

Helpful Hints for *Faerie Queene*, Bk I, Cantos 10-12

Canto X

The House of Holiness is a direct contrast to the House of Pride we get in the first half of Book I. The structural contrast Spenser constructs is supposed to encourage us to compare the two domains and how they are structurally and spiritually different, and how characters who enter are treated. This is the place where Redcross, the emblem of holiness, becomes whole (remember the pun). Dame Caelia is in charge, and her three daughters, Faith, Hope, and Chastity, administer to the guests. There we get a number of allegorical characters who all administer to the healing and education of the previously wayward Redcross. The symbolic characters are obvious enough, but ask yourself why this all culminates in the character “Contemplation”? This “aged Sire” oversees the final transformation of Redcross and fills him with a holy zeal for truth and godliness. Redcross, so happy in this man’s presence asks to be able to stay with him and never return to the mortal world (63); but Contemplation tells him he must return to earthly pursuit of glory, love, and true religion – thus giving us Spenser’s model of a Protestant citizen actively engaged in political matters. Redcross returns to Una “cleansed,” and they depart for the final battle between him and the dragon.

Canto XI

The battle itself is easy enough to follow, but pay attention to its structure. Redcross fights with the dragon for three days – key number in Christian terms. For the first two days he falls back into a healing body of water (baptism?) and returns the next morning healed and refreshed. He battles and slays the dragon as his patron Saint George (see the website for pictures), and his resurrection and victory on the third day alludes to Christ. Also notice Spenser’s invocation at the beginning of the Canto as invokes his muse and the heavy tones of epic – this is billed as a veritable battle between the forces of good and evil. Una, watching the battle from afar, fears each night her hero is destroyed, but recovers each morning when she sees him reemerge onto the battlefield. Redcross finally destroys the Beast – whose pride gets the best of him (53) and gives Redcross an opportunity to strike – and he liberates her parents.

Canto XII

The final book wraps up the events and describes the liberation of the true church, which Una also represents as its offspring. The long-persecuted people emerge and the community celebrates the end of the siege. As Una and Redcross finally commit themselves to marriage, a messenger interrupts the festivities and claims that Redcross already swore his love to another woman, Fidessa (who is Duessa in disguise). After a collective gasp from the audience, Redcross calmly answers that this is the last desperate attempt of the villains and recognizes the messenger is in fact Archimago, the master of duplicity. They capture him (35), and Una’s father unites his daughter and Redcross in “holy knots.” But Redcross does not forget that he is still loyal to the Faerie Queene and returns to her to complete his quest, leaving Una behind mourning until he returns.