



Edmund Spenser: A Life

Andrew Hadfield

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Edmund Spenser's innovative poetic works have a central place in the canon of English literature. Yet he is remembered as a morally flawed, self-interested sycophant; complicit in England's ruthless colonisation of Ireland; in Karl Marx's words, 'Elizabeth's arse-kissing poet'-- a man on the make who aspired to be at court and who was prepared to exploit the Irish to get what he wanted.

In his vibrant and vivid book, the first biography of the poet for 60 years, Andrew Hadfield finds a more complex and subtle Spenser. How did a man who seemed destined to become a priest or a don become embroiled in politics? If he was intent on social climbing, why was he so astonishingly rude to the good and the great - Lord Burghley, the earl of Leicester, Sir Walter Raleigh, Elizabeth I and James VI? Why was he more at home with 'the middling sort' -- writers, publishers and printers, bureaucrats, soldiers, academics, secretaries, and clergymen -- than with the mighty and the powerful? How did the appalling slaughter he witnessed in Ireland impact on his imaginative powers? How did his marriage and family life shape his work?

Spenser's brilliant writing has always challenged our preconceptions. So too, Hadfield shows, does the contradictory relationship between his between life and his art.

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