

THE FAERIE QUEENE 1.1.14–26

14

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
The youthful knight could not for aught be stayed, 120
But forth unto the darksome hole he went,
And lookèd in: his glistering armor made
A little glooming light, much like a shade,
By which he saw the ugly monster plain,
Half like a serpent horribly displayed, 125
But th' other half did woman's shape retain,
Most loathsome, filthy, foul, and full of vile disdain.

15

And as she lay upon the dirty ground,
Her huge long tail her den all overspread,
Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound, 130
Pointed with mortal sting. Of her there bred
A thousand young ones, which she daily fed,
Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, each one
Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favorèd:
Soon as that uncouth light upon them shone, 135
Into her mouth they crept, and sudden all were gone.

16

Their dam upstart, out of her den afraid,
And rushed forth, hurling her hideous tail
About her cursèd head, whose folds displayed
Were stretched now forth at length without entrail. 140
She looked about, and seeing one in mail
Armed to point, sought back to turn again;
For light she hated as the deadly bale,
Ay wont in desert darkness to remain,
Where plain none might her see, nor she see any plain. 145

17

Which when the valiant Elf perceived, he leapt
As Lion fierce upon the flying prey,
And with his trenchant blade her boldly kept
From turning back, and forcèd her to stay:
Therewith enraged she loudly gan to bray, 150

And turning fierce, her speckled tail advanced,
Threatening her angry sting, him to dismay:
Who nought aghast his mighty hand enhanced:
The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glanced.

18

Much daunted with that dint, her sense was dazed, 155
Yet kindling rage, her self she gathered round,
And all at once her beastly body raised
With doubled forces high above the ground:
Then wrapping up her wreathèd stern around,
Leapt fierce upon his shield, and her huge train 160
All suddenly about his body wound,
That hand or foot to stir he strove in vain:
God help the man so wrapped in Error's endless train.

19

His Lady sad to see his sore constraint,
Cried out, "Now now Sir knight, show what ye be, 165
Add faith unto your force, and be not faint:
Strangle her, else she sure will strangle thee."
That when he heard, in great perplexity,
His gall did grate for grief and high disdain,
And knitting all his force got one hand free, 170
Wherewith he gripped her gorge with so great pain,
That soon to loose her wicked bands did her constrain.

20

Therewith she spewed out of her filthy maw
A flood of poison horrible and black,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw, 175
Which stunk so vildly, that it forced him slack
His grasping hold, and from her turn him back:
Her vomit full of books and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toads, which eyes did lack,
And creeping sought way in the weedy grass: 180
Her filthy parbreake all the place defilèd has.

21

As when old father Nilus 'gins to swell
With timely pride above the Egyptian vale,

His fatty waves do fertile slime outwell,
 And overflow each plain and lowly dale: 185
 But when his later spring 'gins to avail,
 Huge heaps of mud he leaves, wherein there breed
 Ten thousand kinds of creatures, partly male
 And partly female of his fruitful seed;
 Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed. 190

22

The same so sore annoyèd has the knight,
 That well nigh chokèd with the deadly stink,
 His forces fail, ne can no longer fight.
 Whose courage when the fiend perceived to shrink,
 She pourèd forth out of her hellish sink 195
 Her fruitful cursèd spawn of serpents small,
 Deformèd monsters, foul, and black as ink,
 Which swarming all about his legs did crawl,
 And him encumbered sore, but could not hurt at all.

23

As gentle Shepherd in sweet even-tide, 200
 When ruddy Phoebus gins to wink in west,
 High on an hill, his flock to viewen wide,
 Marks which do bite their hasty supper best,
 A cloud of cumbrous gnats do him molest,
 All striving to infix their feeble stings, 205
 That from their 'noyance he no where can rest,
 But with his clownish hands their tender wings
 He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

24

Thus ill bestedd, and fearful more of shame,
 Than of the certain peril he stood in, 210
 Half furious unto his foe he came,
 Resolved in mind all suddenly to win,
 Or soon to lose, before he once would lin
 And struck at her with more then manly force,
 That from her body full of filthy sin 215
 He raft her hateful head without remorse;
 A stream of coal black blood forth gushèd from her corse.

25

Her scattered brood, soon as their Parent dear
They saw so rudely falling to the ground,
Groaning full deadly, all with troublous fear, 220
Gathered themselves about her body round,
Weening their wonted entrance to have found
At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
They flockèd all about her bleeding wound,
And suckèd up their dying mother's blood, 225
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.

26

That detestable sight him much amazed,
To see th'unkindly Imps, of heaven accurst,
Devour their dam; on whom while so he gazed,
Having all satisfied their bloody thirst, 230
Their bellies swollen he saw with fullness burst,
And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end
Of such as drunk her life, the which them nursed;
Now needeth him no longer labour spend,
His foes have slain themselves, with whom he should contend. 235