Lecture Series on
Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
Book I Canto I: Lecture 1

By Dr. Pooja Agarwal

Department of English and Modern European

and Other Foreign Languages

(School of Languages)

Introduction to the English Renaissance

The **English Renaissance** was a cultural and artistic movement in England dating from the late 15th to the early 17th century. It is associated with the pan-European Renaissance that is usually regarded as beginning in Italy in the late 14th century. Like most of northern Europe, England saw little of these developments until more than a century later. The beginning of the English Renaissance is often taken, as a convenience, to be 1485, when the Battle of Bosworth Field ended the Wars of the Roses and inaugurated the Tudor Dynasty. Renaissance style and ideas, however, were slow to penetrate England, and the Elizabethan era in the second half of the 16th century is usually regarded as the height of the English Renaissance.

Introduction to the English Renaissance

The English Renaissance is different from the Italian Renaissance in several ways. The dominant art forms of the English Renaissance were literature and music. Visual arts in the English Renaissance were much less significant than in the Italian Renaissance. The English period began far later than the Italian, which is usually considered to begin in the late 14th century, and was moving into Mannerism and the Baroque by the 1550s or earlier. In contrast, the English Renaissance can only be said to begin, shakily, in the 1520s, and continued until perhaps 1620.

Major Writers

- **Francis Bacon**
- **Francis Beaumont**
- **George Chapman**
- **Thomas Dekker**
- **John Donne**
- **John Fletcher**
- **Ben Jonson**
- **Thomas Kyd**
- **Christopher Marlowe**

- **William Rowley**
- **William Shakespeare**
- **Philip Sidney**
- **Edmund Spenser**
- **John Webster**
- **Thomas Wyatt**
- **William Tyndale**
- **Thomas More**
- **Thomas Nashe**

Introduction to Edmund Spenser

Edmund Spenser, (born 1552/53, London, England—died January 13, 1599, London), English poet whose long allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene* is one of the greatest in the English language. It was written in what came to be called the Spenserian stanza. The patterns of meaning in Spenser's poetry are frequently woven out of the traditional interpretations—developed through classical times and his own—of pagan myth, divinities, and philosophies and out of an equally strong experience of the faith and doctrines of Christianity; these patterns he further enriched by the use of medieval and contemporary story, legend, and folklore.

The Spenserian Stanza

The Spenserian stanza is a fixed verse form invented by Edmund Spenser for his epic poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590–96). 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.

Introduction to *The Faerie Queene*

The Faerie Queene, one of the great long poems in the English language, written in the 16th century by Edmund Spenser. As originally conceived, the poem was to have been a religious-moral-political allegory in 12 books, each consisting of the adventures of a knight representing a particular moral virtue; Book I, for example, recounts the legend of the Red Cross Knight, or Holiness. The knights serve the Faerie Queene, who represents Glory and Queen Elizabeth I. The first installment of the poem (Books I–III) was published in 1590; the second (Books IV–VI), in 1596. The first folio edition appeared in 1609.

Introduction to *The Faerie Queene*

The poem derives its form from the Italian romance—for example, in the division into books and cantos and the inventive energy of the entrelacement (the continually bifurcating and infolded narrative). The poem is written in what came to be known as the Spenserian stanza: eight lines of 10 syllables followed by one 12-syllable line, rhyming ababbcbcc.