

Spenser as the Poet's Poet ⁹ ^{Second} Father of English Poetry.

Edmund Spenser is one of the greatest English Poets. He contributed a lot to the development of English Poetry as well as English Language. His influence on his contemporary and later Poets has been so great that he is called the 'Poet's Poet'. He is really an important landmark in the history of English Poetry. Some critics go to call him the Second father of English Poetry, as Chaucer being its real father. In fact, Spenser gave a new direction to its intrinsic quality and decorated it with the structural elements of classical beauty. His poetic works have been an enriched source of genuine inspiration to the generations of Poets.

The often-repeated description of Spenser as the 'Poet's Poet' can be interpreted in different senses. He may be the 'Poet's Poet' in the narrow Renaissance sense. That is, he is a poet not of the common men but of the scholars who are well versed in the classical and humanistic studies. It is so because his Poetry is embedded in the Pastoral tradition of Vergil, the romantic and moral tradition of Plato and Aristotle. The 'Phrase' may also be taken to mean that Spenser has intensified those qualities which constitute the essence of poetic art. In other words, his Poetry abounds in its artistic beauty, sensual appeal and inspiration, as well as in its power to give delight by sheer beauty of phrasing, vividness of pictures and the musical and rhythmical felicities that charm the soul.

Spenser may also be considered as the Poet's Poet in England, for he has glorified and elevated English Poetry. There has been divergent opinions regarding the true function of

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of Poetry and art. The moralists used to emphasize that Poetry should be an instrument of moral edification. Whereas others advocated art for art's sake and considered Poets - ministering angels of joy and delight. It is the credit of Spenser that he has harmonised both these views in his Poetry. To a profound ~~base~~ a profound moral tone he has added the graces and charms of beauty, loveliness, decoration and picturesqueness. That is why the moralists get morality and Virtue, and ~~the~~ those interested in ~~glor~~ gratification of physical sense are also fully satisfied in his Poetry. See the following lines:-

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"... oft fire is without smoke
And peril without show: therefore your stroke
Sir Knight, with hold, till further try all made
Ah Ladies (sayd he) 't shame were to revoke
the forward footing for an hidden shade
Virtue gives her selfe light through darkness for
to wade."

Spenser ~~did~~ has also done a lot for the improvement of English diction, style and versification. He enriched the language and made it musical and a fit medium for expression of intense feelings. His mixture of old English with classical syntax produced something new for English Poetry. He used to alter words, made one word to the duty of another, interchanged active and passive, transferred epithets from their proper subjects and gave them shapes that the situation might demand. In this way he created a true royal style, beautiful, flexible and magnificent. For an example:-

"So downe he fell, that th' earth him underneath
Did grone, as feeble so great load to life"

So downe he fell, as an huge rocky cliff
whose false foundation wares have washt away
with dreadful payse is from mayneland rift,
And troling downe great Neptune doth dismay."

In fact, Spenser's service to the English Poetry is varied. He experimented with the quantitative system of the classics, the syllabic system of the French and the English system of Chaucer, until he evolved something of his own in the form of the Spenserian Stanza. It firmly established itself as a metric of all kinds of narrative and reflective Poetry. But, on account of its grace and voluptuous rhythm it also suited to the pictorial as well as the musical faculty of a poet. The Romantic poets were deeply fascinated by it and Keats, Shelley and Byron admirably used it in their great poems. Spenser's verbal melody and music based on the onomatopoeic words, proper employment of vowels and consonants and alliteration were unique. Shelley, Keats, Tennyson and Swinburne learned the melody of their Verse from Spenser. The service which Spenser rendered to English Poetry by this exquisite sense of harmony is unparalleled.

Spenser's word paintings and gorgeous scenes are equally impressive. He was a born painter who never held a brush in his hand. He influenced the world of Paintings of the pre-Raphaelites. See the beautiful description of a cottage:-

"There was an holy chappell redified
wherein the Hermit dwelt to say
His holy things each morne and eventide
thereby a Christall streame did gently play
which from a sacred fountaine welled forke alway."

Spenser influenced more poets than any other writer of English Verse. Cowley became a poet by

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by reading 'The Faerie Queene'. Milton acknowledges that he was his original. Dryden calls him master. Pope compares him to a mistress whose faults we see but whom we love with them all. Collins and Gray also show his influence on them. Shelley and Keats were his worthy disciples. Wordsworth finds him as an embodiment of nobility, purity and sweetness.

In fact, it was Spenser who raised poetry and gave a place to the poet that is near to God, the supreme maker. He had supreme trust in poetry and the vocation of the poets. It was his greatness that he looked upon the poet not merely as a lover of beauty but also a man charged with mission to work for the elevation and redemption of mankind.

To conclude, we can say that Spenser is really the poet's poet and the second father of English poetry.

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