Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* I.i.14-28
The Red-Crossed Knight’s encounter with Errour

14  But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
   The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
   But forth vnto the darksome hole he went,
   And looked in: his glistring armor made
   A little glooming light, much like a shade,
   By which he saw the vgly monster plaine,
   Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
   But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
   Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

15  And as she lay vpon the durtie ground,
   Her huge long taile her den all ouerspred,
   Yet was in knots and many boughtes vpwound,
   Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred
   A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
   Sucking vpon her poisonous dugs, each one
   Of sundry shapes, yet all ill fauored:
   Soone as that vncouth light vpon them shone,
   Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

16  Their dam vpstart, out of her den effraide,
   And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile
   About her cursed head, whose folds displaid
   Were stretcht now forth at length without entraile.
   She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle
   Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe;
   For light she hated as the deadly bale,
   Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine,
   Where plaine none might her see, nor she see any plaine.
17 Which when the valiant Elfe perceiu'd, he lept  
As Lyon fierce vpon the flying pray,  
And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept  
From turning backe, and forced her to stay:  
Therewith enrag'd she loudly gan to bray,  
And turning fierce, her speckled taile aduaunst,  
Threatning her angry sting, him to dismay:  
Who nought aghast, his mightie hand enhaunst:  
The stroke down fro[m]; her head vnto her shoulder glaunst.

18 Much daunted with that dint, her sence was dazd,  
Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round,  
And all attonce her beastly body raizd  
With doubled forces high aboue the ground:  
Tho wrapping vp her wreted sterne arownd,  
Lept fierce vpon his shield, and her huge traine  
All suddenly about his body wound,  
That hand or foot to stirre he stroue in vaine:  
God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine.

19 His Lady sad to see his sore constraint,  
Cride out, Now now Sir knight, shew what ye bee,  
Add faith vnto your force, and be not faint:  
Strangle her, else she sure will stranglle thee.  
That when he heard, in great perplexitie,  
His gall did grate for griefe and high disdaine,  
And knitting all his force got one hand free,  
Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine,  
That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.
Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has.

As when old father Nilus gins to swell
With timely pride aboue the Aegyptian vale,
His fattie waues do fertile slime outwell,
And ouerflow each plaine and lowly dale:
But when his later spring gins to auale,
Huge heapes of mudd he leaues, wherein there breed
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male
And partly female of his fruitfull seed;
Such vgy monstrous shapes elswhere may no man reed.

The same so sore annoyed has the knight,
That welnigh choked with the deadly stinke,
His forces faile, ne can no longer fight.
Whose corage when the feend perceiu'd to shrinke,
She poured forth out of her hellish sinke
Her fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small,
Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,
Which swarming all about his legs did crall,
And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.
23 As gentle Shepheard in sweete euen-tide,
   When ruddy Phoebus gins to welke in west,
   High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,
   Markes which do byte their hasty supper best;
   A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest,
   All striuing to infixe their feeble stings,
   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 fearefull more of shame,
   Then of the certaine perill he stood in,
   Halfe furious vnto his foe he came,
   Resolv'd in minde all suddenly to win,
   Or soone to lose, before he once would lin;
   And strooke at her with more then manly force,
   That from her body full of filthie sin
   He raft her hatefull head without remorse;
   A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed fro[m]; her corse.

25 Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent deare
   They saw so rudely falling to the ground,
   Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare,
   Gathred themselues about her body round,
   Weening their wonted entrance to haue found
   At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
   They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
   And sucked vp their dying mothers blood,
   Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.
26 That detestable sight him much amazde,
   To see th'vnkindly Impes of heauen accurst,
   Deououre their dam; on whom while so he gazd,
   Hauing all satisfide their bloudy thurst,
   Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,
   And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end.
   Of such as drunke her life, the which them nurst;
   Now needeth him no lenger labour spend,
   His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend.

27 His Ladie seeing all, that chaunst, from farre
   Approcht in hast to greet his victorie,
   And said, Faire knight, borne vnder happy starre,
   Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye:
   Well worthy be you of that Armorie,
   Wherein ye haue great glory wonne this day,
   And proou'd your strength on a strong enimie,
   Your first aduenture: many such I pray,
   And henceforth euer wish, that like succeed it may.

28 Then mounted he vpon his Steede againe,