

Help for Faerie Queene, Cantos 4-6

Canto IV

As the opening tells us, there is no greater shame to a knight than “lightness and inconstancy in love.” Redcross has allowed his doubt to separate him from his true love and has forsaken her for the false Duessa. In this Canto Duessa leads Redcross to the highly symbolic House of Pride. Notice Spenser’s description and its allusion to earlier poetic models.

The scene is overly-wrought with symbolism as each of the seven sins parades before the seeming Queen. Notice the order in which the sins emerge and see if you can make any sense of Spenser’s organization.

Inside the court of Pride, where Duessa is quite comfortable sitting next to the Queen Lucifera (4.37), Redcross comes across Sans joy, brother to the earlier pagan knights Sans loy and Sans foy. Because Redcross holds the shield of his slain brother, Sans joy attempts to fight until the Queen prevents them. The two knights retire and Duessa sneaks away to flirt with and promise herself to Sans joy – signifying how false and inconstant she is.

Canto V

When dawn finally comes the two knights thirsty for battle rush to the battleground. As the two battle, Redcross eventually gains the advantage; but before he can deliver the fatal blow, Duessa comes to Sans joy’s aid and magically covers the wounded pagan with a dark cloud so that Redcross cannot find him. The victory goes to Redcross who is brought to a bed where he may heal his wounds. Meanwhile, Duessa uses the cover of night to escape to the underworld where the “griously” goddess of Night resides; together they take Sans joy to hell where he may be healed by the dark arts. Notice the representation of women in this and the earlier stanza – what do you make of Spenser’s decisions?

The two women bring Sans joy to Aesculapius (son of Apollo), a kind of damned doctor – notice his story and how he comes to be thrown into hell; what does Spenser think of the “healing arts”? Duessa, leaving Sans joy below, returns to the House of Pride. But Redcross’ squire, the Dwarf, wanders around the castle and finds a dungeon full of wretched victims who have fallen victim to Lucifera, Queen of Pride. He immediately warns Redcross and the two of them escape through a back gate.

Canto VI

We turn back to Una (notice the way Spenser shifts focus from Redcross to Una). Sans loy, after defeating Archimago (whom he thought was Redcross), takes Una to a dark corner of the forest where he attempts to seduce and rape her. Her screams alert the troop of “Faunes and Satyres,” who come to rescue her. After Sans loy runs away, the forest creatures convince her they mean no harm and take her back to their home. The simple people take her to be a god and worship her “as a Queene.” Then Satyrane enters the scene (notice his background story), a noble and fierce fairy, and because he is so moved by Una’s beauty and grace, he learns “her discipline of faith and veritie” (31.9). Moved by her single devotion to Redcross, Satyrane decides to help Una escape and escort her to find her lost love. They come across a pilgrim who misinforms Una that Redcross is dead – he of course is referring to the image of Redcross, Archimago, and they find Sans loy, whom Satyrane challenges for his disgrace to chivalry. The two battle

fiercely, and Una flees the scene. The “pilgrim,” standing aside and watching everything, turns out to be Archimago and pursues Una.