

*First published in 1590, these stanzas are from the proem (prefatory poem) to Book 2 of Edmund Spenser's epic poem, The Faerie Queene (1590-96). Here, as elsewhere, Spenser's imaginative vision of a British mythological past is inflected with his awareness of England's imperial enterprises in the late 16th century. Spenser (1552?-99) himself contributed to English efforts to colonize Ireland as he was writing The Faerie Queene.*

Right well I wote most mighty Soueraine,  
That all this famous antique history,  
Of some th'abundance of an idle braine  
Will iudged be, and painted forgery,  
Rather then matter of iust memory,  
Sith none, that breatheth liuing aire, does know,  
Where is that happy land of Faery,  
Which I so much do vaunt, yet no where show,  
But vouch antiquities, which nobody can know.

But let that man with better sence aduize,  
That of the world least part to vs is red:  
And dayly how through hardy enterprize,  
Many great Regions are discouered,  
Which to late age<sup>1</sup> were neuer mentioned.  
Who euer heard of th'Indian *Peru*?  
Or who in venturous vessell measured  
The *Amazons* huge riuier now found trew?  
Or fruitfullest *Virginia* who did euer vew?

Yet all these were, when no man did them know;  
Yet haue from wisest ages hidden beene:  
And later times things more vnknowne shall show.  
Why then should witlesse man so much misweene  
That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?  
What if within the Moones faire shining spheare?  
What if in euery other starre vnseene  
Of other worldes he happily should heare?  
He wonder would much more: yet such to some appeare.

text from: Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 203-04.

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<sup>1</sup> to late age: i.e., until very recently. The Amazon was first sailed by Europeans in 1540. In 1584 Sir Walter Raleigh presented to Queen Elizabeth I the lands he had discovered in North America.