Edmund Spenser

Edmund was the eldest son of John Spenser, a Lancastrian gentleman by birth who had become a journeyman of the Merchant Taylors' Company. Spencer attended the recently-founded Merchant Taylors' School and then went to Pembroke Hall in Cambridge. While still at university he wrote some verses in the style of Petrarch and Du Bellay, and these were published in van der Noodt's "Theatre for Worldlings". On leaving Cambridge, Spenser became secretary to John Young, the bishop of Rochester. In 1579 he obtained a place in the Earl of Leicester's household where he made friends with the Earl's nephew, Philip Sidney. He wrote the Shepheardes Calender at this time. The following year he began work on The Faerie Queene though he published none of it until 1589 when he entrusted the first three books to his London publisher, Ponsonby. He also married his first wife, Machabyas Chylde, at about this time. In 1580 Spenser was appointed secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton and attended him on his trip to Ireland.

Spenser returned to settle in Ireland in 1591 and wrote Colin Clouts in this year. He became a landowner and returned to London only to supervise the publication of his poetry. He married again to Elizabeth Boyle in 1594 and his poems Amoretti and Epithalamion celebrate the wooing and marriage.

The Tamed Deer

Like as a huntsman after weary chase
Seeing the game from him escaped away,
Sits down to rest him in some shady place,
With panting hounds beguiled of their prey:

So, after long pursuit and vain assay,
When I all weary had the chase forsook,
The gentle deer returned the self-same way,
Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brook.

There she beholding me with milder look,
Sought not to fly, but fearless still did bide;
Till I in hand her yet half trembling took,
And with her own good-will her firmly tied.

Strange thing, me seemed, to see a beast so wild
So goodly won, with her own will beguiled.

Sonnet 30

My love is like to ice, and I to fire:
how comes it then that this her cold so great
is not dissolv'd through my so hot desire,
but harder grows, the more I her entreat?

Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
is not delayed by her heart frozen cold,
but that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
and feel my flames augmented manifold?

What more miraculous thing may be told
that fire, which all thing melts, should harden ice:
and ice which is congealed with senseless cold,
should kindle fire by wonderful device?

Such is the pow'r of love in gentle mind
that it can alter all the course of kind.

So Let Us Love

Most glorious Lord of life! that on this day
Didst make thy triumph over death and sin,
And having harrowed hell, didst bring away
Captivity thence captive, us to win:

This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin;
And grant that we, for whom Thou diddest die,
Being, with thy dear blood, clean washed from sin,
May live for ever in felicity;

And that thy love we weighing worthily,
May likewise love Thee for the same again;
And for thy sake, that all like dear didst buy,
With love may one another entertain.

So let us love, dear Love, like as we ought:
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.