

Helpful Hints for *Faerie Queene*, Bk I, Cantos 7-9

Canto VII

As we saw in the House of Pride, Sloth is the first in the train of sins and seems to be the “gateway drug” by which a person may slip into further sin. When Canto 7 begins, we have Redcross resting on the grass by a fountain (pond), and he is “disarmed.” His repose is extremely dangerous to Spenser’s sense of the ever-vigilant mind, and the “bubbling wave” of the fountain has an allusive charm similar to that of Morpheus’ (the god of dreams). Spenser gives us the mythological background of the fountain – a nymph who refuses to hunt with Diana and instead rests “in the midst of the race” (like Redcross) – and when she is punished by Diana, the result is that all who drink from the water will grow weak. The careless, and now enfeebled, RC is easy prey for the giant Orgoglio (who represents puffed-up pride) and he drags RC away to his castle, taking the shifty Duessa with him as his new queen. The Dwarf witnesses all this and eventually finds Una, to whom it tells the whole story. King Arthur happens to meet the melancholic Una and vows to help her rescue her knight. Note the way the two main characters share their stories at the end of this canto and how they define themselves to one another.

Canto VIII

The opening stanza makes clear that Arthur’s presence is a result of God’s grace. Arthur quickly attacks the giant, and Duessa joins the fight to support her new mega-lover on a beast (her depiction reminds readers of the Book of Revelations). After a bit of battle, and Timias’ wounding (Arthur’s squire), Arthur manages to kill the pompous giant, wound the beast, and capture Duessa. It is probably important to note that it is Arthur’s shield, with the image of the Faerie Queene, that blinds the giant and gives Arthur the upper-hand (stanza 19). Upon victory, Una praises Arthur and he goes into the castle to retrieve Redcross. Inside he meets the allegorical Ignaro (Ignorance), who seemingly never moves anywhere (31), and a frustrated Arthur moves on to find a highly decorated chamber (reminiscent of Catholic churches). He finds a weary Redcross, who wants to die, yet Arthur “with constant zeale, and courage bold, / After long pains and labours manifold” rescues Redcross (note the contrast between Arthur’s vigilance and Redcross’ apathy). They then decide to strip Duessa (46) before letting her go, and find that she is a misshapen monster under her deceiving clothes (48).

Canto IX

Taking a moment to recover and chat, Arthur tells his story as to why he is out looking for the Faerie Queen. Scornful of lovers, he had too much “liberty,” which encouraged Cupid to inflame him with the love of the Queen. He sees her in a dream and will never rest until he finds her. The new friends exchange oaths of loyalty and separate, leaving us with Una and Redcross. They suddenly see a man rushing madly across the plain and RC stops him to find out what/who is pursuing him. The frightened man resembles a “fowle reproach of knightood’s faire degree” (he’s an embarrassment with his disheveled fear). Trevisan tells how he and a love-sick friend happened to meet Despair, who eventually convinces the friend to take his own life; Trevisan barely managed to escape. Redcross demands that Trevisan take him back to Despair’s cave so

that he may accuse this villain. Redcross, however, is still too weak (and not too bright) and quite quickly falls victim to Despair's dangerous rhetoric of self-destruction. About to give in, Una chastises RC for his weak mind (52-53) and gets him out of there. She realizes he is still not ready for the final task of rescuing her parents and takes him to the House of Holiness so that he may be "cured."

Notice all the connections to the other "lesser" characters and Redcross – the people they encounter give us an analogue to Redcross' condition, spiritually and physically.