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SYMBOLISM IN BOOK I OF *THE FAERIE QUEENE* BY EDMUND SPENSER

Summary. The article provides an in-depth examination of symbols used by Spenser in book one of his epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. It explores the historical and religious context of the work, namely the reign of Tudor monarch – Queen Elizabeth I and the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Spenser’s poem glorifies the Tudor monarch because of her policy due to which significant country’s development in all spheres could be observed and also criticizes the Catholic Church which attempts by any means to be as influential and authoritative in the Renaissance as it used to be in the Middle Ages. It has been shown that the writer reflects it with the help of allegory and symbols. An allegorical name of a character embodies certain vice or virtue. An ideal ruler, the supporter of Protestant faith, Queen Gloriana stands for Elizabeth. The Roman Catholic Church is represented by Archimago (Hypocrisy) and Duessa (False Religion) who symbolize the Pope and the church (or according to some critics Mary, Queen of Scots). The true nature of this church is shown on the example of its followers whose names are Falsehood, Hypocrisy, False Religion, Ignorance, Prejudice, Church-robber, Pride, Faithless, Joyless, Lawless, Lucifera, Dragon of Sin, etc. These two main antagonists attempt to deceive and hurt the protagonist The Red Cross Knight (Holiness) who serves the queen (England) and who mirrors a human being, thus performing the function of an everyman character. The encoded idea of the author is to show metaphorically that after successful completing the quest, slaying the dragon of Sin (overcoming all the spiritual weaknesses) the protagonist is able to achieve eternal happiness and peace in heaven. This idea is reinforced by numerous allusions to the Bible – numbers 3 and 12, St. George, the Bible itself, the fall of man, Babel, seven deadly sins, the Tree of Life, the Well of Life, death and rebirth, New Jerusalem as well as Christian values – faith, hope, love and concepts – humility, zeal, reverence, obedience, patience, repentance and mercy.

Key words: symbols, allegory, allusion, historical and religious context, Queen Elizabeth I, Protestant Church vs Catholic Church.

Formulation of the problem. The epic poem *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser is one of the most unusual and complex works of the English Renaissance due to its historical and religious context. This poem was published in 1590; sixty years earlier, a series of Parliamentary acts initiated by Henry VIII would begin the English Reformation, a move away from the Catholic Church and into a national, Protestant faith with the monarch as the head of the church. This profound change had direct influence on Edmund Spenser and his most famous work. During the Renaissance period, there was a return to Greek and Roman ideals in the arts which had a lasting impact on cultural expression at a time when literature was becoming more accessible to the masses. Though Anglicanism was

the official religion by the end of the sixteenth century, many people at the time, including Spenser, thought the Roman Catholic church still had too much power which was abused. The shift toward Protestant Christianity also occurred because people believed that God offered a free gift of grace. This was different than the idea that you got to heaven through good works and status in the Catholic Church. Spenser was taught by humanist teachers at the Merchant Taylors school which influenced his perspective on the church and of politics at the time. It was said that he wrote the *Faerie Queene* for Queen Elizabeth with political intentions to praise her for what she had done for the country and as an ideal, Protestant monarch [1].

Analysis of recent research and publications. The *Faerie Queene* has been an object of some investigations – W. F. DeMoss analyzed Spenser’s moral virtues according to Aristotle [2]; Philip Alan Tenant Gardner studied Biblical allusions in Book One of the poem [3]; Jason Hamilton investigated the images of the House of Pride and the Redcrosse Knight [4; 5]; Janet K. Romine interpreted the image of Prince Arthur in *The Faerie Queene* [6] and authors of Spenser Encyclopaedia collected articles about background of Spenser’s literary career [7]. Each research deals with a specific aspect. In our investigation we have explored all the symbols and allegorical characters of Book One of the epic poem.

The aim of the article is to study Book One of Spenser’s poem *The Faerie Queene* in terms of its symbolism and allegory.

The presentation of the main research material. Edmund Spenser built his epic poem around the conflict between the Catholic and the Protestant Churches. Describing these two churches he used opposition – the Catholic Church with all its followers is depicted as authoritative, hypocritical, immoral, sinful and vain while the Protestant one is shown as virtuous, forgiving, pious, true and truthful. At the head of the Catholic Church is the Pope – evil magician Archimago (also called Hypocrisy). One should mention that each character is given an additional allegorical name which reveals his or her true nature. Queen Elizabeth (Gloriana) appears as the ideal ruler supporting the Protestant Church. It is obvious from Spenser’s description: “...she was *good and noble every one loved her*” [8]. The perfect image of the queen is reinforced with the description of the knights serving her: “*Her court was the most splendid one in the world, for all her knights were brave and gallant, and each one thought only of what heroic things he could do, and how best he could serve his royal lady. ... each of her twelve chief knights was known as the Champion of some virtue. Thus Sir Guyon was the representative of Temperance, Sir Artegall of Justice, Sir Calidore of Courtesy, and others took up the cause of Friendship, Constancy, and so on.*” [8]. The author uses a string of positive evaluative epithets to describe the queen and her knights – *good, noble, loved, splendid, brave, gallant, heroic*. In this very description of the queen we come

across number 12 (twelve knights in her court and the great twelve-day feast held by her) which is frequently used in the Old and New Testaments symbolizing God's perfect governmental foundation and divine authority [9]. Thus, Elizabeth I (or Gloriana) represents this ideal divine authority. From history we know that the kingdom was prosperous under her reign thanks to Privateering (state-sponsored Piracy) against Spain, the beginning of Colonisation and slave trade. England witnessed a lot of achievements under her rule – Francis Drake became the first to circumnavigate the world; theatre flourished giving such prominent English playwrights as Ch. Marlowe, W. Shakespeare and B. Jonson etc. Nevertheless, according to the text of the poem, two main antagonists pose a threat to her kingdom – Archimago (Hypocrisy) and Duessa (False Religion) embodying the Pope and the Catholic Church. When Spenser describes Archimago (*“He looked very wise and good. He was dressed in a long black gown, like a hermit, and had bare feet and a grey beard; he had a book hanging from his belt. He seemed very quiet and sad, and kept his eyes fixed on the ground, and all the time, as he went along, he seemed to be saying prayers, and lamenting over his own wickedness”* [8]), a reader immediately understands an allusion to the monks of the Roman Catholic Church. He is assisted by Duessa personifying falsehood of Catholicism. Finally, when *“all the finery was taken from Duessa”* [macleod], the reader sees the true face of the Catholic Church – *“And when this disguise was taken from her, they saw her as she really was--old, and ugly, and bad. She would no longer be able to deceive people by her pretended goodness, and youth, and beauty, for every one who saw her shrunk away in horror”* [8]. In some criticism we come across slightly different interpretation of Duessa – she stands for Mary, Queen of Scots [10; 7] who supported Catholics and persecuted Protestants. In canto five, when Duessa tells the Red Cross Knight her fake story, she mentions that *“she said that she was the daughter of an emperor, and had been engaged to marry a wise and good prince. Before the wedding-day, however, the prince fell into the hands of his foes, and was cruelly slain...”* [8]. This story echoes life facts of Mary, Queen of Scots – The only surviving legitimate child of James V of Scotland, Mary was six days old when her father died and she inherited the throne. Mary married her half-cousin, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, in 1565, and in June 1566, they had a son, James. After Darnley orchestrated the murder of Mary's Italian secretary and close friend, David Rizzio, their marriage soured. In February 1567, Darnley's residence was destroyed by an explosion, and he was found murdered in the nearby garden [11].

Initially Edmund Spenser intended to write twelve books of his poem but he managed to produce only six. Each book is entitled after a protagonist knight possessing a certain virtue with the help of which it is possible to defeat the Catholic Church. Book One is named after the Red Cross Knight embodying holiness. The Red Cross Knight, or Holiness, can be interpreted in different ways. In cantos four, five and eighteen he is referred to as St. George, the patron saint of England – *“When he sat upon his fiery charger he looked such a splendid warrior you would have thought it was St. George himself.”*; *“The true St. George, meanwhile, had wandered far away.”* and *“A blessed end is ordained for you. Amongst the saints you shall be a saint, the friend and patron of your own nation. Saint George you shall be called Saint George for merry England, the sign of Victory* [8].” Just like St. George he kills a dragon and saves the whole kingdom and its inhabitants in last cantos: *“On the morning of the third day he slew the dragon. Then*

all the trumpets sounded for victory, and the people came flocking as to a great feast, rejoicing at the fall of the cruel enemy, from whose bondage they were now free [8].” Not accidentally the Red Cross Knight wears the red cross on his breastplate and on his silver shield – the red cross which is even now depicted on UK flag. If we trace the vocabulary used by Spenser to describe this character, we will notice typical characteristics of a fighter and protector – *brave, gentle, modest, the goodliest man in the world, valiant, worthy of the armour, courteous, strong, noblest knight, determined, conqueror, brave champion*, etc. Moreover, in canto fifteen, when the Red Cross Knight being thankful to Prince Arthur for his help bids farewell to Arthur, he gives him a symbolic gift – *“a Bible, all written with golden letters, rich and beautiful* [8].”

At the same time the Red Cross Knight represents an individual, a Protestant, fighting against evil – the Catholic Church. He is supposed to go on a journey which will make him stronger and help win the battle against his main enemy – Dragon of Sin. In such a way the writer draws a parallel to each of us who has to make a strengthening life journey full of mistakes and trials. At the beginning of his journey, in canto 2, the Red Cross Knight being *“full of eagerness and fiery courage, unstoppable”* [8] finds himself in the Wood of Error – *“wild, dark place with hidden danger”* [8]. Despite the servant's warnings (his servant embodies Prudence) he comes farther and farther until he sees *“an ugly monster, a wicked big creature”* [8] called Falsehood and shown as a snake. The image of Falsehood is intentionally chosen by Spenser – a reference to the Bible meaning danger, deception and evil [12]. One of the main repetitive ideas is that the protagonist must always listen to his attendant Prudence and must never be separated from his companion Una, or Truth, – truth, holiness and prudence are the qualities necessary for any Christian. One more detail that links the Red Cross Knight with Christianity, God and the Bible is mentioning that the final battle continued three days. As we know, number three is significant in the Bible. It can symbolize: God's perfect design – (2 Cor. 12:2); Completion – (Hosea 6:2); Resurrection – (Matthew 12:40); Justified Repayment and Divine Purpose – (Gimmel in the Hebrew Alphabet); The Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [13]. Number three biblically represents divine wholeness, completeness and perfection. If ever there were a desire to highlight an idea, thought, event or noteworthy figure in the Bible for their prominence, number three was used to put a divine stamp of completion or fulfillment on the subject [14]. Finally, two objects mentioned in the Bible help the protagonist heal his wounds and defeat the monster – the Well of Life and the Tree of Life (*“But so great was the power of the water in this well that although the Knight's own strength was utterly exhausted, yet he rose out of it refreshed and vigorous. The name of the spring was called the Well of Life...next night he rested under a beautiful tree laden with goodly fruit; the name of the tree was the Tree of Life. From it flowed, as from a well, a trickling stream of balm, a perfect cure for all ills, and whoever ate of its fruit attained to everlasting life. The strength of the Red Cross Knight alone would never have been sufficient to overcome the terrible Dragon of Sin, but the water of the Well of Life, and the balm from the Tree of Life, gave him a power that nothing could resist.”*[8]). Each time he nearly dies but we can observe some kind of physical resurrection which reminds us of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice.

The next ordeal our main character goes through is deceit of Archimago and Duessa. At the start of the journey the Red Cross

Knight is too gullible, inexperienced, lacks confidence in Una and as a result he leaves her and keeps Duessa company. Therefore, new troubles and difficulties appear on his way. Firstly, he comes face to face with three brothers, allies of Duessa and Archimago – Sans Foy (Faithless), Sans Joy (Joyless) and Sans Loy (Lawless). In the text they are called Saracens – those that do not believe in God. They have no faith, no joy and do not follow God's laws.

In canto eight Duessa takes the Red Cross Knight to the House of Pride which embodies sin and evil. On the one hand, the palace is *“beautiful, grand, stately and lovely to look at”*, its walls are *“covered with dazzling gold-foil and there are many lofty towers and picturesque galleries, with bright windows and delightful bowers; and on the top there is a dial to tell the time.”* But at the same time *“a building rested on so frail a foundation. For it was mounted high up on a sandy hill that kept shifting and falling away. Every breath of heaven made it shake; and all the back parts, that no one could see, were old and ruinous, though cunningly painted over.”* [8]. In one sense, the House of Pride is similar to the tower of Babel, the idea that mankind can build something divine with their own hands. Additionally, Spenser's description suggests that, while the building is impressive, its walls are not very thick or strong, suggesting a false sense of strength [4]. The ruler of this palace is Lucifera (an allusion to Lucifer) who *“had crowned herself a queen, but had no rightful kingdom at all, nor any possessions The power which she had obtained she had usurped by wrong and tyranny. She ruled her realm not by laws, but by craft.”* [8]. She is surrounded by servants representing seven deadly sins – an usher by name Vanity and councilors Idleness, the nurse of Sin; Gluttony; Self-Indulgence; Avarice; Envy; Wrath. The House of Pride is a symbol of the Red Cross Knight's mind at this time, as well as the position of his soul. Up to this point, the Red Cross Knight has shown infidelity and chose to follow Duessa rather than Una, i.e. following the wrong path towards sin. It is his inability to discern and follow the light that leads him to the House of Pride. Just as the House of Pride looks impressive from the outside, but is actually feeble and weak, the Red Cross Knight also appears knightly and strong, but he is rotting from the inside. It will take a lot of work for him to atone from this new low [4]. One should also mention that there are secondary negative characters (villains) who are associates of Archimago and Duessa and whose task is to separate and harm Una and the Red Cross Knight – blind Superstition, Kirkrapine (or Church-robber), the Queen of Night who rules the Kingdom of Darkness and Ignorance. Their allegorical names are characteristics of the Catholic Church.

Cantos twelve and sixteen form the climax of the poem – the Red Cross Knight is imprisoned by a hideous monster Orgoglio, or Pride, and he finds himself in the Cave of Despair. Because of such vice as pride the main character is defeated and kept in a dungeon. Metaphorically the protagonist is captured in the moment of his weakness when he drinks some water from the enchanted fountain which makes anyone *“faint and feeble”* [8]. The implicit message of the author is that the Red Cross Knight yields to pride and he is punished for that. When we analyze this fall of the knight, it is important to mention Prince Arthur who rescues the Red Cross Knight and kills Orgoglio, or Giant Pride.

The Red Cross Knight has yielded to Pride (Orgoglio), the greatest of all Christian sins. In such a way Spenser implicitly makes a reference to an episode from the Bible – the fall of man. The knight requires aid and Arthur could logically provide this

aid in the form of Divine or Heavenly Grace, as many critics have suggested [6, p. 26]. DeMoss points out that the Red Cross Knight thought himself worthy of great things when he accepted Una's quest and that he proved later that he was, indeed, worthy [2, p. 79]. Then pride has overcome the knight and caused him to fall; in one moment he has overestimated his own ability. The help which the Red Cross Knight needs to raise him from his fall must come in the form of the Christian virtue that can counteract Pride. Grace, as described in Christian terms by St. Thomas, could accomplish such a task. The Red Cross Knight has sinned and, therefore, must receive Divine Grace if he is to rise from his fallen state and be virtuous again. That Arthur is, indeed, the Grace which the Red Cross Knight must have is shown symbolically by Spenser in the battle episode in which Arthur's shield is a strong weapon for him and a key to the allegory for the reader. Arthur's shield blinds Orgoglio and Duessa's beast and enables him to win the battle [6, pp. 26–27]. There is another interesting interpretation of Arthur. He is a type of the Redeemer, the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, one who will deliver Israel from the entrapment of her cycle of error and wandering. In a New Testament context, however, Israel is no longer merely a nation; its meaning has expanded to include all of the children of God, both Jew and Gentile whom Christ was born to save. In the light of Tudor mythology, Arthur's function as a type of Christ redeeming Israel is particularly apt. Since both Redcrosse and Una at times function as types of the true English Church in exile during the Middle Ages and oppressed by the overweening pride of Rome, the rescue of knight and lady by Arthur suggests the restoration of the Church of England by the Tudors (who claimed descent from Arthur) [3, p. 44].

One more sin the protagonist succumbs to is despair. When he enters the Cave of Despair and hears sweet words of Despair: *“Think of the deep dungeon, wherein you were lately shut up; how often then did you wish for death! Though by good luck you escaped from there, yet death would prevent any further mischance into which you may happen to fall...Think of all your sins. God is very angry with you. You are not worthy to live. It is only just that you should die. Better kill yourself at once.”* [8], he is persuaded and he takes a dagger from Despair intending to kill himself. Una, or Truth, is the one who saves him putting him to shame and reminding him about his task – to save people from the dragon: *“Fie, fie, faint-hearted Knight! What is the meaning of this shameful strife? Is this the battle which you boasted you would fight with the horrible fiery Dragon? Come, come away, feeble and faithless man! Let no vain words deceive your manly heart, nor wicked thoughts dismay your brave spirit. Have you not a share in heavenly mercy? Why should you then despair who have been chosen to fight the good fight? If there is Justice, there is also Forgiveness, which soothes the anguish of remorse and blots out the record of sin. Arise, Sir Knight, arise and leave this evil place.”* [8]. While addressing the knight she is deeply emotional and uses plenty of rhetorical questions and exclamatory sentences emphasizing key Christian concepts – heavenly mercy, justice, forgiveness, remorse and sin.

The House of Holiness is shown as a striking contrast to the House of Pride and the Cave of Despair. As the knight must be healed and must regain his strength and faith before the final battle, Una leads him to the House of Holiness. The house is governed by Dame Celia whose second allegorical name is Heavenly Lady and who *“comforts those in trouble and helps the helpless poor”* [8].

Here the Red Cross Knight is to be taught basic Christian values – faith, hope and love. Dame Celia’s daughters – Fidelia (Faith), Speranza (Hope) and Charissa (Love) represent these values and each instructs him in turns. In this very house they are surrounded by servants Humility, Zeal, Reverence, Obedience, Patience, Repentance and Mercy (seven virtues versus seven deadly sins). In this place the knight undergoes mental and spiritual transformation. He “repents all his wrongdoings”, starts “trusting steadily and not losing his heart”, learns to be patient, he is also taught “love and righteousness”, is instructed “how to do well and to shun all wrath and hatred, which are displeasing to God” and eventually he is “shown the path to heaven” [8]. Mercy brings the knight to a hospital where he is trained to help others. Only after this stage of learning Mercy guides the Red Cross Knight to a hermit called Contemplation. The hermit shows him the City of the Great King, or New Jerusalem, “which God has built for his chosen people, cleansed from sinful guilt by Christ, who died for the sins of the whole world, and now these people are saints and live in this city.” [8]. This place symbolizes heavenly life and Spenser skillfully describes it – “It was a goodly city. The walls and towers were built very high and strong, of pearl and precious stones, more beautiful than tongue can tell... and in it dwelt eternal peace and happiness. As the Knight stood gazing, he could see the blessed angels descending to and fro, and walking in the streets of the city, as friend walks with friend. At this he much wondered, and he began to ask what was the stately building that lifted its lofty towers so near the starry sky, and what unknown nation dwelt there.” [8]. The knight is so much bewildered that he cannot hide his emotions – “Until now,” said the Knight, “I thought that the city of Queen Gloriana, whence I come, was the fairest that might ever be seen. But now I know otherwise, for that great city yonder far surpasses it.” [8]. And when he wants to stay in this city (each Christian strives for heavenly life), he is reminded about his task and is promised a reward afterwards – “...when you have won a famous victory, and high amongst all knights have hung your shield, follow no more the pursuit of earthly conquest, for bloodshed and war bring sin and sorrow. Seek this path which I point out to you, for it will in the end bring you to Heaven. Go peaceably on your pilgrimage to the City of the Great King. A blessed end is ordained for you. Amongst the saints you shall be a saint, the friend and patron of your own nation. Saint George you shall be called – Saint George for merry England, the sign of Victory.” [8]. And this is one more encoded message to a reader urging him to seek a path to God (a path to salvation) and as a result he will be rewarded by going to heaven and experiencing eternal peace and happiness.

Therefore, The Red Cross Knight embodies the concept of holiness, or the ability to perfect ourselves through discipline and worship to God. Throughout the whole poem we can observe the process of making himself holy after which he is able to battle the dragon. The writer depicts his metaphorical death and rebirth and it is obvious that the protagonist is the everyman hero and represents all of us in the same journey [5].

Conclusion. To sum up, Book One of *The Faerie Queene* has a deep symbolic meaning. Edmund Spenser skillfully encoded his message to a reader in each detail of his work – allegorical names of characters, their description and relationships with others, the language they speak and the numbers used throughout the whole book. But in order to decode and interpret the author’s implicit message one should know its historical and religious background – the personality of Queen Elizabeth I, strife between the Catholic and Prot-

estant Churches, Elizabeth’s support of Protestants and the Bible as a source of numerous references.

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Бернар Г. Б. Символізм першої книги епічної поеми *Королева Фей* Едмунда Спенсера

Анотація. Стаття містить поглиблене дослідження символів, використаних Е. Спенсером у першій книзі його епічної поеми *Королева фей*. Увага фокусується на історичному та релігійному контексті твору, а саме правлінні монарха династії Тюдорів – Єлизавети I та протистоянні між католицькою та протестантською церквами. Поема Спенсера возвеличує Єлизавету I через її політику, завдяки якій спостерігався значний розвиток країни в усіх сферах, а також критикує католицьку церкву, яка намагається в епоху Ренесансу будь-якими засобами повернути собі ту впливовість та авторитарність, яку вона мала у часи Середньовіччя. У статті власне показано, як автор відображає це за допомогою алегорії та символів.

Алегоричне ім'я кожного персонажа втілює певний порок або певну чесноту. У творі королева Глоріана, яка зображена ідеальним правителем, що підтримує протестантську церкву, символізує Єлизавету. Римо-католицька церква представлена персонажами Архімаг (Лицемірство) та Дуесса (Хибна Релігія), які уособлюють Папу Римського та саму церкву (або згідно певних критиків, Марію Стюарт, яка підтримувала католиків). Справжнє обличчя цієї церкви показане на прикладі її прихильників – Брехня, Лицемірство, Хибна Релігія, Невігластво, Упередження, Церковний Злодій, Пиха, Невірний, Безрадінний, Беззаконний, Люцифера, Дракон Гріха, тощо. Ці два основні антагоністи намагаються обдурити та нашкодити протагоністу твору – Лицарю Червоного Хреста (Святості / Побожності), який служить

королеві (тобто Англії) і який віддзеркалює звичайну людину, кожного з нас. Закодована ідея автора полягає у метафоричному показі того, що лише після успішного проходження квесту, убивства Дракона Гріха (тобто подолання усіх своїх духовних слабкостей) протагоніст може досягти вічного щастя та спокою на небесах. Ця ідея підсилюється численними біблійними алюзіями на числа 3 та 12, постать Святого Георгія, гріхопадіння людини, Вавилон, 7 смертних гріхів, древо життя, джерело життя, смерть та відродження, Новий Єрусалим, а також такі християнські цінності, як віру, надію, любов, смиренність, запал, благоговіння, покора, терпіння, каяття та милосердя.

Ключові слова: символи, алегорія, алюзія, історичний та релігійний контекст, Єлизавета I, Протестантська церква – Католицька Церква.