

Dr. Stapleton Some study questions for *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1

Note the stanza form, ideal for narrative as well as an aura of the supernatural via incantatory rhymes (ababbcb5c6 = eight lines of pentameter and one hexameter). A little quatrain precedes each canto and summarizes its content.

The first four stanzas work as an invocation, and establish his literary relationships with Ariosto and Virgil. *FQ* is simultaneously an **epic**, a **romance**, and an **allegory**, fueled by abstractions, knights-errant, and the *in medias res* flashback narrative structure. Quasi-medieval diction, and the overlay of classical and biblical allusions contribute to the effect.

stanza canto 1

- 1-3 how do these many details define our hero, Redcrosse?
- 4 who is the lady, and how do these details define her? Where is she finally named, and what does her name mean?
- 10 what is the symbolic import of this stanza?
- 13-16 what's happening here? How do the events define the hero? For later: virtually the same thing happens on two other occasions.
- 19-20 the first instance of barfing in our poem. What is the significance of this upchucking for the perpetrator? Who is talking, and what is she saying?
- 28 what is the symbolic import of this stanza, and how is like #10?
- 29-30 the villain, who seems not at all villainous, and is not named? What is his religion, and why does that matter?
- 35 the last four lines are the most important. Why?
- 38-39 How many spirits ("sprites") are summoned? What is their nature?
- 39 What does this creature do?
- 43 Whom does he meet? The name of the villain first mentioned—its symbolic import?
- 45 another creature, who looks delusively like someone else; the person we meet in #4 is named.
- 46-47 what does the creature from #39 do?
- 50— what is the "uncouth sight" that the hero sees? What psychological trauma is the author illustrating?

stanza canto 2

- 2— the creatures from canto 1 are reconfigured—into what and why?
- 7 who is the subject of this canto?
- 8 please evaluate the last line of this stanza for fairness.
- 10 as whom does the villain disguise himself? Why?
- 12 who is this? Whom does he meet? The significance of the name of the male person? His religion?
- 13 who is this? Importance of details? Why should we meet her in this stanza, in this canto? Where do we first hear her name? (hint: #34). With whom are we very obviously supposed to contrast her?
- 19-20 Which two important things happen here? Their symbolic import?
- 23— What giant lie does the villainess tell?
- 26 What does the villainess very appropriately call herself?
- 33 This was once a person. What is it now?
- 35-41 What awful story does the creature tell?
- 41 the first instance of "nether parts" in our poem. What's the symbolic import?
- 44-45 The importance of these stanzas?

stanza canto 3

- 3 Why is Una “of nought afraid”? How is she symbolically identified in the initial quatrain?
- 5-6 What happens?
- 10, 13 Who are these folks? Why are they afraid of Una?
- 17 Who is this? What’s his relationship with the women in #10-13?
- 24 Who shows up? Whom does he closely resemble?
- 30 Why is Una fooled by this?
- 33 The brother of someone you’ve already met, with the same type of name.
- 38 Some critics say that this stanza exemplifies the proverb, “The Devil is an ass.” How?
- 41 What awful things does the person we meet in #33 appropriately perform?

stanza canto 4

- 1 How is this addressed to us as well as to Redcrosse?
- 2-7 What details does Spenser include as appropriate for the House of Pride?
- 12— One of the great set-pieces in English literature, an example of emblematic scene painting, like a medieval tapestry. How does Spenser appropriately identify each of the sins?
- 38 The third brother shows up. Why is he angry?
- 45-51 What is the nature of the conversation between this brother and Duessa-Fidessa?

stanza canto 5

- 5 Who or what is presented as a prize? Why? What does it exemplify about Redcrosse?
- 8-9 A minor question—do you find the first line of each of these stanzas ironic?
- 11-13 What do the combatants say to each other? What happens to the opponent of Redcrosse?
- 14 How does this stanza re-emphasize the matter of #5?
- 20 Who appears here?
- 22, 25 What question does Duessa ask? How is it answered?
- 26 How does the sixth line of this stanza identify Duessa?
- 31 Where do the two women go?
- 32— What do they see? Who shows up in #36?
- 45-53 What does the Dwarf reveal to Redcrosse? Who or what is described?

stanza canto 6

- 2 We return to Una who has been missing since canto #3. What indignity is she undergoing?
- 3-7 What happens? Who shows up to save the day?
- 8 Who rides away, and why?
- 11 What is the “salvage (i.e., savage) nation”?
- 16, 19 What does the Nation feel compelled to do? How does Una feel about it?
- 20-30 Here is the story of Sir Satyrane, a side-narrative. What is its purpose?
- 34 A mysterious stranger.
- 36 What lie does the stranger tell?
- 40 What form of mistaken identity occurs?
- 48 Who does the stranger turn out to be?

stanza canto 7

- 1 an editorial, not just about Redcrosse but about us. What's the point?
 3 what's the point of the last line of the stanza?
 4-7 What does the hero do at this point? The significance of the second line of stanza 2?
 8-10 Who is this? What is his symbolic import, not just in name and attitude but in build and in some sense, shape?
 14 What ironic thing does Duessa do at this point?
 20 Who is re-encountered? Why?
 26 Note Spenser's artistry of summarizing five of the seven cantos in which Redcrosse has appeared.
 29-30 The other hero of *The Faerie Queene*—the symbolic import of his description?
 40-42 What is the point of the colloquy here? Especially st.41, line 9?
 43-47 The *in medias res* convention is observed—the middle of the epic provides the beginning of the story, just as the beginning of the epic (1.1) literally commences in the middle of the story.
 48 Why does Una address the sword and shield?

stanza canto 8

- 1 Another editorial, perhaps to be contrasted with 7.1.1. What's the point?
 3 Who is the Squire?
 5-6 What are Duessa and Orgoglio doing when the horn blows? What is Duessa riding to create Spenser's iconography?
 12-14 The second battle with this sort of creature (compare 1.1)
 20-23 How does Arthur vanquish Orgoglio, the Beast, and Duessa?
 24 The significance of the last line.
 28 What is Una's attitude to the captured Duessa?
 36 The interior of Orgoglio's castle resembles?
 38-41 The nadir for the hero, to begin his regeneration. His bodily affliction symbolizes?
 42 What does Una say?
 44 Note how Arthur gently corrects Una. Why?
 45-50 The revenge of the heroine, and more "neather parts" (cf. 1.2). Why does Duessa not die?

stanza canto 9

- 3 Why must Arthur depart?
 11 What is the significance of the fifth line of this stanza? How is it indicative of the theme of the entire work?
 13-15 Arthur recalls an encounter that bears a strange resemblance to 1.7.7.
 21-22 Who rides up in terror, with a halter around his neck, and why?
 27-30 What does this person recount? What does it have to do with anything?
 33 Here is Despair himself, in a cave, just like Error's den (1.1), the dungeon beneath the House of Pride (1.5), and, of course, Orgoglio's dungeon (1.8).
 42— Why does Despair's speech have such an effect on Redcrosse?
 46-47 Especially these stanzas, truly devilish, Satanic
 51 Redcrosse's temptation
 53 Una's bold move.

stanza canto 10

- 1 Another editorial stanza—its import and audience?
 2— Where are we now? Why does Redcrosse need to go here? How does it contrast with the House of Pride, 1.4?
 4 The importance of Caelia, Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa?
 6 The first line, indicative of theme? Zele?
 7 Reverence?
 10 Caelia's declaration, lines 3-5?
 13 Fidelia's iconography?
 14 Speranza's?
 18-19 Why should Una ask Fidelia to help Redcrosse? What is the mode of instruction?
 21-22 What does Redcrosse learn here?
 24-28 Which two opposing allegorical figures dominate these proceedings? What necessary ordeal must Redcrosse undergo?
 29-31 Charissa's iconography? How to compare, contrast with 1.1.15?
 34 Who acts as Redcrosse's patron now, taking over for Una?
 46-47 Someone else in "a little Hermitage," but not the same as 1.1.34. Why must Redcrosse encounter this person now, and why alone?
 53, 57 What is the importance of these stanzas, especially with regards to topography?
 61 Redcrosse learns his true identity ("I am your father, Luke").
 63 Why does Redcrosse not want to leave?
 68 What's the importance of "himselpe he gan to find"?

stanza canto 11

- pr. What does Spenser mean by "that old Dragon"?
 5-7 What is the point of these stanzas?
 8 The first day of the Battle—why is the Dragon (our third, incidentally) already waiting for him?
 9-14 Why does Spenser take so much time to describe the Dragon?
 20 Who or what gets wounded?
 25 The significance of the density of the scales, the uselessness of the stroke?
 28 How, through sound and language, does Spenser convey the agony of the hero?
 29 The significance of the Well of Life?
 32 The end of the first day—why must Redcrosse be alone?
 33 Second day.
 35 Another wound—why?
 38 Another. Who and why?
 39 Another. Who and why?
 43 Another.
 46, 47 The significance of the trees.
 48 And yet again, water, the end of the second day.
 50 The third day
 54 Why should the Dragon be so easily vanquished?

stanza canto 12

- 5 Who are these two people, and why are they not explicitly named?
 9-10 Why these stanzas on the people and the Dragon?
 14 The description of the two people from #5.
 22 What significant disrobing occurs here, and with what are we supposed to contrast it?
 28, 32, 34 How do these stanzas conclude?