

Notes on Canto 7, Book I, *The Faerie Queene*

Wesley Advocates, 6 March 2016 (Alamo Day)

1—This stanza comprises a complex rhetorical question about deceit, in particular Duessa's falseness.

2-7—Having escaped the sins of the world in the House of Pride, RCK now succumbs to the sins of the flesh: sloth, gluttony, lust.

His vanity allows him to dismount and to disarm (a dismounted, disarmed knight has essentially surrendered his identity as a knight) and to luxuriate in the shade beside a fountain.

A parallel to Una's search beginning in Canto 2 and continuing in this canto, Duessa follows RCK seeking to recover him and her power over him: false church wants to control the Christian and continue misguiding him.

Duplicitous Duessa finds him weakened by the enchanted fountain which saps his strength, and they engage in fornication, a dalliance that further weakens RCK. Note the pastoral imagery—birds singing, for example—mixed with images of heat, scorching (lust).

In his lustful embrace of Duessa, RCK re-enacts the dream from Canto 2; he has become like the False Squire embracing and seducing the False Una—a vision which caused him to abandon Truth and the True Church. Now he himself has become wanton—and still fails to recognize how far he has departed from his Christian nature.

7-15—Orgoglio (pronounced or **go** lee oh: pride, superba, a giant puffed full of wind) easily overcomes the unarmed, weak, deluded RCK. Orgoglio uses an oak tree as a mace; although he doesn't smite RCK directly, the wind from his swinging and banging the oak causes RCK to fall and lose consciousness. Keep wind, air in mind as symbolic of Orgoglio. Recall David and Goliath and prepare for Orgoglio and Prince Arthur. In 11, RCK is "Disarmed, disgrast, and inwardly dismayed" as he begins to fight Orgoglio.

Orgoglio surely would slay RCK but for Duessa's intervention: "Oh, you big, gorgeous giant, make him your captive and me your mistress." We have heard similar pleas from Duessa at least thrice. The false church doesn't want the Christian to die—that would eliminate her power; rather, she prefers that he be a captive she can manipulate and torture and boast.

To fulfill his quest, to free Una's parents, RCK must defeat the enemies of Adam: the world, the flesh, the devil. His alliance with Duessa led him to the House of Pride where he barely escaped destruction by the vanity of the world.

Once he rejects the temptations of the world, he immediately falls prey to temptations of the flesh. Orgoglio's hugeness—his violence, his lust, his powers over even monsters such as Duessa's new seven-headed mount—indicate he represents the temptations of the flesh.

Note the humor in 12—RCK could have been pulverized, made as flat as flour, if he hadn't leapt out of the way. And enjoy in 13 and 14 the wonderful simile comparing Orgoglio's noisy banging of his oak to cannons thundering in heaven and on earth (you will remember that Satan and his crew, during the war in Heaven, invented cannons and sought to destroy the Eternal Father, the Son, and their cohorts with cannonfire).

Duessa's plea occurs in 14; she saves RCK in order to make him more miserable; Orgoglio drops him, in 15, into the castle dungeon, where RCK will find his nadir, descending very closely to physical and spiritual death. RCK's superiority, self-righteousness, vanity, sloth, gluttony, lust—all of which the ordinary Christian remains susceptible to—land him in the dungeon.

16-18—Orgoglio dresses Duessa in finery, sets a crown (mitre) on her head, and presents her a new mount: all signs that Duessa represents the RCC wherein fleshly pride proves victorious over mankind, false religion rules the world, the Christian knight is helpless, hopeless, silenced. See footnotes.

Center of narrative structure and crisis of allegory occurs between 18 and 19. RCK has descended as far as he can go, and now Dwarf summons Una and, subsequently, Prince Arthur, who will resurrect RCK and ensure he can fulfill quest. Turn in structure from tragic to comic.

19-25—Dwarf carries away RCK's useless, dented armor so he can seek help. Reason continues to work even when body succumbs to defeat. When Una sees Dwarf with armor, she immediately assumes the worst, RCK's death: after all, if he were alive, surely he would have found her and resumed their quest. Her faith in RCK remains strong. She faints twice, thrice, always revived by reason who continues to support Truth and True Church, and she demands the truth: What has happened to RCK since we parted at the Hermitage?

26—Dwarf summarizes RCK's misadventures thus far: Archimago, Fidessa/Duessa, Fradubio and Fraelissa, House of Pride, Sansjoy, Orgoglio.

27-28—Despite all she hears, the True Church never surrenders hope for the Christian, RCK. She expresses her love: although Dwarf's story nearly breaks Una's heart,

. . . love fresh coles unto her fire did lay:

For greater love the greater is the losse.

Was never Ladie loved dearer day,

Then she did love the knight of the Redcrosse;

For whose deare sake so many troubles her did losse.

Thus, Una renews her resolve (28)—“and evermore in careful constant mind,” she determines to free RCK somehow.

29-36—Enter Prince Arthur and his squire, Timias. These early stanzas describe PA’s armor, a baldric with a Virgin Mary emblem; a sword in an ivory sheath, a golden hilt, a mother-of-pearl handle; a helmet covered with a dragon motif made of sparkling red gems; a crest, sprinkled with pearls, resembling a great almond tree; a shield of diamond, pure diamond, kept covered by a veil—a parallel to Una who wears a veil. In his case, the shield, impenetrable, signifies the NT truth brought, carried by Christ. PA is our Christ figure here, come to redeem, to change men’s lives. Because of its blinding light, no enchanter, no hypocrite, no shapeshifter can survive looking at PA’s shield—as we shall see when he fights Orgoglio. (Merlin made the shield and all the arms for PA. Only in Faery Lond can we see such a shield.)

37—Timias, PA’s squire, carries a thrice-tempered spear and rides a daring, eager steed. (Timias, whose name means *merit*—think of a timocracy--will prove essential to PA’s success.)

38-52—Dialogue between Una and PA. Prince Arthur displays both compassion and courtesy as he engages Una—Christ with the True Church, quite the opposite of RCK’s fornication with Duessa which opened the canto. In 40, PA notes her “grief is wondrous greate.” In 41, through stichomythia, they explore grief, faith, and reason: this stanza bears two or three readings.

Relying on PA’s wisdom and prowess (42), Una begins her story, telling how Adam and Eve became imprisoned in the castle, at the mercy of Satan (43-44), how many knights attempted to free them, all failing (45), how she came to Gloriana at Cleopolis seeking a knight and found “a fresh, unproved knight / Whose manly hands imbrewed in guiltie blood / Had never been, ne ever by his might / Had throwne to ground the unregarded right” (47). Lacking Dwarfes’ concision, she retells RCK’s adventures—forsaking her, acquiring Duessa’s affections, visiting the House of Pride, ending in Orgoglio’s dungeon 49-51).

Alas, the very horrors of retelling cause Una nearly to faint again. But PA assures her he will not forsake her till he frees RCK and sets them back to their quest. And he will prove faithful.

