

## Topic Page: [Spenser, Edmund, 1552?-1599](#)

Definition: **Spenser, Edmund** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

English poet. Spenser's debut volume was the pastoral *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney. His masterpiece is *The Faerie Queene* (1589-96), a romance and moral allegory.

### Summary Article: **Spenser, Edmund (c. 1552–1599)**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

English poet. His major work is the allegorical epic *The Faerie Queene*, of which six books survive (three published in 1590 and three in 1596). Other books include *The Shepheard's Calendar* (1579), *Astrophel* (1586), the love sonnets *Amoretti*, and the marriage poem *Epithalamion* (1595).

Born in London, Spenser was the son of a Lancashire clothmaker. He was educated at Merchant Taylors' School, which was then a grammar school, and in 1568 he began his studies at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. In 1580 he became secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton, Lord Deputy in Ireland and at Kilcolman Castle completed the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*. In 1598 the castle was burned down by rebels, and Spenser and his family narrowly escaped. His attitude towards the Irish problem, expressed in both book five of the *Faerie Queene* and his *View of the Present State of Ireland* was that merciless oppression was the only solution. He died in London, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Little is known of Spenser's student career, but he is thought to have engaged in the religious disputes that raged at this time. Certainly, the influence of Calvinism is seen in his early compositions and translations of Italian poet Petrarch, which are preserved in the treatise 'Theatre of Worldlings', published in about 1569, which predicts the ruin of Rome and the downfall of the Antichrist. Spenser came down from Cambridge with a master's degree in 1576 and, returning to London, became acquainted with English poet Sir Philip Sidney and his circle, and obtained a post in the household of Sidney's uncle, the Earl of Leicester. With Sidney, English poet and courtier Edward Dyer, and others, he formed a literary club, the *Areopagus*. Shortly afterwards, he published the *Shepheardes Calender* (1579), a sequence of pastoral poems, one for each month of the year, covering the themes of time, decay, and the cycle of the seasons. This work owes much to Roman pastoral poets such as Virgil, and Spenser's letters of this period stress his belief that English poetry should be shaped on classical models. During his long stay in Ireland, which lasted from 1580 until shortly before his death in 1599, he was visited by English explorer Sir Walter Raleigh, his neighbour at Kilcolman. Raleigh read Spenser's draft of *The Faerie Queene*, and, realizing how far superior it was to any English poetry that had gone before, encouraged the poet to complete his major work. He completed the first three books in 1589, while the next three appeared seven years later. In 1595 he published the sonnet sequence *Amoretti* and the ode 'Epithalamion', both celebrating his courtship and marriage to his second wife, Elizabeth Boyle.

The central figure of Spenser's allegorical masterpiece *The Faerie Queene* is Gloriana, who represents the English monarch Elizabeth I. The work is a celebration of the queen and court of Protestant England, embattled against Catholic Spain. Accompanying themes are chivalric virtue and romantic passion. Its distinctive stanza form (nine lines, eight of which are iambic pentameters (five-foot lines of poetical metre, closing with a 12-syllable alexandrine, and with the rhyme scheme 'ababbcbcc') is of Spenser's

own invention. The six completed books of the poem contain the exploits of: The Knight of the Red Crosse (representing holiness); Sir Guyon (temperance); Britomart (chastity); Cambel and Triamond (friendship); Artegall (justice); and Sir Calidore (chivalry).

### quotations

Spenser, Edmund

### documents

Spenser, Edmund: From Book 1, The Faerie Queene

Spenser, Edmund: 'Sonnet 75'

Spenser, Edmund: 'To His Booke'

### weblinks

Edmund Spenser Home Page

Selected Poetry of Edmund Spenser (1552–1599)

'Shepheardes Calendar'

### images

Spenser, Edmund

### audios

Spenser, Edmund The Faerie Queene

### **APA**

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

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Spenser, Edmund (C. 1552--1599). (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/spenser\\_edmund\\_c1552\\_1599](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/spenser_edmund_c1552_1599)

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## Chicago

"Spenser, Edmund (c. 1552–1599)." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/spenser\\_edmund\\_c1552\\_1599](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/spenser_edmund_c1552_1599)

## Harvard

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## MLA

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