

The faerie queene – allegory in canto iv assignment

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Spenser observed corruption within the Roman Catholic church, and with his use of literature and allegory, he was able to express these ideas and reactions to society. It is necessary to analyze Spenser's work carefully because he uses fiction to represent different ideas and spiritual factors. Popular for the time period, Spenser writes a "courtesy book," which means that the book's purpose is to instruct people into becoming better individuals. He expresses this idea in his introduction where he writes, "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (716).

In Spenser's, "A letter to the Authors," he tells the reader that the narrative in *The Faerie Queene* is full of continuous allegory and that the reader must be aware of this to understand the book's meaning. Even though *The Faerie Queene* contains 3 books with numerous cantos in each, I will focus on the first book and particularly Canto 4. Edward Spenser's literature in *The Faerie Queene* takes the form of an epic poem, while exemplifying the use of allegory, which gives the reader insight to some of Spenser's ideas and reactions to the society of his time.

Spenser believed that much sin occurs regularly in society, which is overlooked, and that the Catholic church was quite a suspect. Spenser uses characterization to create symbols which represent different concepts. His use of allegory in *The Faerie Queene* brings attention to the politics and Christianity of the time. Several examples of Spenser's use of symbolism is with the characterization of Una and the Red Cross Knight. We can see from the beginning of the text that the Red Cross Knight is a representation of knighthood, as well as mind and will, and Una represents faith and truth.

Spenser takes these ideas further by allowing Red Cross to abandon Una, implying that he has forsaken his faith. Red Cross will encounter trouble in his upcoming battles because of the lack of faith and his weak judgment. Spenser's fiction-making skills are evident in *The Faerie Queene*. Applying fiction to literature gives the reader the opportunity for self-discovery. Isabel Maccaffrey remarks further on this idea in her book, *Spenser's Allegory*.

She writes, " Each reader of the poem is encouraged to become a " noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline," to recognize in the details of the fiction an unfolding of the ordinary processes of his life in a manner that will persuade him to understand their underlying nature and, having understood, to amend them"(57). The reader can juxtapose the events and actions of his life comparing them to the fiction that Spenser created, which can lead to the development of a more ideal person. Canto 4 is essential because Red Cross is introduced to the ' House of Pride' and the seven deadly sins.

At this point, we can see some of the purpose in Spenser's use of fiction. The whole canto is full of allegorical hints that the House of Pride is far from being a holy place. One hint that Spenser uses is when he writes, " For on a sandie hill, that still did flit" (Bk1. C4. st5. li41). Building a house on sand does not provide sufficient protection, and adversity will make it tremble. The home of Queen Lucifera represents instability, which hints to the reader the sinful nature of instability. However, it clearly takes cleverness to build a house in such a fashion.

This is the same type of cleverness it took to make Duessa beautiful, but in both instances, it is a cleverness that is not applied. Spenser uses Queen

Lucifera to create a representation of pride. Spenser is proposing that being too prideful is an attribute of a sinner. Spenser writes, "To dim the brightnesse of her lorious throne, / As envying her selfe, that too exceeding shone" (1. 4. 8. 71-72). Lucifera is in competition with her own throne and she will never be satisfied with herself. She is also in competition with the sun, which proves the point further.

All the allegorical hints describing the House of Pride are overlooked by Red Cross. In fact, he bows down to Lucifera and gives her full respect. Lucifera is the queen of pride, which, as mentioned earlier, means that she is a symbol for something evil; perhaps the reason for her relation to Lucifer. It is always important to analyze the actions of Red Cross and other characters. Red Cross cannot understand the sinful nature of the 'House of Pride' at first, because of his inability to perceive, but rather judge according to appearance.

Lucifera introduces her advisors, which are direct representations of each of the seven deadly sins. The first of the deadly sins is idleness. Idleness is portrayed as a monk riding a donkey. This is a direct attack by Spenser, going after the monasteries of his time for committing this sin. It can also be understood that people pursue these sins because they thought it would be pleasurable, but the result is never pleasurable. The second of the deadly sins is gluttony. The animal used to represent gluttony is a pig. Gluttony is deformed, drunk, and resembles a monster.

The next deadly sin was lustful lechery, which rode on a goat. Spenser notes that this man was inconsistent, which corresponds with the instability and

sinful nature of the House of Pride. The fourth deadly sin is Avarice, or greed, who rode on a camel. Avarice never had enough money. There was so many things he could need , but his greediness was infinite. Spenser writes, ' Whose wealth was want, whose plenty made him pore. "(1. 4. 29. 256) Envy was the next of the deadly sins. The animal used to represent envy was a wolf. Envie was a character who chewed Oh his own entrails and was cynically against people who do good.

The sixth deadly sin is wrath, which is symbolized by a lion. This character is always looking for a fight to vent his rage but as soon as he releases anger, he feels sorry but is incapable of changing this behavior, even though he recognizes it. The seventh deadly sin is depression or joylessness, which is the result of a life lived according to one of the deadly sins. Red Crosse watches all of this but he does not go near any of the beasts. He is able to ake this correct decision because they are not disguised and at this point, we know that Red Crosse judges things based on appearances.

Red Cross does not understand the evil nature of the ' House of Pride' until he sees it for himself. The numerous skulls and bones on the floor of the house is what gives it away to Red Cross. Afterwards, Sans Joy sees Red Cross and immediately wants to fight him because he sees his brother's shield in Red Crosse's hand and recognizes him as the killer. Lucifera holds off the fight until the next day. Duessa secretly sneaks into Sans Joys room and warns him of Red Crosse's shield and armor. She then declares her love for Sans Joy. Red Crosse is unable to make the right decision once again.

He leaves the house with Duessa, still unaware of her disguise. The introduction of the seven deadly sins was a technique used by Spenser to direct the reader away from these sins. Paul Alpers writes in his book, *The Poetry of the Faerie Queene*, "the sense of earthly sinfulness and vanity has, in some sense, been our moral strength throughout this canto" (347). He then goes on to say that the narrative is trying to express that, "our escape from this hell is a narrow one. The seven deadly sins provide some moral implications for the reader.

In the third stanza of canto 4, Red Cross is led down a wide path. Spenser writes, "a broad high way that led, / All bare through peoples feet, which thither traveiled" (1. 4. 2. 17-18). These lines are a direct allusion from the Bible: "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction." (Matthew 7. 13) Spenser gives Red Cross all of the necessary warnings to steer him away from the 'House of Pain,' but the hints don't register for Red Cross. It is easy for the reader to mark Red Cross as an irrational character because of all of his wrong decision-making.

However, Spenser characterizes Red Cross in this manner, so that he can provide an individual for comparison with the reader. This is an influential technique used by Spenser, in order to produce effective allegory and incorporate some of his ideas. In canto 7, we are introduced to the character of Prince Arthur. Prince Arthur is a symbol for England and as an ideal warrior. He is also a partial representation of Jesus Christ. In canto 7, Spenser writes, "For so exceeding shone his glistening ray, That Phoebus golden face it did attain, As when a cloud his beames doth over-lay;

And silver Cynthia waxed pale and faint. " (1. 7. 34. 302-305) The shield of Prince Arthur is impenetrable and brighter than the sun. Prince Arthur is able to shine brighter than the sun because he is a representation of Jesus. Lucifer cannot be in competition with the sun because she is human. The shield represents the power to reveal things for what they really are; exactly what Red Cross doesn't have. Canto 4 is a very important aspect to Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* because Spenser integrates the seven deadly sins, which act as a guideline for the readers. Maccaffrey makes reference to this idea in her book.

She writes, " Their function is to remind us of the total context within which the Red Cross Knight is blindly making his way toward disaster or triumph, damnation or salvation" (89). It is evident that the incorporation of the Seven Deadly Sins into the literature, is provided for the reader, rather than Red Cross. Spenser uses allegory so that the reader can understand what he is trying to express and to show that men are sinners, even though they are unaware of it at times. Because he wants his poem to be a guideline, Spenser makes it clear which characters are good or bad, and what ideal behavior looks like.