of an idle braine	
Will iudged° be, and painted forgery,	<i>judged</i>
Rather then matter of iust° memory,	<i>just</i>
Sith° none, that breatheth liuing° aire, does know,	<i>since / living</i>
Where is that happy land of Faerie,	
Which I so much do vaunt,° yet no where show,	<i>praise</i>
But vouch antiquities, which no body can know. ²	

But let that man with better sence aduize,°	<i>advise</i>
That of the world least part to vs is red:°	<i>read</i>
And dayly how through hardy enterprize,	
Many great Regions are discovered,	
Which to late age were neuer mentioned.	
Who euer heard of th'Indian <i>Peru</i> ?	
Or who in venturous vessell measured	
The <i>Amazon</i> huge riuer now found trew?	
Or fruitfullest <i>Virginia</i> who did euer vew? ³	

1. This is Edmund Spenser's original preface to the second book of *The Faerie Queene*. No spellings have been changed so the reader can see with his own eyes the way the author originally wrote his tale. Watch carefully—Spenser uses the letter “i” instead of “j” and the letter “u” instead of “v” (among other things!).

2. Spenser addresses his writing to his “Sovereign,” meaning his Queen, Elizabeth I. He says that he knows some people will judge his story to be merely made up, a “painted forgery.” This is the case, he says, because no one knows where Faerie Land is.

3. Spenser says that wise men will know that many lands are constantly being discovered like Peru or the Amazon or Virginia. These new lands are proof that Faerie Land may be found if searched for.

Yet all these were, when no man did them know;
 Yet haue from wisest ages hidden beene:
 And later times things more vnknowne shall show.
 Why then should witlesse man so much misweene° *misjudge, be mistaken*
 That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?
 What if within the Moones faire shining spheare?
 What if in euery other starre vnseene
 Of other worldes he happily should heare?
 He wóder° would much more: yet such to some appeare. *wonder*

Of Faerie lond yet if he more inquire,
 By certaine signes here set in sundry place
 He may it find; ne° let him then admire, *nor*
 But yield his sence to be too blunt and bace,
 That no'te° without an hound fine footing trace. *could not*
 And thou, O fairest Princess under sky,
 In this fair mirrhour maist behold thy face,
 And thine owne realmes in lond of Faery,
 And in this antique Image thy great auncestry.⁴

The which O pardon me thus to enfold
 In couert vele, and wrap in shadowes light,
 That feeble eyes your glory may behold,
 Which else could not endure those beames bright,
 But would be dazled with exceeding light.
 O pardon, and vouchsafe with patient eare
 The braue aduentures of this Faery knight
 The good Sir *Guyon* graciously to heare,
 In whom great rule of Temp'raunce goodly doth appeare.⁵

4. Here Spenser gives a brief description of the whole story to follow. He aims to tell a story that is a mirror of the English Queen, her history, and the land of England.

5. Spenser begs the pardon of his Queen because he will tell of her under a "covert veil," that is, he will tell a story over top of her story. He says he will do this because otherwise feeble eyes would not be able to behold her "exceeding light." The overlaid story, he says, will be the adventures of a Faerie knight, the good Sir Guyon who will show forth the virtue of temperance. And thus the story begins.

anto I.

*Guyon by Archimago abused,
The Redcross knight awaits,
Finds Mordant and Amavia slain
With pleasure's poisoned baits.*

1

That cunning architect of cankered guile,
Whom Prince's late displeasure left in bands,¹
For falséd letters and suborned wile,^o
Soon as the Redcross knight he understands,
To been departed out of Eden lands,
To serve again his sovereign Elfin Queen,
His arts he moves, and out of caitiffs'^o hands
Himself he frees by secret means unseen;
His shackles empty left, himself escapéd clean.

plot

capturers'

2

And forth he fares full of malicious mind,
To worken^o mischief and avenging woe,
Where ever he that godly knight may find,
His only heart-sore, and his only foe,
Since Una now he algates^o must forgo,
Whom his victorious hands did earst^o restore

work

*always
recently*

1. For those of you who have read Book I, this is our old friend, the devious magician Archimago, at it again!

To native crown and kingdom lately go:
 Where she enjoys sure peace for evermore,
 As weather-beaten ship arrived on happy shore.

3

Him therefore now the object of his spite
 And deadly food he makes: him to offend
 By forged treason, or by open fight
 He seeks, of all his drift the aimed end:
 Thereto his subtle engines he does bend
 His practic^o wit, and his fair filed tongue, *experienced*
 With thousand other sleights: for well he kenned,^o *knew*
 His credit now in doubtful balance hung;
 For hardly could be hurt, who was already stung.²

4

Still as he went, he crafty stales^o did lay *baits*
 With cunning trains^o him to entrap un'wares. *traps*
 And privy spials^o placed in all his way, *secret agents*
 To weet^o what course he takes, and how he fares; *find out*
 To catch him at a vantage^o in his snares. *weakness*
 But now so wise and wary^o was the knight *careful*
 By trial of his former harms and cares,
 That he descried,^o and shunnéd^o still his sleight:^o *endured / guarded / wit*
 The fish that once was caught, new bait will hardly bite.

5

Nathlesse^o the enchanter would not spare his pain, *nevertheless*
 In hope to win occasion to his will;
 Which when he long awaited had in vain,
 He changed his mind from one to other ill:
 For to all good he enemy was still.³
 Upon the way him fortunéd to meet,
 Fair marching underneath a shady hill,
 A goodly knight, all armed in harness meet,
 That from his head no place appearéd to his feet.

2. When you know where the bees' nest is, you tend to stay away. Archimago knows it will be more difficult to assault Redcross this time since Redcross will be on his guard.

3. Archimago waited for a while in order to trap Redcross. But when no opportunity presented itself, he took what he could get.

6

His carriage was full comely and upright,
 His countenance demure and temperate,
 But yet so stern and terrible in sight,
 That cheered his friends, and did his foes amate:^o *dismay*
 He was an Elfin born of noble state,
 And mickle^o worship in his native land; *great*
 Well could he tourney and in lists debate,^o *fight in tournaments*
 And knighthood took of good Sir Huon's hand,
 When with king Oberon he came to Faerie Land.⁴

7

Him als^o accompanied upon the way *also*
 A comely Palmer, clad in black attire,
 Of ripest years, and hairs all hoary gray,
 That with a staff his feeble steps did stire,^o *guide*
 Lest his long way his agéd limbs should tire:
 And if by looks one may the mind aread,
 He seemed to be a sage and sober sire,
 And ever with slow pace the knight did lead,
 Who taught his trampling steed with equal steps to tread.⁵

8

Such when as Archimago them did view,
 He weened^o well to work some uncouth wile, *thought*
 Eftsoones^o untwisting his deceitful clew,^o *soon / plot*
 He 'gan^o to weave a web of wicked guile, *began*
 And with fair countenance and flattering style,
 To them approaching, thus the knight bespake:
 "Fair son of Mars, that seek with warlike spoil.
 And great achievements great yourself to make,
 Vouchsafe^o to stay your steed for humble miser's sake."⁶ *decide*

9

He stayed his steed for humble miser's sake,
 And bad^o tell on the tenor^o of his plaint;^o *asked him / nature / trouble*

4. This is Sir Guyon our hero, our champion, our Knight of Temperance. He's not all those things at once mind you, but he's well on his way.

5. Sir Guyon is traveling on a horse, and beside him walks an old Palmer, a man of many years who is Guyon's trusty guide.

6. Archimago has assumed the beggar's cloth hoping to secure some pity.

Who feigning° then in every limb to quake,	<i>pretending</i>
Through inward fear, and seeming pale and faint	
With piteous moan his piercing speech 'gan° paint; ⁷	<i>began</i>
“Dear Lady how shall I declare thy case,	
Whom late I left in languorous° constraint?	<i>weak</i>

7. Archimago's putting on a show as if he's really scared.



Fairy Tales



Fairy tales are an important part of healthy Christian living. They are not simply “made up” stories with no impact or relation to real life or how we actually live. In fact, the history of the world is a beautifully told fairy tale. The story begins in a perfect garden with a man, a woman, a forbidden fruit, and a crafty dragon. There in the opening chapter of God's story, He reveals the theme of History: the struggle between the seed of the woman and the offspring of the dragon. The story unravels its tapestry of tales through centuries casting this same battle again and again showing the faithful woman and her children doing battle with the dragon and his crafty sons. The struggle climaxes at the Cross where Jesus defeats the dragon through his death and resurrection. We, who are God's people, are united to Christ and share in His victory.

This Gospel and all of history show emphatically that we do not live in a sterile, naturalistic universe. The world that the triune God created is filled with tales of giants and wizards, prophets and floods, fair ladies and dragons, angels and rainbows, magic and miracles. We live in a world where water comes out of the sky, fire shoots out of mountains, and millions of stars whirl above our heads. The God who made this world is a brilliant and excessively imaginative God. At least one way in which we honor and image our Creator is through recreating and imitating His arts. The stories we tell and paint and live ought to be filled with the same sorts of mind blowing events and details. The secularists and evolutionists are boring and uninteresting with their chance and arid naturalism. But we are the sons and daughters of a God who plays with dragons, dances over His people, and became a man for our salvation. We live in a faerie land, and we can't help but love fairy tales because we are in the middle of one.

Would God thyself now present were in place,
To tell this rueful° tale; thy sight could win thee grace.⁸ *awful*

10

“Or rather would, O would it so had chanced,
That you, most noble sir, had present been,
When that lewd° ribald° with vile lust advanced *immoral / wicked person*
Laid first his filthy hands on virgin clean,
To spoil her dainty corpse so fair and sheen,
As on the earth, great mother of us all,
With living eye more fair was never seen,
Of chastity and honor virginal:
Witness ye heavens, whom she in vain to help did call.”⁹

11

“How may it be,” said then the knight half wroth,[°] *angered*
“That knight should knighthood ever so have shent°?” *shed*
“None but that saw,” quoth° he, “would ween° for troth,[°] *said / know / certain*
How shamefully that maid he did torment.
Her looser golden locks he rudely rent,
And drew her on the ground, and his sharp sword,
Against her snowy breast he fiercely bent,
And threatened death with many a bloody word;
Tongue hates to tell the rest, that eye to see abhorred.”

12

Therewith amovéd from his sober mood,
“And lives he yet,” said he, “that wrought this act,
And doen° the heavens afford him vital food?” *do*
“He lives,” quoth° he “and boasteth of the fact, *said*
Nor yet hath any knight his courage cracked.”
“Where may that treachor° then,” said he, “be found, *traitor*
Or by what means may I his footing tract?”[°] *track*
“That shall I show,” said he, “as sure, as hound
The stricken deer doth challenge by the bleeding wound.”¹⁰

8. Archimago, laying it on thick, says, “If only you were telling this story; it would win you much favor.”

9. Archimago has told Guyon that some villain has just dishonored a young maiden. He calls the heavens to witness, perhaps alluding to Deuteronomy 22:27, where a betrothed maiden was not held liable for rape if it occurred in the countryside because she “cried out, but there was no one to save her.”

10. Guyon asks if the villain is still alive, Archimago says he is, Guyon asks where he is, and Archimago says he’ll take him to him.

13

He stayed not longer talk, but with fierce ire° *wrath*
 And zealous haste away is quickly gone
 To seek that knight, where him that crafty squire¹¹
 Supposed to be. They do arrive anon,° *soon*
 Where sat a gentle lady all alone,
 With garments rent, and hair disheveled,
 Wringing her hands, and making piteous moan;
 Her swollen eyes were much disfigured,
 And her fair face with tears was foully blubbered.¹²

14

The knight approaching nigh° thus to her said, *near*
 “Fair lady, through foul sorrow ill bedight,° *afflict*
 Great pity is to see you thus dismayed,
 And mar the blossom of your beauty bright:
 Forthy° appease your grief and heavy plight, *therefore*
 And tell the cause of your conceived pain.
 For if he live, that hath you doen° despite,° *done / wrong*
 He shall you do due recompense again,
 Or else his wrong with greater puissance° maintain.”¹³ *strength*

15

Which when she heard, as in despiteful wise,
 She willfully her sorrow did augment,° *increase*
 And offered hope of comfort did despise:
 Her golden locks most cruelly she rent,
 And scratched her face with ghastly dreariment,
 Nor would she speak, nor see, nor yet be seen,
 But hid her visage, and her head down bent,
 Either for grievous shame, or for great teen,° *grief*
 As if her heart with sorrow had transfixed been.¹⁴

11. The “crafty squire” is Archimago. He’s referred to as the squire for the next few stanzas.

12. That’s a real word. Use it often.

13. I.e., “He’ll pay you back or suffer worse for his actions.”

14. At the offer of being revenged, she pulls her hair out, scratches her face, and goes silent like a stone. Talk about a temper tantrum.

16

Till her that squire bespake, “Madame my lief,^o *dear*
 For God’s dear love be not so willful bent,
 But do vouchsafe now to receive relief,
 The which good fortune doth to you present.
 For what boots^o it to weep and to waiment,^o *good is / lament*
 When ill is chanced, but doth the ill increase,
 And the weak mind with double woe torment?”
 When she her squire heard speak, she ‘gan^o appease *began*
 Her voluntary pain, and feel some secret ease.

17

Eftsoone^o she said, “Ah gentle trusty Squire, *presently*
 What comfort can I woeful wretch conceive,
 Or why should ever I henceforth desire,
 To see fair heaven’s face, and life not leave,
 Since that false traitor did my honor reave^o?” *steal*
 “False traitor certes,”^o said the faerie knight, *truly*
 “I read^o the man, that ever would deceive *say*
 A gentle lady, or her wrong through might:
 Death were too little pain for such a foul despite.” *wicked deed*

18

“But now, fair lady, comfort to you make,
 And read,^o who hath ye wrought this shameful plight. *say*
 That short^o revenge the man may overtake, *quickly*
 Where so he be, and soon upon him light.”
 “Certes”^o said she “I wote^o not how he hight,^{o15} *truly / know / is named*
 But under him a gray steed did he wield,
 Whose sides with dappled circles weren^o dight;^o *were / covered*
 Upright he rode, and in his silver shield
 He bore a bloody cross, that quartered all the field.”^{o16}

19

“Now by my head,” said Guyon, “much I muse,
 How that same knight should do so foul amiss,
 Or ever gentle damsel so abuse:
 For may I boldly say, he surely is

15. I.e., “I don’t know what his name is.”

16. She describes the knight who dishonored her as a knight with a shield bearing a red cross. Uh-oh. Hold on now, who is this guy? Careful, Guyon.