

The Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser as an Allegory

Spenser's allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene* is a remarkable literary venture of the Elizabethan age. In fact, allegory was the most popular literary device of the time and he uses it to express the spirit of his age.

Allegory is a literary device in valuing a double meaning. The primary meaning is clearly expressed while the secondary meaning is only suggested by subtle means. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser employs moral allegory as his purpose is essentially didactic. He wants to express the interaction between virtues and vices and shows that virtue must be a triumph in the long run. Spenser, however, colors his theme with a fiction of variety and entertainment in order to make his lesson delightful.

In the '*Faerie Queene*' there is a fusion of three kinds of allegories.

1. A moral or spiritual allegory dealing with the action and interaction of virtue and vice.
2. A religious allegory dealing with the important religious events of the age.
3. A personal and historical allegory.

Moral and Spiritual Allegory

The good characters of the book stand for the various virtues, while the bad characters symbolize the corresponding vices. The **Red Cross Knight** represents **Holiness** and **Lady Una** stands for **Truth, Goodness and Wisdom**. Her parents symbolize the Human race and the Dragon who has imprisoned those stands for Evil. The mission of Holiness (Red Cross Knight) is to help Truth (Lady Una) to fight Evil (Dragon) and thus regain its rightful place in the human heart.

In the course of its mission, Holiness has to meet many adventures and fight many evils. First of all, it has to encounter a terrible monster which is Error. As long as Holiness is helped by Truth, it can defeat any of the forces of Evil. Archimago, the symbol of Hypocrisy succeeds in separating Holiness (Red Cross Knight) from Truth (Lady Una). The Red Cross Knight takes Duessa representing Falsehood to be his lady love and Lady Una wanders forlorn in search of her champion. Holiness, when separated from Truth, becomes too weak to resist Falsehood. Thus the Red Cross Knight is now guided by Duessa (Falsehood) and is like a puppet in her hands.

Religious Allegory

This moral and spiritual allegory mingles with the religious allegory of the book. The different characters also stand for various religious events and dignitaries of age. The reformation was the most important religious movement of the time and in this epic Spenser has represented it allegorically. He is all for Reformed Church of England which is the only true church for him and against Papacy and Catholic Church. The Red Cross Knight, **for example**, represents the Manhood of England or the Reformed Church fighting against the corruption.

The parents of Una symbolize Humanity and the foul **Dragon** who has captured them, stands for Pope of Rome. Archimago represents the cunningness and hypocrisy of Papacy.

Political and Personal Allegory

With these two allegories there mingles a third one--a political and personal allegory. Spenser wrote his epic especially for the glory of **Queen Elizabeth** and his courtiers. In Spenser's epic, she is **Gloriana** the Faerie Queene who sets various adventures to her knights symbolizing the courtiers of the Queen of England. There are countless other personal and historical references.

Criticism

A number of objections have been raised against Spenser's use of allegory. The device is essentially a technique of vision, but Spenser's use of it, instead of imparting clarity, confuses the story and perplexes the readers. All is confused and obscure, nothing is clear and comprehensible. Too many digressions, add further to the confusion of the readers. They may impart variety to the epic but they make the action loose rambling and discursive, and the story incoherent and meaningless. So the didactic purpose of the book is not achieved.

To conclude, we can say that Spenser's "**The Faerie Queene**" is one of the greatest **allegorical** epic we have ever read in English literature. It is an excellent moral and spiritual allegory.