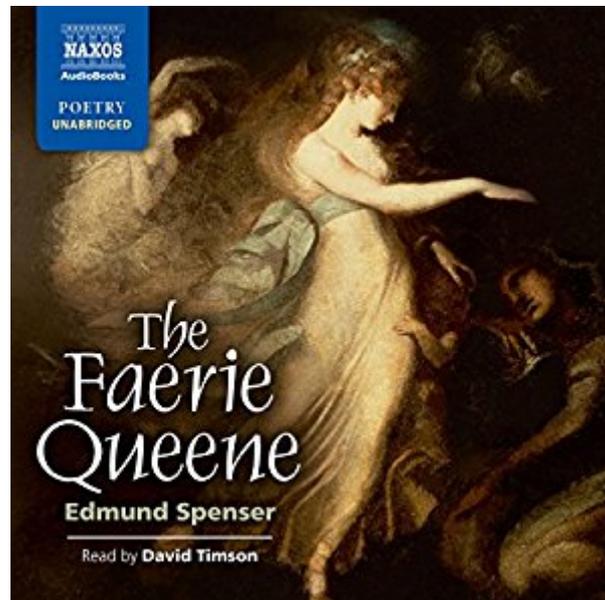


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The Faerie Queene



Synopsis

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....

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

THE FAERIE QUEENE. By Edmund Spenser. Edited by Thomas P. Roche, Jr with the assistance of C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr. 1247 pp. Penguin English Poets, 1978 and Reprinted. Although everyone has heard of Edmund Spenser's amazing narrative poem, 'The Faerie Queene,' it's a pity that few seem to read it. To a superficial glance it may appear difficult, although the truth is that it's basically a fascinating story that even an intelligent child can follow with enjoyment and interest. It appears difficult only because of Spenser's deliberately antique English. He needed such an English because he was creating a whole new dimension of enchantment, a magical world, a land of mystery and adventure teeming with ogres and giants and witches, hardy knights both brave and villainous, dwarfs, magicians, dragons, and maidens in distress, wicked enchanters, gods, demons, forests, caves, and castles, amorous encounters, fierce battles, etc., etc. To evoke an atmosphere appropriate to such a magical world, a world seemingly distant in both time and place from ours, Spenser created his own special brand of English. Basically his language is standard Sixteenth Century English, but with antique spellings and a few medievalisms thrown in, along with a number of new words that Spenser coined himself. The opening lines of the poem are typical: "A Gentle

Knight was pricking on the plain, / Y cladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde, / Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remain, / The cruell markes of many a bloody field...." (page 41). If, instead of reading with the eye, we read with the ear or aloud, the strange spellings resolve themselves into perfectly familiar words such as clad (clothed), mighty, arms, silver, shield, deep, cruel, marks, bloody, field.

This is a review of *The Faerie Queene*, Penguin Classics edition, edited by Thomas Roche (ISBN 0140422072). *The Faerie Queene* itself will not be to everyone's taste. It is probably easier than Milton, definitely harder than Malory, and parts of it are very accessible and parts of it are not very accessible at all. However, the language, which most will perceive as the primary barrier to Spenser's work, is not that difficult to get used to. Take Book I, Canto V, stanza 5, for example: At last forth comes that far renowned Queene, With royall pomp and Princely maiestie; She is ybrought vnto a paled greene, And placed vnder stately canapee, The warlike feates of both those knights to see. On th'other side in all mens open vew Duessa placed is, and on a tree Sans-foy his shield is hangd with bloody hew: Both those the lawrell girlonds to the victor dew. In line one, "renowned" just means "renowned," and should be pronounced with three syllables: "re-nowm-ed," not "renowm'd." There is a difference. In line two, the knowledge that Spenser typically uses "i" for "j" and "u" for "v" is all readers need to read "majesty" for "maiestie." A passing acquaintance with Chaucer would help with line three, which features the Middle English prefix "y-" on "ybrought." Line four: pronounce "placed" "plas-ed," not "plazd"; and just remember "v" means "u" for "vnder." Line five presents no problems. In line six, some readers might wonder why "the other" is contracted to "th'other." Here, a basic knowledge of English prosody is necessary.

EDMUND SPENSER : THE FAERIE QUEENE. Edited by A. C. Hamilton. 753 pp. Longman Annotated English Poets. London and New York : Longman, 1977 and Reissued. The Longman Annotated English Poets edition of 'The Faerie Queene' has been designed primarily for students and academics, but will appeal to anyone who is looking for an extensively annotated Spenser which gives maximum help with the language, historical allusions, symbolism, allegory, and much else besides. In other words, this is not so much a reader's edition of 'The Faerie Queene' as one for those engaged in an intensive and in-depth study. The pages are quarto sized (10 by 7.5 inches) and printed in double columns, with Spenser's text being given mainly in the left column, and the accompanying explanatory glosses and extensive and detailed notes given to the right. Hamilton's notes are, in every way, superb, and considerably enrich one's understanding of Spenser's subtle

and highly allusive poem. The notes, however, are so extensive, that they can tend to interfere with one's enjoyment of the poem, as there is the constant temptation to glance to the right to read Hamilton's invariably interesting remarks. Unfortunately, presumably to reduce costs, Spenser's text was not reset, and what we have been given is a much-reduced and rather poor copy of the Oxford University Press edition of 'The Faerie Queene.' The result is a poorly printed text of the poem in a font as miniscule as that used for the sidenotes, and hence one that can be tiring to read. The text of the poem is preceded by Hamilton's informative General Introduction, and the book is rounded out with an extensive Selected Bibliography.

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