

SYMBOL AND ALLEGORY IN MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Annotation:

In literature symbolism is used to embody something more than itself. Symbols can vary from objects, people, situations, and actions or any other element with literal meaning. Without some type of emphasis, repetition, or position in the work the reader may have little success identifying symbolic value.

Allegory is a fancy word that really just means "extended metaphor." In an allegory, people, places, things, and happenings (oh, those nouns) have two layers of significance.

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There is a trend in modern literature to have recourse to the use of certain things or elements to represent or mark certain aspects or matters. The particular thing is the 'symbol' that, out of its apparent form or sense, carries a deeper meaning. Thus, 'a rose' may well be used to indicate beauty, 'white' of 'purity'. These symbols may be used to indicate beauty and purity respectively. Similarly, any other element may be dexterously exploited symbolically by an author to express his or her point of view or a certain shade of life, of course in a highly sophisticated manner. This trend is popularised as symbolism. This is a distinct feature, particularly in modern English poetry. The English poetic recourse to symbolism is remarkably patent in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, his *Ariel Poems*, and a good many poems of W.B. Yeats. Symbolism definitely leads to intricacy, but, at the same time, this proves engaging in the communication or manifestation of certain poets or elements in a distinctly sophisticated manner. Such a symbolic manner enhances the impressiveness and the literary quality of the work concerned.

The symbolic Movement in Modern English poetry appeared as a sort of protest against the excessive romanticism of Georgian poetry in the early years of the twentieth century. Of course, actually, the symbolic movement started at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The chief exponents of the movement were the poets of France, England, and even America. A good many

poets started using symbols in their writing to express the complexity of modern life and society, in a world, lost in mechanism and commercialism.

The eminent modern English poets who are noted for the symbolic trend in their poetry are, as indicated, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. They are found to use this technique as an instrument to give out their study and review of the contemporary reality of modern society. The chief representative of the symbolist movement in English poetry is definitely Yeats. His poetry stands highly as the ideal specimen of modern symbolic English poems. A variety of emotions and situations are effectively presented by him Through a multitude of indirect statements and apt symbols. Through his use of symbols, the imagery becomes a part of symbolic art. In many of his poems, he is found to have used symbols like 'Swan', 'Byzantium ', 'Goose', 'Second Coming'. 'Towers', and so on. His visions and expressions are equally animated with symbols.

Allegory is a technique for expanding the meaning of a literary work by having the characters and sometimes the setting and the events, represent certain abstract ideas, qualities, or concepts – usually moral, religious, or political in nature. Unlike symbolism, the abstractions of allegory are fixed and definite and tend to take the form of simple and specific ideas that, once identified, can be readily understood. Because they remain constant, they also are easily remembered. In their purest form, works of allegory operate consistently and simultaneously at two separate but parallel levels of meaning: one located inside the work, at the level of the particular ideas or qualities to which these internal elements point. Such works function best when these two levels reinforce and complement each other: we read the work as narrative, but are also aware of the ideas that lie beyond the concrete representations. Allegories tend to break down when author's focus and emphasis shifts in the direction of the abstract, when we have reason to suspect that the characters, for example, exist only for the sake of the ideas they represent. At such times our interest in the narrative inevitability falls away and we tend to read the work for the message or thesis it promotes.

In the most famous sustained prose allegory in the English language, John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress (published in two parts, in 1678 and 1684), the didactic impulse always latent within allegory is very clear. Pilgrim's Progress is a moral and religious allegory of the Christian soul in search of salvation. It tells the story of an



individual, appropriately named “Christian”, who warned by the Evangelist to leave his home in the City of Destruction, sets off with his pack (containing his load of worldly sins) to seek the Celestial City (heaven). His road, however, is a long and difficult one, and at every turn Christian meet individuals and obstacles whose names and personalities (or characteristics) embody the ideas, virtues, and vices for which they stand: Mr. Worldly Wiseman (who dwells in the town of Carnal-Policy), Mistrust, Timorous, Faithful (who tells about his own encounters with Pliable, Discontent, Shame, and Talkative), Giant Despair (who holds Christian prisoner for a time in Doubting Castle), the Slough of Despond, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Hill Difficulty, and so on.

Although such works of pure allegory as Bunyans’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Edmund Spencer’s *The Faerie Queene* are relatively rare, many works make extended use of allegory (Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*, and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*), and many more make occasional use of allegory, not infrequently combined with symbolism. As a functional more of presentation, however, allegory is unquestionably out of favor among modern and contemporary authors and critics, for reasons that have to do with the nature of allegory itself. First of all, the didacticism of allegory and its tendency toward a simplified, if not simplistic, view of life is suspect in a world where there is little common agreement about truth and the validity of certain once universally respected ideas and ideas. Second, the way allegory presents characters is simply not in keeping with the modern conception of fictional characterization. In allegory the characters, and the ideas and ideas those characters embody, are presented as given. The modern author, on the other hand, prefers to build characters and to develop and reveal their personalities gradually, in stages, throughout the course of the work. And, finally, twentieth-century critics tend to be intolerant of any literary work whose meaning is not totally contained within the structure of the work.



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