**Protestant Allegory in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene***Dr. Anthony G. Cirilla, Instructor

**Course Description**

In the last chapter of The Allegory of Love, C.S. Lewis wrote that on the subject of courtly love “Spenser is not so much part of my subject as one of my masters or collaborators.” Later on he writes, “He makes imaginable inner realities so vast and simple that they ordinarily escape us as the largely printed names of continents escape us on the map… To read him is to grow in mental health.” Partly medieval-inspired allegory, partly Arthurian-inspired romance, filled with allusions to Greco-Roman and Italian epic, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* is one of the first great Protestant epics that influenced John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Tolkien’s conception of Elves and Faerie and, of course, C.S. Lewis’s entire corpus (including The Chronicles of Narnia and The Space Trilogy).

In this course, we will read Spenser’s “Letter to Walter Raleigh” where he defined his purpose in writing The Faerie Queene, as well as three major influences: Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale” and “The Tale of Sir Thopas,” John Lydgate’s “The Legend of St. George,” and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. We will then read in great detail Book One of The Faerie Queene which relays the tale of the Redcrosse Knight and his battle with a fiendish dragon. Spenser himself identified the biblical core of his allegorical adventure as Ephesians, which will serve as the touchstone for our approach to the poem’s interpretation. We will explore how Spenser’s Protestant, and specifically Anglican and Reformed, spirituality finds edifying and beautiful expression in his chivalric allegory.

**Course Objectives** Objectives for this course include: (1) understand Spenser’s allegorical methods, (2) understand the theological, historical, and literary background to *The Faerie Queene*, (3) articulate the literary value *The Faerie Queene* has, especially in a Protestant and specifically Anglican context, and (4) consider and develop answers to major questions surrounding the text.

**Course Format**

The format of the course will be predominantly one of mini-lectures followed by guided discussion. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather than in pure lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on our private discussion board.

**Course Requirements**

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week).

2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.

3. Weekly participation in the online discussion forum.

4. For those taking the course for-credit: Composition of a 3k-5k argumentative essay that presents a thesis statement-driven position about Spenser’s work or its influence. The paper should be 12-point Times New Romans font, with regular margins and standard citations (I will accept either MLA or Chicago Style).

**Assessment and Weighting**

**Class Participation 25%**

**Discussion Forum Participation 25%**

**Essay 50%**

**Course Texts**

Edmund Spenser. *The Faerie Queene: Book One*. Ed. Carol V. Kaske. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2006.

J.R.R. Tolkien. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo*. Ballantine Books, 1975.

**Course Schedule**

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| **Week** | **Dates** | **Discussion Topics/Themes** | **Reading** |
| 1 | 1/11-17 | Life, work, & influence | Introductions, *Letter to Raleigh* |
| 2 | 1/18-24 | Chaucerian Background | Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale & Tale of Sir Thopas* |
| 3 | 1/25-31 | Arthurian Background | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Stanzas* 1-50 |
| 4 | 2/1-7 | Arthurian & Chivalric Background | *SGGK, Stanzas* 51-101, Lydgate’s “The Legend of St. George” |
| 5 | 2/8-14 | Fierce wars and faithful loves | *Faerie Queene* Proem & Books 1-2 |
| 6 | 2/15-21 | Truth and Pride | *Faerie Queene* Books 3-4 |
| 7 | 2/22-28 | Faith and Grace | *Faerie Queene* Books 5-6 |
| 8 | 3/1-7 | Giants and Princes | *Faerie Queene* Books 7-8 |
| 9 | 3/8-14 | Despair and Holiness | *Faerie Queene* Books 9-10 |
| 10 | 3/15-20 | Dragons and Damsels | *Faerie Queene* Books 11-12 |