

ALLEGORESIS AND THE WESTERN EPIC TRADITION  
FROM HOMER TO TASSO

PROLEGOMENON: TU DUCA, TU SEGNORE, E TU MAESTRO

The greatest poetic achievement of the Middle Ages in general, and of vernacular literatures in particular, is undoubtedly Dante's *Divine Comedy*.<sup>1</sup> Both in the Late Middle Ages and during the Renaissance there was a continuous debate as to whether Dante's great poem was an epic. The view that it was gradually prevailed, and was proclaimed by the Counter-Reformation. For the purpose of this study we shall treat Dante's work as an epic, but of a special kind. The opening lines of Dante's *Inferno*, the first canticle of his *Divine Comedy* do not "imitate" Antiquity:

Nel mezzo di cammin di nostra vita,  
Mi ritrovai in una selva oscura  
Che la diritta via era smarrita.

Midway along the journey of our life  
I woke to find myself in a dark wood  
for I had wandered off from the straight path.<sup>2</sup>

By not "imitating" the ancients in his incipit Dante signals his intention of creating another kind of epic: the *Christian* epic. There had been earlier epic songs written by Christian poets on specifically Christian topics (Claudian's *In Rufinum*, Prudentius's *Psychomachia*) but nothing to compare in scope and style with Homer or Virgil. Dante thus tried to write *the* Christian epic by choosing the central aspect of Christianity (the state of souls after death), and yet casting it in a typically Virgilian mold. Dante introduces Virgil straightaway in Canto I of his *Inferno* which is a prologue to his entire masterpiece:

As a man who, rejoicing in his gains,  
suddenly seeing his gain turn into loss,  
will grieve as he compares his then and now,

so she made me do, that relentless beast,  
coming toward me, slowly, step by step,

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Dante's *Divine Comedy* are from Mark Musa's translations published by Penguin: Vol. I *Inferno* (1984); Vol. II *Purgatory* (1985); and Vol. III *Paradise* (1986). References are given thus: INF[erno], PUR[gatorio], PAR[adiso], followed by Canto in Roman and verse in Arabic numerals, e.g. PAR III, 1 = Paradise, Canto III, verse 1. They are used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> INF I, 1-3.

she forced me back to where the sun is mute.

While I was rushing down to that low place,  
my eyes made out a figure coming toward me  
of one grown faint, perhaps from too much silence.

And when I saw him standing in this wasteland,  
"Have pity on my soul," I cried to him,  
"whichever you are, shade or living man!"

"No longer living man, though once I was,"  
he said, "and my parents were from Lombardy,  
both of them were Mantuans by birth.

I was born, though somewhat late, *sub Julio*  
and lived in Rome when good Augustus reigned,  
when still the false and lying gods were worshipped.

I was a poet and sang of that just man,  
son of Anchises, who sailed off from Troy  
after the burning of proud Ilium."<sup>3</sup>

The last tercet is a paraphrase of Virgil's incipit of the *Aeneid*:

"Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris...  
"I sing of arms and the man who first from the shores of Troy..."

Dante accords to Virgil a position of canonical validity by associating his style with that of Virgil:

"Are you then Virgil, are you then that fount  
from which pours forth so rich a stream of words?"  
I said to him, bowing my head modestly.

"O light and honor of the other poets,  
may my long years of study, and that deep love  
that made me search your verses, help me now!

You are my teacher, the first of all my authors,  
and you alone the one from whom I took  
the noble style that was to bring me honor."<sup>4</sup>

"*Lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto honore*": in his previous works, Dante imitated Virgil's style, structure, and syntax, but we should also keep in mind that Virgil wrote his *Aeneid* in Latin hexameters, Dante his *Comedy* in Italian endecasyllabic verses in *terza rima*.<sup>5</sup> What Dante

<sup>3</sup> INF I, 55-75.

<sup>4</sup> INF I, 79-87.

<sup>5</sup> On the symbolic significance of the *terza rima* see John Freccero, "The Significance of *Terza Rima*", first published in Aldo S. Bernardo & Anthony L. Pellegrini, eds., *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton* (Binghamton, 1983), 3-17, and reprinted in Rachel Jacoff, ed., John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Harvard, 1986), 258-271.

means by "*stilo*" is more than a mere style: it is a wholly new kind of epic inaugurated by Virgil, as I shall discuss later. In the second Canto, Dante called Virgil "my guide, my lord, and my teacher" (*Tu duca, tu signore, e tu maestro*), thereby paying the highest compliment one poet can to another.

Anyone reading the *Divine Comedy* knows that Virgil is Dante's guide through Hell and Purgatory: that is why Dante called him his guide. Virgil is also the supreme and unique exemplar of that kind of epic Dante chose to imitate: an *allegorical* epic. That is why Dante calls him his lord, indicating Virgil's mastery of this form of art. Virgil is above all the originator of the kind of epic that was anchored in a special view of History: providentially ordained and prophetically foretold. That is why Dante called him his teacher: for he taught Dante how to write a *political allegory* which henceforth became the foundation of the Christian epic. We shall examine the Virgilian kind of epic later, but at this point the reader should note Dante's conscious "imitation" of Virgil which both is and is not in the ancient tradition.

## I. INTRODUCTION: MIMESIS AND ALLEGORESIS

In his well-known study of the representation of reality in Western literature entitled *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach postulated the existence of two fundamental styles of representation which he had called, after having derived them, Homeric and the Old Testament. In Chapter One, "The Odysseus Scar", Auerbach analyzed the episode of Odysseus' return to Ithaca and his recognition by his old housekeeper in Homer's *Odyssey*, and contrasted it with Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis. He then summarized his findings thus:

It would be difficult, then, to imagine styles more contrasted than those of these two equally ancient and equally *epic* texts. On the one hand, externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena, at a definite time and in a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feeling completely expressed, events taking place in leisurely fashion and with very little of suspense. On the other hand, the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for *interpretation*; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and 'fraught with background'.<sup>6</sup> (my emphasis)

Comparing the two archetypes Auerbach came to the conclusion that the Homeric text was rounded, full, perfect in its description, but literal (in a sense of having a single, literal, meaning), whereas the Old

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<sup>6</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New York, 1957), 9; it was originally published in Berne (1946), and the English translation by Princeton U.P. (1953).

Testament text was only sketched-in, partial, impressionistic, but containing meaning (s) above and beyond the literal sense:

The Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no secret second meaning. Homer can be analyzed, as we have essayed to do here, *but he cannot be interpreted*. Later allegorizing trends have tried their arts of interpretation upon him, *but to no avail*. He resists any such treatment; the interpretations are forced and foreign, they do not crystallize into a unified doctrine. ... It is all very different in the Biblical stories... Doctrine and promise are incarnate in them and inseparable from them; for that very reason they are fraught with "background" and mystery, containing a *second, concealed meaning*... and therefore they require subtle investigation and interpretation, they demand them... Doctrine and search for enlightenment are inextricably connected with the physical side of the narrative—the latter being more than simple "reality"; indeed they are in constant danger of losing their own reality, as very soon happened when interpretation reached such proportions that the real vanished. If the text of the Biblical narrative, then, is so greatly in need of *interpretation* on the basis of its own content, its claim to absolute authority forces it still further in the same direction. ... It is inevitable that they themselves be adapted through interpretative transformation. ... Interpretation in a determined direction becomes a general method of comprehending reality.... Paul and the Church Fathers reinterpreted the entire Jewish tradition as a succession of figures prognosticating the appearance of Christ, and assigned the Roman Empire its proper place in the divine plan of salvation. ... If certain elements survived which did not immediately fit in, *interpretation* took care of them...<sup>7</sup> (my emphasis)

Auerbach was not concerned with the origins of these two styles, the Homeric and the Old Testament. He took them "as finished products, as they appear in the texts", and claimed that "the two styles exercised their determining influence upon the representation of reality in European literature".<sup>8</sup> The rest of *Mimesis* is an extremely elaborate analysis of a series of key texts from Petronius to Virginia Woolf, from the first century A.D. to the 20th. Auerbach's study has been widely hailed as a classic—and as far as its scope, erudition, and mastery of the subject go it deserves to be seen as such. But I would venture to say that it is a *flawed* classic: for its fundamental thesis of the existence of two styles, two archetypes, is imposed upon the grandiose edifice without examining carefully and clearly the two keystones. Thus the very title *Mimesis* adds to the confusion: for at best it could be predicated only on the first style, the Homeric style; it is misleading to attribute it to the second. Let us look more closely at the *definition of terms*.

In the best study of *mimesis* available in any language, W. Tatarkiewicz, has followed the idea of imitation from Antiquity to 1700.<sup>9</sup> Summarizing these findings Tatarkiewicz defined *mimesis* thus:

IMITATION was called *mimesis* in Greek and *imitatio* in Latin: it is the same term in different languages. The term exists since antiquity; the concept, however, has changed. Today imitation means more or less the same as copying; in Greece its earliest meaning was quite different. The word "mimesis" is post-Homeric: it does

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 12, 13, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> W. Tatarkiewicz, *The History of the Aesthetics*, 3 vols. (Polish ed., Wroclaw, 1960-1968; English ed., The Hague, 1970).



not occur in either Homer or Hesiod. Its etymology...is obscure. ... In the fifth century B.C. the term "imitation" ...started to mean reproducing the *external* world....For Democritus *mimesis* was an imitation of *the way nature functions*. He wrote that in art we imitate nature....Another concept of imitation, which acquired greater popularity, was also formed in the fifth century in Athens but by a different group of philosophers: it was first introduced by Socrates and further developed by Plato and Aristotle. To them "imitation" meant the copying of the *appearances of things*....In his early writings Plato was rather vague in his use of the term "imitation"....; at first he called "imitative" only poetry in which, as in tragedy, the heroes speak for themselves (epic poetry describes and does not imitate, he said)...Later, beginning with Book X of the *Republic*, his conception of the art as imitating reality grew very extreme: he saw it as a passive and faithful act of copying the outer world. ....Aristotle, seemingly faithful to Plato, transformed his concept and theory of imitation....Aristotle preserved the thesis that art imitates reality but imitation meant to him not faithful copying but a free and easy approach to reality; the artist who imitates can present reality in his own way...To Aristotle 'imitation' was, in the first place, imitation of human actions; however, it gradually became the imitation of *nature*, which was to be regarded as the source of its perfection.<sup>10</sup>

There is no question that Auerbach derived his notion of *mimesis* from the ancient theory of imitation founded on typically Greek premises: "That the human mind is passive and, therefore, able to perceive only what exists." Secondly, even if it were able to invent something which does not exist, it would be ill-advised to use this ability "because the existing world is perfect and nothing more perfect can be conceived."<sup>11</sup> It is thus clear that Auerbach's first archetype or "style", i.e. Homeric, is nothing but the classic theory of *mimesis* as derived by ancient scholars and philosophers from that greatest of epic poets, Homer. So far Auerbach seems to be on firm ground; it is the second archetype that introduces considerable difficulties.

First of all, it should be pointed out that Auerbach's use of the term *epic* for the second "style" is in my opinion clearly inappropriate in a technical sense: the Genesis is not an *epic* as a genre. It is only if we see it as of *epic* proportions, i.e. vast, full of combat (between God and rebellious angels etc.), and of cosmic significance, that the word *epic*, in a loose sense, comes to mind. There is a more important difference between the archetypes of the two "styles": the former is truly an *epic* and recognized as originating the tradition of epic poetry, in the West at least. The latter is a religious work of revelation. It is only since the late 18th century that it can be seen as "literature", i.e. as something on a par with Homer, having purely literary qualities. One can argue that Auerbach is merely following in the well-established 19th- and 20th-century tradition of regarding Scriptures as "literature"—and I will grant that. But it entails problems of additional nature.

As Tatarkiewicz makes clear, the Middle Ages did not know or adhere to Plato's and especially Aristotle's theory of *mimesis*: for a thousand years Aristotle's book on Poetics was virtually unknown in

<sup>10</sup> Entry "Mimesis" by W. Tatarkiewicz in Philip P. Wiener, editor-in-chief, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (New York, 1973), Vol. III, 225-230, q. 225-226.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

the West, and the Renaissance claimed with some justification to have "rediscovered" it. Thus, "in the Middle Ages other premises were advanced, formulated early by Dionysius the Areopagite and by Saint Augustine. If art is to imitate, let it concentrate on the *invisible* world which is more perfect. And if art is to limit itself to the visible world, let it search in that world for traces of eternal beauty. This may be better achieved by means of symbols than by imitating reality."<sup>12</sup> Tatarkiewicz then quotes Tertullian's saying that "God does not permit any imitation of this world (*omnem similitudinem vetat fieri*, from *De Spectaculis* XXIII) and argues that "the theory of imitation was pushed aside in the Middle Ages and the term *imitatio* rarely used."<sup>13</sup> It was however used by John of Salisbury in the same classical sense, and St. Thomas Aquinas repeated the definition that "art imitates nature" (*ars imitatur naturam*, from *Phys.* II, 4).

Apart from using the Scriptures as "literature", Auerbach chose as his second archetype a sort of text which, *by its very nature*, cannot be interpreted on a *literal level alone*. Thus the notion of *mimesis*, of the imitation of reality in whatever form, is not the real essence of this kind of text: *its intrinsic unity and importance is derived from its extra-literal dimension*. To offer an example: the description of the creation of the universe in six days, and other episodes in the Genesis, such as the intended sacrifice of Isaac, are merely sketched in, for they do not depend on the *mimesis* of the original topic, nature, creation or whatever. *Its representation of reality is not mimetic*: it does not derive its credibility from the power of description. *It derives its reality from the underlying structure of belief*: it is to be accepted on the authority of its *extra-literal dimension* (*literal in both senses: as mimetic and as literary*). It is not a "mere" piece of literature, it is much more. *And this much more* was an integral part of the Old Testament, and thus an integral part of Auerbach's second archetype.

Auerbach was aware of the intrinsically different nature of his second "style". That was the reason why he added those all-important qualifying clauses about the *interpretation*. For *interpretation*, I would argue, is the other pole from *imitation* of reality, from *mimesis*: for *mimesis* depends on the *literal* meaning of the text, *interpretation* depends on the *extra-literal* meaning of the text. To put it more precisely in Saussurian terms, *mimesis* privileges the *signifier*, *interpretation* privileges the *signified*. To put it again differently, *mimesis* is structured on the words or signs, *interpretation* is structured on the things. The reader would have realized by now that by *interpretation* nothing else is meant but *allegoresis*. In his Introduction to *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature*, J. Stephen Russell defines allegory and allegoresis as "the creation and interpretation of texts, respectively" and went on to claim that "in the Middle Ages, allegory was not a mode of writing; it was the self-

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

conscious recognition of the way we perforce perceive the world, replace anything with words or other signs." As Hugh of St. Victor explains,

The philosopher knows only the significance of words, but the significance of things is far more excellent than that of words, because the latter was established by usage, but Nature dictated the former. The latter is the voice of men, the former the voice of God speaking to men. The latter, once uttered, perishes; the former, once created, subsists. The unsubstantial word is the sign of man's perceptions; the thing is a resemblance of the Divine Idea.

Thus, the allegoresis is what is meant by *interpretation*, for allegory is defined by Isidore of Seville as "*alieni loquium, aliud enim sonat, aliud intelligitur*" (in saying one thing a person conveys or understands something else. *Etymologiae*, I, 47.22). Angus Fletcher explains that allegory has

the fundamentally oblique character of this symbolic mode. When Saint Augustine speaks of "a mode of speech in which one thing is understood by another", his very open definition is based on the assumption that some primary or literal...level of sense may include another secondary or even more remote sense, which the trained interpreter will seek out through the process of reflection. Such secondary meanings may be imposed upon a text, or an author may clearly build them into a text, but no clear distinction separates the interpretive and creative aspects of allegory, since the two are poles in a single communicative method. The allegorical poet encodes an oblique, multiple (Dante called it a "polysemous") meaning in his fiction.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, though allegory is a structural reality *within* the text, the key to this structure lies *outside* the text itself. As Wolfson makes clear, "the allegorical method means the interpretation of a text in terms of something else, irrespective of what that something else is."<sup>15</sup> Allegory thus consists of *at least* two levels: one literal, the other veiled. To reduce both these levels to that of *mimesis* as such is to deprive allegory of its essence. This is precisely what Auerbach seems to have done by claiming that the Old Testament "style" is one of *mimesis*. Yet, Auerbach knew that his second archetype partook of the literal level only to a certain degree. He tried to deal with this problem by proposing that the second "style" developed into a "figura", a figurative style which, while having the extra-literal meaning, yet was not allegorical. In the epilogue to his *Mimesis* he summarized his findings in his classic essay *Figura*<sup>16</sup>:

The view of reality expressed in the Christian works of late antiquity and the Middle Ages differs completely from that of modern realism. It is very difficult to formulate the specific character of the older Christian view in such a way that the

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<sup>14</sup>Angus Fletcher, entry "Allegory in Literary History" in Philip P. Wiener, ed., *Dictionary of History of Ideas*, Vol. I, 41-48, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup>H.A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), Vol. I, 134.

<sup>16</sup>Erich Auerbach, "Figura" in his *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* (New York, 1959), reprinted from *Neue Dante-Studien* in *Istanbuler Schriften V* (Istanbul, 1944).

essential points are brought out and all of the pertinent phenomena are included. A solution which struck me as on the whole satisfactory resulted from an investigation of the semantic history of the word *figura*. For this reason I use the term *figural* to identify the conception of reality in late antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages....In this conception, an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. *The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections.*<sup>17</sup>

It is quite obvious that Auerbach is using another term, i.e. *figural*, for what the late Antiquity and Middle Ages called *allegorical*. For how else are we to understand the following long passage:

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act. In practice we almost always find an interpretation of the Old Testament, whose episodes are interpreted as figures or phenomenal prophecies of the events of the New Testament...This type of interpretation obviously introduces an entirely new and alien element into the antique conception of history. For example, if an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised, and the latter "fulfills" (the technical term is *figuram implere*) the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally—a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension...It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding. The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something which is eternal, something *omni-temporal*, something already consummated in the realm of the fragmentary earthly event. This conception of history is magnificent in its homogeneity, but it was completely alien to the mentality of classical antiquity...(which) became wholly superfluous as soon as earthly *relations of place, time, and cause had ceased to matter*, as soon as a vertical connection, ascending from all that happens, converging in God, alone became significant. Wherever the two conceptions met, there was of necessity a conflict and an attempt to compromise—between, on the one hand, a presentation which carefully interrelated the elements of history, which respected temporal and causal sequence, remained within the domain of the earthly foreground, and, on the other hand, a fragmentary, discreet presentation, *constantly seeking an interpretation from above.*<sup>18</sup>

In the above passage two clues are given: first, "the relations of place, time, and cause" are predicated on the first conception which characterizes the first or Homeric style. It is quite clear that these relations of place, time, and "cause" are but a mere paraphrase of Aristotle's cardinal rules for the epic: the unity of time, place, and

<sup>17</sup>Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 490.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 64-65.

action. It should come as no surprise to us: Aristotle based his theory of *mimesis* on poetry principally, on epic poetry in general, and on Homer in particular.<sup>19</sup> The second clue, "constantly seeking an interpretation from above", is an oblique way of suggesting *allegoresis*. There is thus no question that Auerbach's two "styles" are indeed *mimesis* and *allegoresis*. But why did not Auerbach call "a spade, a spade"? Why go to such lengths to avoid using the term, and thus misleading the reader? This is indeed the key question. In my opinion Auerbach stood under the authority of no lesser a giant of German literature and literary criticism than Goethe. It was Goethe who distinguished between *symbolism* and *allegory*. In his *Maxims and Reflections* Goethe put it thus:

Allegory transforms reality into a concept, and the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept is always circumscribed and complete in the image, and has to be given and expressed in relation to the latter. Symbolism transforms reality into an idea, an idea into an image in such a way that the idea remains in the image always infinitely efficacious and inaccessible and, even though pronounced in all the languages, remains nevertheless inexpressible. There is quite a difference between a poet searching for a particular in the universal, and seeing in the particular universal. The first case is that of allegory, in which the particular has validity only as an example, as an emblem of the universal; in the second case one goes to the very nature of poetry: one explains the particular case without thinking of or alluding to the universal...True symbolism is that in which the particular element represents the most general, not as a dream or a cloud but as a revelation, live and instant, of the inscrutable.<sup>20</sup>

Auerbach's "figura" is just his way of referring to Goethe's "symbolism", for Auerbach inherited Goethe's distaste for allegory as such. Yet, even though Auerbach goes to such length to distinguish between "figura" and "allegory" he is forced to admit that both in the Middle Ages in general, and in the times of Dante in particular, what he calls "figura" was called "Allegory".<sup>21</sup> That this was indeed the case in late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages has been confirmed by Umberto Eco.<sup>22</sup> Eco pointed out that "symbol" and "allegory" were seen as synonymous by the classical, patristic, and medieval exegetes:

The examples go from Philo to grammarians like Demetrius, from Clement of Alexandria to Hypolitus of Rome, from Porphyry to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, from Plotinus to Iamblicus, where one uses the term symbol also for such didascalic representation and conceptualizations that were otherwise called allegories. And the Middle Ages followed this usage.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See Aristotle, *Poetics*, chs. 7-9, 17-18, 23, 26.

<sup>20</sup>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 1.112-113, 279, 314 in *Festausgabe* Vol. XIV (Leipzig, 1926).

<sup>21</sup>E. Auerbach, "Figura", 51.

<sup>22</sup>Umberto Eco, "L'epistola XIII, l'allegorismo medievale, il simbolismo moderno", originally given as a "Lectura Dantis" held in Bologna on May 10, 1984 and published in *Carte semiotiche* 10 (1984); republished in an expanded version in *Sugli specchi e altri saggi* (Milano, 1985), 215-241.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

J. Pepin has also demonstrated that the Middle Ages knew perfectly well the distinction between what became known as "the allegory of poets" and "the allegory of theologians".<sup>24</sup>

Eco's claim that "symbolism" as such was a Renaissance "rediscovery" of Neo-Platonism based on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* and *Celestial Hierarchy* leads him to conclude that what Dionysius calls "symbolic" has nothing in common with that vision or ecstasy which is at the core of the modern concept of the symbol: "Medieval symbolism is a way of reaching the Divine but is not the epiphany of the Numinous nor does it reveal reality that can be put only in mythical terms and not in terms of rational discourse."<sup>25</sup>

Eco points out that it was St. Augustine who enjoined Christians to interpret the Bible allegorically every time its text seemed to contradict articles of faith or good morals.<sup>26</sup> And the key to this allegoresis rests in the concept of *similitudo* or similitude.

In his path-breaking *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*,<sup>27</sup> Foucault argues that :

up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.<sup>28</sup>

He goes on to describe the four similitudes which, according to him, are absolutely essential: *convenientia* (the adjacency of places): "By this linking of resemblance with space, this "convenience" that brings like things together and makes adjacent things similar, the world is linked together like a chain";<sup>29</sup> *aemulatio* (the reflection or the mirror: it is the means whereby things scattered through the universe can answer one another): "The relation of emulation enables things to imitate one another from one end of the universe to the other without connection or proximity": by duplicating itself in a mirror the world abolishes the distance. "In this analogy, *convenientia* and *aemulatio* are superimposed...Its power is immense, for the similitudes of which it treats are not the visible, substantial ones between things themselves; they need only be the more subtle resemblances of relations...Through it all the figures in the whole universe can be drawn together. There does exist in this space...one particularly privileged point: ...this point is man...He is the great fulcrum of proportions—the centre upon which

<sup>24</sup>J. Pépin, *Dante et la tradition de l'allegorie* (Paris, 1970).

<sup>25</sup>Eco, "L'epistola XIII...", 221.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 224. Eco is relying on Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* mostly.

<sup>27</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (the English Translation of *Les Mots et les Choses* (Paris, 1966)(New York, 1970).

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

relations are concentrated and from which they are once again reflected."<sup>30</sup> and *sympathy* counterbalanced by *antipathy*: "The identity of things, the fact that they can resemble others and be drawn to them, though without being swallowed up or losing their singularity—this is what is assured by the constant counterbalancing of sympathy and antipathy. It explains how things grow, develop, intermingle, disappear, die, yet endlessly find themselves again...(Together) *Convenientia*, *aemulatio*, *antipathy* and *sympathy* tell us how the world must fold in upon itself, duplicate itself, reflect itself, or form a chain itself so that things can resemble one another."<sup>31</sup> Man can find out everything by resorting to *signatures*:

exterior and visible signs in the form of special marks...The system of signatures reverses the relation of the visible to the invisible. Resemblance was the invisible form of that which, from the depths of the world, made things visible; but in order that this form may be brought out into the light in its turn there must be a visible figure that will draw it out from its profound invisibility... And so the circle is closed...The form making a sign and the form being signaled are resemblances, but they do not overlap. And it is in this respect that resemblance is sixteenth-century knowledge is without doubt the most universal thing there is: at the same time that which is most clearly visible, yet something that one must nevertheless search for, since it is also the most hidden; what determines the form of knowledge (for knowledge can only follow the paths of similitude) and what guarantees its wealth of content (for the moment one lifts aside the signs and looks at what they indicate, one allows Resemblance itself to emerge into the light of day and shine with its own inner light.)<sup>32</sup>

Foucault is quite right when he calls "the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to make the signs speak and to discover their meaning", *hermeneutics* and "the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to distinguish the location of the signs, to define what constitutes them as signs, and to know how and by what laws they are linked", *semiology*: the sixteenth century superimposed *hermeneutics* and *semiology* in the form of similitude. To search for a meaning is to bring to light a resemblance. For "hermeneutics" and "exegesis" are respectively "the science of interpretive principles" and "the critical interpretation...of the Bible".<sup>33</sup> Of the types of Biblical *hermeneutics*, there are basically two: literal and allegorical. Ever since the Middle Ages, however, the latter has been split into several kinds, usually three (attributed to Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1265-c.1349)): allegorical, moral, and anagogical:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,  
Moralis quid agas, quod tendas anagogia.*

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-23.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-26.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 26-29.

<sup>33</sup>Entry "Exegesis and Hermeneutics, Biblical" in Vol. 7 of *Macropaedia of The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed. (1983), 60.

The letter indicates what was done, the allegory what you are to believe, The moral sense what you are to do, the anagogic what you are to strive for.<sup>34</sup> It is thus clear that Foucault subsumed *allegoresis* under *hermeneutics* for it is the most important *exegesis*: it includes three out of four medieval exegetical types. Allegory and allegoresis thus can be of several types, and as Eco pointed out, the Middle Ages included symbolism as well. Eco outlined the medieval "general symbolism", which he defined as "aliud dicitur, aliud demonstratur" thus<sup>35</sup>:

#### GENERAL SYMBOLISM

*Metaphysical PAN-SEMIOSIS*

*ALLEGORESIS*

1. *Poetic (in verbis)*

2. *Scriptural and Liturgical  
(in verbis et in factis)*

3. *Universal (in factis)*

Eco explains that the metaphysical Pan-Semiosis represents a semiotic vision of the universe in which every effect is the sign of its proper cause. Quoting Johannes Scotus Eriugena ("*nihil enim visibilium rerum, corporaliumque est, ut arbitror, quod non incorporale quid et intellegibile significet*")<sup>36</sup> Eco points out that there is no question of allegorical or metaphorical similitude between terrestrial bodies and celestial things, but of the great chain of being, citing Lovejoy's classic work.<sup>37</sup> If we revert to Foucault's four similitudes, it is quite clear that *metaphysical Pan-Semiosis* does not qualify in this respect, for it is based on similitude. This leaves only *allegoresis*, and Foucault confirms this when he calls it *hermeneutics* and *exegesis*. At this point let us recall Auerbach's *figura*, or figural representation. Eco specifically states that "metaphysical Pan-Semiosis tends to exclude figural representation" ("*l'a corrente della pansemiosi metafisica tende ad sccludere le rappresentazioni per figure*").<sup>38</sup> Of the three kinds of medieval *allegoresis*, Eco disposes of the universal (*in factis*) quickly: for it represents "the universe not for what it appears but for what it suggests". This leaves the scriptural and poetic *allegoresis* only.

In his essay *Figura*, Auerbach argued that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is based on a figural representation:

<sup>34</sup>Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale, les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959-1961), Vol. I, 13.

<sup>35</sup>U. Eco, "L'epistola XIII...", 226.

<sup>36</sup>J. Scotus Eriugena, *De divisione naturae* 5, 3, in Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*

<sup>37</sup>Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936) and the Italian edition *La grande catena dell'essere* (Milano, 1966).

<sup>38</sup>Eco, "L'epistola XIII...", 227.



In the case of three of its most important characters—Cato of Utica, Virgil, and Beatrice, I have attempted to demonstrate that their appearance in the other world is a fulfillment of their appearance on earth, their earthly appearance a figure of their appearance in the other world. I stressed the fact that a figural schema permits both its poles—the figure and its fulfillment—to retain the characteristics of concrete historical reality, in contradistinction to what obtains with symbolic or allegorical personifications, so that figure and fulfillment—although the one “signifies” the other—have a significance which is not incompatible with their being real. An event taken as a figure preserves its literal and historical meaning. It remains an event, does not become a mere sign. The Church Fathers, especially Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine, had successfully defended figural realism, that is, the maintenance of the basic historical reality of figures, against all attempts at spiritually allegorical interpretation. Such attempts, which as it were underline the reality of history and see in it only extrahistorical signs and significations, survived from late antiquity and passed into the Middle Ages. Medieval symbolism and allegorism are often, as we know, excessively abstract, and many traces of this are to be found in the Comedy itself. But far more prevalent in the Christian life of the High Middle Ages is the figural realism which can be observed in full bloom in sermons, the plastic arts, and mystery plays...; and it is this figural realism which dominates Dante’s world.<sup>39</sup>

Auerbach’s central contention is that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is full of relationships between earthly and divine phenomena. The most important of such relationships, both in political and historical terms, is the universal monarchy set up by Rome. Dante sees it as the anticipation of the Kingdom of God on this earth... Auerbach claims that Dante saw Rome as destined to rule the world from the beginning. When the world was at peace in Augustus’s time, Christ came to this world... The divine symbol is the Roman eagle, and Paradise is called *quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano*... We can understand Virgil’s role in Dante’s *Comedy* only in these terms. Dante reminds us of the figure of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem, and, according to Auerbach, this is an example of figural thinking. The Judaeo-Christian method of *interpretation*, which had been applied to the Old Testament by Paul and the Church Fathers, sees Adam as a figure of Christ, of Eve as one of the Church, just as every event in the Old Testament can only be understood as a figure to be “fulfilled” or realized in the New Testament following Christ’s Incarnation. In the same vein, the universal Roman Empire is the earthly figure of the heavenly fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup>

Auerbach’s use of the term “figura” is designed to obfuscate the issue rather than clarify it. For it is quite clear that the “figura” does not derive its essence from *mimesis*, i.e. from the literal sense, as Auerbach makes clear, for the world beyond is seen as the active fulfillment of God’s design. Its relationship to the earthly phenomena is one merely figural, potential, and in need of fulfillment. This is equally true of the individual souls of the dead: only in the world beyond do they attain their fulfillment and the true reality of their being. Their lives on this earth are only the figure of this fulfillment. In Dante’s eyes, this

<sup>39</sup>E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 170-171.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

fulfilment leads one to find punishment, penance, or reward according to God's judgment. There they attain an actual reality, consonant with the figural view...The relationship between the fulfilled figure in reference to its own past on earth does not involve just character and being but also a *signification*, and it is the cases which include the latter that represent the utmost fulfilment. Auerbach contends that both figure and fulfilment stand for actual historical events. The more intensive and greater of the two is the fulfilment, for, in comparison with the figure, it is *forma perfectior*. It is this which accounts for the overwhelming realism of Dante's beyond, and he achieved it through the figural point of view. According to Auerbach, Dante's beyond is both eternal and yet phenomenal, both changeless and yet historical. This realism in the beyond enables us to distinguish it from every type of purely earthly realism. In Dante's beyond man no longer acts in any earthly fashion, as he does in an earthly representation of human events. He is now acting in an eternal setting which is not just the total and result of all his actions, but also an indication of all the decisive aspects of his life and character. Thus though to the inhabitants of Hell this path appears dreary and barren, yet it is indicative of what was decisive in the individual's life. Thus do the dead appear to the living Dante. Thus the suspense found in the yet unrevealed future, which is a key element in the earthly activities and their artistic imitation, has come to an end. Only Dante can feel this suspense. All the various dramas are now combined in the one which involved his fate and that of mankind: the winning or losing of eternal bliss.<sup>41</sup>

This kind of figural "realism" obviously goes beyond ordinary realism: for not only does it depend on *signification*, it goes beyond *imitation* or *mimesis*. Did the medieval scholars know of this realism or was it completely new in Dante? This is indeed a key question in order to find out what this figural "realism" is all about. Hugh of St. Victor's threefold exegetical method as found in his *Didascalion* has three senses: *historia*, *allegoria*, *tropologia*, all three aspects of *Scriptural allegory*.<sup>42</sup> What is important is that Hugh included the *anagogical* sense in the *allegorical*.<sup>43</sup> It is the *anagogical* sense which *fulfills the reality of this earthly realism*. At this point let me quote the Letter to Can Grande again:

For the clarity of what will be said, it is to be understood that this work (the *Comedy*) is not simple, but rather it is polysemous, that is, endowed with many meanings. For the first meaning is that which one derives from the letter, another is that which one derives from things *signified by the letter*. The first is called '*literal*' and the second '*allegorical*' or "*mystical*". So that this method of exposition may be clearer, one may consider it in these lines: "When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from people of strange language, Judah was his sanctuary and Israel his dominion." If we look only at the letter, this signifies that the children of Israel went out of Egypt in the time of Moses; if we look at the allegory, it signifies our redemption through Christ; if we look at the moral sense, it signifies the turning

<sup>41</sup>Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 171-172.

<sup>42</sup>Hugh St. Victor, *Didascalion*, V, ii, "De triplici intelligentia".

<sup>43</sup>Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, Vol. III, 329-339.

of the souls from the sorrow and misery of sin to a state of grace; if we look at the anagogical sense, it signifies the passage of the blessed souls from the slavery of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory. And although these mystical meanings are called by various names, in general they can all be called allegorical, inasmuch as they are different [diversi] from the literal or historical. For 'Allegoria' comes from "alleon" in Greek, which in Latin is *alienum* (strange) or *diversum* (different).<sup>44</sup> (my emphasis)

Even more important is Dante's next statement where he indicates how his work should be read *allegorically*: "*Se vero accipiatur opus allegorice, subiectum est homo prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii libertatem iusititiae premiandi et puniendi obnoxius est.*"

As Robert Hollander pointed out, "in saying that his allegorical sense will reveal that the free will of each personage in the *Commedia* resulted in his reward or punishment in the afterworld, he has tried to establish, as Auerbach realized, "the figural nature of his *allegorical* sense (a life then in the world "prefigures" the life after that in the afterworld). This is not the allegory of the poets, but of the theologians".<sup>45</sup> This has prompted David Thompson to argue that "if indeed many fine critics have denied that the poem is *allegorical*, it has been largely because Dante's literal level is so fully realized, because "The particular, the individual, the concrete, the fleshed, the incarnate, is everywhere with the strength of reality and the irreducibility of reality itself."<sup>46</sup> Except in certain notable instances, Dante's language is *representational*, not *referential*; *opaque*, not *transparent*. This distinction between the *Commedia* and other literary allegory (as he conceives of it) has led Professor Singleton to argue that "Dante's poem must therefore have been written in imitation of scriptural allegory as it was interpreted in the Middle Ages."<sup>47</sup> Thompson instead proposes that "Dante instead wrote allegory in the epic tradition, as it was conceived of in antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in the Renaissance; and more specifically, that the *Aeneid*, as allegorized by Bernard Silvestris, afforded Dante a significant precedent for his twofold physical/spiritual journey."<sup>48</sup> In the context of Dante studies it matters a lot whether *The Divine Comedy* is the allegory of poets or the allegory of theologians, but for our purposes this is not crucial: whether it is an allegory of poets or that of the theologians, it is still an allegory. And what is crucial is that an allegory (whether of poets or of theologians) is not an abstract, but a concrete (i.e. figural) form of representation: for we must heed Lionel Friedman's advice to "divorce ALLEGORY from PERSONIFICATION, two entirely separate concepts which moderns—but not medieval

<sup>44</sup>Mark Musa, trans., *Dante: Divine Comedy*, Vol. I: *Inferno* (Penguin, 1984), Musa's Introduction, 42.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Hollander, "Dante Theologus-Poeta" originally published in *Dante Studies* XCIV (1976), reprinted in his *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna, 1980), 39-89; quotation on p. 66.

<sup>46</sup>Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies: I. Commedia: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 13.

<sup>47</sup>David Thompson, "Figure and Allegory in the *Commedia*" *Dante Studies* 90 (1972), 1-11.

<sup>48</sup>David Thompson, *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore, 1974), 11.

man—insist on confusing”<sup>49</sup>. Thus I agree entirely with Thompson that Dante’s “figures” are “all intended to have the same *mimetic* status as, say, Natasha or Grushenka—they are flesh and blood, not referential personifications...If they were also regarded as allegories, clearly for classical and medieval readers, a poetic allegory could show us “the concrete, the fleshed, the incarnate” with all the “irreducibility of reality itself.” And if this seems strange to us, it is because we still permit ourselves to be victimized by *Romantic prejudices about the nature of allegory*.”<sup>50</sup> Thus J. E. Shaw showed that there is no real contradiction between a concrete person and that same person being a symbol of some abstract quality, e.g. Beatrice as a real person (possibly Bice Portinari) and as a symbol of Lady Philosophy: the one does not cancel the other.<sup>51</sup> And while Giorgio Padoan has not carried out yet his intention to demonstrate convincingly that Dante used Fulgentius’s allegoric interpretation of *The Aeneid*, and in particular Bernardus de Silvestris’s commentary on the latter as models for his *Divine Comedy*, there is no question that Dante’s son Pietro used Bernardus’s commentary to interpret in places his father’s masterpiece.<sup>52</sup> Even Padoan’s most sceptical critic, Robert Hollander, admits that “perhaps the most important thing, for his own poetic development, which Dante learned from the *Aeneid* was...not how to write an “epic”, or a journey to the realm of the dead, or a celebration of *Romanitas* (all of which elements of Dante’s response to the *Aeneid* are decidedly important and much noticed), but how to compose a narrative poem which describes actions as though they were historical, to compose a fiction that is intended to be taken as historically.”<sup>53</sup> Hollander (as he himself admits) has been under a great influence of Charles Singleton’s famous dictum that “the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction.”<sup>54</sup> Hollander is absolutely correct in seeing Virgil as a poet who chose for his major work not *fabula*, but *historia*: “And if that is true, then the persons and events of Virgil’s poem were likely to become, in Dante’s mind, the precursors—the *figurae* if you will—of persons and events in his own poem. And if the poet himself, as protagonist of his own poem, is the new Aeneas..., if the *Commedia* is the new *Aeneid*, then... I am willing, am even compelled, to argue for a “figuralized” Virgil in Dante’s treatment, one different from all other medieval treatments of Virgil.”<sup>55</sup> And he is on firm ground when he points out that “the

<sup>49</sup>Lionel Friedman in *Romance Philology* 20 (1966), 124 quoted by Thompson, op. cit., 32.

<sup>50</sup>Thompson, op. cit., 32 citing his “Allegory and Typology in the *Aeneid*” *Arethusa* 3 (1970), 143-153. He also warns that “medieval studies have been unduly influenced by C.S. Lewis”.

<sup>51</sup>James E. Shaw, *The Lady “Philosophy” in the Convivio* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938).

<sup>52</sup>Giorgio Padoan, “Tradizione e fortuna del commento all’*Eneide* di Bernardo Silvestre” *Italia medioevale e umanistica* III (1960), 227-240.

<sup>53</sup>R. Hollander, “Dante *Theologus-Poeta*”, 71; also see his “Dante’s Use of *Aeneid* I in *Inferno* I and II” *Comparative Literature* XX (1968), 142-156.

<sup>54</sup>Charles S. Singleton, “The Irreducible Dove” in *Comparative Literature* IX (1957), 129.

<sup>55</sup>R. Hollander, “Dante *Theologus-Poeta*”, 72-73.

*Aeneid* is a prophecy (albeit after the fact), both in whole and in part. Aeneas is, for Virgil, "figura Augusti."<sup>56</sup> But that does not mean that Hollander is correct in drawing the following conclusion: "Bernardus (the tradition originates as early as Fulgentius) is pleased to read the poem (*The Divine Comedy*) as an allegory of the growth of the human psyche. For him it has no historical reference or relevance. This de-historicized *Aeneid* held a certain attraction for the Dante of the *Convivio*, but one cannot imagine that it could have been of more than trivial interest to the poet of the *Commedia, scriba Dei imperatorisque propheta*".<sup>57</sup> For he thereby forgets that *both such interpretations can be accommodated by the various allegorical senses*. And thus his other statement that "Virgilio is not Reason", is particularly associated with the use of the rational faculty (if only once specifically so—*Purgatorio* XVIII, 46-48, verses which also associate Beatrice with faith). He is first and foremost the historical Virgilio, most importantly the author of the *Aeneid*, which is what Dante knows best about him, and "signifies", as does many a personage in the *Commedia* along "figural" principles.<sup>58</sup> For the "figural" principle is an allegorical principle—but so is the view of Virgil as reason. Both are allegories, but the latter is also a symbol—and we should remember that for Hugh of St. Victor a "symbol" is a "visible sign".<sup>59</sup> And this makes it possible for Eco to claim that "not even Dante draws a definitive line of demarcation between a "symbol" (in the modern sense of the term) and allegory."<sup>60</sup> This proves that Auerbach's contention that Dante's "figural" representation is a form of *mimesis* and not of *allegoresis* is a fiction of his (Auerbach's) imagination based on Goethe's modern notion. But it is not Dante's. As Foucault concluded, "and so the circle is closed."<sup>61</sup>

Auerbach's *Mimesis* is a classic: together with Curtius's<sup>62</sup> and Bolgar's<sup>63</sup> great works it forms the foundation for the modern view of the growth of Western literature, both in Latin and vernacular, from the end of Antiquity to the flowering of the Renaissance. But it is a flawed classic: because of its rejection of *allegory* and *allegoresis* as important, indeed (as I will argue in Section VII) central modes of representation in the late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and even (though challenged) during the Renaissance, its very title, *mimesis*, which confounds the issue: it deals with two "styles", one of which is *mimetic*, the other of which is not (or more accurately, is not just) *mimetic*, but *allegorical*. And in order to prove that, both *Mimesis* and "Figura"

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 73, ft. 73.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 73, ft. 73.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>59</sup>See Maria Simonelli, "Allegoria e simbolo dal *Convivio* alla *Commedia*" in *Dante e Bologna* (Bologna, 1967), 221-226.

<sup>60</sup>U. Eco, "L'Epistola XIII...", 235.

<sup>61</sup>M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 28.

<sup>62</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York, 1953).

<sup>63</sup>R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries: From the Carolingian Age to the End of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1964).

misrepresent the nature of medieval allegory and allegoresis by arguing that the figural representation is NOT allegorical at all, but mimetic.

Auerbach's characterization of the "figural" representation in general, and that of Dante in particular, is not correct; and his fundamental dichotomy governing the two styles of *mimesis* is inappropriate, for only one (Homeric) is purely mimetic, while the other (Old Testament) goes beyond (*aufheben* to use Hegel's term) mimetic, and is allegorical. In the rest of the study I shall try to show that it was *allegoresis*, and not *mimesis* that was the *traditio princeps* (if I be permitted to use such a neologism of *infima Latinitas*) of both the epic tradition and the literary criticism which shaped and defined this tradition from the height of Antiquity to the end of the Renaissance.

## II. MIMESIS AND THE EPIC TRADITION

If we were to take a formally "purist" attitude to the epic tradition, then there has been in the history of Western literary tradition only one perfect epic: Homer's *Iliad*. Every other epic, including Homer's own *Odyssey*, has fallen short of this sublime ideal. Since all subsequent attempts to "imitate" the *Iliad* successfully have failed, the very idea of "imitation" as central to epic poetry (a notion powerfully propagated by one no less than Aristotle in his *Poetics*) is a sham—a self-delusion at best, a hallow bombast at worst. Yet, why is this so? What is it that makes the *Iliad* the perfect epic, inimitable above all?

We cannot go here into a detailed examination of Homer's great poem on the Trojan War, but we can indicate certain of its characteristics necessary in order to compare it with subsequent epics. Crucial to our discussion of Homer's poetics in the *Iliad* is Milman Parry's seminal notion that the Homeric verse is formulaic, i.e. built up of chunks of constantly-repeated, metrically-determined, situationally-apposite "cliches".<sup>64</sup> Thus, for instance, every main hero of the *Iliad* is always accompanied by one of the set of standard epithets: for Achilles it is "swift footed" (*podas tachus*).<sup>65</sup> Milman Parry's great discovery was that this technique is characteristic of oral poetry in general, and of oral epics in particular. He proved this by examining the still-living tradition of oral poetry in former Yugoslavia, where bards put together poems by stringing along a number of stock expressions.<sup>66</sup> Put in another way, Homer's formulaic verse, based on oral tradition, privileges the signifier over the signified, to put it in Saussurian terms. For, as Conte explains, in oral poetry signifiers are autonomous, and they use poetic memory. In Homer the composition of both parts of and entire lines rests on formulaic diction. This diction is in turn based on sequences of lines whose sound patterns are similar to the bard. Thus "*me knises amfeluthen edus autme*" (a pleasant odor of roast meat reached me;

<sup>64</sup>Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 72-73; Conte, *op. cit.*, 74.

<sup>66</sup>M. Parry,

Odyssey 12.369) is very similar to "*me kouraon amfeluthe thelus aute*" (the feminine shouting of young women reached me; Odyssey 6.122). Another example given by Conte is "*anstes Ahilea lodas tahun*" (having raised swift-footed Achilles; Iliad 18.358) echoes "*Antilohos d'Ahilei lodas tahun aggelos elthe*" (Antilochus swift-footed came as messenger to Achilles; Iliad, 18.2). Thus the signifier takes over and makes it appear as though the verse is composed only of remembered metrical equivalences: the latter indicate that Achilles and epithet are closely linked while giving a shortshrift to the syntactic demands of the new context; in other words, Antilochus becomes "swift-footed" only because he comes in contact with Achilles who is the legitimate bearer of this epithet.<sup>67</sup>

What is important for our purpose here is that the oral epic tradition which reached its apogee in Antiquity with Homer approaches the narrative, i.e. "what the poem says", in a radically different way from the subsequent written epic tradition. It should be emphasized that oral epic tradition was supposed to be *recited*; the written epic tradition was designed to be *read*. Even more importantly, from the standpoint of this dichotomy of oral vs. written, oral epic poetry was recited by *improvisation*; written epic poetry was composed by *design*. This is not to say that oral epics in general, and Homer's in particular have no overall structure, no overarching design—for they do. But, whereas the written epics have one way of realizing this overall design, oral epics work through multiple ways. To put it bluntly, Homer knows *where* he wants to get with his epic, but he is not sure all the time *how* he is going to get there. In other words, he *improvises as he goes along*. In order to do so, he (and other oral epic poets) rely on a large mental stock of signifiers which can be used alternatively, according to meter and situation, to propel the narrative forward.<sup>68</sup>

This may seem rather a complex operation to the reader, and it does sound complicated. Stephen A. Nimis has shown brilliantly how Homer uses his similes to redirect the text, i.e. as a propulsion method for the narrative. Nimis has shown that his interpretation of the Homeric composition is the opposite of the interpretive strategies employed by the so-called "essentialists". The latter have tried to analyze Homer's epics in the same manner as a Pindaric ode or a Virgilian eclogue. But in the latter the elements of structure predominate: balance, symmetry, parallelism, and so forth. Such an analysis subordinates the linear unfolding of the text to its wholeness, its closure, i.e. its being an object which can be seen "all at once". The latter, if they are to be primary, require of an oral poet what he neither has nor truly needs, i.e. the ability to see the poem as a whole before beginning to recite it, or, after having completed a "first draft" to be able to review it and revise it so that it fits into an organically unified whole. Nimis's analysis, on the other hand, emphasizes the *forward*

<sup>67</sup>Conte, *op. cit.*, 73-74.

<sup>68</sup>Parry's revolutionary insight into Homer's poetics was further refined by A.B. Lord in his *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, 1960)

*propulsion* of Homeric narrative, which is a characteristic singularly important in oral poetics. Nimis cautions us against thinking that the poet has no idea where he is going at the beginning: he knows *where* he wants to get, but he does not know *in the beginning how* to get there, for there are many ways of getting where he wants to get, determined by many factors on the text's route. These factors are other songs, many lexical and with semantic associations, meter, mimetic considerations, and even phonic similarities. Only in exceptional cases does the poet take a particular course out of desperation. More likely, his course will be "overdetermined" by many levels of linguistic organization. All these levels can be either generative or, when the poet must choose from many of them, determinative.<sup>69</sup>

What Nimis brings out forcefully is that oral epic poetry depends on the simile (and other similar devices) for text-generating purposes, and it does so at the expense of the unilinearity of the plot. That is why when Homer does not get the right simile the first time, he adds the second, so that the contextual and semantic associations will propel the narrative forward. No wonder that Homer's epics in general, and the *Iliad* in particular seem to us open-ended: "It is a significant fact in itself that the ending of the *Iliad*...has always seemed problematic, if not downright clumsy. The forward propulsion of these texts does not become finally used up or exhausted at the end of these works: it simply stops. The generative potential at the end of these works is just as full as it is anywhere else, and the text could literally have kept on going forever. Closure is anathema to a propulsive poetics, whose entire mechanism is geared to continuation, to preventing the breakdown of the performance."<sup>70</sup> The key word here is "performance": it alerts us to the cardinal fact that oral epics were performed, i.e. recited, and that originally they had been improvised. By "improvised" I mean that the poet tried to take into his performance the audience's mood, its response, the nature of the occasion, his physical condition etc.<sup>71</sup>

It has probably already struck the reader that if oral epics were performances, i.e. recitations, their contents must have been well known to their audiences. By contents I mean what is loosely known as the plot. Now, everybody knew what happened to Troy and Odysseus, so that there was no suspense involved. But *how* the story would be told, i.e. *how* the poet would get from A to Z, from the beginning to end, must have been the real excitement. In other words, the oral epic tradition in general, and Homer's epics in particular stressed not so much the already-known plot, but what they called *peripeteia*, i.e. what we would call episodes. Thus, we come to the paradoxical conclusion that oral poetry stresses those parts of the narrative which either retard,

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<sup>69</sup>Stephen A. Nimis, *Narrative Semiotics in the Epic Tradition: The Simile* (Bloomington, 1987), 60-61.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.



complicate or lead aside the main action. Anyone familiar with the plot of the *Iliad* will spot this immediately.<sup>72</sup>

Such approach to the plot, and such use of the narrative, above all the simile, could not be sustained once oral epics gave way to written ones. Written works are composed to be read, and even though some were recited just like their oral predecessors, different standards governed their composition: the structure of the whole work determined the place and importance of each of its parts. Since written epics were composed in order to be read, their plot had to be fixed: every reading had to be identical. And this meant that Homer's technique of relying on the simile to propel the narrative no longer seemed functional in a strictly defined plot.<sup>73</sup>

To recapitulate, the overall plot and its resolution is not the only concern of the poet. Most of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* consists of various things that do not move the plot forward. If we can take the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as representative, it seems clear that Homer and his audience preferred all sorts of other things to "getting the story told", for the latter was traditional and well-known. Thus to Homer the plot was a loose "skeleton" onto which all sorts of other things could be hung, rather than a "soul" of the work in Aristotle's definition. And thus the plot, though determinative and generative for the narrative, is neither uniformly so nor the primary factor in generating text.<sup>74</sup>

Now we can understand why Homer consistently uses the same epithets, the same stock expressions, the same formulaic chunks—for he is following squarely in the tradition of oral epic poetry. To put it more correctly, he is the apex, the culmination of this oral epic tradition. But after him, epics were written, i.e. composed and rendered in a fixed form. From the standpoint of the written epic tradition Homer has been consistently misunderstood; and even Milman Parry and his continuator Albert Lord obscured the uniqueness and distinctiveness of oral epic poetry. They had argued that the notion of formula systems and typical scenes as "building blocks" privileges structure, or form, into which these units can be fitted. But only *after* Homer do these notions of structure become more important. For a poetics based on structure rests on *revision*, i.e. a self-conscious evaluation of the work according to a preconceived idea. And this later development is related to the introduction of writing. That is why Parry's compilations of tables of formulas cannot be imagined without the use of writing. And that is why formulas drawn up by Parry and Lord do not make up the mental stock of the oral poet, in the same way that tables of declensions of nouns and verbs do not make up the mental stock of general speakers.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup>For a short summary of the *Iliad* see K.W. Gransden, *Virgil's Iliad: An Essay on Epic Narrative* (Cambridge, 1984), Prologue: Homer's *Iliad*, 9-30, where the *Iliad* is the model for Books VII-XII of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>73</sup>For the difference between the oral and written epic see C.M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London, 1945/1963), 2-6.

<sup>74</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 62.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 94.

I have dwelt on Homer at some length because as Nimis makes clear "Homer is the beginning (for us anyway) of a tradition."<sup>76</sup> How do we define "a tradition"? The concept of "tradition is based on the concept of "imitation". The latter concept is not a *spontaneous* feature, but a *conscious* one. And this means that only *individual* poets can imitate. That is why, according to Albert B. Lord, the various South Slavic singers of epic songs always insisted that they were singing the same poem after having heard another version: "Each performance is the specific song, and at the same time it is the generic song. The song we are listening to is "the song"; for each performance is more than a performance; it is a re-creation. Following this line of thinking, we might term a singer's first singing of a song as a creation of the song in his experience. Both synchronically and historically there would be numerous creations and re-creations of the song. This concept of the relationship between "songs" (performances of the same specific or generic song) is closer to the truth than the concept of an "original" and "variants". In a sense each performance is "an" original, if not "the" original." And thus Lord concludes that "in oral tradition the idea of an original is illogical."<sup>77</sup>

Now "originality" is the antithesis of "tradition and the concept of imitation" which lies at its root. T.S. Eliot in his seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" deplored "our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors...Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."<sup>78</sup> Eliot asserts that "Tradition involves, in the first place, the historical sense (which) involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within the whole of the literature of his own country has simultaneous order."<sup>79</sup> Eliot wrote his essay in 1920; his ideas are obviously applicable to the written, but not oral epic tradition. Gian Biagio Conte's *Rhetoric of Imitation* stresses the roles of texts rather than writers, and thus is applicable to both written *and* oral epics:

Tradition can be defined simply as poetic "langue", the simultaneous projection of literary models and codifications, a single organic body of once individual but now institutionalized choices, a system of rules and prescriptions. If one concentrates on

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<sup>76</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 95.

<sup>77</sup>Lord, *op. cit.*, 101.

<sup>78</sup>T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent" in Frank Kermode, ed., *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (London, 1975), 37-38.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

the text rather than on the author, on the relation between texts (intertextuality) rather than on imitation, then one will be less likely to fall into the common philological trap of seeing all textual resemblances as produced by the intentionality of a literary subject whose only desire is to emulate... One text may resemble another not because it derives directly from it nor because the poet deliberately seeks to emulate but because both poets have recourse to a common literary codification.<sup>80</sup>

As Greene sees it, the first quality of the epic is its "expansiveness". While tragedy confines poetic imagination to the *agon*, the struggle between the protagonists' wills and fates, and comedy cramps its imagination and revels in the limitations and thus follies and absurdities of human condition, the epic revels in unbounded imagination, in huge vistas ready to be reclaimed by humanity: "Epic answers to man's need to clear away an area he can apprehend, if not dominate, and commonly this area expands to fill the epic universe, to cover the known world and reach heaven and hell. Epic characteristically refuses to be hemmed in, in time as well as space; it raids the unknown and colonizes it. It is the imagination's manifesto, proclaiming the range "of its grasp, or else it is the dream of the will, indulging its fantasies of power."<sup>81</sup>

The nature of epic simile stems from the *difference* between tragedy and the epic, as Conte points out, for drama has features totally incompatible with the epic ones. Thus, for instance, dramatic characters possess critical awareness which allows them to interact with others by stepping outside of themselves, so to speak. This critical awareness on the part of the characters allows them to have a sense of the world which is uniform and where a dialectical solution is possible after conflict have taken place. This dramatic view of the world is undivided, and allows only one frame of reference. Yet, this is the place where people meet and clash in drama. The epic does not possess an equivalent to this; in it reality begins to exist as a result of various situations and facts in the narrative field. For in the epic people make up the elements of the world, and they "practice" their ways of living.<sup>82</sup>

The second characteristic of the epic is the nature of its hero(s). There is a profound difference between a tragic protagonist and an epic hero: a tragic hero is weighed down by his (her) own limitations, and a plot of a tragedy is built on the triumph of these limitations over human ambitions and wills. In short, every tragic protagonist carries the seeds of his (her) own destruction: he or she is doomed. An epic hero struggles not to overcome his (her) doom (for this is impossible for mortals) but to render him(her)self immortal by executing great heroic feats which would live in memory of men after he or she is gone. Tragedy is about the unstoppable Triumph of Time; the epic is about the

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<sup>80</sup>Conte, *op. cit.*, 27-28.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas M. Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven, 1963), 10.

<sup>82</sup>Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca, 1986), 159-160.

overcoming, going beyond (Hegelian *Aufhebung*) Time. As Greene points out, "Epic awe, as distinguished from religious or mythic awe, springs from the realization that a man can commit an extraordinary act while still remaining limited...The most important recognition scenes in epic are not between two people but between the hero and his mortality."<sup>83</sup>

It is thus clear that the basic difference between tragedy and the epic is that the former is a stylized representation of a contest among subjective wills of individuals: a tragedy without willful protagonists is not a tragedy, for tragedy springs from the well of human intentions, desires, wills. The latter is a stylized representation of a contest between its hero(s) and the world. It is thus an objective contest. From this it follows that the wellspring of all tragedy is ethics, i.e. the eternal agonies between Good and Bad, useful and Desirable, Pleasure and Harm. The wellspring of the epic is politics, i.e. the eternal struggle between the Individual and Society, Society vs. Society, Culture vs. Culture (or Culture vs. Nature). As Greene concludes, "the subject of all epic poetry might thus be said to be politics, but a politics not limited to society, a politics, embracing the natural and the fabulous worlds, embracing even the moral or spiritual worlds they sometimes shadow forth, and involving ultimately the divine. The implications expand to suggest, if not frankly to assert, a cosmic power struggle."<sup>84</sup>

If the epic is a stylized form of political *agon*, then it must too control what the stuff of politics is all about: ritualized violence: "The two-fold concern of politics—the establishment of control through violence and the right use of control in government."<sup>85</sup>The epic is concerned only with the former, i.e. with the establishment of control through violence, but in order for this violence to be meaningful, i.e. rational, it has to be subordinated to a higher purpose.

A maker of an epic not only integrates the action(s) of his epic into a provisionally given order, but assumes such a role of Providence himself. As the Greeks realized since Homer, to be a writer of of the epic is to be like god.

Since the epic is a stylized form of political *agon*, i.e. of controlled use of ritual violence, it places the emphasis upon the *narrative* i.e. *what has happened*, and not upon the *dialogue* i.e. *why something happened*. For by narrating the course of events one establishes the causal relationship which is thus objective, understandable, and self-sufficient. By stressing the dialogue, tragedy tries to delve beneath the surface of things, i.e. go beyond the narrative to the motives, and thus to find out the hidden springs of human action. One thus establishes the causal relationship which is thus subjective, only partly understandable, and partial. This, in my opinion, is a crucial distinction.

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<sup>83</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>84</sup>Greene, *op.cit.*, 17-18.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

If this dichotomy is accepted, then it follows that the epic's "emphasise" not what a poem is, but what a poem says.<sup>86</sup> If one were to oversimplify modern trends in literary criticism (and by modern I mean since Romanticism) one could argue that the main reason why the epic has gone definitely out of fashion is that it stresses "what a poem says", i.e. the narrative, as opposed to "what a poem is", i.e. the internal structure of the poem. From the Romantic preference for feeling, *Gefühl*, the Formalist emphasis on Form at the expense of the Content, to the Structuralist obsession with the self-contained and self-generating structure of the poem, modern literary critics have attacked, derided, and devalued "the message" and "exalted and extolled the form".

This is not the place to trace the evolution of this distinctly modern approach to poetry (for it obviously, until the Formalist movement, is not applicable to prose in general, and to the novel in particular). In my opinion, the roots of it are in Petrarch and his conscious refusal to integrate his *magnum opus*, *Canzoniere in vita ed in morte di Madonna Laura*, into any higher objective purpose apart from that of his own subjective, individual, spiritual development. Petrarch's *Canzoniere* is a lyrical counterpart to Augustine's *Confessions*: a form of spiritual autobiography.<sup>87</sup> Of course, it is widely known that Petrarch wrote his *Secretum* his secret book, to converse with Augustine about his failings. Petrarch thought he could learn from Augustine for both share the same sense of personal failure. As Weintraub explains in case of Augustine, the *Confessions* deal with the central issue confronting man: just when he concentrates all his effort on leading the kind of life he wants, he confronts his inability to do so. Thus he panics over his utter helplessness as far as his life task is concerned. And then at the moment of his greatest despair, there comes a sudden reversal, as though it had been achieved by the intervention of a secret force. This leads to realization that this is the turning point, regardless of whether it is seen as gradual or instantaneous.

In his *Canzoniere* Petrarch comes to terms with his own life by exploring what had proved to be a central stumbling block for his leading that life in happiness: his unrequited love for Laura. In 366 *canzoni*, i.e. one for each day of the year, he dissects his love affair in a purely unsystematic, uncoordinated, intensely subjective way. It is no exaggeration to say that he established the canon by which all subsequent lyric poetry to this day has been judged. At the core of the lyric is "what the poem is", i.e. its preoccupation with the form. The Beauty of lyric poetry lies in its internal structure as expressed in its outward form. This is the exact opposite of epic poetry: the epic stresses "what the poem says". This is not to deny that epic poetry does not have a beauty of form as well as of content, but to stress that this beauty is subordinated to and integrated with, the structure of the narrative. It

<sup>86</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry* (Oxford, 1935; 1958), 110.

<sup>87</sup>The literature on Petrarch is enormous. For this line of approach see Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago), Ch. 2.

does not, as the Formalists argued, do violence to words just for the sake of doing so (this is the all-important rider).<sup>88</sup>

Modern literary criticism has tended to disparage the epic and to judge by the standards of lyric poetry. We shall see shortly that there were inherent reasons for doing so, and that such an approach was not a mere predilection of the Romantics and post-Romantics, Structuralists and post-Structuralists. To take a single, though notorious account, Benedetto Croce's whole theory of the aesthetics is based on the crucial distinction between "what is poetry and what is not poetry." And when all his qualifications are duly taken into account, it still comes out that Croce's poetry is a basically lyrical expression of feeling. "Narrative in poetic works, which can incorporate any number of philosophical, theological, moral, cultural, intellectual etc. views, is seen by Croce as a mere "filler", i.e. something extraneous to "poetry as such, which is there only to hold a fragile structure together, or, even worse, to remind us that even the greatest poets are not "poets" all the time. For Croce "poetry" basically means "lyrical poetry".<sup>89</sup>

No wonder that Croce found those sections of Dante's *Divine Comedy* that stressed "ideas" rather than "feelings" as definitely "not poetry", like the famous simile at the end of the *Paradiso* that of the three concentric circles representing the Trinity. I have chosen this example not only because of its great intrinsic importance to Dante's masterpiece as a whole, but also because it betrays Croce's predilection for (lyric) "poetry" at its worst:

When he strives to say something at least of what he directly saw, of his contemplation and ocular perception of nothing less than the Divine Trinity, the summit of theological and metaphysical thought, he describes instead three circles of diverse colour occupying the same space, the second a reflection from the first, glowing with a human likeness, and the third like unto fire: wherewith Dante once again exclaims that word and voice fail him for such a thought, and that what was granted to him by grace was a lightning vision which contented his mind only for an instant.

After adding my tribute...may I be allowed still to observe, with all moderation, that what we have admired is a lesson, a lesson on an exalted theme, magnificently developed on the highest level of style, but still a lesson conducted according to the technique of teaching. And having paid my tribute to this lesson, may I be permitted to disregard it when seeking, *elsewhere than in this admirable didacticism, the poetry which Dante (a great poet, though the literary commentators seem often to forget it) uttered in this very canto? Or are we to be given only the choice between drinking and drowning, the choice between assigning to poetry what pertains to instruction or renouncing the search for poetry in this canto...?* (my italics)<sup>90</sup>

Thus, for Croce, Dante's whole theological scaffolding of the *Divine Comedy* is "not poetry". This is to condemn most of the great work, to deprive it *as an epic* of its structure (for Dante's poem is an epic, as I

<sup>88</sup>On Russian Formalism see Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism* (New Haven, 1965).

<sup>89</sup>See Benedetto Croce, "Love Poetry and Heroic Poetry" (1936) in B. Croce, *Philosophy--Poetry--History: An Anthology of Essays* (London, 1966), 331-337.

<sup>90</sup>B. Croce, "The Last Canto of the Paradise" in Croce, *op. cit.*, 828-829.

will demonstrate later), and to distinguish between two Dantes: the one of the theologico-philosophical "non-poetry", and that of lyrical "poetry". Lest I be accused of doing injustice to Croce let me quote him again:

*Yes, but where is it in this (last) canto that Dante really expresses his sentiment? Not in the many verses (two thirds or more of the entire canto) in which he strives to utter while protesting that he cannot utter, for these are plainly a sequel to his theological exposition, continuing it up to the point where theology has to deny itself, having reached to the inscrutable and ineffable... The poetic reader, however, knows very well where it is in this canto that Dante really expresses his feelings—in three tercains which alone stand out and outshine all the remainder:*

As he who sees things in a dream and wakes  
to feel the passion of the dream still there  
although no part of it remains in mind,

just such am I: my vision fades and all  
but ceases, yet the sweetness born of it  
I still can feel distilling in my heart:

so imprints on the snow fade in the sun,  
and thus the Sibyl's oracle of leaves  
was swept away and lost into the wind.

PAR XXXIII, 58-66

*This is the lyric cry of a man who has long been enveloped in a dream of singular delight and joy, composed maybe of contradictory, absurd, and chaotic shapes such as the intellectual memory could not retain, but leaving behind it a penetrating recollection of pleasure and well-being to outlast the image which induced it. (my italics) <sup>91</sup>*

Please note Croce's distinguishing mark in literary criticism: "This is the lyric [sic] cry of a man...etc." We know what this "lyric" is all about: "Dante really expresses his *sentiments*". I am not going to deny that the above verses are quite fine "poetry", but to deny that characteristic to the rest of the canto (more or less) is preposterous. That is why, when Croce states at the beginning of this article that "Dante—as all will surely now agree—'had a different notion of poetry from ours', he is right but for the wrong reason: 'what for us is the whole of poetry' he regarded as the 'fine raiment' or 'fair style' (the 'decorative' as contrasted with the 'illustrative' element); the substance lying for him in scientific concepts and moral intentions, an idea which guided him in the composition of his sacred poem."<sup>92</sup> This is indeed so as far as Dante is concerned, but that does not make Dante wrong and Croce right, as Croce tries to prove:

*This, of course, does not at all mean that if he had taken our own more correct view of poetry, he would thereby have surmounted certain impediments and dangers and become a freer and a better poet. Ideas, correct or otherwise, are without efficacy in respect of poetic creation which, in its virtues or its failings, may be equally accompanied either by correct or by incorrect ideas. However, it does mean this, that*

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 830.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 825.

*we should consider his poetry not in the light of his own idea, which as part and parcel of the whole mediaeval system of aesthetics and philosophy has been critically surpassed, but by the light of our own which we hold to be true or at any rate more helpful for the understanding. (my italics)*<sup>93</sup>

It will be quite clear to anyone that if the epic stresses "what the poem says", i.e. both the narrative and the ideas which subordinate the plot of the epic to a higher purpose, i.e. the defeat of Time, then any attempt to deny their primacy, to set them aside in favor of "what the poem is", i.e. a purely formalist attention to lyric feeling, will spell a kiss of death for the epic as such. For, as I will show shortly, no great epic since Virgil's *Aeneid* could do without ideas, correct or otherwise. In effect, as I will demonstrate, in order to survive for another two thousand years or more after Homer, the epic had to be rescued by "ideas".<sup>94</sup>

### III. VIRGIL

Though there were a number of written epics before Virgil's *Aeneid*, it is generally regarded as the third great epic of Antiquity, after Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The *Aeneid* is an epic of a totally different quality from Homer's; and nobody has brought this out better than C. M. Bowra:

Between Homer's oral and Virgil's written art there is an enormous difference. The poet who writes for readers operates less with phrases and formulas than with single words. He fashions his sentences carefully and individually; he takes care to avoid omissions and contradictions, to harmonise the details of his plot, to secure an interwoven unity for his whole design. Even when he follows Homer in using the oral device of repetition, Virgil goes his own way and makes variations on a given form. For him the artifices of oral poetry are valuable for their archaic elegance; their beauty is no longer functional...The old formulas were of no real use to Virgil and were even a hindrance; for his aim was to compose a poem which could be read with exact and appreciative care, and for that reason he gains more by variation than by repetition.<sup>95</sup>

Bowra makes clear that Virgil's art is very close to modern poetry whose aim is to give each line as much significance as possible, so that each word counts and thus grabs the attention of the reader who can bestow it, unlike the listener. While the oral epic boasts of simplicity, strength, and straightforwardness, reflected in the sweep of its narrative clear in its main effects, the written epic can do the same by poetical texture, by a careful or exquisite choice of words, and by phrases, lines, and paragraphs which convey rich significance. Homer's achievement lies in the irresistible movement of lines which adds up to magnificent climax. There is thus the singleness of effect, the unity of his heroic or

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 825.

<sup>94</sup>I am using the term 'ideas' in its broadest connotation to mean any form of 'thinking' as opposed to 'feeling'.

<sup>95</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 4-5.



tragic mood, and the concentration on a single action, imagined vividly and portrayed without any "overdetermination". As far as Virgil is concerned, it is the detail rather than the whole that matters: the richness of single phrases, the precision that a word gives to a sentence, or a sequence of sounds which gives to what otherwise would have been trivial a mysterious charm.

There is, of course, another explanation of this difference between oral and written or literary epics, and it can be called roughly sociological: oral epics are the product of societies and cultures which are community-oriented, which are communal in spirit, and where communality imposes its values upon the individual; literary epics are the product of societies and cultures which recognize the distinction between the community and the individual, where culture itself is more and more a product of gifted individuals (.e. literary and artistic culture), and where the relationship between the community and the individual are formally and explicitly regulated. This is Tönnies' famous distinction between a *Gemeinschaft* and a *Gesellschaft*. Now, as Nimis points out, the *Iliad* "can be seen to be poised between the breakdown of a social organization based on a shared communality, implicitly acknowledged in such rituals as the communal meal (a *Gemeinschaft*, and a new social organization in which the individual will be constituted as such, and his relationship to society will become more explicitly formalized (a *Gesellschaft*)."<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the cultural values dominating the *Iliad* are those of the community (a *Gemeinschaft*). The cultural values dominating the *Aeneid* are those of the individuality (a *Gesellschaft*).

This sociological distinction can be also expressed in terms of a dichotomy between the so-called heroic and what I choose to call "ideological". Again I shall turn to Bowra for the definition of the former:

Most oral epics display what is commonly and rightly called a heroic spirit and come from societies which hold heroic standards of conduct, while literary epics, though they have their 'heroes', have a different conception of heroism and of human greatness and come from societies which cannot really be called heroic. The heroic world holds nothing so important as the prowess and fame of the individual hero. The single man, Achilles or Beowulf or Roland, surpasses others in strength and courage. His chief, almost his only, aim is to win honour and renown through his achievements and to be remembered for them after his death. He is ruthless to any who frustrate or deride him. In his more than human strength he seems to be cut off from the intercourse of common men and consorts with a few companions only less noble than himself. He lacks allegiance, except in a modified sense, to suzerain or cause. What matters is his prowess. Even morality hardly concerns him; for he lives in a world where what counts is not morality but honour.<sup>97</sup>

To all of us belonging to any literate culture such an ideal seems anti-social, such a hero an uncivilized being. But, "this ideal, outmoded though it has long been in most parts of the world and intolerable as it

<sup>96</sup>Nimis, *op., cit.*, 72.

<sup>97</sup>Bowra, *op., cit.*, 9.

is in civilised society,<sup>98</sup> has nevertheless remained the supreme inspiration for epic poetry. The problem for the literary epic in general, and for Virgil in particular was how to preserve the appeal and potency of this heroic ideal, while emptying it of its anti-social and anti-cultural characteristics—in short, how to “domesticate” the heroic ideal, how to “civilize” the oral epic.

When approaching Virgil we have to be careful not to read him in the shadow of Homer, or, for that matter of his great imitator and follower, Dante: “I think,” W.R. Johnson says in his study of the *Aeneid* entitled *Darkness Visible*,<sup>99</sup> “it is not generally emphasized enough that we often risk reading Homer on the one hand and Dante or Milton on the other into our Vergil when we are in the act of reading Vergil. For, like any other major poem which happens to be in a major tradition, Vergil’s *Aeneid* is as much in danger from what came before it and what came after it as it is enhanced and magnified by its ancestors and its progeny. The *Aeneid* is, for better and for worse, not only the artifact that Vergil made but also, in part, the artifacts that Homer, Dante, and Milton made, and this problem confronts us each time we read this poem.”<sup>100</sup>

To put the matters squarely, the *Aeneid* is an allegory<sup>101</sup>, and, unless I am mistaken, it is the first epic written in an allegorical vein. But it is not a simple allegory, like some Biblical ones. Johnson points out that, though the *Aeneid* has been seen through the ages as a political allegory, it is also a metaphysical and moral allegory: not three parallel, separate, and independent allegories, but all three moving interdependently, both harmoniously and in a dissonant fashion.<sup>102</sup>

Before we proceed to analyze this new kind of the epic, which is an allegory, let us see why it was necessary for Virgil to invent it, to go beyond Homer (literally and “allegorically”). Again Bowra hits the mark perfectly when he claimed that the writers of the so-called literary epic did not care for the heroic ideal and conduct, such as exhibited by Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*. Though Virgil followed Homer, he had a different conception of what society demanded. Virgil’s society found Homer’s heroes remote and alien. Therefore he had to change the traditional epic form, i.e. to adapt it to his own society. Virgil’s conception of heroism is thus completely different from Homer’s.<sup>103</sup>

W. R. Johnson has applied Auerbach’s dichotomy to Virgil’s *Aeneid* and concluded that “it is probably not too much to say that in Homer everything tends to exist for the sake of the story, for the sake of the visible *muthos* through which we see the else invisible *praxis* and it is probably not too much to say that in Vergil the *muthos* frequently exists for the sake of something beneath its surfaces and beyond its

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>99</sup>W.R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil’s Aeneid* (Berkeley, 1976).

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>101</sup>On allegory see the entry “Allegory in Literary History” in Philip P. Wiener, ed., *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1968), Vol. I, 41-48.

<sup>102</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, 21.

<sup>103</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 10-11.

limits."<sup>104</sup> Johnson entitled his study of Virgil's *Aeneid* *Darkness Visible* in order to stress this "Biblical" style, to put it in Auerbach's terms; or to put it in Gombrich's terms, "impressionistic" style as opposed to Homer's "realistic" style:

The more a painting or a statue mirrors natural appearances, the fewer principles of order and symmetry will it automatically exhibit. Conversely, the more ordered a configuration, the less will it be likely to reproduce nature...An increase in naturalism means a decrease in order. It is clear, I think, that most artistic value rests among other things on the exact reconciliation of these conflicting demands. Primitive art, on the whole, is an art of rigid symmetries sacrificing plausibility to a wonderful sense of pattern, while the art of the impressionists went so far in its search for visual truth as to appear almost to discard the principle of order altogether.<sup>105</sup>

Johnson emphasizes that Homer's realism was for Virgil, as it is for us, the norm of poetic fiction. But in Gombrich's spectrum ranging from abstract primitivism to radical impressionism Homer (and in this he is unique among the ancient poets) occupies the exact middle between abstract conceptualization (which in effect subordinates particulars to universals) and undifferentiated perception (which subordinates universals to the accidents). In the context of Gombrich's scheme, Virgil does not do away with order and design, but he does sacrifice them to the complexities of human history, which is what interests him most. And thus, according to Johnson, "what Vergil has to imagine is, essentially, unknown and probably unknowable."<sup>106</sup>

Virgil realized better than any other poet of Antiquity that the world of Homer's epics was not only dead, but, if I may use the term of the 1960's, a "counter-culture": his glorification of the heroic age and its hero was not only downright anachronistic in the Roman world of circa 1 A.D. civilization of the Mediterranean, (for just about the entire the *oikumene* of the Greeks had by the time of Augustus become Roman), but anti-social in so far as it exalted and extolled the individual hero at the expense of society at large, favored individual fame over the glory of the state, and championed the rights of free men vis-a-vis any higher authority—that of a chieftain like Agamemnon, or of an emperor like Augustus. The world of Virgil was not heroic and did not operate according to the heroic code of honor—but the Homeric ideal was heroic and it set the canon for all epic poetry. In order to "domesticate" and "civilize" this heroic epic Virgil had to relativize it, i.e. appropriate it by subordinating it to a higher purpose that Homer would not have understood or approved of. In other terms, Virgil had to "politicize" the epic.

As Nimis argues, "Vergil was involved in an explicit political practice, and the dynamics of his poetics are profoundly influenced by this fact. This practice took the form of an overt celebration of Augustus and of the empire that he had established. Moreover, this celebration has a

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<sup>104</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, 36.

<sup>105</sup>E. H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form* (London, 1966), 94.

<sup>106</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, 46-47.

specifically historical character to it, so that the empire is shown to be superior to its predecessors. Vergil is thus implicitly occupied with the relative value of political institutions..."<sup>107</sup> In my opinion Nimis is on a slender ground when he argues that Virgil favors Cicero's definition of a republic "as better even than monarchy"<sup>108</sup>. True, he could point to Augustus's careful preservation of the facade of the Roman Republic, and his determination not to act like an Oriental tyrant. But it was clear to everyone that real power rested with the *princeps*, and that the Republic was just a delusion on the part of Augustus. Accordingly, I cannot accept Nimis's conclusion that Virgil's *Aeneid* is, to put it in Johnson's terms, "an allegory of the republic". For what do the wanderings of Aeneas have to do with "the mixed constitution" of the republic eulogized by Cicero? I think Nimis sensed the weakness of his thesis when he qualified it thus: "I said initially that Vergil was concerned with the relative value of cultural institutions; but it is clear that he does not pose this question in the same way that Cicero does in the *Republic*. Vergil does not weigh the advantages of an empire against the advantages of a republic or a democracy; he weighs a good emperor against a bad one, a morally fit leader against a morally weak one, a pious hero against a mad and violent one. Provisionally, it can be said that Vergil's encomium of Augustus and the empire is a defense of one of the three simple forms of government discussed by Cicero."<sup>109</sup> Exactly—and this nullifies Nimis's whole point about Cicero and his *Republic*. Virgil's *Aeneid* is not, could not have been, "a political allegory of the republic"; it is, and it could only be, "a political allegory of monarchy"—to be precise, "of the monarchy as established by Augustus".

The three simple forms of government as discussed by Cicero were much earlier described by Aristotle in his book on *Politics*:<sup>110</sup> they are monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. The degenerations of the three result in tyranny, oligarchy, and mob rule or democratic anarchy. Aristotle thought that the earliest form of government was a monarchy, and this is an important point to remember: the Augustan age was seen as the *restoration* of Rome's golden age, and thus Virgil's present, which is, from the standpoint of the *Aeneid*, the future, was a return to the mythical past. The way of the future is by return to the past.

Virgil, however, had a considerable difficulty in offering a new kind of the epic—a Roman national epic, if you please. As Bowra points out, Virgil worked on his epic for twelve years, and yet he felt discontented with it at the end. It seems that the reason why he sought to destroy it was not because it was incomplete, but rather that he felt that his whole conception was wrong, and that he was not a qualified person to do this job. If his epic was to rival the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* it had to have a hero comparable to Achilles and Odysseus. The age of Augustus clearly

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<sup>107</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 115.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 116-119.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>110</sup>Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, Ch. 7, 1279a, 23ff., and 1279b. 1ff.

demanded nothing less than an equivalent to the Homeric epic, in order to celebrate its great achievements. Augustus was determined to have Virgil as his Homer, but his epic was to be different from Homer's: its ideal was to be the Roman *virtus* as opposed to the Homeric ideal of manhood. Though with a different emphasis this epic had to conform to the Homeric standard. But Virgil was not completely suited to such a task.<sup>111</sup>

The concrete problem facing Virgil was how to endow his epic with unmistakably Roman characteristics without writing a history of Rome in verse. The latter has already been done by Naevius and Ennius.<sup>112</sup> As we have seen, the Augustan age wanted another *Iliad*, it did not want another history-in-verse. But it also wanted the preoccupation with Rome's uniqueness and greatness that Naevius and Ennius had stressed. In other words, it wanted a Roman national epic cast in non-Roman (i.e. Greek) form, but imbued with Roman ideas. As we shall see, this could only be accomplished through *allegory* :

His concern was less with historical events than with their meaning, less with Rome at this or at that time than as it was from the beginning and from ever, less with individual Romans than with a single, symbolical hero who stands for the qualities and the experience which are typically Roman. By skilful literary devices, such as prophecies spoken by gods or visions seen in Elysium or scenes depicted on works of art, Virgil links up the mythical past with recorded history and his own time. ... Virgil is less concerned with origins than with a permanent reality as it was displayed from the first and is still being displayed in his own time.

Such a plan and such a purpose demanded a new kind of poetry, and when we turn from the *Iliad* to the *Aeneid*, it is clear that the whole outlook is different and that Virgil has a new vision of human nature and of heroic virtue. Homer concentrates on individuals and their destinies. The dooms of Achilles and Hector dominate his design; their characters determine the action. But from the start Virgil shows that his special concern is the destiny not of a man but of a nation, not of Aeneas but of Rome. Though he opens with "Arms and the man" and suggests that his hero is another Achilles or Odysseus, he has, before his first paragraph is finished, shown that he reaches beyond Aeneas to the long history that followed from him:

genus under Latinum  
Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.

whence came the Latin race,  
The Alban sires and lofty walls of Rome.<sup>113</sup>

It will be clear to the reader that Virgil had "imitated" Homer only to a degree; that "imitation" is not a proper term for such an appropriation of Homer's heroic tradition. A better term would be "adaptation" of the Homeric discourse by the transformation of the semiotic code that governs the relationship between the signifiers and the signified:

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<sup>111</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 37-38.

<sup>112</sup>Conte, *op. cit.*, 76.

<sup>113</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 34-35.

With these words (*arma virumque*) he signals his choice of poetic diction in familiar literary terms—a choice justified by its exemplary value and inherent stylistic restrictions. The verbal texture is interwoven with two other strands that add the enriching power of secondary connotation to the explicit literal meaning (the “content” of the poem). One secondary connotation is the specifically Roman quality of the epic signifier “*arma virum*”; the other is the echo of the Homeric epic by the hendiadys in “*arma virumque*” = *klea andron*. If there were any doubt about Virgil’s intention to exploit connotative force, his use of it is explicit in the first and last lines that frame the invocation: “*Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris*” (I sing of arms and the man who first from the shores of Troy, *Aeneid* 1.1), and “*unde altae moenia Romae*” (whence came the lofty walls of Rome; *Aeneid* 1.7). Here the strains of Homer’s heroic theme and of Roman ideology fuse diverse styles and complexly weave history and myth into harmonious verbal unison. Ultimately the placement of the signifiers side by side, dialectically arranged so that they form a unified whole, is made possible by Virgil’s integration of sense, hence the old formulation of Virgil as the “Latin Homer”.<sup>114</sup>

Bowra has suggested that Virgil was more interested in the permanent features of Roman greatness rather than in Rome’s mythical origins. This is another way of saying that Virgil was more interested in the present than in the past. The “present” is, of course, Virgil’s present, i.e. the perfection of Rome as achieved under Augustus. This has to be kept strictly in mind: *for Virgil’s present is, from the standpoint of the Aeneid’s text, its future*. This is how J. William Hunt’s perceptive study of the structure and sense in Virgil’s *Aeneid* entitled *Forms of Glory* symbolizes this future-oriented characteristic of the *Aeneid*:

Both past and future, so frequently juxtaposed throughout the epic and brought to bear with the weight of destiny upon the present, are suggested here in the opening book at Carthage by the static Trojan panels within the temple of Juno. Throughout the epic, the beginnings of the new are faintly glimpsed in the remnants of the old in just such moments of pause, static moments in which Virgil’s developing themes emerge. The poetic world of the *Aeneid* is constructed to exhibit, at each crucial stage of meaning, symbolically loaded images which open out through time and space, pictures which contain metaphorical expressions of a spiritual progress which will culminate in an ambiguous parable of the soul.<sup>115</sup>

Virgil’s *Aeneid* is not only “a political allegory”, but a spiritual autobiography of its protagonist, Aeneas. Aeneas was a Trojan, fleeing after the destruction of Troy to various lands of the Mediterranean, until *his destiny* (and this is a crucial aspect of the epic) *forced* him to land in Italy, in Latium, and become the progenitor of the Romans. The noble race of the Romans thus came from Aeneas. Now, it was realized both by the ancient Romans and everybody since, that this is sheer nonsense. Virgil probably regarded it as such. But he had to connect the protagonists of Homer’s *Iliad* with his own epic. What better way than to claim that one of the Trojan heroes with his men escaped the destruction of Troy, and ultimately, after years of wandering (the part of

<sup>114</sup>Conte, *op. cit.*, 74-75.

<sup>115</sup>J. William Hunt, *Forms of Glory: Structure and Sense in Virgil’s Aeneid* (Carbondale, 1973), 3.

the *Aeneid* modelled on the *Odyssey*) was *providentially* responsible for starting the Roman race.

If we take a closer look at the cores of both epics, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* they share the same veiled symbolism epitomized by the notions of birth, i.e. of violent foundation that followed the concealment in a womb. Hunt explains that the same word (*molis*) appears in a famous line in the epic's prologue: "such was the cost in heavy toil (*molis*) of beginning the life of Rome"(1.33). The toil of founding is also indicated by another word (*condere*), found at the beginning and the end of the *Aeneid*. The act of founding Rome (*condere*) is the originator and mover of the whole epic, while the final fulfillment of Aeneas's role will be achieved when he thrust his sword into Turnus: "he buried (*condit*) his blade in Turnus' breast" (12.950). Hunt points out that there is a curious mixture of building and burial in the *Aeneid*: thus before Rome could be built, a sword had to be "buried" in the heart of Aeneas's opponent. And a city of Troy was destroyed as a result of the "Trojan horse", i.e. of the wooden horse containing, like in a womb, hidden Greek soldiers (*inclusos utero Danaos*) (2.258). Both Rome and Troy are thus "founded" and "destroyed" due to the idea of being "buried" in, or concealed, in a womb. What this reveals is that both the Trojan past and the Roman future are buried in the womb of time, for death and birth are intertwined, and are mysteriously one.<sup>116</sup>

At this point it is sufficient to recall Auerbach's characteristics of what he calls the "Biblical" style to realize that this is precisely the poetics of the *Aeneid*: "the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed...; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal...remains mysterious and "fraught with background."<sup>117</sup>

Such a style is responsible for what most critics have consistently stressed about the *Aeneid*: its tension. This tension is personified by Aeneas' vacillations between his ultimate destiny, of which he is only dimly aware, and elements of which he is given partially in dreams and oracles, on one hand, and his natural propensity for indulgence and "happy life". His love affair with Dido, the Queen of Carthage, is the best example: he loved Dido, though not as much as she loved him, but sacrificed his love for her rather cavalierly in order to pursue, no matter how dimly, his ultimate destiny. The tension of Aeneas is that of Virgil: Virgil had to reconcile the elements of heroic life, derived from the *Iliad* with those of the Roman exemplary *pietas*, derived from Naeivius's and Ennius's annals-in-verse. Such a reconciliation created a halfhearted hero: his actions are not dictated by his own code of honor, but by the higher fate of Gods, i.e. history. No wonder that Aeneas is, to put it in modern terms, "alienated": what he wants to do, i.e. what he

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>117</sup>Auerbach, *op. cit.*, 7.

has been brought up to do best, he cannot do: behave in a heroic manner worthy of Achilles by obeying only his own impulses; what he has to do, i.e. what the gods representing history have decreed he should do: found another race of warriors who will triumph over the rest, he is not fully aware of. The result is vacillation, confusion, "backsliding" on the part of Aeneas, exasperation on the part of modern readers. As Hunt puts it, "his individual loneliness in a social world is a mood at the heart of the epic, a mood of alienation and indecision."<sup>118</sup>

What Aeneas is confused about, what he does not understand about his relationship to Dido, what he could not have known, and what Virgil and we do know, is that he is a symbol of Rome, and as such must part company with Dido, the symbol of Carthage. For the union between the two, and Aeneas's consequent decision to stay in Carthage and not go elsewhere (i.e. to his ultimate destination, Italy) would defeat the providential purpose of founding that Rome which would achieve its very greatness on the ruins of Carthage. What Aeneas is not aware of is that he does not have a freedom of action: he is both a symbol and an instrument of Providence. As such he can procrastinate, backslide, vacillate and delay, but he cannot give up. He cannot do so because he is merely a pawn in a larger cosmic game between gods and goddesses who supported the Greeks and Troy respectively (Jupiter and Juno, for instance), and who in the epic support either Aeneas as an embodiment of future Rome, or Carthage. The result is that Aeneas's behavior appears incomprehensible. Conte makes clear that Homer's epic interwove heroic and divine action. Though it may appear that all events are overmotivated, both men and gods retained their individual responsibility for their own actions. The Latin epic appropriated this feature of doubling the planes of action, but it subordinated the individual to a larger historical scene. Accordingly, struggle among nations became the most significant aspect of this Latin epic, and it subordinated to this larger vista all individuals and their quarrels, thus making the epic both narrower and less flexible. Thus the quarrel between Jupiter and Juno can only be understood in its universal sense. Thus, in Ennius's account the struggle between Rome and Carthage in which Jupiter supported Rome, and Juno Carthage, ended when, following Rome's defeat of Carthage in the second Punic War, Juno was reconciled with Rome. Virgil was stuck with this polarity, and he accepted it. But he proceeded to complicate it: he introduced into his epic the story of the love affair between Dido and Aeneas which destroyed the basic simplicity of the polarity between Jupiter and Juno, Rome and Carthage.<sup>119</sup>

Aeneas is thus much more than an epic protagonist, and at the same time much less: he is a changer of history, but he is an object rather than a subject; an instrument rather than an agent. That is why many readers have complained of his "cardboard" quality as a character. The fundamental paradox of the *Aeneid* is this: when Aeneas acts as a

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<sup>118</sup>Hunt, *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>119</sup>Conte, *op. cit.*, 151.



human being in a heroic mold, he acts *against* the design of history, as, for instance, when he falls in love with Dido; but when he goes against his own nature, he *further*s the design of the gods. Thus his actions are not motivated by his nature, and he does not have responsibility for those of his actions which carried out the divine will.

Let us take briefly a look at the final confrontation between Aeneas and Turnus, the champion of the native peoples threatened of being displaced as masters of Latium by Aeneas and his Trojans. Virgil portrays Turnus preparing for the duel as a bull:

mugitus veluti cum prima in proelia taurus  
terrificos ciet au irasci in cornua temptat  
arboris obnixus trunco, ventosque lacessit  
ictibus aut sparsa ad pugnam proludit arena.

As when a bull preparing to do battle awakes tremendous bellows; trying to hurl his rage into his horns, he butts up against the trunks of trees and lashes at the winds with blows or practices for the battle by pawing at the sand. (*Aeneid* XII, 103-106)

As a cultural hero, Turnus quite clearly is a failure...; and the difference between his *ethos* and that of Aeneas is immediately registered in the passage at hand (*Aen.* XII, 107-112):

Nec minus interea maternis saevus in armis  
Aeneas acuit Martem et se suscitatur ira,  
oblato gaudens componi foedere bellum.  
tum socios maestique metum solatur Iuli  
fata docens, regique iubet responsa Latino  
certa referre viros et pacis dicere leges.

Meanwhile Aeneas, no less keen for battle and ruthless in the arms his mother gave him, calls up his indignation, happy that the war is to be settled by a compact. He comforts his companions, stays the fears of said Iulus; he teaches them the ways of fate. Then he orders his men to carry back his firm answer to King Latinus and dictates the terms of peace.<sup>120</sup>

As Nimis points out, "there can be no question that the *ethos* of Aeneas, his portrayal as a hero of culture, is represented as a justification of his ultimate victory in the *Aeneid*."<sup>121</sup> Virgil thus makes it quite clear that, while Aeneas is no less keen for battle, he is opposed to endless wars as such, and he longs to establish peace by, of course, establishing his own dominion over Latium—in other words, by dispossessing the natives. This is a perfect rationale for *pax Romana*—this is, after all, how Rome established universal peace: through its own dominion over the *oikumene* which put an end to all wars.

The portrayal of two combatants is thus typical of the dichotomy "culture vs. nature", Aeneas as a symbol of Rome vs. Turnus as a symbol of animal strength, the bull. It follows that Aeneas is a new kind of a hero, an un-Homeric hero in so far as he has this additional quality

<sup>120</sup>Translation by A. Mandelbaum, *The Aeneid of Virgil* (New York, 1961).

<sup>121</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 130.

of being a, as a German would put it, *Kulturträger* whereas Turnus is a typically Homeric hero, a personification of the primordial forces of Nature. In the *Iliad* for instance, when Achilles removes himself from intercourse with other Greeks as a preparation for his final duel with Hector, he no longer communicates with language, he "groans". This is the attribution of natural forces to a human being: for Nature is mute, it cannot speak (language is, of course, the quintessential attribute of humanity), and it groans, as in this phrase: "Beneath their feet the ground groaned heavily".<sup>122</sup>

Thus, as Bowra stresses, "the Rutulian prince who defends Latium against Aeneas and his Trojans is one of Virgil's most convincing creations. He has the vitality and nobility of a Homeric hero, and we are forced to admire him and even to sympathise with him...Turnus is a second Achilles, as the Cumaean Sibyl tells Aeneas:

alius Latio iam partus Achilles,  
natus et ipse dea, (VI, 89-90)

In Latium is a new Achilles born,  
Himself a goddess' son."

Bowra points out that like Achilles Turnus's whole life was dedicated to honour and renown in war...Virgil thus points out his strength and energy, e.g. when he attacked the Trojan camp, Virgil compares him to a hungry wolf circling round sheep (IX, 59-64); or when Virgil says that he fell on Pallas as a lion attacks a bull (X, 454-456). Bowra's claim is that these similes are based on *The Iliad*, and thus prove that Virgil sees Turnus as equal to Achilles and Ajax. There is no question that Virgil tries very hard to make Turnus appear as a hero according to the Homeric mold who only in battle finds his true self.<sup>123</sup>

Turnus thus represents Nature versus Culture personified by Aeneas. But Aeneas himself personified that Nature back in Troy, for Virgil makes it clear that Aeneas was a great hero, one of the best among the Trojans. In order to overcome the forces of Nature personified by Turnus Aeneas has to return to his former self, for the last time, and summon his own brute nature. That is why the fight between the two is finally described as "a battle between two raging bulls" (*Aeneid*, XII, 715-724):

ac velut ingenti Sila summove Taburno  
cum duo conversis inimica in proelia tauri  
frontibus incurrunt, pavidi cessere magistri,  
stat pecus omne metu mutum, mussantque iuvencare  
quis nemori imperitet, quem tota armenta sequantur;  
illi inter sese multa vi vulnera miscent  
cormuaque obnixa infigunt et sanguine largo  
colla armosque lavant, gemitu nemus omne remugit:

<sup>122</sup>*The Iliad* B, 784; Nimis, *op. cit.*, 68-73.

<sup>123</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 44.

non aliter Tros Aeneas et Dauvius heros  
concurrunt clipeis, ingens fragor aethera complet.

And just as on huge Sila or on lofty Taburnus, when two bulls charge together into hostile battle with butting brows: the trainers shrink back in terror, the whole herd stands mute with fear, the heifers wonder who will rule the woods, whom the whole herd will follow; the bulls with massive force trade wounds, and struggling gore each other and wash their shoulders and legs with much blood, and the whole woods bellows with their groans: Just so Trojan Aeneas and Daunian Turnus crash together with their shields, and their violence fills the air.<sup>124</sup>

By using the Homeric epithet "groans" for both the real (whole woods) and personified (Aeneas and Turnus) forces of Nature, Virgil signals that this final confrontation is a truly Homeric one. There is no question that the whole simile of the fight of two bulls is a Homeric one; but unlike Homer, Virgil invests the fight with a higher, non-natural, but historical and cultural significance. As Nimis explains, the battle of the bulls results in victory for the one who will become a leader of the herd, will have over it the *imperium* and whose seed will exclusively generate offspring. Thus, in the context between Turnus and Aeneas the victor will be seen retrospectively as the hero of culture; and his victory will be attributed to the virtues of culture. Thus the victor assumes the positive sign of culture, while the loser gets stuck with its negative sign. As far as Virgil is concerned, the leader represents the origin of culture, and as thus is the model that will be imposed on the rest. The emperor thus represents both good and bad, and the rest must conform, otherwise their actions represent anti-culture. According to Nimis, imperial culture is defined as "that which the emperor does".<sup>125</sup>

This brings us back to our point that the *Aeneid* is "an allegory of monarchy", to be exact, of "the monarchy established by Augustus". Since its protagonist is the epitome of Rome, he has to personify the Roman Imperial spirit. And the spirit of Rome was built on the *subordination* of one's private interests to that of the state—in this case, the State. That is why Aeneas, as a symbol of future Rome, had to outgrow his Nature and establish his new Culture, or, to put it otherwise, to cease being a hero and become a statesman. According to Bowra, Virgil understood that the heroic type represented by the Homeric heroes was fatally flawed in so far as it lived for its own glory only, and thus was very destructive. Though Virgil admired this type, he understood that this old heroic ideal of the Homeric type was inappropriate for his age and Augustan Rome. He knew what harm can be caused by the reckless self-assertion of such a Homeric hero. As opposed to it, Virgil set his own ideal of Roman manhood with great difficulty, for he had to create a man who could be compared to the best of the Homeric heroes, in so far as courage and endurance was concerned, but would also exhibit certain other traits that meant nothing to Homer. In Virgil's treatment of Dido and Turnus one can

<sup>124</sup>The *Aeneid* XII, 715-724 (trans. by Mandelbaum).

<sup>125</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 131.

see that Virgil's hero was not guided by the Homeric virtue of self-assertion, but on some other principle. Yet in order to rival Achilles and Odysseus, Aeneas had to be a great man and a ruler. Thus Virgil had to combine the Homeric type of a hero and a new type symbolized by the Roman *virtus*.<sup>126</sup>

What is important for our study is that in the opinion of many, if not most readers of the *Aeneid*, Virgil failed: his Aeneas is a rather wooden and unconvincing character. *The fundamental reason why Aeneas is a failure as an epic hero is that he is not free to determine his own course of action. And the reason why he is not his own free agent is that he is a tool of the gods, i.e. an instrument of history. We shall see that this failure of the new "hero", so to speak, was not only Virgil's, but Tasso's and Gundulic's problem as well.* It can now be seen how Aeneas's failure as a new kind of an epic hero is the result of ideology whose carrier he has become—in this case the ideology of Imperial Rome. Yes, despite this relative failure, Virgil's Aeneas is a powerful reaffirmation of the central feature of the epic, a stylized form of political *agon*, as Nimis points out:

The *Aeneid* has often been interpreted as a narrative of self-constitution: the development of Aeneas from the old heroic (i.e. Homeric) virtues to civilized (i.e. Augustan) virtues. At the same time, Aeneas' career is seen as a *simulacrum* of the struggle of Rome herself. But the model of signification which emerges from our discussion seems to make Aeneas the kind of fully finished and self-same being typical of Homeric epic. Aeneas won; that fact makes him by definition the hero of culture. Aeneas' character does not change in the *Aeneid*; it unfolds before us. What Aeneas learns he learns by revelation, the unfolding before his own eyes of what he means, what he has meant, and what he always will mean; and when he goes awry, as he does by dallying in Carthage, a divinity must intervene and get him to "come back to himself". By viewing the *Aeneid* as the process by which Aeneas becomes the Roman model of hero, we fall prey to fiction that culture is somehow prior to itself.<sup>127</sup>

This is indeed how Aeneas has been seen by critics: as an internal struggle within the Trojan's soul between good and bad, so to speak. Here is Hunt's description:

The first half of the poem shows life as a journey to find a promised land, the second half shows life as a battle to found a new nation; but these two themes of wandering and struggle are fused into a further meaning which gives the epic its unity and depth. *Virgil depicts all of life as an exile, as a pilgrimage through the horror of the unknown, not only to discover where the new home is to be settled but also to determine what the shape of duty will be when it is found.* Aeneas does not merely journey, with a clear knowledge of his point of departure and final destination; he also wanders for many years in a void, filled with false starts and puzzling developments. And Aeneas' later struggle is not merely with opposing armies; *he must fight within his own soul to understand his prophesied fate, and he must fight both with and against his own followers to found a new kingdom of peace with justice.*

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<sup>126</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 56-57.

<sup>127</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 133-134.

*Virgil's poem therefore is the story of man as an exile not merely in the world but within his own soul as well. The real journey is finally seen to be a spiritual quest for identity, the real battle an interior struggle to integrate the forces of the human soul.*<sup>128</sup>

It is Lilian Feder who put it best when she argued that

it is at least as painful for Aeneas to fulfill his destiny as it is for others to experience the consequences of his decision. The cause is noble, but by inspiring violence and destruction it involves a tragic waste of noble spirits sacrificed to the cause. Aeneas is forever cast in a double role: the Roman leader fulfilling at any cost his obligation to his nation, and the man enduring pity and despair at every moment of victory. His acceptance of a knowledge of sorrow is both the cost and the gain of his accomplishment, and the task accomplished is what gives deliverance from and at the same time significance to the torment of those who failed.<sup>129</sup>

At this point it would have struck the reader that Aeneas, despite his final triumph (or, to put it more accurately, because of it) is a *tragic* figure. What Virgil has done is in effect combined epic characteristics with those of a tragedy. This has been noted by Virgilian experts: R.S. Conway has argued that Virgil's *Aeneid* is a hybrid structure in which the methods and motives of epic poetry alternate with those of Greek tragedy in such a way that the odd-numbered books stress the similarities while the even-numbered books stress the contrasts.<sup>130</sup> Viktor Poschl went further and divided the whole *Aeneid* into three parts of four books each, of which books 1-4 are "dark", books 5-8 are "light", and books 9-12 are "dark" and "tragic". This is to suggest a structure similar to that of Greek tragedy.<sup>131</sup> This was finally worked out by George E. Duckworth who saw "all three equal sections of the epic emerging as a trinity of forces in a tragic parable: The two tragedies frame a central message not only of a Roman hero but also of Roman history, and the speech of Anchises at the center of the patriotic middle panel expresses both personal and national ideals."<sup>132</sup> Thus Duckworth concluded that both the Homeric epic and the Greek drama had an impact on Virgil's *Aeneid*.

In combining the characteristics of the epic and of tragedy Virgil created a hybrid—for his *Aeneid* is not a true tragedy. As Conte points out, Virgil's "dialectic of contamination", in Conte's phrase, starts when the text can come up with a *point of view* whose axis no longer is in the center as dictated by the dogmatic norm of the epic genre. Thus Virgil transforms the epic code by allowing its potentialities to re-emerge from the depths of history. Homer has only one point of view,

<sup>128</sup>Hunt, *op. cit.*, 6-7.

<sup>129</sup>Lilian Feder, "Virgil's Tragic Theme" in *Classical Journal* 49 (1954), 207-208.

<sup>130</sup>R. S. Conway, "Virgil's Creative Art" in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 17 (1931), 25.

<sup>131</sup>Viktor Poschl, *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the "Aeneid"* Ann Arbor, 1962), 37-38, 90-91, 130-131, 137ff.

<sup>132</sup>Hunt, *op. cit.*, 11-12.

and the text and its representation are unequivocal, for its focus claims to represent the truth, to which the text rather than the author's personality lays claim. Everything in Homer takes place on a single plane, which is invisible because it is invariable: its single point of view is a direct relationship between objective truth and its object: the world. Homer's text is unambiguous, for it radiates from a single center, and projects an image of the truth which is absolute and immutable. "The secret of epic objectivity lies hidden here." The epic norm claims to represent reality objectively, and thus claims all of reality. This means that its own point of view is successfully concealed; in order to reveal it and get rid of its perspective, Virgil had to introduce multiple viewpoints. In the Homeric epics History is a single process, but in the Virgilian epic, there are successive layers of History, pushed into the background, which contain the lost battles and causes, repressed memories, and all the price that had to be paid for the *imperium* to be established. Thus Virgil relativizes rather than obliterates the epic's absolute point of view. Having introduced multiple viewpoints, Virgil renders his epic polycentric. Each point of view not only has an autonomous meaning, but tries to assert its own hegemony over the text as a whole. Each point of view claims to represent the world truthfully, and ignores every other point of view which tries to do exactly the same. Thus every point of view tries to monopolize the arrangement of all events within its purvey. Each point of view, however, has an inbuilt limit to this process, for by winning over every other point of view, it would obliterate itself by obliterating all the other points of view, since it is the artistic effect that is responsible for it.<sup>133</sup>

Conte makes it perfectly clear that Virgil's *Aeneid* while appropriating some tragic characteristics, is not a tragedy, for a tragedy is based on a dialectical solution which emerges out of a real clash of wills expressed in a *dialogue* in Virgil's *Aeneid* there is no real clash of wills, and no dialogue:

Copresence, then, is the basic category in Virgil's poetic technique. In him contradiction does not entail an outcome, and it does not display (even if it desires) a tendency toward gradual resolution. No "becoming" appears; conflict and contrast thrive without entering upon a real dialectic and without being set in motion along a temporal path. Virgil fails to reveal time-induced action, because in him past and future become absorbed in a prearranged, stable time.<sup>134</sup>

There is thus no drama at the center of Virgil's *Aeneid*, everything has been preordained, and no human will can affect its outcome (i.e. the plot) in any significant way. What I have said earlier about Aeneas not being responsible for his own actions is what deprives him of any truly dramatic quality; and his suffering, such as it is, is not that of a real tragic hero. According to Johnson, Homeric art teaches that a suffering may become almost tolerable if it is acknowledged and shared, though still remaining unintelligible. And thus Homer's *Iliad* concludes with

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<sup>133</sup>Conte, *op. cit.*, 152, 154, 157.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 158.

the triple threnody of superb quality. But Virgil's *Aeneid* does not share suffering, and does not use dialogue. This is indicative of Aeneas's preference for internalizing sorrow rather than releasing it in the form of communication. This in turn reveals Aeneas as an essentially solitary hero whose understanding is full of futility and despair. But it does not mean that Aeneas is a fool. What it means instead is that neither history nor art can explain what "happens and does not happen in history".<sup>135</sup>

"What happens and does not happen in history" is, of course, the terrible price that any historical triumph exacts: the peace of the victor which signifies "the silence of the grave", as Nimis points out: "The imperial model of signification is one which imposes a pre-established meaning on that which is ambiguous, a process which would presumably go on until there is *imperium sine fine* (*Aen.* 1, 279), until all non-culture is assimilated and organized according to the imperial model."<sup>136</sup> And yet, as I pointed out in the beginning, Virgil understood the price of war and of victory; according to Johnson, "the pathos does not nullify the grandeur, but the grandeur does not redeem the pathos." There is no counterpoint between the pathos and the grandeur which would establish an equilibrium which would result in our saying that we do understand the terrible price that had to be paid for the glory of Rome; or that we do understand the fraud at the core of this epic which results in the nightmarish vision of *The Aeneid*. The latter refuses to allow us to reach either conclusion. According to Johnson, there are two visions, but not a double vision, for the two refuse to merge together, which would enable us to analyze them separately as the necessary components of the process. Rather, according to Johnson, "the arcs that should complete the circle, in precise proportion as they seem to near one another, keep swerving off in opposite tangents." By combining art and history in such a pattern, Virgil came up with his own dialectical process. But this dialectic is not a true one, for it does not result in a synthesis, such as in negative affirmation that is "*eminently suited to, say, the Christian temper*"<sup>137</sup> (my italics)

Adam Parry characterized this unreconciled (and unreconcilable) duality in his "Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*": "We hear two distinct voices in the *Aeneid*, a public voice of triumph and a private voice of regret."<sup>138</sup> But it was Viktor Poschl who hit the nail on its head when he claimed that "it was Virgil who discovered the grievous burden of history and its vital meaning; he was the first to perceive deeply the cost of historical greatness."<sup>139</sup> A historian like Polybius could write glibly: "Fortune has caused the whole world and its history to tend towards one purpose—the empire of Rome."<sup>140</sup> Virgil, who believed in the

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<sup>135</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, 107.

<sup>136</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 135.

<sup>137</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, 110-111.

<sup>138</sup>Adam Parry, "The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*" in *Arion* 2, No. 4 (Winter, 1963), 79.

<sup>139</sup>V. Poschl, *op. cit.*, 39.

<sup>140</sup>Polybius, *History*, I, 4, 5.

divine foundation of Rome's greatness, was nevertheless seized by some sort of spiritual uneasiness. That is why the predominating mood of the *Aeneid* is its melancholy. As Bowra points out, "this melancholy rises out of Virgil's doubts and misgivings. Behind his belief in the Roman achievement we can see his uncertainty about its reality and its worth."<sup>141</sup>

More than most of his contemporaries Virgil sensed what the rule of Augustus would probably end up as in the hands of his successors: a tyranny. And thus his political allegory of monarchy is also both a promise and an omen: a promise of the return of the Golden Age under Augustus, and an omen of Oriental despotism that would follow it. Johnson is perfectly right when he argues that "the heyday of Orientalism is a long way off when Vergil is writing the *Aeneid* but what Auerbach calls "the darkening of the atmosphere of life" has already begun in Vergil's lifetime, and his poem reflects these beginnings and uses them."<sup>142</sup> And that is why Johnson is going to have the final word on Virgil:

No poet, not Dante himself, has imagined the disintegration of justice and truth with such precision and such power, and for this reason no poet, not Homer himself, has shown how precious and how fragile are the formation and equilibrium of man's integrity of spirit.<sup>143</sup>

#### IV. DANTE

Anyone reading the *Divine Comedy* knows that Virgil is Dante's guide through Hell and Purgatory: that is why Dante called him his guide (*tu duca*). Virgil is also the supreme and unique exemplar of that kind of epic Dante chose to imitate: an *allegorical* epic. That is why Dante calls him his lord (...*tu signore*...) indicating Virgil's mastery of this form of art. Virgil was above all the originator of the kind of epic that was anchored in a special view of History: providentially ordained and prophetically foretold. That is why Dante called him his teacher (...*e tu maestro*): for he taught Dante how to write a *political allegory* which henceforth became the foundation of the Christian epic. And Dante's great work is the third kind of the epic, the so-called "Christian epic". Dante took over from Virgil his ideological view of Rome's unique role and destiny in history, and "Christianized" it, i.e. integrated it into his medieval world view of Imperial power.

It was from Virgil that Dante took "*lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto honore*" (the noble style that was to bring me honor)<sup>144</sup>. Dante, however, took from Virgil much more than "the noble style": Dante's whole *Divine Comedy* is an elaborate discourse on the government or the reign of Evil (the *Inferno*), on the perversion of the Good Government through the perversions of Love (*the Purgatorio*) and the

<sup>141</sup>Bowra, *op. cit.*, 92.

<sup>142</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, 143.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>144</sup>INF I, 87.



government or reign of Good (*the Paradiso*). Seen in such a light, Dante's masterpiece is a political allegory just like Virgil's *Aeneid*, and its third canticle, *Paradiso*, is an allegory of monarchy.

It is the first point, the view of the *Divine Comedy* as Dante's political allegory that I want to touch upon here briefly. As Nimis points out, "Virgil offered a content-form that Dante could use as an expression-form for the "Kingdom of God": the ideal form of government represented in the *Aeneid* as the empire under Augustus. Virgil's words about paradise in the first canto are a paradigm of this portrayal by means of imperial imagery:

che quello *imperator* che la su *regna*,  
perch'io fu' ribellante alla sua legge,  
non vuol che `n sua città per me si venga.

*In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;*  
quivi e la sua città e l'alto *seggio*:  
oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!

(INF, I, 124—129)

For that *emperor who reigns* there above  
because I was rebellious to His law,  
wills it not that through me any one should come into His *city*.

*In all parts he governs* and there *He reigns*:  
there is His city and *His lofty throne*.  
O happy the man He chooses to go there!"

(trans. by Sinclair)

In the *De Monarchia*, Dante suggests there is a homology between the kingdoms of God and man, and the Roman Empire is there singled out as the clearest manifestation of the monarchical ideal. In the *Comedy*, the poet who celebrated the golden age of Rome, himself an unwitting messianic poet in his fourth *Eclogue*, comes to the aid of Dante to mediate his portrayal of the Kingdom of God.<sup>145</sup>

In his Virgil's *Iliad*, K. W. Gransden set out "to try to re-establish the paramount value of books VII-XII of the *Aeneid* as epic narrative. They represent, after all, Virgil's *Iliad*. It is commonly agreed that Homer's *Iliad* surpasses his *Odyssey* in tragic intensity and in the power of its narrative."<sup>146</sup> Here Gransden repeats the common view that the first six books of the *Aeneid* represent Virgil's *Odyssey* and the last six his *Iliad*.<sup>147</sup> Since Homer's *Iliad* is universally judged to be superior to his *Odyssey* the same should hold true of books VII-XII of the *Aeneid* vis-a-vis the first six books. This is what Gransden claims is the case: that "*Aeneid* VII-XII is a continuous epic narrative of sustained power and

<sup>145</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 153.

<sup>146</sup>K.W. Gransden, *Virgil's Iliad: An Essay on Epic Narrative* (Cambridge, 1984), 1.

<sup>147</sup>On this common division see Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilised Poetry* (Oxford, 1964), chs. 6 & 7.

grandeur, planned and executed on the largest scale and offering a structural unity which matches that of its great model."<sup>148</sup>

It is in the beginning of Book VII that Virgil states most clearly the providential destiny of Rome. To Venus's question to Jupiter, "What end do you give, great king, to his labours?", meaning to Aeneas's role in history, Jupiter answers: "*Imperium sine fine dedi*" (I have given them empire without end).<sup>149</sup> Note that Jupiter refers to "them", not to "him": he is referring to Aeneas's offspring, the Romans. As Gransden points out, the empire of his descendants "had not ended when Virgil wrote the poem, a thousand years after the events supposedly narrated". And a thousand years after that, Beatrice said to Dante, 'You shall be with me, without end (*senza fine*) a citizen of that Rome of which Christ is a Roman."<sup>150</sup> Beatrice's words are spoken toward the end of Dante's second canticle of *Purgatorio*, as an anticipation of Dante's ascent to Paradise.<sup>151</sup>

By choosing Virgil to be his guide through the regions of Hell and Purgatory as far as a "pagan" could go without Christian Revelation Dante singled out the Roman poet as *the* poet of this world united under the aegis of Rome, i.e. as *the* poet of Roman, secular, monarchy. Even though he is barred from Paradise on account of his lack of Christian faith, Virgil constantly reminds Dante that the political constitution of this world mirrors that of the Heavenly Kingdom. This idea, powerfully stated in pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>152</sup> enables Dante to argue that the entire world should be subject to the rule of the Emperor (the Roman though now a Christian Emperor), just as all of Paradise is ruled by Christ. In Canto XX of *Paradiso* Dante placed Emperor Constantine the Great topmost among the great rulers of this world for having brought about the union of the Roman *imperium* with Christianity.<sup>153</sup>

There was a medieval view of Virgil which claimed that the Roman poet had come closest to predicting the future triumph of Christianity in his fourth *Eclogue*, and that only his dying before the birth of Christ (Virgil died in 19 B.C.) prevented him from becoming a Christian. No matter how ridiculous this idea may look to us, Gransden warns us that "the old idea of Virgil as *anima naturaliter Christiana* (the naturally Christian soul) poised uncertainly at the very end of the era of what Dante called the false and lying gods, unable to escape from the pagan world to whose values he seemed not wholly to assent, remains powerful".<sup>154</sup>

In order to explain this properly, it is necessary to examine Dante's handling of Virgil in Canto I. Virgil's appearance comes after Dante's

<sup>148</sup>Gransden, *op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>149</sup>*The Aeneid* VI, 801-805.

<sup>150</sup>Gransden, *op. cit.*, 39.

<sup>151</sup>PUR XXXII, 101-102.

<sup>152</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius (Dionysius the Areopagite), *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, *passim*.

<sup>153</sup>PAR XX, 55-60.

<sup>154</sup>Gransden, *op. cit.*, 216-217.

encounter of the three beasts (the leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf), and his desperate flight from the she-wolf. To Dante's plea for help (*Miserere di me*) Virgil responds with his "biography". This "biography", as Nolan points out, is

the kind of brief *vita auctoris* with which grammar school masters throughout the Middle Ages typically introduced the study of classical writers to their pupils. Vergil's self-introduction mirrors the formulas found in the common medieval *accessus ad auctores*, including not only a synopsis of his parentage and place in Roman history, but also the "materia" and "intentio" of his work...Then he identifies with brilliant economy the "materia" of his poem and its "intentio" as these would have been explained by the grammar school *magister*. The subject of his poem, he says, is the "just son of Anchises who came from Troy after proud Ilium was destroyed by fire." By juxtaposing the "just" man and "prideful" city to show the deserts of each, he underscores a major moral lesson of his work as medieval schoolteachers typically presented it.<sup>155</sup>

It should be pointed out that for Dante pride is the greatest of all sins, the source of all others, and that this view was widely held in the Middle Ages. But Dante has another dimension of Pride in his view: it is the view of the ancients as "prideful" as opposed to the Christians as "humble". For in medieval eyes, Pride is a challenge to God's omnipotence. It is also possible to see an allusion to the heroic epic as such, for the heroic epic consisted of the overwhelming pride or *hubris* of the main hero whose "heroic" conduct challenged the gods. And it was precisely Virgil who "tamed" such a heroic view, and produced a different kind of hero. Virgil is thus a proper teacher to Dante whose epic cannot incorporate any "prideful" heroes, but instead the humble, repentant Everyman (Dante himself as a pilgrim). Thus, the famous line, *tu duca, tu signore, e tu maestro* identifies Virgil as not only Dante's *guide* through Hell and Purgatory, and not only his *lord* as the greatest in the guild of epic poets (Dante placed Virgil above Homer), but as his *teacher*:

This reverent image of Vergil as teacher is one which is anticipated in the *Convivio* where Dante counsels youths to give obedience to "maestri e maggiori" who alone can teach them to keep to the "buono Cammino" once they have entered "ne la selva erronea di questa vita" (IV.24) In the *Comedy*, the figure of the guide as *magister* is lovingly developed: the word "maestro" itself occurs more than 100 times, more often than not applied directly to Vergil...The term teacher posits a close personal relationship between guide and pilgrim, and one which would have been thoroughly familiar to all who had enjoyed a basic education in the arts. Furthermore, it is a relationship which imitates that between God and His creation in Dante's poem. Just as God, the "Maestro", never lifts His watchful, loving eyes from his creation (PAR X, 7-12), so Vergil, the "maestro" to whom Dante entrusts his will at the end of Inferno II, guards the intellectual and moral and spiritual welfare of this charge with absolute concentration.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>Barbara Nolan, "Dante's Vergil, the Liberal Arts, and the Ascent to God" in J. Stephen Russell, ed., *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1988), 30.

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

Virgil thus in effect assumes certain aspects of God in his relationship to Dante; the most important of them is the gift of prophecy. Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to elucidate the relationship between prophecy and poetry in general. Again, we have to go back to Homer, to the origins of the epic tradition as it has survived (and been defined) in the West. In her *Homer and the Bard* Penelope Murray has argued that in ancient Greece in general, and in Homer's period in particular, many if not most poets were depicted as blind. Homer himself was said to have blind. And blindness was also a prerequisite for a gift of prophecy:

This frequent association of blindness with poets and prophets deserves comment. In the first place, these tales may well reflect a true situation: it would be natural for the blind to become bards in Homeric society, since they would be unable to take part in many other occupations. Blind people have good memories, and in an oral culture memory is, of course, a vital factor in poetry...As well as perhaps reflecting a true situation, the association of blindness with poetry and prophecy undoubtedly has a symbolic significance which the Greeks recognized. For the stories about blind poets and prophets imply that these people have a special kind of sight: they lose their physical sight, but they gain something better—inner sight or vision.<sup>157</sup>

Now we are in a position to tackle the next problem: Virgil's use of prophecy in Canto III. We should recall that Virgil made it absolutely clear to Dante when he first met him in Canto I that he was no longer alive, but a shadow:

"...Non, omo, omo gia fui..." (INF I, 67)  
 "No longer living man, though once I was,"

This is an important point: it establishes a parallel between Virgil and Dante which is akin to that between a blind bard and his audience in ancient Greece. For Virgil is no longer alive, but he can *see* the real meaning of God's creation, whereas Dante (as a pilgrim) is still alive, yet cannot *see* the proper meaning of things. This is made manifest in Dante's puzzlement over the most famous of all sayings in the *Divine Comedy* (and the one most memorable and easily associated with Dante): "*Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate*" (INF III, 9: Abandon every hope, all you who enter.) Dante turns to Virgil and says: "*Maestro, il senso lor m'è duro*" (INF III, 12: "Master," I said, "these words I see are cruel".) It is a measure of Musa's great achievement as a translator that he inserted the words "I see" to heighten the difference between Dante's literal sight, and Virgil's allegorical vision. For Virgil answers: "*Qui si convien lasciare ogne sospetto*" (INF III, 14: Now here you must leave all distrust behind.) This is Virgil's gift of prophecy operating on Dante: Virgil "translated" (in its original meaning of "transposing") one meaning *for* another, i.e. *into* another. This is tantamount to prophecy: for like Delphic oracles, prophecies make no

<sup>157</sup>Penelope Murray, "Homer and the Bard" in Tom Winniffrith, Penelope Murray & K.W. Gransden, eds., *Aspects of the Epic* (London, 1983). 9-10.

sense in ordinary, everyday sense—their meaning cannot be *seen*. They have to be reoriented from “now” to the future, from the present to the time of the fulfilment of the prophecy. And such a reading is very much a medieval exegetical commentary on God’s *liber*:

Vergil’s method of glossing comments importantly on medieval scriptural exegesis and also on the proper allegorical reading of Dante’s poem. Through Vergil as *maestro*, Dante demonstrates that this inscription and all texts (including the text of God’s creation) admit of a deeper sense than the letter provides; the literal surface is to be penetrated in order to serve the moral needs and spiritual condition of the individual reader or ‘student.’<sup>158</sup>

In his *Epistle to Can Grande* Dante stated that his *Divine Comedy* was not simple, but rather it is polysemous, that is, endowed with many meanings. For the first meaning is that which one derives from the letter, another is that which one derives from things signified by the letter. The first is called “literal” and the second “allegorical” or “mystical.”<sup>159</sup> We should recall that J. Stephen Russell in his *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* defines allegory and allegoresis as “the creation and interpretation of texts, respectively.” This has also been the view of Jesse M. Gellrich in his *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*. Gellrich contends that Singleton’s argument that Dante’s poetics is that of (Aristotle’s concept of ) imitation is seriously flawed. He claims instead that Dante’s poetics is based on the idea of producing meaning:

Dante has the last word about the poetics of his poem: he says that poetry imitates not *what* nature makes, but as nature makes. It carries on the process of creating and producing that is going on in nature...Instead of reflecting an object in the mirror, the passage suggests a poetics of *producing* meaning as a teacher does and the student does after him. This process is in the making through the reader’s interaction with the text. The form of the poem therefore is not, as it is for Aristotle, a concretized or objectified thing; rather, form is ongoing in the process of interpretation, coming into being in the dynamics of response.<sup>160</sup>

It may seem to the reader that in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* a single point of view exists. But Mark Musa says that of Dante that “the reader must be careful from the beginning to distinguish between the two uses of the first person singular in *The Divine Comedy*, one designating Dante the Pilgrim, the other Dante the poet.”<sup>161</sup> It was a great Russian literary critic, Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) who emphasized the “polyphonic” nature of Dante’s masterpiece, i.e. that it voices many points of view rather than a single one of the author. As Morson and Emerson put it:

<sup>158</sup>Nolan, op. cit., 34.

<sup>159</sup>P. Toynbee, ed., *Epistolae* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1966), X.

<sup>160</sup>Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, 1985), 145-146.

<sup>161</sup>Mark Musa, INF, I, note 71-72.

In a polyphonic work...each major hero retains the capacity to “mean directly”. That is, the role played solely by the author in a monologic work is multiplied, so that several characters may play it. Each character has his own word, and neither the author nor any other character can turn that word into a mere character trait.<sup>162</sup>

Such a polyphonic approach adopted by Dante is best exemplified by the famous episode of Paolo and Francesca in Canto V of the *Inferno*. It should be pointed out that Francesca addresses to Dante the Pilgrim the famous lines:

*Nessun maggior dolore  
che ricordarsi del tempo felice  
ne la miseria...*

...“There is no greater pain  
than to remember, in your grief  
past happiness...” (INF V, 121-123)

which are the only verses from *The Divine Comedy* paraphrased in Gundulic’s *Osman*. Dante, in Gellrich’s view, indicates the *difference* between poetry as *imitation* and poetry as *interpretation* by distancing the style of Francesca’s speech from its original prototype, the *dolce stil nuovo* poetry:

She begins her “poem” with the line, “Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprendre” (line 100), which imitates, if it does not reproduce, the famous line of Guido Guinizelli, “Al cor gentil ripara sempre amore” (“love always repairs to the gentle heart”)... Although her speech echoes literary tradition, it is not by any means the poetry of Arnaut Daniel, Guinizelli, or Dante himself in *La vita nuova*. Her discourse, rather, is from the prose romances of France, the place of origin of her name, which, incidentally, means “French”. Although her language sounds like an imitation, she appropriates only enough of the *dolce stil* to enunciate a difference and departure from it.<sup>163</sup>

Francesca’s discourse, such as it is, clearly affects Dante the Pilgrim greatly; and for the first and only time throughout his entire otherworldly voyage Dante the pilgrim loses control, surrenders wholly to his grief, and passes out. This is rendered poetically by the famous line: “*E caddi come corpo morto cade.*” (I fell as a dead body falls.)<sup>164</sup>

Dante the Poet thus allows Francesca to state her case, which he does not find acceptable, but Dante the Pilgrim does fall victim to Francesca’s discourse. Dante was also familiar with another reader of Virgil who succumbed to Dido’s charms as he did to Francesca’s:

On the basis of the exegetical tradition that identified spiritual blindness and sense appetite with the femininity of Eve, Dante establishes a parallel between the carnal desire and fornication of the lovers and their response to the French text. The

<sup>162</sup>Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, 1990), 254.

<sup>163</sup>Gellrich, op. cit., 151.

<sup>164</sup>INF V, 143.

parallel makes use of the fundamental distinction, argued by Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana*, between 'enjoying' a text 'for its own sake' and 'using' its literal sense in order to understand spiritual truth. The failure to make this distinction in reading results in 'carnal' and 'feminine' enjoyment, the kind we observe in Paolo and Francesca or that is illustrated by Augustine himself in his account in the *Confessions* (book 1) of reading the story of Dido. Delight in the next for its own sake is so intense for Augustine that he weeps for Dido when he has not yet wept for Christ. Such literal-minded reading leads away from spirituality, Augustine concludes, as a form of fornication. ...The invitation to recall the *Aeneid* comes in Francesca's remark 'e ciò sa'l tuo dottore' ('and this your teacher known'; line 123), which connects the story of lost love in Virgil's poem...Her comment opening the story of reading, 'Noi leggiamo un giorno' ('We read one day'; line 127), balance that day we read no farther in it'; line 138), and both recall' ('no longer did I wish to read').<sup>165</sup>

It is thus clear that by *interpretation* Dante follows Augustine's interpretation of Virgil's episode *in a form of allegoresis*. Gellrich points out that "Dante is not *imitating* Augustine or Virgil, but *interpreting* them for the particular purposes of his poem. His text counts for its meaning on the ignorance of Francesca and the silence of the pilgrim, on the pastness and difference of texts that they echo and even quote without realizing the significance of their own words."<sup>166</sup> The reader would have noticed that there is a hidden tension between Dante the Poet and Dante the Pilgrim: while the former condemns the two lovers, the latter swoons of grief. The tension, however, is not resolved. If we turn to Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande*, Dante explains the allegoresis of his *Divine Comedy* thus: "It signifies our redemption through Christ; if we look at the moral sense, it signifies the turning of the souls from the sorrow and misery of sin to a state of grace; if we look at the anagogical sense, it signifies the passage of the blessed souls from the slavery of this corruption to the freedom of the eternal glory."<sup>167</sup> In other words, Dante's epic is about the transformation of Dante the Pilgrim into Dante the Poet (of *The Divine Comedy*). The tension between the two, however, remains throughout the text of the *Comedy* and is not resolved until the final vision at the end of the *Paradiso*.

From the standpoint of Dante's spiritual autobiography, the tension (not to say conflict) between Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet can be expressed as that between Dante the Poet of *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*) and Dante the Poet of *La Divina Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*). Musa brings this conflict out:

...The *Vita Nuova* is a cruel book—cruel, that is, in the treatment of the human type represented by the protagonist. In the picture of the lover there is offered a condemnation of the vice of emotional self-indulgence and an exposure of its destructive effects on a man's integrity. The 'tender feelings' that move the lover to hope or despair, to rejoice or to grieve (and perhaps even to enjoy his grief), spring from his vulnerability and instability and self-love. However idealistically inspired, these feelings cannot, except spasmodically, lead him ahead and above; as long as he continues to be at their mercy, he must always fall back into the

<sup>165</sup>Gellrich, op. cit., 152-153 quoting Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, 12.

<sup>166</sup>Gellrich, op. cit., 154.

<sup>167</sup>Musa, "Introduction" to INF, 42, quoting from Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande*.

helplessness of his self-centeredness. The man who would realize his poetic destiny must ruthlessly cut out of his heart the canker at its center, the canker that the heart instinctively tends to cultivate. This is...the main message of the *Vita nuova*.<sup>168</sup>

Dante's rejection of his youthful *Vita Nuova* is thus tantamount to his rejection of his former self, i.e. of himself as a Poet of *dolce stil nuovo* of *l'amour courtois*, of courtly love. Only thus can Dante's derision of the troubadour style found in Francesca's inversion of Guido Guinizelli's *canzone* be properly understood. Musa makes the point that Dante's "recantation is the most original in medieval literature—a recantation that takes the form of re-enactment, seen from a new perspective, of the sin recanted."<sup>169</sup>

The "sin recanted" is to fall victim to "the canker that the heart instinctively tends to cultivate".<sup>170</sup> This is what Dante the Pilgrim does in Canto V of the *Inferno* and that is why for the first and only time Dante the Pilgrim is overwhelmed by grief and passes out. It is no coincidence that Dante the Pilgrim is in the greatest tension with Dante the Poet precisely on this point: for Dante's pity for Francesca and Paolo is Dante's self-pity. It is thus his sin of self-centeredness at whose root lies the cardinal sin of Pride. And Pride will not let the objectivication of one's self in another go unnoticed, and thus either gladdened or pitied. Dante the Pilgrim fails his first "test" in Hell because he is still vulnerable to the kind of Love he was guilty of in *La Vita Nuova*: self-centered love. Dante indicates this "call of Love" which he still felt as a Pilgrim in the beginning of the final three tercets of Francesca's speech:

Love, that kindles quick in the gentle heart,  
seized this one for the beauty of my body,  
torn from me. (How it happened still offends me!)

Love, that excuses no one loved from loving,  
seized me so strongly with delight in him  
that as you see, he never leaves my side.

Love led us straight to sudden death together... (INF V, 100-106)

This sort of carnal Love Dante would have surmounted by the time of his final vision in *Paradiso* XXXIII; he is then ready for "that Love that moves the Sun and the other stars" ("*L'Amor che muove 'l Sole e l'altre stelle*").

In the Middle Ages, however, it was widely held that there were three kinds of Love: selfish Love, i.e. love of somebody for what one can get out of that person (*propter sese*); love of somebody for that person's sake (*propter ipsum*); and the highest form of Love, which loves the other above everything (*super omnia*).<sup>171</sup> This last form of love was reserved for God, and was usually attained only through mystical union

<sup>168</sup> Musa, "Introduction" to INF, 25-26.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>171</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, c. 1250-1550* (New Haven, 1980), 88-89.



with Him. From this point of view Dante can be said to have passed through three kinds of love on his spiritual journey: the selfish, carnal love of *The New Life* (*propter sese*); the selfless, spiritual love of Beatrice in the first two canticles of the *Divine Comedy* (*propter ipsum*); and the love of that Love that moves the Sun and the other stars, in the final vision at the end of the *Paradiso* (*super omnia*). The final vision is a mystery:

As the geometer who tries so hard  
to square the circle, but cannot discover,  
think as he may, the principle involved,

so did I strive with this new mystery:  
I yearned to know how could our image fit  
into that circle, how it could conform;

but my own wings could not take me so high—  
then a great flash of understanding struck  
my mind, and suddenly its wish was granted.

At this point power failed high fantasy  
but, like a wheel in perfect balance turning,  
I felt my will and my desire impelled

by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars. (PAR XXXIII, 133-145)

In his *History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic: From Homer to Spenser* Page DuBois deals with the epic tradition "as a form of history..." There are clearly differences between pure historians and poets, as Aristotle makes clear. In the *Poetics* he distinguishes between poetry and history:

The difference between a historian and a poet...is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts. (*Poetics* 1451a-b)

"The epic poet writes the history of his hero and his community; thus he composes a text both about "what happened" and about "what might happen."<sup>172</sup> DuBois then quotes Walter Benjamin on the crucial difference between a historian and a chronicler:

The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what a chronicler does...<sup>173</sup>

DuBois's contention is that this is precisely what the epic poet does:

He displays events as *models of the course of the world*. In the epic poem, there is an intersection between the fictive life of an individual hero and a vision of a larger

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<sup>172</sup>Page DuBois, *History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic* (Cambridge, 1982), 1.

<sup>173</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), 96.

history. Thus the lives of individuals and the destiny of the community are fitted into a larger pattern of time... I will argue that history, man's reading of the past, is part of poetry especially in the epic, and that its use in poetry is part of the attempt to control the present and shape the future of the human community. Epic poetry, in the great tradition from Homer to Spenser, helped to shape man's understanding of the past and to project a future for the poet's patron and audience.<sup>174</sup>

DuBois defines *ekphrasis* as a form of the representation of history in epic poetry, i.e. "the verbal description of a work of graphic art." DuBois subscribes to Benjamin's view that the *ekphrasis* "represents a model of the course of the world".<sup>175</sup> Such a view is shared by Hayden White in his *Metahistory*:

I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them.<sup>176</sup>

There are three *ekphrases* used by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*: the first is in Canto XIV of the *Inferno* and represents the Old Man of Crete; the second *ekphrasis* is that of the Terrace of Pride in the *Purgatorio*; the third is that of the Eagle in *Paradiso* XVII-XX. This brings us back to our discussion of Virgil's role and the concept of imitation. It also ties in with Nolan's point about medieval education. As DuBois points out, "Dante uses the Terrace of Pride as a play on the concept of *imitatio* in the form of the *ekphrasis*. Before the Gate of Purgatory Dante walks over the steps which mirror a human body, and mirror back the presence of the hero: the first step is of marble, the second dark, the third like porphyry, of the color of blood spurting from a vein. Before unlocking the gate the angel engraved on Dante's forehead the signs of sin: "*Sette P ne la fronte mi descrisse*" (IX, 12: Seven P's he traced on my forehead..."<sup>177</sup>

Dante and Virgil thus entered the Gate of Purgatory and found themselves on the lowest terrace—that of Pride. There they see beneath their feet a series of carvings in the bed of rock. The long catalogue starts with Satan, the Prince of Pride, and ends with the destruction of Troy:

I saw Troy gaping from its ashes there,  
O Ilium, how you were fallen low,  
depicted on the sculptured road of stone. (PUR XII, 61-63)

This catalogue consists of three groups of four tercets, of which Troy forms the subject of the last, as the most devastating example of pride, *superbia*. The first series of four tercets begins with *Vedea*, the second

<sup>174</sup>DuBois, *op. cit.*, 1-3.

<sup>175</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>176</sup>Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), 2.

<sup>177</sup>DuBois, *op. cit.*, 57-58.

with O..., the third with *Mostrava*. The last tercet of the series repeats the triad at the beginning of the three lines (61-63):

*Vedeva Troia in cenere e in caverne;  
o Iliou, come te basso e vile  
mostrava il segno che li si discerne!*

It all spells UOM, MAN. Man is pride.<sup>178</sup>

What significance does this *ekphrasis* with its depiction of the proud Troy have for Dante's conception of himself as a "Christian" poet and for his *Divine Comedy* as a "Christian" epic? The answer lies in his relationship to his *maestro*, Virgil, and in turn to Virgil's own *maestro*, Homer.

Homer, of course, was the poet of Troy—his *Iliad*, however, is not concerned with the entire Trojan war, but with the wrath of Achilles primarily. It is thus an epic about the fall of a proud city brought about by the defeat of its *proud* champion, Hector, by the *proud* champion of the Greeks, Achilles. In short, what dominates the *Iliad* is overweening Pride, *hubris*, *superbia*. This Pride brings down its own destruction: of Troy, of Achilles. When Virgil took over from Homer, when he tried to imitate him, he was aware that the heroic kind of Pride was self-defeating for it did not serve any higher purpose. Accordingly, he subordinated the pride of Aeneas, a Trojan himself, to that of the future destiny of Rome. In the *Aeneid*, pride is thus tamed, rechanneled and future-oriented, but it is still there. After all, the future Roman Empire is nothing but Pride, but Pride controlled and guided. Thus we can see the nature of Virgil's *imitatio* of Homer: the concept of Pride is taken over ("imitated") but at the same time it is transformed. Virgil both does and does not follow Homer.

When Dante set out to "imitate" Virgil's kind of epic, he was presented with a dilemma: he could take over ("imitate") Virgil literally or he could transform Virgil through allegory. Dante chose the latter: the seven P's on his forehead symbolize his assumption of the qualities of ancient, pagan champions—chief of which is Pride, to which sin Dante pleaded guilty of. Dante thus becomes a heroic champion, but suitably changed through Virgil's *imitatio* of Homer: Dante's heroic conduct is now subordinated to a much higher purpose than that of Virgil's *terrestrial Rome*—it is to that of *Heavenly Rome*. It is "that Rome where Christ is Roman" ("*...quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano*"; PUR XXXII, 102). Like Achilles and Aeneas before him Dante has to die to his former self—not physically as Achilles does, but spiritually, allegorically as Aeneas does. What Dante does is to render Pride, the Sin of Heroes, into an Everyman's Sin—and War into an Everyman's Struggle. It is true as DuBois comments that "Dante therefore alters radically the relationship between the hero and his community...Dante's hero is no martial defender, no founding father. The reader is drawn into his pilgrim's journey...because, like the hero

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 65.

Dante, the reader is a human being and alone must write his or her own history."<sup>179</sup>This is, however, a very narrow, literal view of Dante as a hero: true, he is not cast in a role of a warrior for his Honor (Achilles) or his (future) race (Aeneas), but he is a warrior for his own Soul. Of course, an allegorical warrior, but still a warrior. Dante's *ekphrasis* of walking over the picture of fallen Troy is thus his triumph over the heroic concept of Pride: no wonder that at the end of the Canto the first P, the heaviest of them all, that of Pride, is removed from Dante's forehead by an angel. Dante literally "goes beyond" Homer: for the fall of Troy is also a powerful indictment of the corruption of the World before the coming of Christ.

Dante's walking over the picture of fallen Troy is also his rejection of *hubris*, that excessive Pride which stems from Self-Love (*propter sese*) of the Homeric hero: it is sufficient to recall what damage this self-centeredness on the part of Achilles did in Homer's *Iliad*. In Dante's view Homer's *Iliad* is thus an epic characterized by self-love: of Achilles above all, but of Hector, Agamemnon, Paris, etc. It is typical of the form and stage of carnal love: and Paris's love for Helen (not to mention Achilles's homosexual love of Patroclus) is abundant testimony to this. Yet, and this is very important, DuBois points out that "there is an intersection between the fictive life of an individual hero and a vision of a larger history."<sup>180</sup> In Homer's case his protagonist in the *Iliad*, Achilles, is typical of a society which values the group at the expense of the individual, and where communal values take precedence over individual yearnings. Thus, whenever Achilles wishes to show his displeasure or disagreement with the views of his elders and of Greeks in general, he refuses to share a communal meal, the most characteristic form of communal gathering in Homeric Greece. His return to communal meals, on the other hand, symbolizes his acceptance of communal values and of group judgment over his wishes.<sup>181</sup>

We have already seen how, according to Nimis, the *Iliad* represents a moment of the breakdown of a social organization which rests on such communally-shared rituals like the communal meal, and an emerging society in which the individual will have his relationship to the former formalized in order to become a constituent part of it.<sup>182</sup>This view is based on Tönnies' famous distinction between a *Gemeinschaft* and a *Gesellschaft*.<sup>183</sup>This stage of the epic is also reflected in its form: it is basically an oral epic put together for the purposes of oral recitation at such communal gatherings, like the meals or poetry contests, and it is only codified a long time after its author's death.

Dante's second *ekphrasis* is found in the *Inferno*, Canto XIV. It is the famous weeping statue of the Old Man of Crete.<sup>184</sup>Dante, led by Virgil,

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>181</sup>Nimis, op. cit., 64-73.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>183</sup>F. Tönnies, *Community and Society* (East Lansing, 1957).

<sup>184</sup>INF XIV, 94-142.

reaches the Seventh Circle of Hell, that of Violence, and is told by Virgil of the Old Man of Crete:

'In the middle of the sea there lies a wasteland,'  
he immediately began, 'that is known as Crete,  
under whose king the world knew innocence.

There is a mountain there that was called Ida;  
then happy in its verdure and its streams,  
now deserted like an old, discarded thing;

Rhea chose it once as a safe cradle  
for her son, and, to conceal his presence better,  
she had her servants scream loud when he cried.

In the mountain's core an ancient man stands tall;  
he has his shoulders turned toward Damietta  
and faces Rome as though it were his mirror.

His head is fashioned of the finest gold;  
pure silver are his arms and hands and chest;  
from there to where his legs spread, he is brass;

the rest of him is all of chosen iron,  
except his right foot which is terra cotta;  
he puts more weight on this foot than the other.

Every part of him, except the gold, is broken  
by a fissure dripping tears down to his feet,  
where they collect to erode the cavern's rock;

from stone to stone they drain down here, becoming  
rivers: the Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon,  
then overflow down through this tight canal

until they fall to wher all falling ends:  
they form Cocytus...' (INF XIV, 94-119)

The Old Man of Crete is an *ekphrasis* of an apocalypse, that of the Second Daniel, namely of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of four successive kingdoms in history. The first three are variously designated as Near Eastern, but the last is always seen as Roman. This is an important clue: in addition to Virgil *telling* Dante of the statue (Dante never sees it for it is not found in Hell), the very prophecy is concerned with that city and its empire whose poet was Virgil. But it is also Dante's rejection of Virgil's view of history. According to DuBois, the second *ekphrasis* represents a classical view of history, for the Old Man is the sculptural mimesis of cyclical progression. Crete is an island in the center of the sea literally in the "middle of the earth" (the *Mediterranean* ), and it was the birthplace of Jupiter who had to be hidden from his father Saturn, for the latter wanted to perpetuate the golden age during which he dominated over all the other gods. Thus, Crete as Saturn's island *par*

*excellence*, represents an attempt to resist change, to perpetuate the golden age.<sup>185</sup>

Saturn devoured all of his children, fearing to be deposed by one of them, but Rhea outwitted him, and Jupiter toppled Saturn from his heavenly throne. Just as Virgil's *Aeneid* is thematically linked to Homer's *Iliad*, so the two mighty cities of antiquity are related in the statue, for the statue stands for the decline of the ancient world. It is found within the mountain regarded mistakenly by the Trojans as their birthplace. It has its back turned to Egypt, a symbol of the old decadent Oriental world, and faces Rome, the center of the empire, and the future of the Mediterranean world. But the statue itself is static, caught between the two worlds, a symbol of recurrence, of the repetition of time, of inevitable decline. Du Bois comments that Dante compared the statue to the diviners who are punished in Hell by having their heads turned backward and to gaze backward through eternity, for like them the statue is fixed in its cyclical notions of history.<sup>186</sup>

Dante's second *ekphrasis* is thus a powerful indictment of that cyclical notion of history, which presupposes Virgil's belief in the return of the golden age (in the age of Augustus), but which also doomed the *pagan* Roman Empire (though not the Roman Empire as such!).<sup>187</sup> Dante's rejection of the cyclical notion of history is thus a critique of the second form and stage of the epic, that of the literary and classical epic which emerged after the communal bonds that held individuals together had been broken, but the individual had not thereby been emancipated or liberated: the bonds of communality had been replaced by that of the universal State, the first of which (after a brief appearance under Alexander) was the Roman Empire. No wonder that Virgil's protagonist, Aeneas, is alienated and confused, for his nature, i.e. his Trojan origins, prompts him to act according to the Homeric principle of *hubris*, while his calling, his destiny as the founder of Rome, compels him to behave in a purposeful way. It is thus clear that Aeneas is caught between the *hubris* of Homer's hero, and the *probitas* of the Augustan age. Aeneas's kind of love is not for itself (*propter sese*) for, digressions aside, it is channeled toward the love of the other: Rome. It is thus selfless love (*propter ipsum*). But it is still a love of the created thing, not of its Creator, in Dante's eyes.

This critique of Virgil's *Aeneid* is fully mirrored in Dante's *ekphrasis* of the Old Man of Crete. It symbolizes decline by its attempt to recapture the Golden Age: "The image is a gloomy, bitter one, of decline, tears, hopeless circularity, and degeneracy." There is no possibility of returning to the Golden Age of the Past by going back to the Past—the circularity is hopeless. The cyclical notion of history is thus a necessary outcome of those who had no true notion of history oriented toward a goal. The Old Man of Crete antedates Christ's birth, and symbolizes its hopelessness, its fixity, and its recurrent nature. It stands for two kinds

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<sup>185</sup>DuBois, *op. cit.*, 55.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>187</sup>Charles T. Davis, "Dante's Vision of History" in *Dante Studies* 93 (1975), 143-162.

of knowledge Antiquity possessed (according to Dante): the Old Testament, and the myth of the series of ages, represented by metals (Gold, Silver, sometimes Bronze, and Iron ages) sung by the great poets like Virgil and Ovid.<sup>188</sup>

As part of the first *ekphrasis*, that of the Terrace of Pride, there are images of Humility. The first is that of Annunciation. It is this first image of Humility which provides the supreme example of the highest stage and form of Love: the Love of God for His Own sake and not for that of his creations, whether selfish (*propter sese*) or selfless (*propter ipsum*). Mary's love is *super omnia*:

The angel who came down to announce on earth  
the peace longed for by weeping centuries,  
which broke the ancient ban and opened Heaven,

appeared before our eyes...

One would have sworn that he was saying 'Ave!'  
for she who turned the key, opening for us  
the Highest Love, was also figured there... (PUR X, 34-37, 40-42)

Note Dante's reference to the statue of the Old Man of Crete which is perpetually shedding tears, i.e. weeping, representing the "weeping centuries", contrasted with Mary's key to the Highest Love. The key word above is AVE: it is EVA (Eve) spelled backward. It announces the incarnation of God, and thus the wiping off of the original sin committed by Eve. It is Mary, however, who, though speechless, dominates the scene: "All is focussed on the opening of the *alto amor*" (= high love, i.e. Love *super omnia*). Like Gabriel, Mary is not named; she takes her identity from the words she speaks, which all who know the story recognize. This high love is paradoxically the perfect exemplum of humility; Mary is god's servant."<sup>189</sup> Paradoxically, DuBois makes a rare mistake in interpretation: it is not Mary who speaks the words "which all who know the story recognize"; it is the angel who addresses her thus: "AVE. GRATIA PLENA. DOMINUS TECUM." (Hail, Full of Grace, God is with you.) Mary's humility is brought out in a double manner: she is not named, and she is not the one who speaks but is instead spoken unto.

The two *ekphrases* in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, the Old Man of Crete, and the Terraces of Pride and Humility thus represent three different stages in the history of mankind: Biblical history, classical history, and Christian history. For Dante there are three "histories", three different kinds of human knowledge about the past: the Old Testament, the pagan poets, and the New Testament. By reconciling the two pre-Christian sources, the Old Testament and pagan tradition, Dante gives to the Greek and Roman worlds a God-given task. Thus

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<sup>188</sup>DuBois, op. cit., 57.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 59.

Dante's tripartite vision of history is a continuous testimony to the presence of God in history, so that, according to Dante, all of human history is God-given. This is especially true of the Roman Empire: for Dante the Roman Empire was a God's instrument used to punish mankind for its wrongs, but at the same time a force of order. For it was Augustus who established the peaceful conditions for Christ's birth, and thus his foundation of the Roman Empire was God-ordained. It is Virgil's view of the Roman Empire in the *Aeneid* which was normative for Dante.<sup>190</sup>

In his *Convivio* Dante argued that universal, temporal monarchy, symbolized by the Roman Empire, is the only proper form of government for the entire world. "The roots of imperial majesty," Dante says, "lie in the need of the 'umana civiltade' which is ordered to one end: 'happy life'."<sup>191</sup> This *umana civiltade* his translation of Aristotle's *poletéia*, is threatened by cupidity, *cupiditas* the inability of men to remain content with their own as ordained by God. This disease infects all men: "To prove the first point we must note that cupidity is the chief opponent of justice."<sup>192</sup> Such a pessimistic view of human nature was derived by Dante from Augustine. Augustine went so far as to deny the possibility of real justice in human affairs. For Augustine, the State was just the bigger robber band.<sup>193</sup> But unlike Augustine Dante also had an optimistic view of the future within history.<sup>194</sup> Augustine denied the eschatological, millenarian, apocalyptic vision of the future in a literal sense, and insisted that it was all an allegory of the existing pattern of salvation. Dante firmly believed in a providential purpose in history.

Dante's prophetic view of history was first broached in his unfinished *Convivio*. It is in Book IV that Dante stated his belief in the providential role of the "Roman people". Affirming that the root of the Emperor's power stems from the need on the part of human civilization to fulfil its purpose—the *vita felice*, Dante cites Aristotle on the necessity for human society to have an overall end. Next he relates this human necessity to God's providential role in history. Monarchy is thus seen as an instrument for achieving this end, and only a universal monarch, who is free of cupidity, can ensure that all men can live happily in peace. But Dante goes even further: he relates indissolubly the rise of the Roman Empire and the coming of Jesus Christ in this world:

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>191</sup>Lorenzo Minio-Paluello, "Dante's Reading of Aristotle" in *The World of Dante: Essays on Dante and his Times*, ed. by C. Grayson (Oxford, 1980), 74 quoting Dante's *Convivio*, IV, 4.

<sup>192</sup>Marjorie Reeves, "Dante and the Prophetic View of History" in Grayson, ed., *The World of Dante*, 44 quoting Dante's *De Monarchia* I, xi, 11: "Ad evidentiam primi notandum quod iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas."

<sup>193</sup>St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, IV, 4: P. Brown, "Saint Augustine" in B. Smalley, ed., *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1965), 1-18.

<sup>194</sup>B. Nardi, "Dante Profeta" in *Dante e la cultura medioevale* (Bari, 1942), 263-4, 269-72.



Dante reads the providential pattern even more deeply by drawing a parallel or concord between the birth of David, the root from which Jesus sprang, and the birth of Rome in the advent of Aeneas in Italy, events which he makes contemporary. The divine election of the Roman *imperium* is manifest in the simultaneous advent of the progenitor of the Son of God and of the founder of the holy city, a political actualization to accompany the divine actualization. From this past manifestation Dante looks to the future.<sup>195</sup>

As Nimis points out,

Vergil offered a content-form that Dante could use as an expression-form for the 'Kingdom of God': the ideal form of government represented in the *Aeneid* as the empire under Augustus. Vergil's words about paradise in the first canto are a paradigm of this portrayal by means of imperial imagery:

'...because that Emperor dwelling on high  
will not lead any to His city,  
since I in life rebelled against His law.

Everywhere He reigns, and there he rules;  
there is His city, there is His high throne.  
Oh, happy the one He makes His citizen! (INF I, 124-129)

In *De Monarchia* Dante suggests there is a homology between kingdoms of God and man, and the Roman Empire is there singled out as the clearest manifestation of the monarchical ideal.<sup>196</sup>

It is in the beginning of Book VII that Virgil states most clearly the providential destiny of Rome. To Venus's question to Jupiter, "What end do you give, great king, to his labours?", meaning to Aeneas's role in history, Jupiter answers: "*Imperium sine fine dedi*" (I have given them empire without end.) Jupiter refers to "them", not to "him": he is referring to Aeneas's offspring, the Romans. As Gransden points out, the empire of his descendants "had not ended when Virgil wrote the poem, a thousand years after the events supposedly narrated." And a thousand years after that, Beatrice said to Dante, "You shall be with me, without end (*senza fine*)", a citizen of that Rome of which Christ is a Roman."<sup>197</sup>

The third *ekphrasis* in *The Divine Comedy* is the figure of the Eagle in Cantos XVIII and XIX of the *Paradiso*. It represents the allegory of monarchy. The figure of the Eagle made out of the final M in DILIGITE IUSTITIAM QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM is thus the *ekphrasis* of the final stage of history, that of universal Christian, Roman Monarchy, according to Dante's *De Monarchia*. In Canto XX it is revealed that the eye of the Eagle is made up of five stars: Trajan, Hezekiah, Constantine, William II of Sicily, and Rhipheus. Of the five Dante placed Emperor Constantine the Great topmost among these great rulers of the world

<sup>195</sup>Reeves, "Dante and the Prophetic View of History", 48-49.

<sup>196</sup>Nimis, *op. cit.*, 153.

<sup>197</sup>PUR XXXII, 102.

for having brought about the union of the Roman *imperium* with Christianity.

Dante's tripartite vision of history is also expressed in each of his three cantiche separately: in the *Inferno*, the endlessly repeated torments and sufferings of the souls suggest the cyclical view of history; in the *Purgatorio* the upward spiralling of the cleansing process reminds one of the linear view of history; and in the *Paradiso* the vision of M, of the Rose, and of the Three Circles of God, represent meta-history as simultaneity: "Dante's poem affirms this divine meta-history, and shares his view of it in *Paradiso*. History appears cyclical, or linear, or horizontal, from the point of view of mortals... Vertical reading as well as horizontal, all words, all signs, make up the immense structure of language which Dante uses to articulate a vision of the Supreme Good, and to lead each reader, *as an epic hero*, to Paradise."<sup>198</sup> (my emphasis)

Bakhtin puts it best when he argues that

...with a consistency and force of genius, Dante realizes this stretching-out of the world—a historical world, in essence—along a vertical axis. He structures a picture of the world remarkable for its architectonics—a world that has its life and movement tensely strung along a vertical axis: nine circles of Hell beneath the earth, seven circles of Purgatory above them and above that ten circles of Paradise. The temporal logic of this vertical world consists in the sheer simultaneity of all that occurs (or "the coexistence of everything in eternity"). Everything that on earth is divided by time, here, in this verticality, coalesces into eternity, into pure simultaneous existence. Such divisions as time introduces—"earlier" and "later"—have no substance here; they must be ignored in order to understand this vertical world; everything must be perceived as being within *a single time*, that is, in the synchrony of a single moment; one must see this entire world as simultaneous. Only under conditions of pure simultaneously—, or what amounts to the same thing, in an environment outside time altogether—can there be revealed the true meaning of "that which was, and which is and which shall be": and this is so because the force (time) that had divided these three is deprived of its authentic reality and its power to shape thinking. To "synchronize diachrony",<sup>4</sup> to replace all temporal and historical divisions and linkages with purely interpretative, extratemporal and hierarchized ones—such was Dante's form-generating impulse, which is defined by an image of the world according to pure verticality.<sup>199</sup>

Bakhtin goes on to argue that men and women who populate Dante's vertical world are very historical, and they desire very strongly to escape this vertical immobility, and to enter the historical world in order to shape it. But Dante forces them to stay on an eternal and immobile extratemporal vertical axis. Only in such powerful temporal-historical episodes as that of Francesca and Paolo does the reader get to see how powerful this urge to escape is. As Bakhtin concludes,

This is the source of the extraordinary tension that pervades all of Dante's world. It is the result of a struggle between living historical time and the extratemporal other-worldly ideal. The vertical, as it were, compresses within itself the horizontal, which powerfully thrusts itself forward. There is a contradiction, an

<sup>198</sup>DuBois, op. cit., 70.

<sup>199</sup>Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination by M.M. Bakhtin: Four Essays* (trans. by Caryl Emerson and Mihcael Holquist; Austin, 1981), 156-157.

antagonism, between the form-generating principle of the whole and the historical and temporal form of its separate parts. The form of the whole wins out.<sup>200</sup>

Bakhtin advances the conventional view that Dante straddles the boundary line *between* the two epoches of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and that the tension comes from his work being the product of an age of transition. Morson and Emerson summarize Bakhtin's findings thus:

The genre of the encyclopedic dream-vision exhibits a still more interesting conceptualization of time and space. The most important works Bakhtin has in mind are the *Roman de la Rose*, *Piers Plowman*, and, especially, *The Divine Comedy*. Characteristic of these works is a feeling for the social contradictions at the end of a given epoch, a sense that impels the form toward a historical sense; and yet, at the same time, these works display an even more powerful impulse *to overcome time entirely*.<sup>201</sup>

The function to overcome time is an epic function par excellence. In order to do so, however, it has to avail itself of the art of prophecy. In order to overcome time *entirely* it has to incorporate apocalyptic prophecy. Dante's age (1265-1321) was precisely the age during which the apocalyptic prophecies, derived from the writings of the Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore (1145-1202), finally achieved widespread popularity in medieval Christendom. As Marjorie Reeves has argued,

where these older conqueror prophecies "(i.e. of the Last Roman Emperor)" came under the influence of Joachimist thought they acquired something of this element of spiritual *renovation* in a new age to com... In the pseudo-Joachimist literature of the thirteenth century a transformation took place. A political Joachimism was developing in Dante's lifetime. The programme that emerges envisages the overcoming of the great Antichrist by a holy alliance of emperor and pope and then a period of bliss before history is wound up at the Last Judgment. Under its divinely appointed leaders human society is to attain, not perfection, but at least its earthly beauty.<sup>202</sup>

The key question is: was Dante influenced by the writings of Joachim and his followers? This has been a very debated issue. As Reeves puts it frankly, "there are arguments for and against the suggestion that Dante took inspiration from the Calabrian abbot and his disciples."<sup>203</sup>

Dante included Joachim of Fiore in the fourth sphere of the Heavens, that of the Sun, devoted to theologians. Joachim is found in the outer circle of souls and given the twelfth place. He is mentioned thus in Canto XII of the *Paradiso*:

...Shines the Calabrian Abbot Joachim  
Who had received the gift of prophecy.

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<sup>200</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>201</sup>Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaic* (Stanford, 1990), 400.

<sup>202</sup>Reeves, op. cit., 53.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., 53.

"Who had received the gift of prophecy" (*di spirito profetico dotato*), as Reeves make clear, is the direct quotation from the Antiphon to Vespers by which the followers of Joachim of Fiore were allowed to celebrate their founder. "Thus Dante," according to Reeves, "undoubtedly believed Joachim to have been a true prophet."<sup>204</sup>

What kind of a prophet was Joachim of Fiore?

Joachim would never have called himself a prophet in the sense of one who foretells the future according to revelations given directly and instantly to him. His whole doctrine of spiritual intelligence...with which he believed he had been endowed was indeed a gift from on high, but it was poured out only on those who wrestled and agonized over the hard, external realities of the Letter. The two Testaments are the indispensable framework of spiritual understanding...: only to those who have disciplined themselves by long study, meditation, and prayer upon the Letter of Scriptures will the Book be opened, the secrets revealed, and full illumination given.<sup>205</sup>

This spiritual intelligence or *Spiritualis Intellectus* proceeds from both the Old and the New Testament in the same way that God the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Applying the concordance between the Old and the New Testaments, and the concept of Trinity to his vision of history, Joachim divided all history into two and three periods. In his *Liber figurarum*, Joachim combined the double with the triple divisions. Thus all of history was encompassed by TWO Testaments, Old and New (*Vetus et Novum Testamentum*), but it simultaneously consists of THREE states (*status*), i.e. the Age of God the Father (PATER IE), of God the Son (FILIIUS EU), and of God the Holy Spirit (SPIRITUS SANCTUS UE). Yet, it should be pointed out that Joachim stressed the unitary as well as the trinitarian structure of history which is a reflection of the One and of the Trinity at the same time: "The Father is a principle, the Son is a principle, the Holy Spirit is a principle—not three principles, but one principle. But because the faithful acknowledge that God is three Persons, he has willed to be three sorts of principles at three proper times of which the first belongs especially to the Father, the second to the Son, the third to the Holy Spirit"<sup>206</sup>

Joachim started by determining the duration of world history to be over 153 generations. The generations of the New Testament are given as thirty years in length, but this is not the case with the Old Testament generations, and will not apply to the generations of the third *status*. By counting the number of generations in each *status* he found that both the first *status* and the second, which overlapped, contained three groups of twenty-one generations each, so that we have the key

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>205</sup>Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford, 1969), 16.

<sup>206</sup>Delno C. West & Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History* (Bloomington, 1983), 53-54.

numbers of 21, 42 and 63. On the basis of parallelism between the Age of God the Father and that of God the Son, Joachim concluded that the Age of God the Holy Spirit would similarly consist of the same pattern.

Starting from St. Augustine's tripartite division of all history, ie. into the three stages of Before the Law (Adam to Moses), Under the Law (Moses to Christ), and under the Gospel (Christ to the Last Judgment), Joachim developed his own comprehensive theory of history which differed in one important aspect radically from that of St. Augustine: whereas the latter had argued that Christ had inaugurated the last dispensation, Joachim believed that the last stage had not yet arrived. As he explained it in his *Expositio in Apocalypsim*:

The first of the three epochs spoken of existed during the age of the law. Then the Lord's people...were under the elements of this world. They were unable to attain the liberty of spirit...The second epoch was initiated under the Gospel. It remains to the present with some liberty considered from the perspective of the past but not with the freedom to be characterized in the future...The third epoch, therefore, will be ushered in toward the close of the present age, no longer under the screen of the letter but in the spirit of complete freedom. The first epoch, under the law of circumcision, was begun with Adam. The second, flowering under the Gospel, was instituted by Uzziah. The third, based on our calculation of the generations, was heralded by St. Benedict, its consummation of unsurpassed splendor is to be seen near the end... At that time, the Holy Spirit will appear to cry in a loud voice: "The Father and the Son have worked up to this time, and now I work."<sup>207</sup>

Searching for further clues in his *Expositio in Apocalypsim* Joachim came up with the mystery of the number 7: it was a symbol of the Divinity of the Godhead Which is represented by the cross with four points and this was proclaimed by the four Gospels. The Number 4 stands for the temporal, and the Number 3 for the spiritual. Four was the symbol of material things, as the earth was created on the fourth day, matter consisted of four elements, there were four seasons, and four cardinal points. The Number 3 stands, of course, for the Trinity. The Number 7 is thus the union of temporal and spiritual numbers. In the Apocalypse, Chapter 5-7, there is a book sealed with the seven seals.

Joachim used the mystical number 7 to subdivide each of the TWO Testaments, Old and New, into 7 periods. For the Old Testament they are: 1) from Abraham or Jacob to Moses and Joshua; 2) from Joshua to David; 3) from David to Elias (Elijah) and Elisha; 4) from Elisha to Isaiah and Hezekiah; 5) from Hezekiah to Judah's Captivity; 6) from the return of the Jews from Captivity to Malachi's death; 7) from Malachi to John the Baptist and Christ. For the New Testament they are: 1) from Christ to the death of St. John; 2) from the death of St. John to Constantine; 3) from Constantine to Justinian; 4) from Justinian to Charlemagne; 5) from Charlemagne to the present (c. A.D. 1200); 6) the new period about to begin; and 7) the end of the second half of all history, the conversion of the world, the Sabbath.

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<sup>207</sup> Joachim of Fiore, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice, 1527; reprint Frankfurt 1964), 5v, quoted by Delno C. West & Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, op. cit., 17-18.

Having presented in a very brief compass Joachim's theory of history, let us see how it is reflected in Dante's *Paradiso*. First of all, it should be pointed out that properly speaking individual blessed souls are found only in the first 7 constellations of Heaven: the eighth, that of the Fixed Stars, is given to the Church Triumphant, and the ninth, that of the Primum Mobile, is occupied by the nine orders of Angels. Needless to say, neither of the two has (or has had) any *temporal* aspect at all (the Church Militant is the former's equivalent in its *temporal* aspect; the latter belong to the Realm of Eternity). But the 7 constellations are occupied by those who have had a *temporal* dimension, i.e. who had lived, but now occupy a spiritual realm. The central place within these 7 constellations is given to theologians, in the Fourth Constellation. Note that the Fourth Constellation represents those who had tried to divine (appropriately speaking) the essence of Godhead represented by the mystic number 4. It is within this Fourth Constellation that the outer circle of souls contains Joachim of Fiore.

Thus mystical number 7 and 4 come together in the crucial Constellation of the Sun symbolizing not only the Theologians who inhabit it in two circles (one inner, one outer) of souls, but the object of their contemplation, and the subject of their scholarship: the Godhead. As Musa points out,

Dante describes the time of year (note the temporal dimension) 'that he made his ascent to Paradise in terms of four circles and three crosses as a vernal equinox...The four and three represent another reminder of the seven virtues (four cardinal and three theological) that were shining at the beginning of the ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory... Circles and crosses...are shapes that will be developed in the course of the journey through the Paradise. The action in the sphere of the sun...(Cantos X-XIII) is built on the figure of the circle...The circle...is the dominating figure in the Paradise...At the end of the poem three circles become contained in one...' <sup>208</sup>

In Canto XIV the mystical numbers 1, 2 and 3 are presented together for they are intimately related: 1 symbolizes the One, the Unity of God; 2 symbolizes the two nature of God, Human and Divine;  $1 + 2 = 3$  symbolizing the Trinity of God:

That One and Two and Three which never ends,  
and ever reigns in Three and Two and One,  
uncircumscribed and circumscribing all... (PAR XIV, 28-30)

In the last Canto of the *Paradiso* Dante used the image of three concentric circles to convey the Trinity:

Within Its depthless clarity of substance  
I saw the Great Light shine into three circles  
in three clear colors bound in one same space;

the first seemed to reflect the next like rainbow  
on rainbow, and the third was like a flame  
equally breathed forth by the other two. (XXXIII, 115-120)

<sup>208</sup>PAR xi (Musa's introduction).

For Joachim of Fiore colors are mystical symbols as well: thus the diagram illustrating Joachim's divisions of history from his *Liber figurarum* contains definite colors in the Bodleian MS: "The circle (which symbolizes eternity) of the Father is drawn in green, which indicates hope... The circle of the Son is blue, which signifies monarchy and heaven or, as in this case, the Christ as king of the universe. The circle of the Holy Spirit is displayed in red to signify the passion of Christ, love..."<sup>209</sup> Now, it seems to me that Dante might well have thought of green and blue as colors most appropriate to the rainbow, but, on the other hand, *he might have had in mind the seven natural colors of the rainbow*. Be that as it may, the third color, that of the flame, is of course red, which corresponds to the red of the circle of the Holy Spirit in Joachim's diagram.

The Fourth constellation which includes the Theologians is that of the Sun. In that realm of mystery of number 4, Joachim of Fiore is to be found. Joachim of Fiore is found in the outer ring, and Musa comments that "theologically, the arrangement of the circles is also significant. The inner one, which is the source of the outer one, is made up largely of Dominicans, characterized principally by their wisdom. The outer circle, composed at least partially of Franciscans, known for their love acts as their reflection."<sup>210</sup> In his "The Dance of the Stars: *Paradiso X*" John Freccero argued that the number of souls in each circle, twelve, was based on the number of the signs in the Zodiac. He also pointed out the Platonic origins of the imagery. The two movements of the Trinity, according to Freccero, "(i.e. the generation of the word and the spiration of love) represent respectively an act of intelligence and an act of will. However else one divides the cast of characters in the Heaven of the Sun, there seems general agreement that the first circle represents intellectuals who shone with "cherubic splendor" and the second represents lovers who burned with "seraphic ardor", exemplifying respectively intelligence and will."<sup>211</sup> So Joachim of Fiore is identified with Love and Will—and here we have to recollect that Love is the generation of the Holy Spirit, the *Third* Person of the Trinity, and Will represents the third stage of the conversion, that of Paradise, as found in Augustine's *Confessions*.

The most important question we have to ask ourselves at this point is why did Dante give such a prominent place in the inner circle to Joachim of Fiore? I think the answer is fairly obvious: because of Joachim of Fiore's use of prophecy. This is, after all, how Dante identifies him: "*di spirito profetico dotato*" (who had received the gift of prophecy). Where did Joachim of Fiore find the sources of his prophecy? In the book of Revelation or the Apocalypse, erroneously

<sup>209</sup>West & Zimdars-Swartz, op. cit., 21.

<sup>210</sup>PAR 148 (Musa's comment on PAR XII, 1-21).

<sup>211</sup>John Freccero, "The Dance of the Stars: *Paradiso X*", first published in *Dante Studies* 86 (1968), 85-111 and reprinted in John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, edited by R. Jacoff (Harvard, 1986), 247.

attributed to St. John. According to Joachim of Fiore, the Apocalypse contained the yardstick by which to judge all history. It also must be seen as a whole. As West and Zimdars-Swartz put it, "the Apocalypse is a work of grandeur...It is genius at work, and genius inspires genius. In the final analysis, the Apocalypse contains the fate of humanity...The Apocalypse is the only book in the New Testament primarily dedicated to the meaning of history and Joachim understood that. With Joachim seeing the Apocalypse as the fate of mankind, we enter into the two fold realm of history: the remembered past and the expected future."<sup>212</sup>

Joachim of Fiore rejected the Tichonian-Augustinian view that the period inaugurated with Christ would last unchanged until his second coming. It should be pointed out that Tichonius, who died circa 400 A.D., wrote a treatise on the Apocalypse which has not been preserved. But from commentaries on this work written by others, it is clear that Tichonius believed that the Apocalypse did not talk of future but of present events, i.e. of the diabolical attack on the Church. Thus Tichonius saw Christ and Satan as fighting for the mastery of the earth. The New Jerusalem was not something coming in the future, it was found in the present Church, and will last until the end of time. St. Augustine took over and popularized Tichonius's views. It was St. Augustine which was mainly responsible for driving the millenarian expectations of the early Christians out of the field.<sup>213</sup> In the last pages of Augustine's *City of God (De civitate Dei)* a comprehensive periodization of history is offered made up of eight ages (*aetas*) analogous to the number of days in a week (7+1, the last being the millennium). The problem with Augustine's "Great Week" theory was that it was literally running out by the year 1,000 A.D., i.e. at the beginning of the second millennium after Christ's birth. For Augustine took the *beginning* of the sixth age to be marked by Christ's birth, though he claimed that history was not yet 6,000 years old. This was an obvious inconsistency, devised to get around apocalypticism which the great Father abhorred. Others drew the appropriate conclusion from the Augustinian scheme: if the world was not yet 6,000 years old when Augustinian lived, that meant that Augustine got his ages wrong—there should be only seven not eight days, so that the present age was really the fifth. This was the solution, adopted with some modifications, advanced by Joachim of Fiore.

In his *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti*, (*The Book of Concordances of the Old and New Testaments*) Joachim restructured the "Great Week" theory by splitting history into *two* periods: one before and one after the birth of Christ, both of which are divided into 7 ages (*tempus*). The first half of all history is called after the Old, the second after the New Testament. It is quite clear that within this scheme of double sevens he was still following Augustine, though with important modifications. But this double set of sevens is superimposed

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<sup>212</sup>West & Zimdars-Swartz, op. cit., xii-xiii.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 11.



upon a much more elaborate numerological system by using three basic terms for historical reference:

In the first instance he divided history into three *status* (the epochs), which connect the members of the Holy Trinity. He used this term 'status' only when speaking of the three broad, basic divisions. The second basic term is *tempus*, which he used to subdivide the three *status*. The third usage is *etas*, which he used to divide salvation history into seven time periods, that is, a sevenfold division of time, which cuts across and corresponds to the three *status*... Joachim defines the parallel concordances of the Old Testament and the New Testament in seven stages, and then projects the meanings of these stages on the seven seals of the Apocalypse. In this way, Joachim developed the basic division of a system of double sevens, thus bringing together *status*, *tempus*, and *etas* into a single parallel. Each epoch had its own sequence of 7, while the overall history of mankind is related to the seven-day week of history.<sup>214</sup>

The overlapping of two, three and seven divisions of history allowed Joachim to accomplish something that is crucial to his theory of history: what Norman Cohn has called incubation periods.<sup>215</sup> In effect, each *status* is the incubation period for the next, but because of the double procession of the Holy Spirit (from the Father and the Son), the third *status* had its incubations in both the first (of the Father) and the second (of the Son).<sup>216</sup> Thus one *status* was conceived "in the womb of another" or another two, in the case of the third. Thus it is appropriate to claim that Joachim of Fiore's theory of history was both linear, in a sense that one *status* followed another, and cyclical, in a sense that there is an element of recurrence. It was by using this pattern of recurrence that Joachim could argue that the length of each *status* would be the same, for it was based on a recurrence of the similar occurrences, e.g. Elisha, with whom the third *status* originated (i.e. was conceived, not ushered), lived twenty-three generations from Adam, while Isaiah, who marked the beginning of the second *status* can also be said to have lived twenty-three generations after Adam. Thus there were forty-two generations from Abraham to Christ, and the same number from Christ to the beginning of the third *status*. It is thus clear that the whole Joachimite theory of history is based on the idea of recurrence, i.e. cyclicity.<sup>217</sup>

A particularly fine study of Dante's final vision of God in his *Paradiso* has been made by John Freccero.<sup>218</sup> Dante's concluding verses are:

*A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;  
ma già volgeva il mio disio e l' velle,*

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 16, 21.

<sup>215</sup>Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London, 1957), 101.

<sup>216</sup>See Joachim of Fiore, *Liber Concordie II*, 1 (Venice, 1519, reprint, Frankfurt, 1964), p. 8, col. 4; p. 9, cols. 1,4; p. 10, vcol. 1.

<sup>217</sup>Joachim of Fiore, *Liber Concordie II*, 1 (p. 11, col. 3). G.W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought from Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkeley, 1979), 219, concludes: "And so Joachim proceeded, demonstrating that significant events and characteristics in one great stage had counterparts in another, recurrences which impressed a divine stamp on salvation history."

<sup>218</sup>J. Freccero, "The Final Image: *Paradiso XXXIII*, 144" in J. Freccero, *Dante*, 245-257.

*si some rota ch'ilgualmente è mossa,  
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.*

At this point power failed high fantasy  
but, like a wheel in perfect balance turning,  
I felt my will and my desire impelled

by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

The crucial image is that of “like a wheel in perfect balance turning”. *This last image has been consistently misunderstood by literary critics,* according to Freccero:

The last image is not of a circle, but of a wheel...Yet, in spite of the apparent simplicity of the comparison, or perhaps because of it, it does not seem to have evoked any coherent image in the minds of its numerous commentators. Benedetto Croce...called into question the poetic worth of the last canto precisely on the grounds that Dante had surrendered poetic vision to abstract thought; and, while many have quarreled with the verdict, few have debated the evidence. No one, so far as I know, has bothered to consider the difference between the circle, a geometric abstraction, and the concrete object that embodies it.<sup>219</sup>

Freccero called attention to Ezekiel’s vision of the wheels, and suggested that Dante derived his understanding of Ezekiel’s wheels (on his fiery chariot ascending to Heaven) from the commentary by Pseudo-Dionysius which reads:

As for the winged wheels which go ahead with neither twist nor swerve, these have to do with the power to keep right on along the straight road, directly and without wandering off, and all this because the wheel of their intelligence is guided in a way which has nothing in it of this world...Those Godlike wheels of fire ‘revolve’ about themselves in their ceaseless movement around the Good...<sup>220</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysius thus explains Ezekiel’s vision in terms of a *double motion* of the wheels: in a straight line ahead (unilinear), and circling around themselves (circular). Freccero is absolutely correct when he claims that “the passage from the Areopagite describes not only circulation, but forward motion as well: a circle turns endlessly in the abstract and describes a single simple motion, and is for that very reason the traditional symbol of perfection or eternity. But when a wheel turns, it goes somewhere.”<sup>221</sup>

Joachim’s allegorical exegesis of Ezekiel’s vision is the crux of his *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamentis* already mentioned. It consists of five books. “Books I-IV of the *Liber Concordie* are Joachim’s study of

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 247, citing Benedetto Croce, “L’ultimo canto della Commedia” in *Poesia antica e moderna* (Bari, 1943), translated in B. Croce, *Philosophy, Poetry, History: An Anthology of Essays* (Oxford, 1966), 825-833.

<sup>220</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius, *De caelesti hierarchia* XV, 9 as in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York, 1987), 190.

<sup>221</sup>Freccero, op. cit., 249.

biblical and ecclesiastical history as well as the various ways history can be divided."<sup>222</sup> Specifically, each of the four books of the *Liber Concordie* "marking a progression from simple to more difficult material, is symbolized by one of the four faces of the living creatures in Ezekiel's wheel."<sup>223</sup> Book V is certainly, together with his unfinished *Tractatus super Quattor Evangelia (Treatise on the Four Gospels)*, Joachim's most masterful allegorical commentary:

The abbot expresses the inter-relationship of his allegorical commentaries on the historical books of the Bible in terms of Ezekiel's vision of the wheel within a wheel... According to Joachim...the outer wheel is the general history of the Israelite people from Adam to Ezra and Nehemiah...The inner wheel is the general history of the Church as it is expressed in the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse contains the key to understanding the future events of the Church, not only in history but also after the end of the world. Through understanding those events, one can also discern the previously hidden meaning of past history. Thus the general history of the Apocalypse corresponds to the general history in the Old Testament.<sup>224</sup>

Ezekiel's vision of the wheel within a wheel is not only a symbol, it is a paradigm: "Joachim states that within each of the two general histories are four special histories. These four spiritual histories are symbolized in the four faces of each living creature *within the wheel in Ezekiel's vision.*"<sup>225</sup>

Ezekiel's vision of the wheel within a wheel is a symbol used by Joachim to pull together the images connected with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The four faces of Ezekiel's inner wheel, i.e. the general history contained in the Apocalypse, has as its four faces Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John. Their symbols, Man, Ox, Lion, and Eagle, represent respectively Christ's Nativity, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. A particular order is associated with each of these four symbols: 1) the Order of Doctors; 2) the Order of Martyrs; 3) the Order of Pastors; and 4) the Order of Contemplatives. To these four Joachim adds the fifth: the fifth order of fire. To this Order of Fire Book V of *Liber Concordie* is fully devoted. The inner wheel is marked in large letters: CARITAS (LOVE). This Love is, of course, identical with Dante's AMOR *che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.* (PAR XXXIII, 145)

There was, however, another powerful influence behind Dante's conception of his masterpiece: St. Augustine. Augustine's *Confessions* are the classic exemplar of the process of conversion. This is reflected in the very structure of the *Confessions* whose structure is tripartite. In Book I through IX of his *Confessions* the Augustine who had received the gift of faith looks down, from the fixed position of truth, upon his life of sin from his day of birth to his day of conversion. In order to highlight the act of conversion itself, Augustine draws a sharp line between his old, unregenerate self which could not see his life except

<sup>222</sup>West & Zimdars-Swartz, op. cit., 46-47.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 49 citing *Liber concordie* 112v-113v; *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice, 1527; reprint, Frankfurt, 1964), 2v-3.

<sup>225</sup>West & Zimdars-Swartz, op. cit., 49 & the figure of the Wheels of Ezekiel on 50.

from a shifting perspective, and his new self which sees life as a part of the eternal design of the universe, existing with all its parts in timeless space and simultaneously. The second part contains books X through XII of Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine goes through a series of meditations on memory, time, and the Creation. In this second part the narrator no longer stands on a fixed point outside his temporal life: there are no longer two Augustines, one trapped in time and the other outside of it. There is no only one Augustine who is again in a position of uncertainty, suspended between his past conversion and his quest for salvation. The third part consists of Book XIII which is a meditation on the Creation, i.e. on the Book of the Genesis. Though in this part too there is only one Augustine, he no longer pursues his quest for complete knowledge, but rather expresses his conviction that faith is wisdom in a form of confession directed to God.<sup>226</sup>

This tripartite structure of Augustine's *Confessions* corresponds to the Soul's progress from Sin through Conversion to God (Salvation). But as Spengemann points out, there is a problem with seeing these three parts as integrally related elements in a single, coherent structure. For though each part represents a stage in the soul's progress from sin and indifference to God, through a desire for salvation, to the realization of getting salvation through faith alone, each part seems to invalidate or call into question, or at least to qualify, the preceding one through its narrative mode and theological ideas. Thus the second part calls into question the authoritative stance taken by the narrator in Books I through IX, for in Part I the latter no longer claims to know in Part II what he professed to know in Part I: the ultimate purpose and meaning of his life. On the other hand, the enquiries of Part II do not lay the groundwork for the assurance in Part III. Thus while *The Confessions* as a whole stand for the soul's search for rest, each of the three parts finds a different resting place or end to its action. Though the end of part I was clearly defined by the narrator, the end of Part II is still to be achieved by the narrator. While in Part II meditation is seen as a means to an end outside itself, in Part III faithful meditation becomes its own end.<sup>227</sup>

The three parts, accordingly, display a different relationship between knowledge and faith: Part One presents full knowledge through the faith attained at the moment of his conversion; in Part Two faith is the instrument toward the truth by which such knowledge is to be attained; Part Three sees the identification of faith with knowledge, and who has faith, has truth.

In Part One, i.e. Books I through IX of the *Confessions*, the structure is that of what became a standard form of autobiography: "The mode is grounded ultimately in the conviction that the retrospective narrator

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<sup>226</sup>William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, 1980), 1-2.

<sup>227</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.

can see his life from a point outside it, that his view is not subject to the limiting conditions of the life he is recounting."<sup>228</sup>

In brief, it is a story of the loss of one's unity: "And gathering myself together from the scattered fragments into which I was broken and dissipated during all that time when, being turned away from you, the *One* lost myself I could not even find myself, much less find you."<sup>229</sup>

It is sufficient to look at the very beginning of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, at the opening stanza of Canto I, which serves as an introduction to the work as a whole, and not just to the *Inferno* to realize that Dante's masterpiece starts out as a gigantic tale of self-loss:

Nel mezzo del cammin di *nostra* vita  
Mi ritrovai in una selva oscura,  
Che la diritta via era smarrita.

Midway along the journey of *our* life  
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,  
for I had wandered off from the straight path. (INF I, 1-3)

As Mark Musa makes clear in his commentary to his above-translation of Dante's *Inferno*: "In the first line of *The Divine Comedy* Dante establishes the central motif of his poem—it is the story of man's pilgrimage to God. That we are meant to think in terms not just of the Pilgrim but of Everyman is indicated by the phrase 'the journey of *our* life' (*our* journey through sin to repentance and redemption)."<sup>230</sup>

The writing of *The Divine Comedy* was prompted by Dante's dissatisfaction with his love lyrics which by the time he was thirty-five ("midway along the journey of our life", i.e. the Biblical three score and ten = 70 years) he regarded as insufficient, indeed as sinful. As Musa summarizes Dante's realization of this failure, expressed in his *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*):

In Chapter XLII, the final chapter of the *Vita Nuova*, the poet expresses his dissatisfaction with his work...Having arrived at this point, he would choose from among his earlier love poems many that exhibit it his younger self at its worst, in order to offer a warning example to other young lovers and, especially, to other love poets. This, of course, would imply on Dante's part, as he is approaching "il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" ("midway along the journey of our life"), a criticism of most of the Italian love poetry for which his century was famous...One might even say that the *Vita nuova* is a cruel book—cruel, that is, in the treatment of the human type represented by the protagonist. In the picture of the lover there is offered a condemnation of the vice of emotional self-indulgence and an exposure of its destructive effects on a man's integrity. The "tender feelings" that move the lover to hope or despair, to rejoice to grieve (and perhaps even to enjoy his grief), spring from his vulnerability and instability and self-love. However...as long as he continues to be at their mercy, he must always fall back into the helplessness of his self-centeredness. The man who would realize his poetic destiny must ruthlessly cut out

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>229</sup> Spengemann, *op. cit.*, 11 quoting Warner's translation, 91.

<sup>230</sup> INF 72 (Musa's commentary to I, 1-3).

of his heart the canker at its center, the canker that the heart instinctively tends to cultivate.<sup>231</sup>

Thus the failure of the *Vita Nuova* led Dante to write his *Divine Comedy*.

The decision to write the *Divine Comedy* was already announced at the end of the *Vita Nuova*: "After this sonnet there appeared to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I should be capable of writing about her in a more worthy fashion."<sup>232</sup> [my emphasis] It is thus clear that Dante's "conversion" took the form of his recantation of his earlier poetry which reflected his earlier self-love, and his decision to realize a new, higher form of love, that of love for somebody else's sake (and not one's own sake).

The conversion abolishes the distinction between the narrator and the former self by fusing the two together, as found in Part Two of Augustine's *Confessions*:

When the narrator stood outside time and the protagonist stood in it, time and eternity were absolutely opposed entities: the one leading to death, the other to eternal life. But now that the narrator finds himself moving through time in his quest for eternity, he interprets time according to the Platonic theory of emanation...<sup>233</sup>

The Platonic theory of emanation is based on the notions of the One which is Pure Light and Love. Dante's second canticle, the *Purgatorio*, is divided into three parts representing misdirected, deficient, and excessive Love. As Dante's sinful self-love led him to write his *Vita Nuova*, only to reject it midway in his life, so his self-less love prompted him to write his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*:

Part Three of Augustine's *Confessions* finds a solution to his problem in the narrator's affirmation of faith. Thus, "he terminates his inquiry and turns to a third mode of confession: an impassioned avowal of his belief that the truth exists even though he cannot know it and that faith in its existence is tantamount to full knowledge of it."<sup>234</sup> This third stage of spiritual autobiography is found in Books XII-XIII of the *Confessions*. This third stage corresponds to Dante's *Paradiso* the third and final canticle. As John Freccero explains in his brilliant article on "The Significance of *Terza Rima*", "I should now like to suggest that this movement also can serve as the spatial representation of narrative logic, particularly autobiography. The paradoxical logic of all such narratives is that beginning and end must logically coincide, in order

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<sup>231</sup> INF 24-26 (Musa's Introduction to Dante's *Inferno*).

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>233</sup> Spengemann, op. cit., 28-29.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

for the author and his *persona* This exigency...takes the form, 'I am, but I was not always so.'" <sup>235</sup>[my Italics]

This is, of course, precisely the motif and motto of the *Confessions* and Freccero's essay is a superb application of Augustine's concept of conversion to the structure of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, both thematic and poetic: "The ending of the *Inferno* is marked by a literal conversion, a turning upside-down of the Pilgrim and his Guide" (for they come out of Hell in the southern hemisphere, where the Mountain of Purgatory is, and thus literally "upside down" or "down under")...The second part of the "journey" (the *Purgatorio*) "also ends in a conversion, with the theological motifs of sanctifying grace...Finally, in the transition between nature and supernature, the whole of the universe is turned to mirror the image of God surrounded by his angels."<sup>236</sup>

The *Paradiso* completes the journey by attaining the Vision of Unity, of One, which dominates its Canto XXXIII, the final canto of *The Divine Comedy*: "The main action of the *Paradise* is concerned with how man's soul, as it contemplates the making of God's universe, rises by stages in order to arrive at an understanding of the One creator of that universe. To see the universe as One is the final goal of the journey, and the movement of the journey is from fragmentation to unity."<sup>237</sup> The final recovery of that unity, in Dante's miraculous Vision of the Godhead, at the same time leads to his instant realization of the power of Love, of that Love *above all* (*super omnia*), the Highest Form of Love reserved for man's selfless love of God) which closes the Book of Dante's Life as the *Vita Nuova* has opened it: for Dante started his *New Life* thus: "In my Book of Memory, in the early part where there is little to be read, there comes a chapter with the rubric: *Incipit vita nova*." And in the next section Dante describes a miraculous Vision of Beatrice, and henceforth, as he puts it, "from that time on, Love governed my soul." Of course, as already pointed out, this was a self-love which "reigned over me with such assurance and lordship...that I could only dedicate myself to fulfilling his every pleasure." That kind of sinful love now gives way once and for all, at the end of the *Paradiso* to "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars." ("*l'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle*"). Dante's Book of Life was closed: his process of conversion completed. This experience forms the subject-matter of a "Christian epic".

The last sentence plunges us into the crux of the problem Dante faced: there were no precedents for a truly "Christian epic" when he set out to write his masterpiece. There was a continuation of the Virgilian epic after the triumph of Christianity, such as Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and *Waltharius* probably by Gaeraldus, but all of these fell considerably short

<sup>235</sup>J. Freccero, "The Significance of *Terza rima*" in J. Freccero, *Dante*, 258-271, first published in Aldo S. Bernardo & Anthony L. Pellegrini, eds., *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1983), 3-17; quotation on 263-264.

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, 265-267.

<sup>237</sup>PAR ix (Musa's Introduction to Dante's *Paradiso*).

of the "expansiveness" of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The first truly Virgilian epic, both in scope and in style, was certainly Walter of Chatillon's *Alexandreis* which must be dated post 1174 and pre 1202.<sup>238</sup> Yet, neither the early Christian "epics", such as they were, nor *The Alexandreis* are *Christian epics* from a formal point of view: though they were written by professing Christians, they did not treat of the heroic deeds (*res gestae*) of the Christians.

The long tradition of Virgil's literary epic in the Middle Ages was thus powerfully reaffirmed by Walter of Chatillon's *Alexandreis* precisely at the beginning of one of the longest and most celebrated encounters between Christianity and Islam: the period of the Christian Crusades (1095-1291).

Though Dante's masterpiece is, by common agreement, an allegory, it is a special kind of allegory. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is also different in structure from the traditional epic. For Dante's great work did not sing of "arms and men" (*Arma virumque cano*, as Virgil put it). Throughout the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance literary critics had considerable difficulty deciding what kind of a poem, in the context of poetics, Dante's work is. As Robert Hollander puts it, "we may all agree...that Dante's poetry is a Christian poetry. What we have been unable to agree on is the nature of the poetic which produced the *Commedia*."<sup>239</sup>

As I shall explain in more detail later, the very earliest commentators on Dante's *Divine Comedy* were very uneasy with his literal claim that he undertook the journey into Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and came back to write it down. As Giorgio Padoan stresses, the earliest critics, "Pietro di Dante, Benvenuto da Imola, and Francesco da Buti all take pains in their *commenti to Paradiso* I, 4-12, to point out that Dante did not actually journey into Paradise. And Pietro's commentary is a precious source of insight into fourteenth-century uneasiness about the *Commedia*...: Pietro (Dante's son) continually informs us that his father *feigns* that he saw such and so; the literal claim made by the poem was too strong even for him."<sup>240</sup> Accordingly, the major tradition of Dante literary criticism emerged shortly after his death which regarded the *Divine Comedy* above all as an allegory.<sup>241</sup>

Treating the *Divine Comedy* as an allegory meant stressing what I have called its ideology: the whole theologico-philosophical structure of the poem which reflected Dante's world view. With the Renaissance "discovery" of Aristotle's *Poetics*, disagreements over the *Divine Comedy* arose over its nature: whether Dante's work was an epic, and thus the first "Christian" epic to rival the ancients. It should be emphasized that Dante's work was the first extensive work of poetry

<sup>238</sup> Walter of Chatillon, *The Alexandreis*, trans. by R. Telfryn Pritchard (Leiden, 1986), 5.

<sup>239</sup> Robert Hollander, "Dante Theologus-Poeta" in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna, 1980), 39.

<sup>240</sup> Giorgio Padoan, "La 'mirabile visione' di Dante e l'Epistola di Cangrande" in *Dante e Roma* (Florence, 1965), 292.

<sup>241</sup> The best study is by R. Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* (Princeton, 1969).



written in a vernacular comparable to Homer's and Virgil's classics. But was it *an epic*? I shall deal with it in the section on allegoresis.

## V. TASSO

Ernst Robert Curtius passed one of his magisterial judgments when he stated that "both Milton and Tasso came to grief over the deceptive phantom of "Christian epic". The Christian cosmos could become poetry in Dante's journey to the otherworld, and after that only in Calderon's sacred plays."<sup>242</sup> This verdict has been disputed by Judith A. Kates:

For Tasso accomplished that feat toward which Renaissance poets continually struggled, the re-creation of classical epic in a form and language congruent with Christian vision. Tasso, in full awareness, grappled with the 'problem' of Christian epic—the need to create a recognizably epic narrative, while transforming such heroic poetry into a vehicle for the exploration of the inner life, the truly significant life for a Christian. *La Gerusalemme liberata*, in my reading, shifts the arena of epic heroism inward, toward the moral and psychological, and yet preserves an allegiance to classical form.<sup>243</sup>

Since either the success or failure of Tasso's effort is crucial for the understanding of Gundulic's *Osman*, we shall try to find out what Tasso actually did to the epic.

Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) has as its *incipit* the opening line "imitating" Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Canto armi pietose e il Capitano / Che il gran sepolcro libero di Cristo..." (I sing of pious arms and the Captain who liberated Christ's tomb...) "Armi", of course, stands for Virgil's "Arma" while "il Capitano" is a substitute for "Virum", i.e. "Arma virumque cano". This "imitation" of the *Aeneid* is only partial as Kates points out:

But Tasso shapes this very invocation, its language resonant with classical echoes, in ottava rima. This immediately complicates our sense of literary tradition and associations from the past. The lines may offer a parallel to Virgil's opening statement of subject, but their poetic shape, the pattern of rhyme and meter, takes the traditional form of chivalric romance, not an Italian version of Latin hexameters. In the context of this invocation's intense classical echoes, the stanza embodies Tasso's response to the modernist who would see ottava rima and its traditional subjects as the only natural vein of narrative poetry for the Italian language. Here in the traditional Italian verse form is an equivalent to genuine epic in the high classical manner. The intimacy of the connection between a statement and its verse form becomes a metaphor for the union of epic and romance in the poem as a whole.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>242</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York, 1963), 244.

<sup>243</sup>Judith A. Kates, *Tasso and Milton: The Problem of Christian Epic* (London and Toronto, 1983), 9.

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid.*, 66-67.

Kates alludes to the literary debate between those who insisted that all modern epics should “imitate” the great classics of Antiquity almost slavishly, i.e. the “ancients” and those who argued that the romances of Boiardo and Aristo, *Orlando Innamorato* and *Orlando furioso*, represented a new “Italian” form of epic, i.e. the “moderns” (or modernists). What we should note here is Tasso’s *ambivalent* attitude to the epic tradition of Antiquity: on the one hand, he wants to set his own epic in such a high classical tradition, but, on the other, he realizes that it is no longer possible to “reproduce”, i.e. “imitate” slavishly the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*, and pretend that such an epic will be believable. To put it bluntly, he cannot expect his readers to take any of the pagan gods, goddesses, Muses, Titans, cyclops, and other mythical figures seriously—and yet an epic must appear serious. He chooses to deal with this problem in his typically eclectic fashion:

As though responding directly to the classical parallels of the opening stanza, he immediately appeals to a muse (just as Virgil does), but explicitly not the muse invoked by Homer or Virgil: “O Musa, tu che di caduchi allori/ Non circondi la fronte in Elicona”(O Muse, you who do not garland your brow with fallen laurels in Helicon) (I,2). The poet, in *propria persona*, deliberately points up the contrast between classical and Christian epic. At the same time he infuses his language with all the power and authority derived from his direct evocation of the Greek and Latin models for his Italian.

Nevertheless, the poet’s voice does create a highly ambivalent relationship between this epic and its classical models. By opening the poem as he does, Tasso immediately sets up positive associations with ancient epic. He achieves grandeur and seriousness of tone, in large measure, through the resonances from Greek and Latin in his language. But he devalues the culture from which that greatness arose...Tasso founds his poem on the paradoxical devaluation of a classical world which nevertheless provides his only real examples of epic.<sup>245</sup>

Such a paradoxical devaluation of a classical world finds its best example in Tasso’s names for his characters: he gives classical names to the forces of Hell presided by Pluto (*Plutone*) i.e. Satan. His Muslim characters are often called classical names: thus the King of Egypt is called “a thundering Jove” in Canto XVII; but his Christian characters are spared (mostly) this comparison with ancient heroes. Tasso also does not introduce any pagan gods or goddesses with the important exception of the figures of Fortune and Mars, taken together to mean Fate: “Sta dubbia in mezzo la Fortuna e Marte” (“It remains doubtful between Fortune and Mars”; XX, 72)<sup>246</sup> Tasso was sensitive to the Counter-Reformation charge of “offering pagan gods” to Christian audiences, and he took pains to defend this exception:

It might seem to someone that I introduce pagan gods. If that is so, let us eliminate these and all other similar expressions. But I continue to believe that these words have been so molded by usage that now they signify and are understood by men to signify only that the outcome of war was doubtful because the valor of the soldiers was equally balanced. I think these expressions should be classified under that figure

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<sup>245</sup>Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 69.

of speech (I don't know what it's called) in which the name of the deity is used instead of the thing he represents.<sup>247</sup>

If Tasso could choose to avoid having a Pantheon of pagan gods and goddesses, he could not avoid dealing with the heroic character of classical heroes. Though he chose for his subject the First Crusade (1096-1099), a clash between the Crusaders and the "Saracens", i.e. the Muslim forces of the Near East, Tasso did not have the luxury of Dante to dismiss heroic, martial behavior as such: he had to deal with it. From the very beginning, Tasso regarded his epic as "the heroic poem (*poema eroico*) and often called it by its Greek name *epopeia*. As Kates points out, Tasso associated his epic with heroic values found in the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*. But in order to successfully imitate the ancient models, he had to define what he meant by the term "the heroic poem".<sup>248</sup>

He did this in the first set of discourses on the epic called *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (*Discourses on the Poetic Art*)<sup>249</sup> probably written in 1561-1562 during Tasso's stay in Padua while he was attending a course of lectures given by Sigonio on Aristotle's *Poetics*.<sup>250</sup> In effect, these discourses are Tasso's first *Poetics*, his second *Poetics* is entitled *Discorsi del poema eroico*, were written at the end of his life. Tasso's first *Poetics* is very Aristotelian: he accepts Aristotle's definition of poetry as "imitation". He also accepts the idea that any epic must include the element of the marvelous, *meraviglia*. In classical epics this element was supplied by the actions of the gods, goddesses, Muses, Titans and other mythological beings. However, "any poem that depends on the classical deities and mythic beings immediately loses its hold on readers to whom that whole mythology is false."<sup>251</sup>

If he cannot use classical mythology for his element of the marvelous, Tasso has only one alternative: to turn to the tradition of the *chanson de geste*, typified by the Italian expansions of the the Roland theme into romances. Such were Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and his father's *Amadigi*.

Straightaway Tasso is faced with a major dilemma: he regards Boiardo's and Ariosto's poems as "romances", not "epics" because they lack the unity of plot, the major requirement for the epic according to Aristotle; and yet, he admires and wants to imitate their successful incorporation of "the marvelous" based on fantasy. It seems as though he cannot reconcile the irreconcilables; but he does—by arguing that Boiardo's and Ariosto's "romances", though they lack the unity of plot, belong to the same genre as the epics. In other words, they are simply poor or failed epics. This will involve him and others in a furious debate over the respective merits of Ariosto's and his own works.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70 quoting T. Tasso, *Le Lettere*, ed. by Guasti (Florence, 1854), I, 119-120.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>249</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*, ed. Luigi Poma (Bari, 1964).

<sup>250</sup> This is the view taken by Poma in his introduction to Tasso's *Discorsi*.

<sup>251</sup> Kates, *op. cit.*, 54.

Tasso thus ended by appropriating “that charm in imaginative inventions that makes the romances so pleasing” for the modern epic. He was deeply conscious of the fact that his contemporaries wanted to be entertained above all, not bored stiff by classical allusions: “When he relates the story of his father’s first strictly classicist attempt to write a narrative poem that ended up driving all the courtiers from the hall, he reflects this development in Italian culture.” The result, in his own *Jerusalem Delivered* is a high-powered fusion of the classical epic with Renaissance romance which accounts for “much of the tragic drama characteristic of the *Liberata*”<sup>252</sup> As Kates points out, most critics divide *Jerusalem Delivered* into two respective “halves”: heroic vs. romantic, epic vs. romance. This tradition goes back to Benedetto Croce who distinguished between “love poetry” and “heroic poetry”. Thus, one of the best studies of Tasso, C.P. Brand’s, divides Tasso’s epic into “heroic” or “classical” epic, which includes battles, duels, and everything supernatural, and “the romance” which is everything else. This is nothing but Croce. C.P. Brand justifies his stand thus:

the heroic ideal is adulterated therefore with the charms of the romances—notably the loves and enchantments—and Tasso admits his compromise from the beginning...between the heroic, serious didactic elements on the one hand and the fanciful and romantic on the other...<sup>253</sup>

This is a rather naive reading of *Jerusalem Delivered*, however; for Tasso “heroic” means something that can have both positive and negative value. Let us take one of the high points of the entire epic: the Council of Demons in Canto IV. This episode is reminiscent of the councils of the gods in ancient epics. It is also evocative of Dante’s language in *Inferno*, though with this important difference, namely, that Tasso presents the devils in general, and Pluto in particular, as creatures of classical mythology, debased, but heroic. Nevertheless, there are distinctive traits of Dante’s Hell in Pluto’s call to the “*Tartarei numi*” (Tartarean gods, IV, 9). Though Pluto’s sound is full of defeated grandeur, it is placed in the context of the Christian view of the fallen angels. For he sees Pluto and his followers as “*l’alme a Dio rubelle*” (the souls rebellious to God, IV, 18), and Pluto turned into Satan as “*il gran nemico de l’umane genti*” (the great enemy of human kind, IV, 1).<sup>254</sup> Though couched in classical garb Tasso judges according to Christian cosmology: “*l’alme a Dio rubelle*”.

Where did Tasso derive his identification of Satan and his demons with “Tartarean gods”? The answer reveals Tasso’s intricate relationship with the writers of romances, in this case, Matteo Maria Boiardo, the author of *Orlando innamorato* (1483, 1495). In one of the innumerable episodes, the hero Orlando is ensnared into an enchanted garden lorded over by Falerina, a witch. It is, of course, an allegory.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 63.

<sup>253</sup> C.P. Brand, *Torquato Tasso* (Cambridge, 1965), 80.

<sup>254</sup> Kates, *op. cit.*, 72-73.

In *The Allegorical Epic*, Michael Murrin analyzed Falerina's Garden and came to the conclusion that

Boiardo follows Virgil's actual practice rather than that of the Virgil of the medieval expositors. We would accordingly assume that, as in Virgil, the fabulous episodes should yield the allegorical readings: the monsters and the fays with their enchanted gardens, those modern equivalents of the classical marvelous. Boiardo, however, changed the literal presentation of these wonders in two respects: he made them mostly evil, and he made them fantastic in the way we refer to dream sequences...In romances the fabulous is therefore often demonic and disruptive and its interpretation a moral exorcism of what we must avoid. This principle applies as well to the *Gerusalemme liberata*...<sup>255</sup>

We shall see that this was indeed the case with Tasso's epic, but we are still stuck with our "Tartarean gods". Murrin argues that "private libraries in the Renaissance were usually small"<sup>256</sup>, though one such private library, the famous Ducal Library at Urbino was not only a rather extensive one, but one of the most famous as well. Boiardo, however, did not reside at Urbino or at Ferrara whose ducal library lent books as well. Be that as it may, Murrin thinks that Boiardo "may have read the *History of the Mongols* of Friar Giovanni da Pian del Carpine."<sup>257</sup> This brings us very close to the mark: as Denir Sinor points out (in Murrin's summary):

Europeans, shocked at the violence of Mongol warfare, connected them to hell. The Tatars became the Tartars from the River Tartarus, beasts rather than men which ate human beings and drank blood...Friar Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, papal envoy to the grand khan, (was) sent to examine their system and to understand their intentions. His report is one of the fullest, and there is evidence that Boiardo may have read it.<sup>258</sup>

Boiardo placed his Falerina's Garden in "Tartaria", and Tasso was merely following in his footsteps. He was also following Boiardo in regarding the fabulous as demonic. This is demonstrated by his enchanted forest in Canto XIII of *Jerusalem Delivered*.

Tasso wrote this episode of the enchanted forest late when he was completing the epic in 1574-1575. As Murrin points out, "he wrote it at the same time as he developed his basic allegorical conception, the metaphor of the body politic."<sup>259</sup> And he wrote in a letter that he consciously put such an allegory into his epic:

If therefore, the miracles of the wood and of Rinaldo are appropriate to the poetic art in itself, as I believe, but are perhaps excessive for the quality of the times in this history, the severe (critics) are more likely to tolerate this superabundance of

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<sup>255</sup> Michael Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in its Rise and Decline* (Chicago, 1980), 54-55.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

miracles if it is believed that there is allegory in them. *There really is...*and since there is, I dearly wish others to believe that there is.<sup>260</sup>

We shall deal with the metaphor of the body politic later. Now we shall look at the crucial importance of the enchanted forest in Tasso's epic: "This forest is fundamental to Tasso's plot. Without timber the Christians cannot make siege towers to assault Jerusalem. They cannot cut wood anywhere else, but demons protect the trees of this wood and frighten away the crusaders. Its exorcism is thus the necessary preliminary to the capture of Jerusalem, which falls immediately after."<sup>261</sup> The enchanted forest is an allegory of (the loss of) reason. Tasso explained it himself in his *Allegoria del poema*:

The enchantment of Ismen in the wood, deceiving with illusions, signify no other thing than the falsity of the reasons and persuasions which are engendered in the wood; that is, in the variety and multitude of opinions and discourses of men.<sup>262</sup>

The enchanted forest was believed by the Crusaders to have been the place for the Sabbath, the gathering of witches. But the basic fear stemmed from its dark nature:

Ma quando parte il sol, qui tosto adombra  
 notte, nube, caligine ed orrore  
 che rassembra infernal, che gli occhi ingombra  
 di cecita, ch'empie di tema il core;  
 ne qui gregge od armenti a' paschi, a l'ombra  
 guida bifolco mai, guida pastore,  
 ne v`entra peregrin, se non smarrito,  
 ma lunge passa e la dimostra a dito.

But when the sun his chair in seas doth steep,  
 Night, horror, darkness thick, the place invade,  
 Which veil the mortal eyes with blindness deep,  
 And with sad terror make weak hearts afraid.  
 Thither no groom drives forth his tender sheep  
 To browse, to ease their faint in cooling shade;  
 Nor traveller nor pilgrim there to enter  
 (So awful seems that forest old) dare venture.<sup>263</sup>

The key word above is "smarrito" (off the straight path) which recalls immediately the first *terzina* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
 Mi ritrovai nel una selva oscura  
 Che la diritta via era smarrita.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 94; the so-called 'Poetic Letters' are listed and explained by Murrin on 90-91; the letter in question is #48.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89 quoting Tasso, "Allegoria del poema". It was first published together with *Gerusalemme Liberata* in 1587.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 109 quoting Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, XIII, stanza 3; the translation is by Edward Fairfax.

Midway along the journey of our life  
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,  
for I had wandered off from the straight path. (INF I, 1-3)

The allusion to the incipit of Dante's *Divine Comedy* alerts the reader immediately to three important factors: 1) that the whole episode of the enchanted forest should be read primarily as an allegory; 2) that its importance derives from its identification with Dante's *selva oscura* i.e. the Region of Unlikeness, the Realm of Sin; and 3) that it symbolizes for Tasso, as for Dante, the loss of Reason as a guiding principle. Let us illustrate the above points.

Tasso has left us a contradictory testimony to his use of allegory. In his letter to Scipione Gonzaga of June 1576 he claimed that he did not include allegory in every part of his epic. But in another letter of June 1576, to Luca Scalabrino, he claimed the opposite:

Tired of poetizing, I have turned to philosophizing and have extended most minutely the allegory not of a part but of the whole poem in such a manner that in the entire poem there is neither action nor principal character that, according to this new finding, does not contain marvelous mysteries.<sup>264</sup>

I agree with Murrin that Tasso telescoped his development by applying it retroactively to his first draft: "Certainly the historical sections of the *Liberata* which Tasso wrote in the 1560s contain nothing that suggests the Prose Allegory. When he returned to the poem in the early 1570s, however, we find right away the metaphor of the body politic, the basic conception behind the Prose Allegory."<sup>265</sup>

Kates refers to the intimate relationship between Tasso's enchanted forest and Dante's "dark wood": Tasso's verses echo the opening verses of Dante's *Inferno* and suggest immediately that Tasso has appropriated Dante's epic for his own purpose, and identified the state of the Christian crusaders upon entering the "dark wood" with Dante's own psychological predicament. Just as the latter had found himself as a "peregrin" off the straight path, so the former had found themselves enchanted by the forest which created in the Christian warriors an acute sense of fear. The major obstacle to the conquest of Jerusalem becomes this sense of fear.<sup>266</sup>

Thirdly, there is no question that Tasso is following Dante closely in regarding the loss of control on the part of Reason over the appetites as the key to man's fear: Murrin points out that Tasso regarded Ismeno's enchanted wood as made up of different varieties of human *discourse*. Thus those who visit it are terrified by various illusions and try to explain the latter in differing interpretations. These interpretations have all one thing in common: *circular reasoning*.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 101 quoting Poetical Letter #76.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>266</sup> Kates, *op. cit.*, 110-111.

<sup>267</sup> Murrin, *op. cit.*, 108.

The last phrase has another powerful allusion. In his *City of God* Augustine says: "...The wicked walk in a *circle*; not because their life is to recur by means of these circles, which these philosophers imagine, but because the path in which their false doctrine now runs is circuitous."<sup>268</sup> This is Augustine's condemnation of Virgil's view of the connection between the fall of Troy and the rise of Rome which, in Augustine's opinion, presents a circular view of history:

In the *Aeneid* Virgil is perhaps not finally interested in applying the doctrine of metempsychosis (the eternal cycle of the soul's transmigration in and out of bodies) to history generally, but this together with the notion of a resurrection of fallen Troy in Rome and that of a return of the Golden Age under Augustus does present the prospect of history conforming to a cyclical pattern. Augustine finds such a prospect repugnant. He regards the events of Christian myth as having happened once and only once and as having made a definitive, irreversible difference...At the heart of Augustine's disagreement with Virgil and pagan historiography is the Augustinian conception of universal history as an essentially linear movement from Creation to Apocalypse, a teleological process directed toward the single goal of individual salvation.<sup>269</sup>

The cyclical view of history finds its exact counterpart in romance, as the linear view of history finds its expression in the epic, according to Tasso. For romance is nothing but a seemingly endless number of what the Greeks called *peripateia* complications of the plot, that delay and prevent the plot from being concluded, i.e. from being teleologically fulfilled. Put in Christian perimeters, by analogy with a progression of the human soul from endless wanderings (a lost soul) to salvation (a saved soul) romance is a literary expression of man's inability to reorient his entire life toward the only goal that matters: his own salvation. It is thus clear that romance is an impediment to (writing) an epic in a general sense, but as no human can ever resist all temptations of wandering, it is appropriately included in the epic as the element of retardation and impediment.

Tasso was both attracted to and repelled by romance: he appreciated (and craved) its effect upon his readers, and he liked its use of the fabulous, but he subordinated it strictly to the overall structure of the plot, and he regarded it as morally suspicious:

Implicit in Tasso's criticism of romance conventions is a moral indictment, which comes to the foreground in the *Liberata*. Here we experience the confusion and unreality of romance as anarchy and illusion, as projections of that state of mind in which nothing seems stable or sure. In a poem in which order is meant to be a manifestation of moral value, romance disorder becomes a metaphor for spiritual privation, for cupidity and heresy. And in a poem that is meant to move in the world of human history, the images of confinement and isolation in the romance landscape betray the hero's inability to see beyond himself.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XII, 13.

<sup>269</sup> Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance* (New Haven, 1982), 63-64.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.



The last phrase brings us back to Augustine. As Andrew Fichter points out,

the difference between the forces governing the Virgilian and the Augustinian worlds seems to be that Augustine's God does not require conscious human compliance...The providential plan, in other words, is so comprehensive as to include apparent deviation as part of the itinerary of salvation. Movement away from God may in the long run be movement toward him. With this principle Augustine gives new meaning to the circuitry that characterizes the movement of the epic hero: 'circumflectere cursus', the injunction under which the epic hero moves, translates into the Christian precept that to be saved one must first be lost.<sup>271</sup>

This is the reason behind Tasso's ambivalent attitude toward romance in general, and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* in particular. Ariosto's work was a romance that started where another (Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*) left off, and had no real conclusion. It thus lacked that unity of plot that Tasso valued and argued for above all. Ariosto's romance, despite its title, had not one but two main protagonists: Orlando and Ruggiero. Orlando typifies the wanderings of romance, while Ruggiero is the true epic hero: it is he who gives the work its higher purpose. Yet, both are Ariosto's adaptation of Virgil's epic to the *chanson de geste*. As Fichter makes clear, both Ariosto's poem and the *chanson de geste* are reflections of Virgil's *Aeneid* as a tragic poem, torn between the conflicting calls of love and duty. Ariosto's plot reveals the consequences of self-destructive passion, *furor*, found in Dido in Virgil's epic. Thus *romance* as such is the Virgilian universe of the *Aeneid* before its "takeover" by a "Christian" poet.<sup>272</sup>

Of the two Orlando is the embodiment of carnal love, of *eros* or *amor* (in Roman parlance), and thus, of self-love. His amorous adventures do not advance the plot of the *Furioso* at all until, literally, he recovers his mind after a trip to the moon. Instead of serving Charlemagne against the Arabs he dilly-dallies with Angelica: "In this thought he betrays the fundamentally self destructive nature of the course on which he has embarked in turning away from Charlemagne and God."<sup>273</sup>

Ruggiero, on the other hand, is the epic and Christian protagonist of *Orlando Furioso*. Though not originally a Christian, Ruggiero underwent a conversion in Canto 41. It is Ruggiero and not Orlando who decided the issue between the Christians and the non-Christians in a duel with Rodomonte. Their duel is, in a sense, a struggle between one's former self and a new self in Pauline or Augustinian terms. According to Fichter, the duel between Rodomonte and Ruggiero is symbolic of the faculties they stand for: Rodomonte tries to wound Ruggiero in his loins, while Ruggiero finishes his enemy off with a blow to his head. Thus Rodomonte's target is Ruggiero's sexual organ, i.e. it is indicative of Rodomonte's own sexual appetite; Ruggiero's aim

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<sup>271</sup>Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>272</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>273</sup>Ibid., 77.

is Rodomonte's brain, i.e. it stands for Ruggiero's rational appetite. But in another sense Ruggiero's struggle is with his former self: his carnal self which died with his baptism. Ruggiero represents the New Man of the Pauline epistles of the New Testament; Rodomonte represents, on the other hand, the Old Testament emphasis on Law without Love (*caritas*).<sup>274</sup>

The problem for Tasso was how to represent this transition from one's former self to a new man without sacrificing the unity of plot, as, in his opinion, Ariosto had done. To be more specific, Tasso could not make an Orlando-type character a protagonist of his epic—but neither would it do to have a formal conversion of a pagan to Christianity in order to save the day for the Christians. As Margaret W. Ferguson points out,

Tasso had to prove the superiority of his Christian epic to Ariosto's poem, which, was, in Tasso's view, ethically and aesthetically confused, an 'animal of uncertain nature.' Basically, Tasso defines the difference between his and Ariosto's poems in terms of a distinction between epic and romance; he associates epic with Aristotelian principles of formal unity and with political and religious ideas about the value of a single, absolute ruler; he associates romance with 'multiple' plots in the aesthetic sphere, with rebellion against political authority, and with polytheistic, pagan values that oppose the doctrines of Christian monotheism. The irony is that his own poem, although much more tightly structured than Ariosto's, is nevertheless a strange blending of romance and epic elements, formal and thematic.<sup>275</sup>

What Tasso did was to invent a protagonist without blemish. This is Goffredo (Godfrey of Bouillon) "the only character in Tasso's epic who could not conceivably have appeared in the *Orlando Furioso*."<sup>276</sup> In his *Apologia in difesa della Gerusalemme Liberata* (1585) Tasso argued that Goffredo is the personification of Reason:

From his first oration made to Christian princes, and from his response to the Egyptian ambassadors, (Goffredo) begins to demonstrate, loosen, increase and prepare the souls of readers, using some universal propositions concerning that which one must pursue or avoid in actions; from whence without doubt I venture to affirm that the wisdom of that captain is the upright judgment of a good prince, and full of all excellence and all perfections.<sup>277</sup>

Goffredo thus is a perfect Christian hero and a perfect prince—the two go together. But precisely because he is *perfect* he cannot "wander off the straight path", so to speak, and he cannot be a protagonist of the human, "erring" side of the epic. Another hero has to be placed beside him: not perfect, and thus subject to human frailties, but redeemable. This is Rinaldo. Thus Tasso, like Ariosto, settles for two heroes, but he tries (unlike Ariosto) to argue the seemingly impossible: that though they are two different and distinct persons, they represent parts of the single Force:

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<sup>274</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>275</sup>Margaret W. Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* (New Haven, 1983), 54.

<sup>276</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 190.

<sup>277</sup>Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 111 quoting Tasso's *Apologia*, 719-720.

The *Army* compounded of divers Princes, and of other Christian soldiers, signifies *Man*, compounded of soul and body...*Godfrey*, which of all the assembly is chosen Chieftain, stands for *Understanding*, and particularly for that understanding, which considers not the things necessary, but the mutable and which may diversely happen, and those by the will of *God*...*Rinaldo*, *Tancredi*, and the other Princes are in lieu of the other powers of the soul; and the *Body* here becomes notified by the soldiers less noble.<sup>278</sup>

As David Quint remarked, "like any other prudent Renaissance man, Goffredo may try to lead his army on the basis of his understanding of contingent events, but the crucial decision to recall Rinaldo comes from above, from God."<sup>279</sup> Tasso's decision to give Rinaldo this crucial role in actually leading the final fight, and not to Goffredo, the supreme commander of Christian forces before Jerusalem, betrays his ambivalence.

The trouble with Goffredo is that being "perfect" he is not capable of amorous adventures—thus he could not serve as a protagonist for romance. Accordingly, Rinaldo had to be added. The only way that Goffredo could be "faulted" for not speeding up the siege of Jerusalem was by rendering him incapable of action by the seditions in the Christian camp. The seditions in the Crusader ranks stem from their impurity, worldliness, self-love, according to Tasso. They are thus symptoms of moral corruption. It is Goffredo who alone can overcome this division in Christian ranks.

In the very opening of *Jerusalem Delivered* Tasso condemned the multiplicity of powers and the divisions of authority and stated his belief in a single monarchy:

Ove un sol non impera, onde i giudici  
pendano poi de' premi e de le pene,  
onde sian compartite opre ed uffici  
ivi errante il governo esser conviene. (I, 31)

Where divers Lords divided empire hold,  
Where causes be by gifts, not justice, tried,  
Where offices be falsely bought and sold,  
Needs must the lordship therefrom virtue slide.<sup>280</sup>

In both *Jerusalem Delivered* and *Jerusalem Captured (Gerusalemme Conquistata)* Tasso starts his narrative with the election of Goffredo as the supreme commander of the Christian forces. As Thomas Greene points out, this is "at variance with history, and Tasso knew it. During the actual crusade, Goffredo was only one of several generals who acknowledged no supreme commander."<sup>281</sup> The reason why Tasso twisted history is obvious: he intended his epic to be a panegyric to the

<sup>278</sup>Fichter, *op. cit.*, 113-114 quoting Tasso's *Allegoria della Gerusalemme Liberata*.

<sup>279</sup>David Quint, *Origin and Originality in the Renaissance: Versions of the Source* (New Haven, 1983), 107.

<sup>280</sup>Translations is by Edward Fairfax.

<sup>281</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 189.

concept of monarchy, as evidenced in Peter the Hermit's speech legitimizing the election. As Ferguson argues,

this speech is significant because it links praise of an authoritarian political system with a bitter critique of the injustices perpetrated in countries governed by "diverse" lords. Italy was, of course, such a country. However ambivalent Tasso was about the imperial claims of men like Charles V and Philip II, he had suffered too much in the courts of petty princes to avoid idealizing (as Dante also did) the concept of a supreme and just ruler. He had developed a strong sense of "injur'd merit", and one may speculate that it was exacerbated by Ariosto's popularity in a country where nobles preferred multiple plots to unified ones in both the aesthetic and the political spheres.<sup>282</sup>

There is no doubt that Tasso blamed the contemporary state of Italy for the misunderstanding surrounding the publication of his *Jerusalem Delivered*: many if not most critics chose to apply to it criteria more appropriate to the romances like Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. This betrayed their inability to escape their own cultural prejudices: those of Renaissance courtiers and princes accustomed to the multiplicity of plots in literature, *and of the multitude of states in politics*. Tasso's topic (the First Crusade) and his approach (the panegyric of monarchy) were simply inappropriate to Italy of many city-states and eclectic and frivolous courtiers. True, like the rest of Europe Italy was swept by the victory at Lepanto and the dreams of liberating Constantinople from the Turks. But the champions of the Counter-Reformation were not petty Italian princes, but great monarchs like Philip II—outsiders, foreigners, Spaniards, both feared and hated in Italy. The only Italian power to participate at Lepanto, Venice, was widely accused of betraying the Holy League by arranging a separate peace with the Turks. To the Spaniards, Frenchmen and Germans the anti-Turkish crusade of the 1570s and 80s might have seemed a real possibility. To the Italians it was a chimera, a *deja vu* and a fashionable pastime à la Castiglione's *Courtier*.

Tasso's emphasis on the crusading spirit (as well as topic) of his epic is an indication of his profound disliking for the petty politicking of the Italian city-states whose ambitious but circumscribed tyrants could not rise above territorial disputes, and fashionable but futile diplomatic games. Tasso's epic betrays a frustration with the real limits of Italian politics, limits stringently set by the great outside powers, above all, Spain. But *Jerusalem Delivered* is also a powerful indictment of that Renaissance eclectic approach to life that valued the present more than the future, civic life more than contemplative life, change and instability (*mutatio rerum*) more than permanence and universal certainties: in short, what is sometimes called the Renaissance philosophy of man. David Quint argues that

the allegory that Tasso outlined for the *Liberata* may also be understood as a defense of the poet's autonomy. He declares the subject of his epic to be a "felicità civile," a happiness available in the life of human action to which Renaissance humanism assigned an independent dignity alongside the life of

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<sup>282</sup>Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 113.

religious contemplation. The moral truths the humanists sought to derive from the contingency and variety of the active life constituted a kind of situation ethics, necessarily relativistic and of a different order from the eternal truths of contemplation. In the body politic of the crusader army, the commander-in-chief Goffredo is a figure "of that intellect, which considers not necessary things but contingent ones, those which can happen in a variety of ways". Like any other prudent Renaissance man, Goffredo may try to lead his army on the basis of his understanding of contingent events, but the crucial decision to recall Rinaldo comes from above, from God. Tasso's moral allegory is clearly an insufficient description of his crusade subject matter which, with an eye to Lepanto and the contemporary struggle against the Turks, represents an episode in providential history...The *Liberata* strives to describe a divine plan working through human action. But it is here that Tasso's Platonizing epistemology militates against a convincing depiction of the link between a Christian source of meaning and a virtually autonomous world of action. For Goffredo, and later for Rinaldo, grace and divine guidance take the form of a contemplative ascent above and beyond that world of action.<sup>283</sup>

This "looking beyond the world of action" is a quintessentially Augustinian notion—and it is based on Augustine's neo-Platonic solution to the Manichean problem. Put another way, this "looking beyond the world of action" represents Augustine's solution to the alienation of the hero in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Fichter explains:

Augustine's *Confessions* have yet to be allotted the place they deserve among the documents basic to our understanding of Christian epic. We continue to be conscious of Aeneas's epic itinerary as Augustine recounts his own journey from Carthage to Rome and his gradual discovery of his spiritual destiny. That Augustine's travels partly parallel those of Aeneas is, to be sure, a historical accident but one whose implications Augustine deliberately exploits. The *Confessions* are in a sense a recapitulation of Virgilian epic in a Christian universe.

If we permit ourselves to think of the *Confessions*, mutatis mutandi, as an *Aeneid*, they are an *Aeneid* that has been expanded (in purely formal terms, from twelve books to thirteen) and brought to closure. In a sense the closing books of the *Confessions*, with their extended meditation on time and their allegorical interpretation of Genesis, represent the ultimate comment on the epic sense of history from a Christian perspective. The *Aeneid* ends looking ahead to the vision of a historical future, a Golden Age—but one from which by Augustine's time the glitter had fallen; the *Confessions*, by virtue of the perception that all moments in time, past, present, and future, are circumscribed by God (book II), look beyond history. The *Aeneid*, like all epic, ends with what is in terms of its "total action" a beginning, the beginning of the historical process of building the Roman Empire. The *Confessions* overgo the *Aeneid* with respect to their conception of a total action as well; they conclude with a return to absolute beginnings, the Creation, and glimpse there a foreshadowing of the absolute end...<sup>284</sup>

As I have already explained, the basic dilemma of a Virgilian hero is that he cannot understand the reason for his wandering; he can only glimpse its future relevance through prophecy. In brief, he does not

<sup>283</sup>Quint, *op. cit.*, 107.

<sup>284</sup>Fichter, *op. cit.*, 40, 44-45.

have the key to his own life's riddle. With Christianity this riddle has been deciphered.

Central to the Homeric hero was the concept of a struggle between two heroes, opponents, forces, principles. All of universe is seen as a stage for it and the hero's principal task is to test himself against others and reach immortality by achieving heroic feats of valor (*klea andron, res gestae*). The Virgilian hero, however, has to subordinate his to that of destiny of which he is only dimly aware or not at all. This results in his own personal alienation: he cannot act heroically all the time without jeopardizing his carrying out of his destiny. Augustine's solution is to look at the very dilemma as basically a delusion: "The Virgilian hero's capacity for endurance becomes an irrelevant, even a dubious virtue."<sup>285</sup>

The notion of the *agon*, of a struggle between *two* forces is, in Augustine's eyes, nothing but a reflection of Manichean heresy, the view that the world is divided by the opposing forces of good and evil. The heroic quest, by pitting one hero against another, in effect reflects this division, for the winner is identified with the good, and the loser with the evil. For Christianity in general and Augustine in particular this means privileging evil with an existence and place in the world of its own. This goes against the neo-Platonic notion, which Christianity appropriated, that evil is non-essence, i.e. a deprivation of good. Augustine sees such a notion as in effect directed against God's omnipotent rule over all creation, good *and* bad, and a justification for the existence of evil in this world. The basic fallacy of the Manichean heresy was, according to St. Augustine, that it regarded evil as a substance in its own right, separate from and independent of God. Since God is good, it follows that evil could not have originated with him. According to the Manichaeans, there were two "antagonistic forces", "both infinite, yet the evil in a lesser and the good in a greater degree"<sup>286</sup>

The negation of evil as an entity in its own right renders the moral struggle in Augustine's *Confessions* a non-issue *once* it has been realized that "evil is nothing but the removal of good until finally no good remains" (3.7). Or, as Augustine put it in philosophical terms, "whatever is, is good; and evil, the origin of which I was trying to find, is not a substance, because if it were a substance it would be good." (7.12). Augustine's adoption of such a solution to the heroic dilemma makes his own personal achievement anti-climactic: for the struggle between good and evil then turns out to be a struggle with nothing, with an illusion. Thus, according to Fichter, Augustine's solution is profoundly anticlimactic. Augustine renders the cosmic fight between the forces of good and evil meaningless: and thus his solution, though it may appear liberating and instantaneous, absurd and unnecessary.<sup>287</sup>

Now we can see that the enchanted forest episode in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* is a mirage precisely because it is the product of the forces of

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 quoting Augustine's *Confessions*, V, 10.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Hell, of evil, and evil does not exist in its own right. Once Rinaldo has come back to his senses, the magic of the enchanted forest is broken, and Jerusalem, protected by the demonic forces, can no longer withstand the Christian forces. But as Fichter points out, the spell of the enchanted forest is above all the false delusion of romance as opposed to the true unity of the Christian epic. Nowhere is this more powerfully brought out than in the so-called Argillano's dream of Rinaldo's dismembered corpse:

Gli figura un gran busto, ond'è diviso  
il capo, e de la destra il braccio e mozzo;  
e sostiene con la manca il teschio inciso,  
di sangue e di pallor livido e sozzo. (8.60)

She showed him a great torso from which the head  
was sundered, and the right hand lopped off;  
and with the left hand it held the severed skull,  
filthy and livid with blood and pallor. (Fichter's trans.)

This vision is an inversion of the body politic, and shows the falsity of romance: Rinaldo's dismembered corpse is a parody of the healthy body, of the body politic which is an anti-thesis of divisive anarchy typical of the heretics.<sup>288</sup>

Tasso's attempted solution to this "divisive, anarchistic, and heretical mind" is to provide in *Jerusalem Delivered* the body politic, made up of many parts, but animated by a single vision— in other words, to create unity out of multiplicity. Now, the reader may ask, why did not Tasso dispense with multiplicity altogether, and offer us pure unity instead? Because Tasso always remembered what happened to his father when he recited his "perfect" poem constructed along all the precepts of Aristotle's *Poetics*: all the courtiers left the hall. An epic that did not have any romance, any peripeteia, any entanglements, delays and unexpected twists, would be incredibly boring, if not impossible to read: it would be predetermined, predictable, and *uneventful*— and *that is the kiss of death for any literary work*. Tasso's solution was very ingenuous: *Jerusalem Delivered* was to have unity born out of the Christian resolution of the multiplicity of romance. In other words, Tasso applied to the epic Augustine's solution in the latter's *Confessions*: once the *agon* is seen as non-existent, i.e. once evil is seen as non-being, there is no obstacle left to the successful and speedy attainment of the end. Unity is thus achieved by denying the ontological being of multiplicity. For Tasso subscribed to the Thomistic notion that "the good, the true, and the one are inter-changeable". Yet Tasso did not reject romance, but rather reformed it. Since romance, given its unreal and multiple nature, is associated with evil, then it has no substance. Since multiplicity cannot exist without unity, romance

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

cannot exist without the epic. Thus Tasso reconciled romance and the epic.<sup>289</sup>

The epic thus has to be verisimilar (true) morally upright (good) and display unity (one) and these are neo-Platonic notions that Augustine appropriated for Christianity. Tasso makes the interrelationship of truth, oneness and goodness clear in his *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (*Discorsi del poema eroico*) :

To prove that the poet's subject is rather the true than the false we can offer yet another argument, derived from the teaching of St. Thomas in the *Summa* and other works of his, according to which the good, the true, and the one are interchangeable, and the true is the good of the intellect; besides, he asserts that evil is not "a nature". Evil, therefore, not being in nature, must be founded in goodness or some good thing, since no entirely wicked or evil thing can exist. In the same way, every multiplicity is based on unity, nor is there any multiplicity which does not participate in unity; and every falsehood is founded on truth. Thus what is totally false cannot be the subject of poetry, indeed it does not exist.<sup>290</sup>

Tasso conceived his *Jerusalem Delivered* as a mighty answer to Ariosto's (and his own father's) romances by claiming and incorporating the romance into the allegorical epic as originated by Virgil and as developed and Christianized by Dante. Tasso's theme is both historical *and* allegorical. This is his advantage over Dante: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, if regarded as an epic, cannot be seen as historical: his visit to the other world is an allegorical representation of Everyman's journey from sin to salvation. True, Dante tried to place it at a particular date (1300) but this is significant not in purely historical, but entirely biographical terms: he was born in 1265 and was 35 in 1300, i.e. midway along the Biblical span of life of 70 years: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" (Midway along the journey of our life, INF I, 1). Virgil's epic derives its historical value from the retroactive view from the future, but it is located in the mythical past—thus it is not a dateable event. Tasso's epic is both historical *and* an allegory of Dante's type. Though its topic is historical, i.e. the First Crusade (1096-1099) which culminated with the capture of Jerusalem by the forces led by Geoffrey of Boulogne, its allegorical theme is, as stated in Tasso's *Allegoria della Gerusalemme Liberata*, the spiritual progress of a Christian toward the other Jerusalem, "Jerusalem the strong citie...situated upon the top of the Alpine and wearisome hill of virtue" (*Allegoria*). It should be emphasized that both historical and allegorical sense are inseparable, and that the allegorical sense is anterior, i.e. a prerequisite for the historical. In other words, the Crusaders cannot take Jerusalem until the Christian forces had been regenerated spiritually. It is because Christian forces are distracted by the failings of their leaders: Baldovin's ambition (*l'umane grandezze*), Tancredi's "vain love" (*vano amor*), Boemondo's quest for empire, and Rinaldo's honor (1.8-10) that earthly Jerusalem

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121 quoting T. Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, trans. by Mariella Cavalcini and Irene Samuel (Oxford, 1973), 33.



cannot be easily and speedily captured. The delay is thus the effect of the lack of overall moral direction, because Goffredo's knights pursue their own ambitious goals which are nevertheless phantoms—and thus in the realm of romance, not of the epic.<sup>291</sup>

The central theme of Tasso's epic demands that *Jerusalem be Delivered* from evil—but also, allegorically from Itself, its own sinful nature. Allegorically speaking, *Jerusalem* is the blessed state of the soul *Delivered* from its own sins. Yet, according to many critics, Tasso failed to carry off this allegory in *Jerusalem Delivered*.

In the *Jerusalem Delivered*, as the very title suggests, the liberation of Jerusalem by the crusaders is the topic. But was Jerusalem truly “oppressed” as Tasso depicts it?

The fact is that we are shown Jerusalem from two very different perspectives. On the one hand it is the holy goal of the crusaders whose very sight brings them to tears (3.7). On the other hand it is a community, neither holy nor unholy, of beleaguered men and women, some of them villainous and some admirable. This latter perspective is the one maintained through most of the poem. We feel the plight of the besieged much more acutely than the necessity of besieging them.<sup>292</sup>

What Thomas M. Greene is saying is that Tasso's original version, *Jerusalem Delivered* did not succeed in convincing the reader that the plight of Jerusalem justified the carnage which was necessary to “liberate” it. In the eyes of the champions of the Counter-Reformation Tasso had not proved that the liberation of Jerusalem was justified on both Divine and moral (i.e. human) grounds.

This is what gave grounds to his enemies for a charge that Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* was not a “Christian” epic. This charge, though expressed in scholarly terms, is echoed by Greene: “Is the whole enterprise (the conquest of Jerusalem) then futile? Is there no moral or metaphysical principle to inform with meaning the conduct of Tasso's heroes? *I think there is none if you stand very near his poem and consider it at close hand, as I have just done.*” [my emphasis] But he hastens to add that there is a conceptual unity to *Jerusalem Delivered*:

If you draw back a little, you can discern the outlines of a systematic conception. The philosophy most congenial to the poet, particularly in his youth during the *Liberata's* composition, was neo-Platonism. Ficino was the Renaissance thinker with the greatest influence on Tasso, partly because Ficino seemed to have reconciled Platonism with Christianity. It may have been he who directed Tasso's attention to the passage in Plato's *Cratylus* suggesting a common etymology of *eros* (carnal love) and *heros* (hero). Tasso alludes to the etymological connection in his prose as though it were a fact. This association of love and heroism seems to me to be a key to his ethic throughout the *Liberata*.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Fichter, *op. cit.*, 127.

<sup>292</sup> Greene, *op. cit.*, 208.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209.

This association of love and heroism prompted Greene to call *Jerusalem Delivered* a "hybrid"<sup>294</sup>. He called Tasso's poetic genius "synthetic". He thought that Tasso's position which "was always mediatory" was a handicap "because his age was itself divided, hypocritical, even to a degree emotionally false, unsure of the moral, social, and philosophic syntheses it had patched up to confront heresy."<sup>295</sup> This "uncertainty" of the age led Greene to characterize *Jerusalem Delivered* as "the brilliant patchwork"<sup>296</sup>, and to opine that "Tasso is the most difficult of epic poets to judge with assurance"<sup>297</sup>. These judgments, vague as they are, do not lead to a conclusion that

the answer lies in his authoritarianism. As a man, he was dependent upon a society headed by a single spiritual authority, the pope, and governed by a series of petty rulers, each absolute within his dukedom. Tasso's temperament was one which found compliance to authority rather too congenial for modern taste. His respect for it was in harmony with the Counter-Reformation glorification of centralized power and hostility to northern individualism.<sup>298</sup>

It seems to me that Getto was closer to the truth when he claimed that *Jerusalem Delivered* "is a document of a diffused affability of a courtier and an academic... The crux of *Jerusalem Delivered's* action was born under the constellation of that culture suffused with the imagination of a courtier, whose "principal and true profession", Castiglione judged, had to be "that of the arms".<sup>299</sup>

The culture of the courts and academies calls to the mind Castiglione's famous book of *The Courtier (Il corteggiano)*.<sup>300</sup> And that is a profoundly Neo-Platonic work: suffice it to point out how much discussion at the court of Urbino is spent on the question of love. It is a pity that Greene did not see this connection, though he does investigate the role of Neo-Platonism in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* and he does quote Tasso's verdict on the superiority of love over honor: "But if love is directed toward created things, it produces prudence, justice, temperance, and courage, generosity, meekness, modesty and the others, which are mingled in such a way that one cannot remain without the other."<sup>301</sup>

That is why Greene's statement that "Tasso used a form of Ficino's system to pattern his fable, but he cannot be said to have written a Platonic poem" is only partly true. It is precisely because he wanted to write such a poem that he revised *Jerusalem Delivered*. And that is why I think Greene's opinion that "Tasso was himself never able to reach,

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<sup>294</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>295</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>296</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>298</sup>Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>299</sup>Getto, *op. cit.*, 322, 323-324.

<sup>300</sup>A very stimulating study of Castiglione's *Courtier* is by Richard A. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven, 1976), 144-164.

<sup>301</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 211-212 quoting T. Tasso, *Prose*, ed. by Ettore Mazzali (Milan, 1959), 214.

even in imagination, the higher sphere of Platonic love" does not tell the full story.<sup>302</sup> For Tasso's epic is not about just the lower sphere of Platonic love: it is also a reflection of that "Love that moves the Sun and the other stars."

In his "Hell" and "Heaven", *Typology and Function of the "Wonderful" in the Liberata*, Guido Baldassari states that there is a "metahistorical" dimension to the battle under the walls of Jerusalem: the struggle between God and Satan, the same struggle which was fought at the time of the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. And that explains "the relevance and seriousness of the Diabolic (element) whose presence in the Liberata...(is not an element of) the grotesque and of parody, but is central and therefore menacing."<sup>303</sup>

Baldassari is absolutely right when he claims that the council of the Hell, i.e. of the Demonic Powers, presented in Canto IV of *Jerusalem Delivered* represents both an influence of Neo-Platonism and of academic Aristotelianism. He quotes Tasso's own view: "Canto IV. The Council of the Demons. From this Canto, as from a source, all other episodes are derived."<sup>304</sup> It is the intervention of the Demonic Powers that prevents the Crusaders from taking Jerusalem, and prolongs the siege—and the story, for another 15 cantos. If we divide *Jerusalem Delivered* into two halves, the ascending, during which the Crusaders are moving to their objective, and the descending, during which they are kept away from their prize, the epic is divided up by the crucial Canto IV: Cantos I-III and XIV-XX are moving (10 cantos), Cantos IV-XIII are stalling (10 cantos).<sup>305</sup> Baldassari's idea that the functions of "Hell" and "Heaven" in *Jerusalem Delivered* are diametrically opposed, the former acting as a retarding factor, and the latter as an intervening one, is a very apposite one: it enables us to see how Tasso combined the notions of Unity and Diversity and ascribed them to the two opposing forces: unity to Heaven, and Diversity to Hell.<sup>306</sup>

Tasso's seriousness in regarding the Demonic Forces is an indication of his respect for the Power and Grandeur of Evil in its own right. It also means that *Jerusalem Delivered* is an epic with in effect *two* main protagonists: the Forces of Good, and the Forces of Evil. The epic is not dialectic in design, but fractured: there is no interaction of the two forces which brings about the higher resolution. As Baldassarri points out, there is no ground for compromise, for "the separation between the two camps in *Gerusalemme* is total, without any possibility of encounters and exchanges".<sup>307</sup> This stems from the fact that "the plot of the *Liberata* is governed by reasons not simply historical and human, but ideological, and therefore of such nature as to exclude the possibility of

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<sup>302</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 21

<sup>303</sup>Guido Baldassari, "Inferno" e "cielo" Tipologia e funzione del "meraviglioso" nella *Liberata* (Rome, 1977), 43.

<sup>304</sup>*Ibid.*, 56-57. Tasso's note is from *Lettere*, no. 82, p. 205.

<sup>305</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>306</sup>*Ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>307</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

whatever reconciling solution, of whatever compromise between the warring parties."<sup>308</sup>

This impossibility of reconciliation stems from Neo-Platonism which, while denying the Manichean view of evil as being, nevertheless retains its separateness: for evil is seen as the very antithesis of good, and though a non-being, a force capable of operating independently in the world. Only Christian Revelation, centered in the Incarnation, can render this relationship null and void, as Augustine observed. Despite his recourse to Augustine, Tasso was unable to get rid of his Neo-Platonic view of the universe in *Jerusalem Delivered*. As David Quint points out, Tasso failed to give his first epic a plausible allegorical meaning,

for Christian allegory depends upon the Incarnation, with which the Platonizing epistemology of Tasso's epic cannot come to terms. In Tasso's later revisions of his epic, the *Gerusalemme conquistata*, when the poet sought to bolster his fiction with a series of outside authorities, he turned increasingly to scriptural typology. Yet...the typological patterns of the *Conquistata* preserve those very Platonic dichotomies of the *Liberata* which they should normally resolve.<sup>309</sup>

Did *Jerusalem Delivered* need a revision in order to make it a truly "Christian" epic? Greene at least thinks so: "Adapting the magical elements of romance to the celestial machinery of classical epic, and adjusting both to Christianity was a particularly delicate task...The fiction of the storybook is not the fiction of the *Paradiso*...The *Gerusalemme Liberata* in effect gives shortest shrift to the Christian (element)."<sup>310</sup> Tasso tried to remedy this by totally rewriting his epic.

At the very end of his life Tasso revised his *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) into *Gerusalemme Conquistata* (*Jerusalem Conquered*).<sup>311</sup> The *Conquistata* came out in 1592; the reasons for its making were set out theoretically in Tasso's *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (*Discorsi del poema heroico*), published in 1594. The final justification for the revision of his masterpiece was his *Judgment on His Gerusalemme Revised by Himself* (*Giudizio sopra la sua Gerusalemme da lui medesimo riformata*), left uncompleted at the time of his death in 1595. As Weinberg explains,

Tasso's purpose is to demonstrate the superiority of the *Conquistata* over the *Liberata* and to explain, at least in part, the reasons for the changes he had made. It is here that the influence of the years of debate becomes apparent. For although he repeats many of the theoretical ideas contained in the two treatises on the epic (*Discourses on Poetic Art*; *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*) he addresses himself largely to three questions prominent in the polemic: the question of truth and history, the question of allegory, and the question of unity. Tasso claims, with respect to the first question, that in passing from the first to the second version of his *Gerusalemme* he has considerably increased the ingredient of truth and of history. He here repeats

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<sup>308</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>309</sup>Quint, *op. cit.*, 116-117.

<sup>310</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 206-207.

<sup>311</sup>T. Tasso, *La Gerusalemme Conquistata*, 2 vols. (Bari, 1934).

an idea which we have already seen in Guastavini's *Discorsi et annotationi* namely, that the beginning and the end of a poem should both have a firm historical basis, whereas the middle may be based upon invention. If the poet were to limit himself to the narration of historical truth, he would not be a poet at all, but a historian; the element of imitation would be lacking:

"...if the true things had been narrated by me in a historical way, I should not merit any praise as a poet; but having treated them in a poetic manner, and having sought the marvelous through the excess of truth, in those things in which I have most completely preserved the image of history and as it were the aspect of truth, I have merited the greatest praise for admirable poetic artistry."<sup>312</sup>

The question of allegory will be examined later; but the question of unity is again central to Tasso's view of the epic:

Disagreeing with Castelvetro both on the singleness of the agent and the multiplicity of the action, Tasso proposes a theory that would admit the action of a group of men but would insist that it be a single action. There may be many actions of many persons, but they must be reduced somehow to unity. This is what Tasso has done...in his *Gerusalemme Conquistata*:

"The unity of the agents in the epic poem must be in conformity with the unity of the action; but the unity of the action is conjoined and almost mingled with many actions; therefore similarly the union of the agents must be an assembling of many...That unity, then, will be most praiseworthy in the epic poem which will be composed of many actions and of many persons." Such unity comes not from the person or the place or the time, but rather from the unity of the form and of the end.<sup>313</sup>

What does he mean by the "unity of the end"? He means basically the ideological unity, the object of the poem, which, of necessity, for a "Christian epic" has to be in the future, not in the present or the past. Summarizing Tasso's point of view, we can say that Tasso prescribed that an ideal, "Christian" epic should be located in the past, relevant to the present, and oriented toward the future. The quarrel over *Gerusalemme Liberata* was thus highly relevant: it was about a "Christian" epic. It also led to Tasso's doubts about his epic and to the writing of the *Gerusalemme Conquistata*.

In her *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* Margaret W. Ferguson offered a Freudian interpretation of Tasso's life-long predicament. It hinges on the fact that his father, Bernardo, wrote a romance, *Amadigi* which Torquato Tasso was forced to defend, out of filial duty, as an epic, against those who accused Torquato of being unfair to Ariosto by regarding the latter's *Orlando Furioso* as a romance while insisting that Bernardo's romance was an epic:

Tasso thus found himself in the unhappy position of being genealogically attached to a poet who was held to be in Ariosto's camp. Genealogy is indeed a crucial issue in the *Apologia* (in *difesa della 'Gerusalemme Liberata'*). If Tasso broods obsessively on the difficulties of defining father-son relationships, it is because, for him, questions of literal and figurative filiation were necessarily and inextricably linked. I

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<sup>312</sup>Weinberg, *op. cit.*, 1056.

<sup>313</sup>*Ibid.*, 1057.

can think of no other major writer in the Western tradition whose identity as a son was more problematically overdetermined than Tasso's.<sup>314</sup>

What Tasso accomplished in the first version of his epic, *Jerusalem Delivered* was a fusion of romance and epic: of Bernardo Tasso (his father) and of Dante (and Virgil behind the latter). But this fusion of his father's and Dante's poems is an uneasy amalgam; it also represents an act of impiety against his father's spirit, according to Ferguson:

His dilemma is similar to the one he depicts in the famous "bleeding tree" episode of *Gerusalemme Liberata* (canto 13), where the hero Tancredi is deflected from his Christian mission by his encounter with a ghost from the past. The phantasmic voice of Clorinda—the beloved pagan whom Tancredi had mistakenly killed in a duel—issues from a tree that Tancredi had slashed in the fulfillment of his duty to the Christian leader Goffredo, who needs wood to rebuild a siege tower. The ghostly voice accusing Tancredi of offending the souls of the dead is a creation of the pagan magician Ismeno, an artist figure who rivals Goffredo in the epic and who is intent on preserving the material realm of nature and romance against the Christian forces. Tancredi is like a son caught between a spiritual and a natural father; to fulfill his duty to the former, he must withstand the power of the latter—a difficult task because he is himself tied to Ismeno's romance ethos by bonds of love and guilt. Ismeno, I suggest, is an allegorical figure who threatens Tancredi in some of the same ways Bernardo and Ariosto threaten Tasso. We shall see, moreover, that Tasso's biography offers rich material for associating Clorinda with the beloved mother Tasso lost as a child, and whose loss he blamed, in part, on the "confusions" of his father's political career.<sup>315</sup>

In his revised epic, *Jerusalem Captured* (*Gerusalemme Conquistata*) Tasso pushes his father into the background, assumes the latter's function himself, and completely identifies with Dante and with his mother. First, he destroys his father's authority over himself by writing a new epic (*Jerusalem Captured*) that would not be an implicit defense of his father's work by its equal attention to romance:

I think it most decorous that in these my ripe years I should know myself better than anyone else...and the man who knows himself, and understands what he writes, may judge his own work.<sup>316</sup>

In a letter to a Catholic bishop in 1593 Tasso rejected his earlier *Jerusalem Delivered* in terms only slightly veiled (by the use of inversion) of the father-son relationship:

I am most affectionate to the new poem, or the newly reformed one, as to a new birth of my intellect; from the first poem I am alienated as fathers are to rebellious sons, whom they suspect to have been born from adultery.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup>Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 55.

<sup>315</sup>*Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>316</sup>*Ibid.*, 110 quoting Tasso's *Giudizio sovra la Gerusalemme Conquistata*.

<sup>317</sup>*Ibid.*, 114 quoting *Lettere*, V, no. 1452.

In effect, it is Tasso who is rejecting his father—and the romance the latter wrote (despite Tasso's arguments to the contrary); but it is also Tasso as a new father who is rejecting his first-born son, *Jerusalem Delivered*, in favor of his second, *Jerusalem Captured*. Rejecting his father, Tasso rejected the romance and the confusion it engendered in poetry—but also anarchy it epitomized in politics. Blaming his father's political "confusions" for the death of his beloved mother, Tasso rejected Italian petty politics, the whole courtier ethos of his father (and of *Jerusalem Delivered*) in favor of the strengthened allegory of the monarchy in *Jerusalem Captured*. And that meant reclaiming more of Dante.

Tasso's rejection of *Jerusalem Delivered* stated in his *Judgment*, deliberately imitates the opening stanza of Dante's *Divine Comedy* with its use of terms: "obscure", "opaque and shadowy places", "hard passages", and "uncertain roads". They signify Tasso's wholehearted embrace of Dante as the only "Christian" poet and thus an end to the amalgamation of romance and epic as two *equal* elements in the Christian epic. Tasso thus rejected Ariosto and his company of poets who wrote romance rather than the epic. Having written his revised epic, *Gerusalemme Conquistata*, Tasso can follow Dante in rejecting the love poetry, i.e. romance of the *Convivio*, in favor of that higher, spiritual love of the *Divine Comedy*. By revising his epic Tasso was moving away from the position he took in his famous canzone, "O del grand'Apennino" in which he likened his father to Aeneas, and followed him into exile; now Tasso sees himself as another Dante, the poet who started his journey by "imitating" Virgil, but who left the latter behind when he met Beatrice at the top of the mountain of Purgatory.<sup>318</sup>

Tasso identifies Dante's *Divine Comedy* with Beatrice as a personification of Divine Wisdom (*Sophia*) and thus as the eternal Feminine, and he "finds in Dante's account of his reunion with Beatrice a model for the contrast between his old and new poems"<sup>319</sup>. In his *Judgment*, Tasso compared his revised version to Dante's meeting of Beatrice in Purgatory when the latter "seemed to me to surpass her former self" (*vincer pariami piu se stessa antica*, PUR XXXI, 83-85):

I shall not, then, compare myself to Ariosto, or my Gerusalemme to his Furioso, as my enemies and friends have almost equally; but rather I shall compare myself already old, and close to death, to myself still young and in an immature period...and I will make a comparison between my almost earthly Jerusalem, and that which, if I do not deceive myself, is much more similar to the idea of the heavenly Jerusalem. And in this comparison, I will be allowed without arrogance, to prefer my mature poems to the unripe ones, and the labors of this age to the games of the younger age, and without blushing I shall assert, apropos of my Gerusalemme, the same thing that Dante said of Beatrice when she had already been made blessed and glorious: "She seemed here to triumph over her ancient self."<sup>320</sup>

<sup>318</sup>Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>319</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>320</sup>Ibid., 116 quoting Tasso, *Opere colle controversie*, XII, 261.

Tasso's decision to make his new epic Dantean finds no better example than in the new episode of Goffredo's dream in Canto XX of *Jerusalem Captured*, already described. In it Goffredo has a vision of Heavenly Jerusalem "which parallels Tasso's vision, in the *Giudizio*, of the poem itself as a heavenly lady like Dante's Beatrice."<sup>321</sup> This Heavenly Jerusalem is a new city (*città nuova*) whose relationship to the old city of Jerusalem is identical to that between the New Testament and the Old—between the vision of sin, lust, and idolatry, and that of Revelation 21:2 where John depicts the new Jerusalem "coming down from God from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." And this is how Goffredo sees Heavenly Jerusalem:

As a royal bride who in joy and festivity  
displays the precious pomp to others,  
and her white breast is encircled with  
rare gems, and her golden head is bound with gold  
.....  
so that city seemed adorned,  
which always and forever  
dawns with eternal light.<sup>322</sup>

Goffredo's dream is Tasso's most sustained effort to provide his new epic with Unity (as opposed to the Multiplicity of romance) in direct "imitation" of the final vision of Dante's *Paradiso*. As Mark Musa singles it out, "the outstanding characteristic of the third canticle is Unity: "To see the universe as One is the final goal of the journey, and the movement of the journey is from fragmentation to unity."<sup>323</sup> Yet, the final vision of Unity, barring Dante's direct encounter with it, can only be made through the use of prophecy. As Ferguson points out, "Tasso's model was the Book of Revelation, and thus Tasso could claim his *Conquistata* as an implicitly divinely-inspired text." As such Tasso's own "Book of Revelation" serves as an allegorical counterpart to salvation history, a structure "like the words of a most serious father [which] may serve not only as an exposition to theologians, but also as a lesson to poets and in particular to those who do not wish to write *vainly*." [my emphasis]<sup>324</sup>

"Those who do not wish to write *vainly*:" This is Tasso's final indictment of the romance—final, for the *Giudizio* or *Judgment* was left unfinished at his death (1595) and was subsequently published. In his attempt to write an allegorical epic Tasso went back to Dante; but, paradoxically, he also went back to Homer, as David Quint points out:

The most remarkable new feature of the *Conquistata* is its imitation of the *Iliad*. Episode after episode is lifted from before the wall of Troy and set down in front of the ramparts of Jerusalem. Rinaldo, his name changed to Riccardo, becomes a second Achilles, equipped with a Patroclus-companion, Ruperto...And so on. Whereas the

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<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 125 translating Tasso, *La Gerusalemme Conquistata*, XX, 27.

<sup>323</sup> PAR, Musa's Introduction, ix.

<sup>324</sup> Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 125.



classical imitations of the *Liberata* had seemed, in the best tradition of Renaissance poetry, to be a vehicle for self-expression, the reader of the *Conquistata* senses the sacrifice of Tasso's poetic personality as he subordinates his own inventions to the Homeric model.<sup>325</sup>

Yet, despite his "imitation" of Homer Tasso achieved the opposite effect: instead of restoring the heroic qualities he actually narrowed the distance between Divine Intervention in history and human independent action. Quint emphasizes that the *Conquistata* allows for much less freedom to human action as opposed to the *Liberata*. For while in the *Liberata* there is a delicate balance between the intervention of the divine forces and the human actions on the battlefield, and while this balance is only called into question occasionally, the *Conquistata* tries to explain historical events by reference to a metaphysical plane.<sup>326</sup>

The reason for this narrowing of the distance between Divine and Human actions is the allegorical essence of the *Conquistata*—for allegory constantly reminds us of a hidden reality, of the Divine plan behind the actions of Man. In short, allegory is an indispensable means to theodicy. Thus the very ending of the *Conquistata* makes it clear that the taking of Jerusalem is just an allegory of a higher, spiritual bliss, the attainment of the Heavenly Jerusalem for a Christian soul:

Così gli accoglie la città terrena,  
la città che lor serba e pace e regno  
regno che è pace ch'il cielo ha più serena. (24. 136.1—3)

Thus the earthly city receives them, the city which  
holds in store for them peace and a kingdom,  
a peace and kingdom which heaven possesses in a happier form.  
(David Quint's trans.)

Note that Tasso uses the key words "*città*" (city) "*regno*" (kingdom) and "*pace*" (peace) twice in the above verses. This is not accidental or insignificant: by using the word "*città*" twice he alludes to both the "terrestrial" (*terrena*) and heavenly Jerusalem, and thus immediately brings to mind Augustine's City of Man and City of God. By using the word "*regno*" twice Tasso again reinforces the basic dichotomy between the terrestrial and heavenly kingdoms; and by employing the word "*pace*" twice, he refers to the interconnection between the outer peace in heaven and earth and the inner peace of the converted and contrite Christian soul. The key terms are repeated twice, in two opposing senses because Tasso wants to emphasize the nature of his epic which is fundamentally allegorical.

And thus at the conclusion of his revised epic Tasso wants his reader to realize that the achievement of the earthly goal is just an entrance to that of the heavenly aim. This is important for it points out that the allegorical epic, especially in its Christian form, stops precisely at the

<sup>325</sup>Quint, *op. cit.*, 125.

<sup>326</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

moment of the attainment of its spiritual goal, as in case of Dante's *Paradiso* (when Dante has a brief vision of God), or at the moment when the attainment of a limited earthly goal opens up the vistas of a vaster heavenly (Tasso's Heavenly Jerusalem) or terrestrial paradise (the kingdom of the Slavs in Gundulic's epic, *Osman*). This means that an allegorical epic in general, and the Christian epic in particular tend to be apocalyptic or millennarian in subject (Dante, Tasso, Gundulic) and rely on prophecy for the fulfilment of its message.

Yet, despite his valiant efforts in the *Conquistata*, the problems of his earlier *Liberata* did not disappear. For though Tasso's *Conquistata* sets in much sharper relief the Christianity that had been mixed together with Platonism in the *Liberata*, and though the allegory of the New Jerusalem in Goffredo's dream is much more concrete than the rather diffused vision of Heaven in his *Liberata*, the fact remains that Platonic dualism still remained intact in his *Conquistata*. Thus though there is now earthly Jerusalem with its parallel in heavenly Jerusalem, and the river Jordan on earth with its counterpart in heaven, the two planes never meet, and thus these two planes, physical and metaphysical, are quite distinct in Tasso's epic universe. Of course, Tasso's Jerusalem can be seen as his "imitation" of Homer's Troy. But Tasso's revisions compound his problem: by reducing his personal poetic freedom vis-à-vis Divine Providence, for Christian symbolism reduces rather than enlarges the poet's scope for action. Quint argues that

the platonism of the *Liberata* allows Tasso to have it both ways; he claims an extratextual source of meaning in Christian truth, yet preserves the distance between that source and his own fiction, which is, for practical purposes, autonomous... In the *Conquistata*, a Christian truth supported by religious authorities and cloaked in typological language operates on a level unrelated and frequently antithetical to the poet's fictional world: whereas the *Liberata* manages to balance, if not reconcile, the conflicting claims of autonomy and authority, the later epic seems to pose a choice between the two.<sup>327</sup>

Tasso's relative failure in bridging this gap between the Human and the Divine forces in history accounts for the shortshrift that the *Jerusalem Captured* has enjoyed at the hands of the critics, as opposed to the abiding fame of the *Jerusalem Delivered*. Yet, such a verdict is in many ways unfair:

If we did not have the *Liberata* we should I think consider the *Conquistata* a great poem... It deserves to stand on its own as a work of art. It is, however, difficult to read it independently of the *Liberata* which is unquestionably superior: our memories of the earlier poem impede us and magnify the pomp and the didacticism of the later work, which seems unbalanced with the love stories so castrated. Thus the *Conquistata* has really been denied a fair hearing from the start.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-131.

<sup>328</sup> C.P. Brand, *Torquato Tasso: A Study of the Poet and of His Contributions to English Literature* (Cambridge, 1965), 130.

We have started this survey of the epic tradition with Homer's oral epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and their celebration of the heroic qualities of their main protagonists, which can be rendered as *hubris*, overwhelming Pride. We have seen how Virgil transformed the nature of the epic when he inaugurated the tradition of allegorical epics whose hero's pride was now subordinated to that of a larger Destiny of a great City or Nation. We have pointed out how Dante further changed the epic by "Christianizing" it, and endowing its protagonist with an inner allegorical struggle rather than a test of arms; and we have finally explained how Tasso tried to make this Christian epic both heroic and allegorical, by going back to Homer and Dante respectively, while continuing the tradition begun by Virgil.

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, Homer was *the* poet of *hubris*, the overweening Pride, and of a proud Hero; Virgil was *the* poet of *gloria imperii*, of Imperial pride (*dominium sine fine*, dominion without end); and Dante was *the* poet of the Glory of God. Tasso tried to combine the *hubris*, Pride of Man, with the Glory of God—two antithetical notions. Yet, this was a typical element of the Age of the Counter-Reformation (or of the "Baroque" as some scholars prefer to call it): the twisted, contorted, and contrived fusion of contradictory elements which gives this combination its preponderantly tense characteristic. This tension is an underlying attempt to weld together the whole epic tradition from Homer to Tasso and pass it on in a suitably Christian, i.e. Counter-Reformation garb. It is a quintessentially Catholic spirit, and is based on the Thomistic view of the world in which pagan elements (like Homer's epics or Aristotle's philosophy) could be appropriately refurbished and combined with thoroughly Christian elements. Such a summa went out of fashion with the waning of the Age of the Counter-Reformation. It could not survive Galileo's, Kepler's and Newton's refashioning of the universe, nor the rise of the Romantic movement with its emphasis on the originality and uniqueness of the individual poet. Yet, as such this synthetic idea has reverberated through time to our own day: T.S. Eliot's dictum that tradition "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."<sup>329</sup>

By going back to Homer at the end of his life Tasso tried to recapture the essence of the epic which his overemployment of the intervening tradition of the allegorical epic from Virgil to Dante had threatened to destroy. He thus went back to the roots, to the sources (*ad fontes*), and this notion of the source "has now become the single most important allegorical figure of the *Conquistata*" as David Quint claims.<sup>330</sup> At the

<sup>329</sup>T.E. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Frank Kermode, ed., *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (London, 1975), 38.

<sup>330</sup>Quint, *op. cit.*, 118.

end of the very long road traversed by the epic tradition it confirms T.S. Eliot's saying that "in my end is my beginning..."<sup>331</sup>

## VI. ALLEGORESIS

There were many ways of providing the epic with an ideological significance that it may or may not have originally possessed. It is a mute question whether Homer's two great epics, whoever they were written by, were intended for anything other than what oral epics (assuming with Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord that the two *were* oral epics) have traditionally been used for: entertainment and as a repository of collective memory, perpetuating the *mythical* view of events that the epics were supposed to portray. There is no question, however, that already in Antiquity, certainly by the time of Plato, Homer's epics, i.e. "the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had been interpreted allegorically."<sup>332</sup> Allegory was used to endow Homeric epics with a deeper meaning which required expert interpretation. In his *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in the Medieval Literature*, J. Stephen Russell has defined *allegoresis* as "the interpretation of texts"<sup>333</sup>. G.M.A. Grube's view that "much is absent from ancient criticism which we should expect to find there. The ancients seem to have felt that great writers were quite capable of expressing their meaning clearly to their audiences, directly, without intermediaries. There is very little in the ancient critics of any period about purpose or meaning, about imagery, symbolism, levels of meaning—these and other aspects of poetry which are not easily subjected to intellectual analysis are nearly completely ignored, and according to Lamberton, must be qualified."<sup>334</sup> Apart from the ravages of time a lot of ancient criticism was orally transmitted. There is no question, however, that what was left was often seriously underestimated by modern histories of ancient literary theory. James A. Coulter calls this the "anti-allegorical bias"<sup>335</sup> at the core of the modern views of ancient literary criticism. That the Greeks were the first in the West to come up with literary criticism as such is a high tribute to the advanced stage of their culture. As T.S. Eliot put it, "literary criticism is a distinctive activity of the civilized mind"<sup>336</sup>. It is with the allegorical interpretations of Homer's epics that Western epic tradition started as a separate and recognizable body made up of both epics and literary

<sup>331</sup>T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "East Coker" in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London, 1969), 183.

<sup>332</sup>Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1989), ix.

<sup>333</sup>J. Stephen Russell, ed., *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1988), ix.

<sup>334</sup>G.M.A. Grube, "How Did the Greeks Look at Literature?" in C.G. Boulter et al., eds., *Lectures in memory of Louise Taft Semple*, 2nd Series, 1966-1970 (Norman, 1973), 99.

<sup>335</sup>James A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, No. 2 (Leiden, 1976), 22.

<sup>336</sup>Frank Kermode, ed., *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (London, 1975), 7; the statement was made in 1961.

criticism of the former that was (and felt apart) from both the oral epic tradition in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and the non-epic, lyrical, body of poetry. That is how we should understand Russell's claim that "some would go even further to say that these complementary processes of allegory and allegoresis (the creation and interpretation of texts, respectively), are the sum total of the experience."<sup>337</sup>

The beginnings of both literary criticism as such in the West, and of allegoresis in particular can be ascribed to the attempts on the part of ancient Greek critics to substantiate their claim that Homer was more than a mere poet (even the greatest of poets), but that he was "divine", i.e. endowed with the gift of prophecy, and thus a sage "with revealed knowledge of the fate of souls and of the structure of reality, and that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are mystical allegories yielding information of this sort if properly read."<sup>338</sup> Thus the Hellenistic reservation of the title "the Poet" (*ho poiotes*) for Homer alone was not sufficient to establish his unique claim: he was acclaimed as "the Theologian" (*theologos kat' exohen*).<sup>339</sup> Homer was credited with having an insight into the pantheon of the gods. No lesser an "authority" than Herodotus attributed to Homer this quality of literally "naming the universe":

The Greeks...were ignorant, so to speak, right up until yesterday or the day before about the origins of the individual gods and whether they were all eternal and what sort of shapes they had, for it is my belief that Homer and Hesiod were four hundred years older than myself and no more. These were the ones who provided the Greeks with an account of the origins of the gods and gave the gods their names and defined their honors and skills and indicated shapes for them.<sup>340</sup>

Antiquity's claim of Homer as a sage generated a vast body of Platonic and especially Neoplatonic allegoresis of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* which has been masterfully surveyed by Lamberton. It is not my intention here to duplicate his efforts. What is of importance for this study is his conclusion that "the chief aspects of the Neoplatonic tradition of interpretation as passed on to the Middle Ages are the ideas (1) that Homer was a sage who was acquainted with the fate of souls, and (2) that the model of the universe he articulated was characterized by an idealism compatible with the thought of Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists."<sup>341</sup> The allegoresis thus represents the principal school of ancient literary criticism, at least as far as Homer's epics are concerned. This dominant allegorical "reading" of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* was bequeathed by Antiquity to both Western and Byzantine medieval literary criticism. Very little has been done in so far as the

<sup>337</sup> Russell, op. cit., xi.

<sup>338</sup> Lamberton, op. cit., 1.

<sup>339</sup> On the term "theologos" see L. Ziehen's entry in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, new ed. by Georg Wissows (Munich-Stuttgart, 1893-1974), V/2 (1934), cols. 2031-2033.

<sup>340</sup> Herodotus, *History*, Book II, 53-54, quoted by Lamberton, op. cit., 22.

<sup>341</sup> Lamberton, op. cit., 43.

Byzantine tradition is concerned<sup>342</sup>, but, as Lamberton points out, "the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were found by the Byzantines to be Christian allegories, or at least to communicate allegorically truths compatible with Christian doctrine, much as Virgil has been mustered to the Christian cause since the time of Constantine."<sup>343</sup> The process of assimilation of Homer to early Christian thought has been treated masterfully by Hugo Rahner in his *Greek Myths in Christian Interpretation*<sup>344</sup>, and there is no question that the Byzantines found "divine Homer" both enormously appealing and somewhat of a problem in the beginning: they were tremendously flattered that he was a Greek and that his verse was of such supreme beauty, but they were bothered by his pagan gods and his often bawdy humor which many of them as aesthetes found distasteful. Their ambiguity is well mirrored in Clement of Alexandria's and Basil of Cappadocia's views expressed at the very end of Antiquity and the beginning of the Byzantine period. Clement, according to Lamberton, "has two central points, to which he returns incessantly, and these are largely determinative of the picture of Homer he presents. First and foremost, he is concerned to demonstrate the unworthiness—indeed, the non-existence—of the pagan gods. Secondly, he wants to enhance the prestige of the Christian tradition and the texts on which it is based by showing that this same revelation penetrated, however, dimly, to the most perceptive and authoritative of the pagans."<sup>345</sup> In his famous address *On the Value of Greek Literature*, Basil of Cappadocia praised all of Homer's poetry as "virtuous," but Ernest L. Fortin has shown Basil's duplicity in both valuing ancient pagan literature and warning about and protecting the young from pernicious passages.<sup>346</sup> The Byzantines regarded Homer as not just The Poet but sometimes as The Sage as found in *The Narrative of a Philosopher Concerning the Seven Greek Philosophers on the Providence Above*. Homer is one of the seven philosophers and he comes up with this "prophecy": "Last of all," Homer said, "At last shall come to us the Lord of the celestial sphere of the word, and he shall appear as flesh without imperfection. And he will take on flesh out of a Jewish virgin, and they shall call him "Forgiveness" and "Exultation". And he shall be crucified by the faithless race of Jews. And blessed shall be those who hear him—and woe to those who do not hear."<sup>347</sup> Until the very end the Byzantine tradition remained deeply attached to the Neoplatonic allegoresis of Homer's epics.

<sup>342</sup>Robert Browning, "Homer in Byzantium" in *Viator* VI (1975), 15-33; in modern Greek there is Agni Basilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *He Anagenesis ton grammaton kata tov ib' aiona eis to Vizantiov kai ho Homeros* (Athens, 1971).

<sup>343</sup>Lamberton, op. cit., 233-234.

<sup>344</sup>Hugo Rahner, *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Deutung* (Zurich, 1957).

<sup>345</sup>Lamberton, op. cit., 78-79.

<sup>346</sup>Ernest L. Fortin, "Christianity and Hellenism in Basil the Great's Address *Ad adulescentes*" in M.J. Blumental and R. A. Markus, eds., *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of A.H. Armstrong* (London, 1981).

<sup>347</sup>Hartmut Erbe, ed., *Fragmente griechischer Theosophien* (Hamburg, 1941), 221-222.

Our concern in this study, however, is the Western epic tradition. The fate of Homer was quite different in the West from that of the East, mainly because the knowledge of Greek disappeared in the West almost completely by the seventh century A.D. at the latest. Even earlier Greek was becoming somewhat of a rarity in the Latin West: thus St. Augustine himself was unable to read Greek with ease and depended almost entirely on Latin sources. Harald Hagendahl states that "nothing suggests that he (St. Augustine) ever read profane Greek authors, not even Plato, except in Latin translation."<sup>348</sup> St. Augustine was fully aware of the Neoplatonic allegorical interpretation of Homer's epics, but, having rejected Neoplatonism as a system of belief, he found it contemptible. He considered the view of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* as allegorical epics, on par with the Christian Scriptures, as dangerous, dismissing it out of hand: "...not that a poet's opinion would have any authority in this matter."<sup>349</sup>

Much more important than Augustine for the transmission of the allegorical tradition of Homer's epics to the West is Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, and even more so his *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*. Macrobius successfully integrated Plotinian Neoplatonism with "divine Homer" in a number of passages. Thus Homer is described as "the fount and origin of all inventions concerning the divine" who had "delivered this truth to the understanding of the wise beneath a cloud of poetic fiction".<sup>350</sup> Especially significant is Macrobius's reference to the Neoplatonic allegory of the golden chain of Zeus in Homer's *Iliad* (Book VIII, 19):

Thus, since mind emanates from the highest god and soul from mind, and soul both shapes and fills with life all that follows and that single blaze illuminates everything and appears in all things, as a single face reflected in a series of mirrors, and since all things follow one another in a continuous succession, degenerating progressively as they descend, he who looks closely will find a continuous bond, composed of interlocking links and never broken, extending all the way from the highest god to the last dregs of the material universe. This, moreover, is Homer's golden chain, which he says god ordered to be hung from heaven to earth.<sup>351</sup>

In Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae* Homer is consistently associated with Philosophia.<sup>352</sup> The mythographer Fulgentius uses Homer more frequently than any other Greek author. These authors and others bequeathed to the Western Middle Ages the allegorical

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<sup>348</sup>Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* in *Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia* 20 (Göteborg, 1967), 445.

<sup>349</sup>Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, edited by George E. McCracken, W.M. Green et al. [Loeb ed.], (London, 1957-1972), V, 8.

<sup>350</sup>Macrobius, *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis* in I. Willis, ed., *Opera*, Vol. II (Leipzig, 1970), 2, 10. 11. See also William Harris Stahl, trans., *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (New York, 1952).

<sup>351</sup>Macrobius, op. cit., 1. 14. 15. See Pierre Leveque, *Aurea Catena Homeri: Une Etude sur l'allegorie grecque* in Vol. 27 of *Annales litteraires de l'Université de Besançon* (Paris, 1959).

<sup>352</sup>Lamberton, op. cit., 279.

interpretation of the epic tradition which stretched from the Neoplatonic schools to Dante, and through Renaissance Platonism all the way to Tasso. The Latin Middle Ages found the ancient allegoresis very similar to their Biblical exegesis which was heavily dependent on the allegorical interpretation:

The Latin Middle Ages already had a deep tradition of biblical exegesis stemming from a closely related ancient Platonist tradition and traceable at least as far as Origen. This exegetical method was based on the postulation of three or four levels of meaning in scripture, and its major modern historian, Henri de Lubac, takes the following thirteenth-century formulation as canonical: *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*. (The letter indicates what was done, the allegory what you are to believe, / The moral sense, what you are to do, the anagogic what you are to strive for).<sup>353</sup>

The Western Middle Ages use of the four-fold interpretation of Scripture made it possible to integrate the ancient allegoresis into the medieval epic tradition starting from the 12th century onward. The first major commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* by Bernard Silvestris (*Commentum super sex libros Eneidos Virgilii*)<sup>354</sup> (though the attribution has been disputed by J.W. Jones and E.F. Jones) interpreted the first six books allegorically: "Thus the shipwreck of book 1 is a metaphor for birth, books 2 and 3 contain fables of childhood, and so forth. The cycle would seem to be complete with book 6, which takes up most of the commentator's time and energy, but he breaks off as Aeneas is about to enter Elysium, and his conclusions are lost to us."<sup>355</sup> David Thompson notes the similarity between Bernard's interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "By assimilating the *Aeneid* to the whole Platonic-Christian tradition of spiritual progress, Bernard makes the poem an allegory structurally very like that of the *Commedia*, in which Dante's physical journey, the literal level of the poem, figures another journey—a spiritual itinerary that takes place *in hac vita*. Thus the allegorized epic afforded Dante a close paradigm for his major allegorical mode, and Virgil may have been Dante's *maestro* in a way we had not here heretofore realized."<sup>356</sup> Thus Thompson traced "Dante's major allegorical mode to classical and medieval interpretations of epic poetry rather than to patristic Biblical exegesis,"<sup>357</sup> an idea Thomson says he derived from H. Theodore Silverstein.<sup>358</sup> Starting from his view that "just as Homer's work lies behind Virgil's, so behind allegorizations of Virgil there lies a long history of Homeric

<sup>353</sup> Lambertson, op. cit., 283 quoting Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale, les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959-1961), Vol. I, 23.

<sup>354</sup> Julian Ward Jones & Elizabeth Francis Jones, eds., Bernardus Silvestris, *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris* (Lincoln, 1977).

<sup>355</sup> Lambertson, op. cit., 285.

<sup>356</sup> David Thompson, *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore, 1974), 28.

<sup>357</sup> Thompson, op.cit., ix.

<sup>358</sup> H. Theodore Silverstein, "Dante and Vergil the Mystic" in *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 14 (1932), 51-82.



interpretation", Thompson concludes that "Dante...wrote allegory in the epic tradition, as it was conceived of in antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in the Renaissance."<sup>359</sup>

This is precisely the point of this study—and Lamberton put his finger on it when he argued that

by 1300 Virgil was seen as a poet whose fictive *integumenta* cloaked a philosophical core, and when he takes Dante by the hand to lead him as far on the spiritual journey as his own limitations permit, he is accepting Dante in the company of such poets, those who aspire to the grand challenge of epic. As the two descend together past the forbidding gates, the first sight that greets them is the school of poets, gathered around its founder, Homer. Now the equation is complete. Dante aspires to speak as Virgil's mouthpiece—that is, to give voice again to the epic tradition Virgil had taken up from Homer. I would suggest that, without the interpretive tradition that has been the subject of this study, Dante could not have conceived of his own poem as the heir of the *Aeneid* and ultimately of the mysterious and forgotten *Iliad* and *Odyssey*<sup>360</sup>

In his *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* Winthrop Wetherbee emphasized the continuity of the allegorical tradition from the Neo-pythagoreans to Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus*.<sup>361</sup> This has been noticed ever since Curtius made the same observation in his classic.<sup>362</sup> While Wetherbee is interested primarily in the influence of Platonism and allegoresis in regards to Bernard Silvestris and Alain the Lille, he also notes that the *Erec et Enide* of Chretien de Troyes displays "an elaborate pattern of allusions to the "philosophical" *Aeneid*."<sup>363</sup> According to Lamberton,

thus, over a century before Dante, vernacular poetry in an epic mode had begun to show the influence of a renewed interest in ancient epic seen through the eyes of an allegorizing Platonist interpretive tradition. In an intellectual world virtually without Greek, the commentators and poets of the twelfth century looked no further than Virgil. But Homer stood there beyond Virgil as his master and model, who had doubtless taught him the basic procedures of his poetry and the relationship between *integumentum* and the philosophical truth.<sup>364</sup>

It was in his Letter to Can Grande (regardless of whether it is authentic) that Dante expressed his belief in the value of the allegorical interpretation:

For the clarity of what will be said, it is to be understood that this work (the *Comedy*) is not simple, but rather it is polysemous, that is, endowed with many meanings. For the first meaning is that which one derives from the letter, another is

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<sup>359</sup>Thompson, *op. cit.*, 3, 11.

<sup>360</sup>Lamberton, *op. cit.*, 288.

<sup>361</sup>Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century: The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton, 1972), 6-7.

<sup>362</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Bollingen Series #36 (New York, 1953).

<sup>363</sup>Wetherbee, *op. cit.*, 236.

<sup>364</sup>Lamberton, *op. cit.*, 287.

that which is "literal" and the second "allegorical" or "mystical"...<sup>365</sup> Dante went on to apply this method to his own work: "The subject of this work must first be considered according to the letter, then be considered allegorically. The subject of the whole work, then, taken in the literal sense alone, is simply 'The state of souls after death,' for the movement of the whole work hinges on this. If the work be taken allegorically, the subject is 'Man—as, according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of free will, he is subject to reward or punishment by Justice...'"<sup>366</sup>

There is thus no question that, as Lamberton claims, "it is thanks to the allegorists that Dante can find a place to stand in the epic tradition."<sup>367</sup> Lamberton takes issue with Robert Hollander who has argued in a number of studies that "Dante has based his allegorical interpretations on the scriptural exegesis, thus claiming that Dante's kind of allegory is that of 'theologians', not of 'poets': 'I would remind the reader that it is the 'atmosphere' of the allegory of the theologians that the Epistle to Cangrande explicitly attaches to the poem...'"<sup>368</sup> Hollander crossed swords earlier with Giorgio Padoan who had posited a strong influence of Bernardus Silvestris's allegorical interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid* on Dante<sup>369</sup> (without, in Hollander's view having proved it). Hollander's most influential work, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia*<sup>370</sup>, was based on the critical insight of Charles Singleton that "the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction."<sup>371</sup> Regardless of whether Dante's work is to be seen as "the allegory of the poets", as Thompson, Padoan, and Lamberton suggest, or as "the allegory of the theologians", as Hollander insists, the fact remains that both schools regard it as an allegory.

From the very beginning Dante's claim that he had actually gone to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and returned to the Earth to tell it all was found to be unacceptable (not to say impious or blasphemous) to his otherwise credulous and pious contemporaries. Even his son and one of the earliest commentators, Pietro, "continually informs us that his father *feigns* that he saw such and so; the literal claim made by the poem was too strong even for him."<sup>372</sup> All the earliest commentators went to great pains to claim that Dante did not actually take a journey to Paradise.<sup>373</sup> Thus, from its very inception, and taking a cue from Dante's own words (if the *Letter to Can Grande* is to be accepted as genuine) or what was thought to be his own words (if the letter is

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<sup>365</sup> Mark Musa, trans., *Dante: The Divine Comedy*, Vol. I: *Inferno* (Penguin, 1981), quoted by Musa in his "Introduction", 42.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>367</sup> Lamberton, *op. cit.*, 294.

<sup>368</sup> Robert Hollander, "Dante *Theologus-Poeta*" in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna, 1980), 70, first published in *Dante Studies* 94 (1976).

<sup>369</sup> Giorgio Padoan, "Tradizione e fortuna del commento all'«Eneide» di Bernardo Silvestre" in *Italia medioevale e umanistica* III (1960), 227-240

<sup>370</sup> Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* (Princeton, 1969).

<sup>371</sup> Charles Singleton, "The Irreducible Dove" in *Comparative Literature* IX (1957), 129.

<sup>372</sup> Hollander, "Dante *Theologus-Poeta*", 71.

<sup>373</sup> Giorgio Padoan, "La 'mirabile visione' di Dante e l'«Epistola a Cangrande»" in *Dante e Roma* (Florence, 1965), 292.

spurious), the commentators used the allegoresis to rescue Dante from possible blasphemy, and his work from false pretensions. The most impressive and long standing tradition of Dante commentaries is saturated and dominated by this "allegorical" reading of *The Divine Comedy*, and only by interpreting Dante's masterpiece as an allegory (of whatever kind) could his work be seen as *an epic* at all, as we shall see later.

It is no exaggeration to state that the history of Dante scholarship from the 14th century to end of the 16th, i.e. from his death to that of Tasso, is an uninterrupted tradition of allegoresis. Aldo Vallone stated unequivocally that "the pillars of the allegorical interpretation...have remained solid always...in every age."<sup>374</sup> While it is beyond this study to offer a comprehensive history of the allegoresis of Dante's masterpiece, a survey of the main commentators from the early 14th to the late 16th century will amply demonstrate this claim.

The earliest commentary is that by Dante's son Jacopo Alighieri (born at the end of the 13th century, died in 1349) who was the first to identify Virgil in Dante's work with Reason. Throughout his commentary Jacopo uses allegoresis: as Vallone puts it, "allegory is always at hand...There is no distance between letter and allegory; both are present instantly. Between them there are no intermediaries..."<sup>375</sup> In various comments Jacopo Alighieri uses the term "allegoria" to indicate his own approach: "And this briefly is the allegory of the author's vision..."<sup>376</sup>; or "in this chapter the author intends to deal with three matters which allegorically are to signify..."<sup>377</sup> Thus Jacopo established a tradition of the allegoresis of *The Divine Comedy* to the point that "when the correspondence between reality and symbolism, representation and allegory is not complete, Jacopo stops, paraphrases, or remains silent."<sup>378</sup> Pietro Alighieri (before 1300, died 1364), as we have seen already, regarded his father's journey as a pure "fictio": "The author (Dante) said that he descended into Hell through imagination intellectually, not personally..."<sup>379</sup> He thus tended to give allegory in his commentary a commanding place as did the next commentator, Guido da Pisa, whose *Declaratio* (1328) and *Expositiones* (1343-1350) provide the other great *Trecento* commentary.<sup>380</sup> Recognized as one of the best

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<sup>374</sup> Aldo Vallone, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo* (Padua, 1981) 2 vols. in A. Balduino's *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, Vol. I, 70.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>379</sup> V. Nannucci, ed., *Petri Allegherii super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam Commentarium* (Florence, 1845), 7 quoted by Vallone, op. cit., 97; *Il "Commentarium" di Pietro Alighieri nelle redazioni Ashburnhamiana e Ottoboniana* (Florence, 1978).

<sup>380</sup> V. Cioffari, ed., *Guido da Pisa: Expositiones et glose super Comediam Dantis or Commentary on Dante's Inferno* (New York, 1974); F. Mazzone, ed., *Guido da Pisa, Declaratio super Comediam Dantis. Edizione critica* (Florence, 1970).

commentaries on Dante's Hell<sup>381</sup>, its interpretive structure includes all four senses, three of which are allegorical,<sup>382</sup> and permeates individual comments thoroughly.<sup>383</sup> The allegorical interpretation by Boccaccio further continues this tradition in the 14th century, and is extended to all religious and moral issues.<sup>384</sup> With Benvenuto da Imola (born between 1336 and 1340, died ca. 1387) we have reached the stage where the critical commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* had become a profession: Benvenuto "read" Dante at Bologna about 1375, and then had his "lectura Dantis" revised and brought out between 1379 and 1380. It is one of the most voluminous commentaries published so far.<sup>385</sup> Benvenuto applied the four-fold interpretation "historice, allegorice, tropologicæ, anagogicæ" to the entire work, and saw it as consisting of three levels: reality, "fictio", allegory. He also placed Dante squarely in the epic tradition by stating that while Dante owed little [sic] to Virgil, the latter owed more to Homer and to other poets and orators, both Greek and Latin.<sup>386</sup> Francesco da Buti, who "read" Dante in Pisa in 1385, followed the standard practice by having "literal" comments followed by allegorical; of the two the latter dominates to the exclusion of everything else.<sup>387</sup> A Commentary by an anonymous Florentine used allegory to ferret out what he called the "apological", "metaphorical", "tropological", "anagogical", and "literal" or "superficial" or "parabolic" senses.<sup>388</sup>

The Renaissance continued this medieval allegoresis of the *Divine Comedy* though it also indulged in quite extensive lexical, grammatical, and non-allegorical studies as well. With the "editio princeps" of Dante's masterpiece in 1481, with the commentary by Cristoforo Landino, one of the leading 15th-century humanists, *The Divine Comedy* entered the world of the printed page. This made it possible for Dante to reach a much wider audience, but it also gave rise to a whole "academic" industry of Dante scholarship, in the "literal" sense of the word: with the establishment of the Academy of Florence on November 1, 1540 Dante became the "property" of academics who

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<sup>381</sup>V. Cioffari, "Importance of the Guido da Pisa's Commentary on the 'Inferno'" in *Dante Studies* 85 (1967), 1-13; id. with F. Mazzoni, "The Prologue to the Commentary of Guida da Pisa" in *Dante Studies* 90 (1972), 125-137; V. Cioffari, "Guido da Pisa's Basic Interpretation" in *Dante Studies* 93 (1975), 1-25; B. Sandkühler, *Die frühen Dante-kommentare und ihr Verhältnis zur mittelalterlichen Kommentartradition* (München, 1967).

<sup>382</sup>Reproduced in Vallone, op. cit., Vol. I, 111-112.

<sup>383</sup>Ibid., 114: "Il materiale allegorico-morale...riempie ogni parte del commento."

<sup>384</sup>G. Padoan, ed., *G. Boccaccio: Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante* (Milan, 1965).

<sup>385</sup>G.F. Lacaita, *Benvenuti De Rambaldis de Imola Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Commoediam* Vol. I, Part I (*Inferno* I-XVII), Vol. I, Part II (*Inferno* XVIII-XXXIV), Vol. II, Part III (*Purgatorio*, I-XX), Vol. II, Part IV (*Purgatorio* XXI-XXX), Vol. III (*Paradiso* I-VIII), Vol. V (*Paradiso* IX-XXXIII) plus the Indexes (Florence, 1887).

<sup>386</sup>Vallone, op. cit., 160.

<sup>387</sup>C. Giannini, *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia*, 3 vols. (Pisa, 1958-1962).

<sup>388</sup>P. Fanfani, ed., *Anonimo Fiorentino, Commento alla Divina Commedia*, (Bologna, 1866).

engaged in acrimonious and often sterile debates from the heights of their chairs of Dante studies. These academics included some of the most illustrious names of Florentine and Italian humanism in general, even including Galileo Galilei.<sup>389</sup>

A good example of the Renaissance approach to Dante is Pier Francesco Giambullari. In his *Commento sopra il I canto dell'Inferno*<sup>390</sup> Giambullari indulges in a number of linguistic and rhetorical exegeses, but he also gives "garbled and precise definitions as per allegory according to the medieval formula." (he says one thing with words and in a sense intends something else).<sup>391</sup>

The Renaissance "rediscovery" of Aristotle's *Poetics* brought a new element in Dante scholarship: to what extent *The Divine Comedy* fitted the central Aristotelian category of imitation or *mimesis*. What was at issue was nothing short of Dante's reputation as a poet: for if his masterpiece could not satisfy Aristotle's criteria of what a good poem is (the unity of place, the unity of time, the unity of action), and, in particular, if it can be shown that *it is not an epic*, then Dante cannot be seen as one of the great poets in the epic tradition stretching back to Homer. Thus, the quarrel over Dante was basically an academic dispute ("*la disputa*") between those who held Aristotle's precepts to be universally valid, and who found Dante's poem wanting both as poetry and as an epic principally because Dante's cannot be said to have imitated Homer and Virgil slavishly (though this could be disputed), and those who upheld the Neoplatonic precepts of allegorical reading as justifying Dante's masterpiece both as a great poem and a great *epic*—in short, between those whose poetics was dominated by the concept of imitation (*mimesis*) and those whose poetics was ruled by the notion of allegoresis.

The Cinquecento literary criticism in general, and that of Dante in particular was saturated with the aesthetical qualities of poetic works. As Bernard Weinberg put it:

The problem of literary criticism in the Cinquecento was largely a problem in aesthetics. This would, of course, be true of criticism in any place and in any period. But it is true in sixteenth-century Italy in a very special way and for two special reasons. Perhaps more than in any other time and place, the problem of criticism was essentially a theoretical problem. The major effort of the critics was to develop a theory of the literary art; even when they were engaged in practical criticism, their preoccupation was primarily with theory and with the possibilities of applying theory to the judgment of specific works. At all times they were aware of theoretical

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<sup>389</sup> A partial list is in Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 387: Francesco Verini, Giovan Battista Celli, Giovanni Strozzi, Pier Francesco Giambullari, Niccolo Martelli, Cosimo Bartoli, Mario Tanci, Piero Trucioli, Ugolino Martelli, Damiano di San Lodovico Epifani, Selvaggio Ghettoni, Francesco D'Ambra, Piero Fabrini, Andrea di Chimenti Ticci, Jacopo Marchesetti, Giovanni Cervoni, Angelo Segni, Ventura Strozzi, Lelio Bonsi, Lorenzo Minori, Tommaso Ferrini, Jacopo Baroncelli, Annibale Rinuccini, Giovan Battista Adriani, Nero del Nero, Baccio Vandini, Bernardetto Buonromei, Niccolo Fabbrini, Giovan Battista Vecchietti, Galileo Galilei, Jacopo Mazzoni.

<sup>390</sup> M. Barbi, *Della fortuna di Dante nel secolo XVI* (Pisa, 1890), Appendix, 365-407.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 365 quoted by Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 388.

cruxes, theoretical difficulties, theoretical modes of approach. Perhaps nowhere else in the intellectual history of the West can one find so continual, so abundant, and so diverse a centering of attention upon problems of literary theory. Moreover, and this is the second reason, the literary aesthetics of the Cinquecento did not develop independently as a free and indigenous flowering. Instead, it was transplanted from Greece and Rome and the European soils of the Middle Ages. It must therefore manifest at all times two concerns, concern with fidelity to the borrowed tradition which it pretended to continue and concern with the usefulness of this tradition for a new age and a new literature.<sup>392</sup>

The "rediscovery" of Aristotle's *Poetics* satisfied thus a deeply felt need to come up with aesthetics based on universally valid rules "sanctified" by the "authority" of "the master of those who know" (*il maestro di color che sanno*), as Dante called Aristotle. As Baxter Hathaway aptly remarks,

out of the many treatises of the classical world, extant in the Renaissance, that were repositories for critical comments, only Aristotle's *Poetics* provided a full system of literary theory. One of the puzzling questions of all time has been why more was not made of Aristotle's *Poetics* in classical times. If discovery implies use, the sixteenth-century Italians can be said to have invented Aristotle's *Poetics* certainly they were the first to make a literary criticism a going concern...They existed in a tradition that did not fully exist until they discovered it.<sup>393</sup>

The "discovery" of Aristotle's *Poetics* by Cinquecento Italy was intimately related to the publication, translation, and commentaries on Aristotle's text. The first Latin translation of the *Poetics* was published in Venice by Giorgio Valla in 1498.<sup>394</sup> This was followed ten years later by the *editio princeps* of the Greek original, published in Venice by Aldo Manuzio in 1508.<sup>395</sup> The real beginning of the dissemination of Aristotle's work was only achieved by Alessandro de' Pazzi's new Latin translation, and the new edition of the Greek text by Giovanni Francesco Trincavelli, both published in 1536.<sup>396</sup>

The great commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* started in 1548 with the publication of Francesco Robortello's *In librum de Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes* (*Explanations of Aristotle's Book on Poetics*).<sup>397</sup> This was followed in 1550 by the commentary by Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi, *In Aristotelis librum de poetica communes explanationes* (*General Explanations of Aristotle's Book on Poetics*).<sup>398</sup>

<sup>392</sup>Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. I (Chicago, 1961), 38.

<sup>393</sup>Baxter Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca, 1962).

<sup>394</sup>Danilo Agguzzi-Barbagli, "Humanism and Poetics" in Albert Rabil, Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy* (Philadelphia, 1988), Vol. III, 85-169.

<sup>395</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>396</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>397</sup>Bernard Weinberg, "Robortello on the *Poetics*" in R.S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* (Chicago, 1952), 319-348.

<sup>398</sup>B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. I, 406-418.

Pietro Vettori's *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum* (*Commentaries on the First Book of Aristotle's Poetics*) came out in 1560.<sup>399</sup> All these commentaries were written in Latin, but in 1570 one of the greatest commentaries was published in Italian: Lodovico Castelvetro's *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata et sposta* (*Aristotle's Poetics Rendered in Vernacular and Explained*).<sup>400</sup> It was followed in 1575 by Alessandro Piccolomini's *Annotazioni nel libro della Poetica d'Aristotele*.<sup>401</sup> Further commentaries in Latin by Antonio Riccoboni and Lionardo Salviati in Italian were published respectively in 1585 and 1586.<sup>402</sup> There were also several more translations of Aristotle's work into Italian and Latin.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these commentaries. As Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli points out,

the great commentaries may well be defined as the internal supporting structure, the skeleton as it were, of the entire body of Renaissance critical literature in the Aristotelian mode. They stand as poles of reference for questions of textual criticism and verbal interpretations; they provide explanations of the Aristotelian doctrines from a position of authority always recognized, even when it is not followed.<sup>403</sup>

As I already indicated, it is important to isolate one central aspect of Aristotle's *Poetics*, namely its concept of imitation. Defined as "if it were the thing itself" (*quasi rem ipsam*, in Robortello's phrasing), imitation is derived in poetry through the use of verisimilitude rather than truth itself:

For, if verisimilar things give us pleasure, all the pleasure derives from the fact that we know these things to be present in the truth; and, in general, to the extent that the verisimilar partakes of truth it has the power to move and to persuade...If verisimilar things move us, the true will move us much more. Verisimilar things move us because we *believe* it to have been possible for the event to come about in the way specified. True things move us because we *know* that it did come about in the way specified. *Whatever virtue is thus contained in verisimilitude is derived totally from its relationship to the truth.*<sup>404</sup>

The relationship between verisimilitude and truth is thus central to poetry, and also distinguishes two closely-related arts: those of poetry and history. As Castelvetro put it in his great commentary,

the priority of history over poetry is not merely a postulate advanced to sustain a system of poetics, but a consequence of a deeply rooted philosophical convictions. He (Castelvetro) firmly believes that in the order of reality first come the objects and then their representation in the work of art: truth comes first and then it is followed

<sup>399</sup> Aguzzi-Barbagli, *op. cit.*, 111.

<sup>400</sup> Bernard Weinberg, "Castelvetro's Theory of Poetics" in R.S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism*, 349-371.

<sup>401</sup> B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. I, 543-553.

<sup>402</sup> Aguzzi-Barbagli, *op. cit.*, 111.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>404</sup> B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. I, 350.

by the verisimilar. Consequently history is strictly related to the domain of reality and nature; poetry instead is rigorously confined to the domain of representation.<sup>405</sup>

Though Aguzzi-Barbagli argues that "with Castelvetro the distance between the two disciplines becomes absolute and unbridgeable"<sup>406</sup>, in fact Castelvetro finds it difficult to draw a clear line between history and poetry despite his valiant efforts to do so: "Poetry derives all its light from history. Poetry is similitude or resemblance of history."<sup>407</sup> After arguing that the language of history is prose, and of poetry verse, he goes on to argue that "the subject matter of poetry must be similar to the subject matter of history, but it must not be identical, because if it were exactly the same it would not be similar and it would not resemble it."<sup>408</sup>

Applying the above criteria to the epic, Robortello says:

In epic poetry, just as in the others, this is the first thing that must be attended to: that the words used should have nothing about them that is incongruous or contradictory, but that they should in every respect agree among themselves and fit properly together. For, whenever either the period of time in which the action is done or the place or the person or the manner is not congruous, these things do not satisfy reason, nor are they acceptable to the mind of the readers or the hearers.<sup>409</sup>

Another commentator on Aristotle's *Poetics*, Benedetto Varchi, "was the dominant figure in the group of Florentine commentators on both Aristotle and Dante."<sup>410</sup> He delivered a series of lectures on Aristotle's *Poetics* before the Florentine Academy in 1553-1554 which were published in 1590. In his "Lezzione secunda" devoted to epic poetry, Varchi admonishes the poets

not to write of human actions in the way in which they were done, but in that way in which it was either possible, or verisimilar, or necessary that they might be done...Poets must not consider in the main how things are done by men, but how they should be done, although many things are permitted to them even outside nature; and even outside the reasonable or the verisimilar, so that they may bring not only greater utility for this mortal life, but also greater delight and admiration to men.<sup>411</sup>

In a series of lectures on Dante from 1543 onwards Varchi interpreted *The Divine Comedy* in the light of fashionable Aristotelianism: to him Dante is one of "the best peripatetics" (*ottimo peripatetico*) who follows "Aristotle, the Prince of the Peripatetics, and his commentators Averroes" (*Aristotele principe de' Peripatetici, e il*

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<sup>405</sup> Aguzzi-Barbagli, *op. cit.*, 115.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>407</sup> L. Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotele*, I: 14, 44.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, I:44.

<sup>409</sup> B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. I, 395.

<sup>410</sup> A. Vallone, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo*, Vol. I, 390.

<sup>411</sup> B. Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 430.



*suo commentatore Averrois*).<sup>412</sup> Thus in his lecture *Sopra que' versi di Dante nel XVII canto del Purgatorio, "Ne' creator ne' creatura mai"* (PUR XVII, 91ff) Varchi goes through the various categories until he discusses "what God is", "what God wills", "how God moves and why", "whether God foresees and how", and "if there is and what kind of love is in God".<sup>413</sup>

It is not my intention to summarize here the so-called quarrel over Dante; this has been done in detail by Weinberg.<sup>414</sup> What I would like to present is an epitome of that aspect of the quarrel which dealt with the structure and nature of Dante's work, culled from some of the most representative as well as prominent participants in the debate. All that is necessary for our purpose is to establish the range of opinion on the question whether Dante's masterpiece was an epic, and why it was (or was not).

As Weinberg points out, the quarrel itself started about 1572, but the foundations for it were laid earlier: as early as a passage in Book II of Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*, written in 1500, and published in 1525. Bembo's *Prose* is generally regarded by critics as one of the most important treatises on the vernacular ever written, and mainly responsible for the final "victory" of the Tuscan dialect as the literary language of Italy. Bembo thus is not the one to question the excellence of Dante's poem merely on the ground that it was written in the vernacular, and not in Latin. But he is the one to charge Dante with encumbering his poem with non-poetic features, above all, theological and philosophical ideas. Since this passage became the *locus classicus* of the Cinquecento detractors of Dante, let me quote it in full:

How much more praiseworthy it would have been if he had set himself to write of a less high and a less ample subject and if he had, in writing, constantly maintained this subject in its middle level, than it was to take so broad and so magnificent a subject and to allow himself to fall very frequently into writing of most base and vile things. And, moreover, how much better a poet he would be than he is, if he had not wished to appear to men, in his rhymes, as something else than a poet. For while he wished to show himself, in his poem, to be a master of all seven arts and of philosophy and besides of all Christian matters, he came to be less absolute and less perfect in poetry.<sup>415</sup>

These are very grave charges indeed: Bembo argues that Dante is primarily a philosopher and theologian ("something else than a poet") who would have been a much better poet had he stuck to poetry alone. Bembo thus held against Dante as a poet precisely those aspects of his

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<sup>412</sup>G. Aiazzi & L. Arbib, eds., B. Varchi, *Lezioni sul Dante e prose varie* (Florence, 1841), Vol. I, 12.

<sup>413</sup>A. Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 391.

<sup>414</sup>B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. II, 819-911.

<sup>415</sup>*Ibid.*, 820. Since Weinberg quotes the original passages in his footnotes, the reader is referred there. They are omitted here. They contain references to archival and printed sources.

poem, let us call them ideological, which later Counter-Reformation critics were to extol.

The defense of Dante came sometime between 1525 and 1542 when Girolamo Benivieni passed his judgment on Dante thus:

As for the soul of this composition, which is without doubt the invention or the plot: if one look closely he will easily discover that Dante imitated a single action (I do not say a dream, but rather a voyage while he was awake and aware, which he had formerly experienced), and this was of a proper size, proportionate, and completed, narrating about himself that which some other plots narrate about others persons, with ornamented language, and profitable to listeners.<sup>416</sup>

Thus by 1542 the lines were clearly drawn: either you liked Dante's poem, or you found him a better philosopher than a poet. As Bernardino Tomitano argued in comparing Dante with Petrarch:

I hold then that he will be a better and a graver poet who with the aid of philosophy will be able to make his compositions more beautiful and graver, but that he should not for this reason argue and speak about philosophy. And therefore I do not concede that Dante, although he may be a better philosopher, is a greater poet than Petrarch. For Petrarch understood that exact amount of philosophy that was necessary to give spirit and firmness to his rhymes, whereas in beautiful diction—which gives his name to the poet—...he was better than Dante.<sup>417</sup>

The first to deal with the question of what genre Dante's work belonged to was Carlo Lenzoni in his treatise *In difesa della lingua fiorentina, et di Dante (In Defense of the Florentine Language and of Dante)* which came out in 1556.

As Weinberg points out, Lenzoni deals with Aristotle's lists of genres, and finds that the epic is the one best used for extended treatment. The epic, according to Lenzoni, is distinguished by its unity of action, "the one principal and perfect action, which has a beginning, a middle, and an end". The epic can also accommodate marvelous actions (*il meraviglioso*). Hence Dante appropriated the latter for his poem.<sup>418</sup>

Lenzoni's opinion that the *Divine Comedy* is an epic was shared by Giovanni Battista Gelli in his *Readings on Dante's Comedy (Lecture sopra la Commedia di Dante, 1554-1556)*.<sup>419</sup> And such a judgment is passed by two commentators on Aristotle's *Poetics*, Giovanni Giorgio Trissino and Lodovico Castelvetro. The former in 1562 put it thus: "(Dante's *Divine Comedy*) belongs to the heroic form, as appears from its use of narrative, from the variety of languages and he employs in it, from the variety of figures, and from the frequency of the similes and comparisons which are there found, and many other things, all of

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<sup>416</sup>Ibid., 821.

<sup>417</sup>Ibid., 822: "Percioché il Petrarca...fu di Dante migliore."

<sup>418</sup>Ibid., 824: "...che ha principio, & mezzo, & fine."

<sup>419</sup>Ibid., 826-827: "He thinks that it is more nearly an epic than anything else." On Gelli also see A. Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 395-401.

which are appropriate to heroic poetry."<sup>420</sup> While Castelvetro argued that Dante's poem is not a comedy, but an epic.<sup>421</sup>

The first voice of the Counter-Reformation to praise precisely those features of Dante's work that Bembo deplored was that of Vincenzo Buonanni, who in 1572 published his *Discorso sopra la prima cantica del divinissimo theologo Dante d'Alighieri* (*The Discourse on the First Cantic by the Most Divine Theologian Dante d'Alighieri*)<sup>422</sup>, a very extensive commentary on the *Inferno*. In it he argued that Dante is a theological poet who made theology more perfect than it was. It was, however, somebody by the name of Castravilla, possibly a pseudonym, who made the quarrel take off in 1572 with his manuscript, titled (in an abbreviated form): *Discorso...nel quale si mostra l'imperfettione della Comedia di Dante* (*Discourse...in Which is Shown the Imperfection of Dante's Comedy*).<sup>423</sup>

What Castravilla did was to subject Dante's poem to a detailed analysis in terms of Aristotle's *Poetics*. We should recall that by 1572 Castelvetro's great commentary had appeared in Italian (1570), and thus both the text and commentary on Aristotle's work were available in Italian, and accessible to a much larger audience than in the first half of the Cinquecento. Castravilla's verdict is truly damning: "(Dante's *Divine Comedy*) ... is not even a poem; and granted that it were a poem, it is not a heroic poem; and granted that it were a heroic poem, it is a bad poem among heroic poems and is all full of imperfections in all its parts."<sup>424</sup> What are Castravilla's reasons for such a condemnation of Dante's classic? They are straight out of Aristotle's *Poetics*: "...Aristotle requires that a poem have a plot, and Dante's has none...Dante's poem has no action, no plot. It merely presents a dream, expounded and narrated, but not *imitated*..."<sup>425</sup> (my emphasis)

What Castravilla set out to demonstrate was that the success or failure of Dante's work as a poem rests on what Aristotle had to say about the epic in his *Poetics*. But for many critics this meant that Dante might not be at fault, if found wanting, but rather Aristotle: "For to find in the *Poetics* a basis for rejecting entirely that poem which most Italians regarded as their greatest literary achievement is to cast more doubt upon the *Poetics* than upon the *Divina Commedia*."<sup>426</sup> This is what Mazzoni's answer to Castravilla (*Discorso in difesa della Comedia del divino poeta Dante*), published in 1572, claims<sup>427</sup>; and what Antonio degli Albizzi, in his answer to Castravilla, written in 1573, loudly proclaims:

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 828.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 829: "Dante's poem is narrative and epic in its form."

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 830-831; also Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 404-406.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 831-834. The MS is in the Vatican *Latinus* 6528. For Castravilla see Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 403-404.

<sup>424</sup> MS Vat. Lat. 6528, fol. 76-76v quoted by Weinberg, *op. cit.*, 832.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 832.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 834.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 834-837.

I cannot force myself to believe, though the common opinion seems to hold the contrary, that in every poem and in every time the precepts and the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics* must be exactly observed by each poet, considering that these are relevant to the rarest achievements of the art and are founded on one or two ancient tragedies and on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* exclusively, which poems one would have to imitate in everything and everywhere—or rather, in truth, copy and translate them—if one wished (one's own poems) to be made exactly like them.<sup>428</sup>

Degli Albizzi's application of Aristotle's *Poetics* to Dante was designed to show that Castravilla's own analysis was faulty: Dante's poem does not lack a plot, it has a feigned rather than a historical action, and all parts neatly form a beginning, middle, and end. He then disposes of one of the most persistent objections to Dante's poem, namely that since he wrote of an imaginary thing (his trip into Afterlife) he could not imitate his own action: "Even though it may be known for certain that the action did not happen, and that it is not true but rather an imagination or a dream of the poet, nevertheless they give pleasure through the imitation and representation of persons acting in that way which is verisimilar."<sup>429</sup> It should come as no surprise to us that Degli Albizzi's conclusion was that Dante's poem must be rated as a perfect epic even though it does not conform to Aristotle's precepts on the epic in his *Poetics*.

Following in Buonanni's footsteps, Vincenzo Borghini produced his *Defense of Dante as a Catholic (Difesa di Dante come Cattolico)*<sup>430</sup> whose title says it all. Borghini praised Dante for not having sung of "vain fictions and fables or dishonest loves, as the other poets usually have...but (of) the highest and most excellent one that can possibly be imagined."<sup>431</sup> Borghini saw Dante's greatness in having clothed his poem with "what may be said to be a complete and perfect Christian ethics, in conformity with the Gospel and the Christian law and with what the Holy Fathers have written, as also with the truths of the philosophers in those realms where the human reason has some validity."<sup>432</sup> The method which Dante used to achieve this was the one of allegory; and Borghini wrote his *Introduction to Dante's Poem by (the way of) Allegory (Introduzione al poema di Dante per l'allegorio)* in 1573 to demonstrate this.<sup>433</sup>

In his answer to Castravilla (1572) Mazzoni had argued that Dante's poem does have a unified plot. In a number of works Bellissario Bulgarini accused Dante of having three plots, one for each one of his canticle, and thus totally devoid of unity.<sup>434</sup> In his marginal annotations

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 839; See Codex Vaticanus Latinus 6528: *La Risposta di Ms. Anton degli Albizzi al Discorso di Ms. Ridolfo Castravilla contro a Dante*.

<sup>429</sup> Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 840. On Degli Albizzi see Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 468-472.

<sup>430</sup> On Borghini see Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 415-423.

<sup>431</sup> B. Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 850.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 851.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 849. See O. Gigli, ed., *Studi sulla Divina Commedia di Galileo Galilei, Vincenzo Borghini ed altri ...*, (Florence, 1855), 306-320.

<sup>434</sup> E.g., *Alcune considerazioni di Bellissario Bulgarini sopra 'l Discorso di M. Giacompo Mazzoni fatto in Difesa della Comedia di Dante* (Siena, 1583); *Sopra quanto in nome del*

to Scipione Gentili's *Annotazioni sopra la Gerusalemme Liberata di Torquato Tasso*, dated 1588, Bulgarini attacked such an allegorical approach: "Histories changed by the poets become fabulous, and all poetic fictions have their origin in the truth. Let this be considered: one cannot feign the impossible which is known to be such by those to whom the poem is addressed, nor can one save oneself by any allegory whatsoever that one might give to it..."<sup>435</sup>

An anonymous Florentine wrote a long letter, dated 1589, as an answer to Bulgarini's critique of Dante.<sup>436</sup> It is a first-class literary criticism that points out the kind of sophisticated unity that Dante's poem possesses: "Therefore, it was necessary to go from Hell through Purgatory to Paradise, and by these three steps, as on a ladder, to ascend to beatitude. And I said three steps, and one ladder, only so that you might consider that there are indeed three places, but only one voyage, and one single action." As for the old charge that Dante violated the rule of imitation because he imitates himself, the anonymous writer points out the difference between Dante the pilgrim and Dante the poet: "It seems to me that Dante imitates not himself... but that personage which it pleased the divine power to attribute to him" (i. e. Dante the pilgrim) ... "which personage is as different from Dante the poet and writer as the truth is different from fiction."<sup>437</sup> And as for Bembo's old charge that Dante put too much philosophy and theology into this poem which rendered his poem less poetic, the anonymous had a ringing retort: Dante's epic is "a noble and sacred poem" which incorporated discussions of more elevated subjects (obviously theology) than Aristotle dreamed of. On the contrary, Dante, though he cannot be charged of not observing Aristotle's rules, nevertheless adapted them.<sup>438</sup>

In my opinion the most original defense of Dante was a lecture by Francesco Bonciani, prepared in 1590 who was a firm believer in Aristotle's *Poetics*. According to Bonciani, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a genre which Aristotle only imperfectly described. This is the epic. Bonciani posits three prerequisites for the epic: 1) its theme must consist of a noble and virtuous action; 2) it must be written in a singularly lofty verse; and 3) and it must combine a narrative and dramatic manner. Bonciani concluded that Dante's poem is an epic, superior to the ancient ones as well as to Tasso's *Gerusalemme*.<sup>439</sup>

In conclusion, I agree fully with Weinberg who proposes that the quarrel over Dante was really a kind of "quarrel of the ancients and the

Sig. Jacopo Mazzoni si scrive a' Lettori da Tuccio dal Corno in *Annotazioni ovvero chiose marginali...sopra la prima Parte della Difesa fatta da M. Jacopo Mazzoni* (Siena, 1608). On Bulgarini see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* Vol. XIV (Rome, 1977), 40-43.

<sup>435</sup> B. Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 891.

<sup>436</sup> *Risposta di Anonimo in difesa di Dante al sign. Bellisario Bulgarini*; the MS is in Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence VI, 164.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 893-894.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 894. On the 'Anonimo' see Vallone, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 506-511.

<sup>439</sup> Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 902-903.

moderns".<sup>440</sup> The basic question is this: can Dante be judged in terms of Aristotle? And if yes, what did Aristotle mean? What was at the core of the problem was the "Christian" nature of Dante's poem, i.e. those theological and philosophical aspects condemned by Bembo and praised by Buonanni and Borghini. After the Council of Trent it was this Christian aspect of Dante's epic that commended itself most of all: "As certain critics came to insist more and more that poetry should serve the ultimate ends of the church, Dante's position as a 'sacred' or as a 'theological' poet was more firmly established."<sup>441</sup> Thus having established that Dante's poem is an epic, the Counter-Reformation critics went on to proclaim it the quintessentially "Christian" epic as such.

It should be emphasized that one can detect a definite shift from a literal, mimetic interpretation of *The Divine Comedy*, i.e. based on the Aristotelian concept of imitation, to an allegorical interpretation, based on the Neoplatonic notion of allegoresis, from the early to the late Italian Renaissance. For taken literally Dante's masterpiece cannot be regarded as an *epic* in a strict sense; taken allegorically it could and was. Thus only allegoresis could make an epic out of Dante's journey to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

The other important literary quarrel of the Cinquecento was that over the respective merits of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*.<sup>442</sup> It was a quarrel which was even more lively and acrimonious, for one of the poets was still alive, and took personal interest in the debate. Moreover it was a quarrel which in many ways can be seen as both parallel to and complementary to the one over Dante: for the quarrel over Dante was over whether Dante's poem was epic, and if so, whether it was superior to those of the ancients *precisely because* it was a "Christian" epic; while the quarrel over Ariosto and Tasso, while ostensibly over the nature and structure of the epic, involved a comparison of an epic romance which captured the eclectic, unstructured strivings of the Renaissance with an epic designed according to the rules found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The quarrel over Ariosto and Tasso was thus a debate over the respective world views as well as poetics of the two historical periods.

As in the case of the quarrel over Dante, the full-blown debate was preceded by a long preparatory period, roughly from 1549 to 1583. It came to an end with the publication of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* in 1581, and the first critique of it as well as comparisons with Ariosto's work. But the positions were already indicated in the middle of the Cinquecento. In 1549 Simone Fornari in his *Brief Apology of the Whole Orlando Furioso (Apologia breve sopra tutto l'Orlando Furioso)*<sup>443</sup> used Aristotle's *Poetics* and Robortello's great commentary on it to defend Ariosto from those who had used Aristotle to denigrate his

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<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 875.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 875.

<sup>442</sup> For an extensive treatment see B. Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 954-1073.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 954-957.

epic.<sup>444</sup> Again, as in the case of the quarrel over Dante, it was the dissemination of Aristotle's work and the appearance of authoritative commentaries on it in Cinquecento Italy that provided the ammunition for both Ariosto's attackers and defenders.

As Weinberg summarizes the battlelines drawn by 1550, the "Aristotelians" charged Ariosto with having many plots instead of the single as demanded by Aristotle. To this Fornari provided a truly "Aristotelian" answer, namely, that in the *Poetics* Aristotle had provided four different kinds of plot: the simple, the complex, the moral, and the passionate, for both the epic and tragedy. Fornari thus tried to argue that the plot of *Orlando furioso* is complex.<sup>445</sup>

In an exchange of letters between Giovanni Battista Pigna and Giovambattista Giraldi Cintio, dated 1554, the former recapitulated all the other charges against Ariosto: "His *title* is incorrect, since it does not correspond to what actually happens in the poem. The *beginning* and the *end* are disconnected, whereas good poets have always made them correspond to each other. The passages from one part to another shows great *disorder*, and the frequent use of magic and the supernatural violates contemporary *usage*. Whereas a poem should have a *single action* Ariosto's has many... *Digressions* are too numerous."<sup>446</sup> We can see that Pigna presented the arguments which go to the core of the matter: can *Orlando Furioso* be called an epic at all? Giraldi's answer is a very detailed point-by-point refutation of these charges, but it boils down to this original stance: that Ariosto's work is *not* an epic, but a new genre, a *romance*. Thus, "he indicates a fundamental difference between the practices of the epic—'their' genre—and the romance—'our' genre."<sup>447</sup> In effect Giraldi's point is that of cultural relativism: Aristotle is right when he judges the canons and products of his own civilization, but he is inappropriate for judging new genres and products of another civilization, totally distant and different from his own "who wrote for other times and in other languages which had other customs and other ways of poetizing".<sup>448</sup>

In his treatise *On the Romances (I romanzi)* Pigna provided a full defense of Ariosto against the very charges which had been listed in his letter to Giraldi: why has the poet called his epic after Orlando and not Ruggiero, who is the main hero? First of all, many writers have given their works titles which do not accurately describe their contents. Secondly, the most notable example is to be found in Homer's *Iliad* itself. Presumably what Pigna means is that Homer did not describe the Trojan war as such, but Achilles' wrath and its consequences, and thus the title of his epic, the *Iliad* is inappropriate, for it does not deal with Troy (*Ilium*) or its war. The final reason is rather spurious: Ariosto

<sup>444</sup>On Francesco Robortello's *In librum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes* (1548) see Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 388-399.

<sup>445</sup>Weinberg, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 955-957.

<sup>446</sup>*Ibid.*, 958.

<sup>447</sup>*Ibid.*, 961.

<sup>448</sup>*Ibid.*, 961.

named his epic after Orlando because he followed the earlier romances, i.e. *Chanson de Roland*, and especially Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*. Accordingly, "it was more opportune to derive the title of the work, and to announce its subject at the outset, from the most famous and chief of the romances..."<sup>449</sup>

Pigna argued that the romance has a different structure from the epic, and that instead of having a single action of one man (the epic), it has as its subject many actions of many men. Such a distinction between the romance and the epic was totally rejected by Filippo Sassetti. In his *Discourse Against Ariosto* (*Discorso contro l'Ariosto*, 1575-1576) he rejected Ariosto's work in its entirety on the grounds that all poems must conform to Aristotle's rules, which Ariosto's does not. Thus for Sassetti

the romance is merely an epic which has been badly put together and the Orlando Furioso is merely a very imperfect poem... The most important flaw in Ariosto's plot is its lack of unity. On this matter Sassetti...is intransigent: unity is a *sine qua non*. ... Moreover, since Ariosto's plot depends upon Boiardo's, it has no proper "beginning" of its own; since it is incomplete when the poem terminates, it has no proper "ending." Its complexity and its fragmentation are such that the reader could not possibly encompass it in a single turn of the memory.<sup>450</sup>

As long as Ariosto's work was the only great heroic poem (regardless of whether it was an epic) produced by the Renaissance, his opponents and detractors could not counterpose another great "Christian" epic, for such did not exist—unless one counted as an epic Dante's poem. And this is precisely what most of the critics of Ariosto's poem did. They were, however, vulnerable to the charge that Dante's poem was not an epic, and had difficulty with the obvious absence of heroic action (of the *Arma virumque cano* type—"I sing of arms and men", as Virgil put it). With the appearance of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) in 1581 the situation changed radically: "For the new work, ostensibly in the epic mode, could not only provide a new object of discussion and criticism but it could also serve as a foil, as a basis for comparison, in the continuing re-evaluation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Ultimately...it could serve as one of the poles in the violent quarrel over the respective merits of the two Cinquecento poets."<sup>451</sup>

From the very beginning Tasso's poem was hailed by many as a "Christian" epic. Thus Orazio Lombardelli pointed out in the very same year of the publication of Tasso's epic that, unlike other "ill-advised and unhappy" writers who had written of "profane, heretical, schismatic, and scandalous things", Tasso had worked for the exaltation of the Christian faith: "For Tasso is the kind of writer who may be read by anybody (children, youths, priests, and nuns) without fear of moral harm or of corrupting suggestions, whereas this is not the case with the three ancient poets (Homer, Virgil, Ovid). The Christian element

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<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 964.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 975, 976-977.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 983.



remains strong throughout Lombardelli's critique", as Weinberg emphasized.<sup>452</sup>

The first to provoke the on-going debate after the publication of Tasso's work was Camillo Pellegrino. In his treatise on epic poetry, published in 1584, he reiterated all of the Aristotelian precepts about the unity of action, and then went on to pass a judgment on Tasso's epic in comparison with both ancient and modern ones: "The author of the *Gerusalemme* belongs at the very top of the list of Italian poets, below Homer and Vergil (whom nobody since has ever equaled) but above Ariosto and his group."<sup>453</sup>

Pellegrino's eulogy of Tasso was vehemently attacked by Leonardo Salviati. Among other charges he accused Tasso of, so to say, "versifying history": "the plot of *Jerusalem Delivered* is a story stolen completely, as everyone knows; whence the author in that work is not a poet, but a reducer of somebody else's story to verse."<sup>454</sup> This was an extremely damaging charge, and it went to the core of the matter. Behind Salviati stood the prestigious and influential Accademia della Crusca. It was Salviati's charge, orchestrated by Crusca, that brought Tasso into the debate with his *Apollogia...in difesa della sua Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Apology...in Defense of his Jerusalem Delivered*) (1585) Tasso's *Apollogia* is above all a rebuttal of Salviati's charge that Tasso had "stolen" his plot from history, and that accordingly he was not a poet at all. This has forced Tasso to look at the whole relationship between history and poetry; and his solution was the one he would adhere to for the rest of his life: a proper mixture of history and poetry, "a mixture through which history has lost the form of history and taken that of poetry, which it would never take if it could not be mixed with poetry..." What is the difference, then, between a poet and a historian? "The historian considers the truth of particulars and the philosopher" (read the poet) "that of universals; the latter considers also verisimilitude in a universal way, because it belongs to the art itself...Therefore the poet does not spoil truth, but he seeks it in a perfect form, supposing in place of the truth of particulars that of universals, which are Ideas...so for poets, who in their consideration of Ideas are philosophers."<sup>455</sup>

It is quite evident that Tasso is a self-declared Platonist in his belief in the existence of absolute Ideas, despite his defense of Aristotelianism. It must have come as a surprise if not a shock to him when the next great attack on his poem came from one of the leading Platonists of the age, Francesco Patrizi. In his *Defense of Ariosto* (*Discorso...in difesa di Lodovico Ariosto*) dated 1585, Patrizi had argued against deriving poetic principles from Aristotle's precepts. Tasso chose to answer in unequivocal terms: "the principles of Aristotle are proper, and true, and adequate to teach us the art of poetry, and to form poems, and to show

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<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 984.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 994.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 1006.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 1011-1012.

us the way of judging of them—contrary to what Patrizi affirms..."<sup>456</sup> In his conclusion Tasso argued that Aristotle provided all the necessary information for the construction of the epic.

If Tasso thought that such a categorical rebuttal would settle the issue once and for all, he was very much mistaken: the Accademia della Crusca of Florence stood behind Salviati's second attack on Tasso called *A Reply to Torquato Tasso's Apology (Risposta all'Apologia di Torquato Tasso)* printed in 1585. Salviati repeated his previous distinction between history and poetry thus: "Imitation is the genus of poetry, narration that of history. The former has the verisimilar for its subject, the latter the truth. The first is made in verse, the second by its nature in prose. Finally, ...they differ in figure, since the body of the poem must be one, and on the contrary this unity is not necessary for history."<sup>457</sup>

Camillo Pellegrino came to Tasso's rescue again in October of 1585 by comparing Tasso favorably with Ariosto. He accused the latter of lacking any unity of plot, so that whole chunks of his poem could be left out without harming the work as a whole, a most damaging assertion from an Aristotelian point of view. Again he passed a highly favorable judgment on Tasso:

One can see then that even if Ariosto has observed, in certain parts of the *Furioso* the teaching and the counsel of Aristotle, in the whole he has not observed it at all. Tasso, if not fully and completely, was much better observer than he of the teachings of that philosopher.<sup>458</sup>

In 1586 Orazio Lombardelli entered the fray again with his *Discourse on the Contrasting (Things Said) about Gerusalemme Liliberata (Discorso intorno a i contrasti che fanno sopra la Gerusalemme Liberata)*. In it Lombardelli dealt with sixteen principal charges against Tasso's epic. The most important, however, is the first one: that the *Jerusalem Delivered* is mere history without plot. Lombardelli tried to demonstrate that the *Gerusalemme Liberata* is not mere history, but a heroic poem:

History is a true narration of things that have happened, made to correspond to the way in which they happened, observing the circumstances of the times, of the places, of the causes, of the accidents, and so on, with the end of profiting and sometimes also of delighting. But the *Gerusalemme Liberata* is a narrative in part true and in part invented, of things that in part have happened and in part have not happened, developed in a different way from that in which they happened, with the greater part of the circumstances altered, with the end of delighting along with utility.<sup>459</sup>

Lombardelli then proceeded to deal with the charge that Tasso delayed the "solution" in his epic by inserting what we would call mere "fillers", i.e. action which is placed in the plot merely to retard and delay

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<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 1014.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 1017.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, 1021.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, 1027.

the main action; to put bluntly, that Tasso's poem suffers from, what opera buffs call, "longeurs". Lombardelli saw this as a positive feature:

...that he should have succeeded so well in knotting and typing all the parts of this poem of his... to have promised to sing the glorious reconquest, and then to have delayed it so much, to have put so many things in its way, to have interrupted it, and to have brought it almost to the point of desperation...until at the end all the obstacles give way.<sup>460</sup>

On the central relationship between history and poetry another defender of Tasso was Giulio Ottonelli, who in his *Discourse with the Defense of G.L. (Discorso con le difese della G.L.)* took issue with Salviati's charge:

...if Tasso had written the war of Jerusalem fought by Goffredo not as a poet but as a historian in the fashion of Quintus Calabrus, of Silius Italicus, and of Lucan, then one might concede that he should rather be called a historian than a poet; but since he wrote it, not as a historian according to the truth, but as a poet in a fictional way, as Plutarch teaches, he is to be called a poet and not a historian. Not because he treated a subject which is found in other writers is it to be denied that the invention is his rather than another's, or that he merits the name of poet.<sup>461</sup>

One of the most zealous as well as capable defenders of Tasso's epic was Giulio Guastavini. In his reply to Salviati of 1588 he went straight to the cardinal issue: whether plots taken straight out of history are fit for poetry. As Weinberg points out, Guastavini goes so far as to claim that historical subjects are the best possible subjects for poetry: "...poetic invention in a certain way is always of that kind of things which are treated by history, that is, of true and real things and not of phantasms."<sup>462</sup> Guastavini argued that the poet "does not leave these true things as they were found in their original state, but he alters, changes, increases, or diminishes them—only up to that point, however, that his precepts permit him to—and he gives them those conditions that are required for a poetic plot; and this is nothing else but to make the plot."<sup>463</sup>

Guastavini was Tasso's ablest defender during the last embittered years of Tasso's life. In 1590 he published his annotations and discourses on the *Jerusalem Delivered*. In them he tried to prove Tasso's superiority over all other Italian poets *with the exception of Dante*. Guastavini's notable contribution is brought out singularly well by Weinberg:

There is a notable attempt to reduce the *Gerusalemme* to the quantitative parts which Aristotle had distinguished in tragedy. Guastavini thinks that Canto I-III constitute the prologue, Cantos IV-XVIII the episode, and Cantos XIX-XXI [sic; it should be XX] the epilogue...In Guastavini's analysis, the prologue and the epilogue are the parts that must have a historical source: the first because it is the foundation

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 1028-1029.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 1031.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 1038.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 1038-1039.

of the whole edifice, and because it must obtain the confidence of the readers, and for other reasons known to the masters of the art; the second because it contains the end of the action. The whole central part is made up of the episodes, which give magnitude to the poem. Here the poet is his own master, and far from depending upon the "common matters" which make up the beginning and the end, he is free to invent and improvise... Beginning and end are known, but middle is unknown; beginning and middle are credible because they are true, but middle is marvelous... Guastavini maintains that the *Gerusalemme* is especially admirable in the middle part and that Tasso's excellence comes largely from this achievement.<sup>464</sup>

On the question of the unity of the plot Guastavini again comes to Tasso's rescue by pointing out that Goffredo is the epic's principal actor, while Rinaldo is an auxiliary. Thus Guastavini "solves" one of the thorniest issues around *Gerusalemme Liberata* that of the two protagonists. In his conclusion Guastavini claims that Tasso should not be compared with Ariosto, but with Dante, "since both are perfect poems and both are epics."<sup>465</sup>

Throughout his life as a mature poet Torquato Tasso had to struggle with the precepts for writing an epic found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. It finally led to not one but two different books of poetics written during respectively his early and late years, his juvenile *Discourses on Poetic Art (Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica)*, probably written as early as 1561-1562<sup>466</sup>, and published in Venice in 1587; and his mature *Discourses on the Heroic Poem (Discorsi del Poema Heroico)*.<sup>467</sup> In between writing the two books of poetics Tasso engaged in a number of literary debates, mostly regarding the appropriateness of Aristotle's *Poetics* for judging the epics in general, and his own in particular. In 1576 Tasso voiced his objections to Castelvetro in a letter to Capponi. Written as marginal comments in a copy of the 1570 edition of Castelvetro, they are mostly brief, but are of importance for his future views. Thus Tasso rejected Castelvetro's idea that "if the material of the poem were that of history, it would be the very same thing, and therefore it would not be similar."<sup>468</sup> He summarized his objections to Castelvetro thus: "You will see that the end of the poet is pleasure and that poetry is not an imitation of history."<sup>469</sup> Tasso's most poignant objection is to Castelvetro's treatment of Aristotle's concept of unity: "Note that it seems that Castelvetro holds that several actions may become one through the unity of time, of place, of person, not merely through dependency. This is most untrue (*falsissimo*)."<sup>470</sup> The epithet "most untrue" betrays already Tasso's future preoccupation with the unity of poetry in general, and of the epic in particular.

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<sup>464</sup>Ibid., 1053.

<sup>465</sup>Ibid., 1054.

<sup>466</sup>On the problem of the dating of the *Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica* see Luigi Poma's edition of *Discorsi dell' arte poetica e del poema eroico* (Bari, 1964), 263-268.

<sup>467</sup>Torquato Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (henceforth DHP), translated with notes by Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel (Oxford, 1973).

<sup>468</sup>C. Guasti, ed., *Le prose diverse di Torquato Tasso* (Florence, 1875), 2 vols., Vol. I, 280.

<sup>469</sup>Ibid., I, 290.

<sup>470</sup>Ibid., I, 282.

After the publication of his *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) in 1581, Tasso was both praised and blamed—and under attack he turned to Aristotle's *Poetics* for a defense of his epic. As I already explained, judgments of Tasso's epic involved an automatic comparison with Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and even, indirectly, with Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*. Thus in response to one of his critics, Francesco Patrizi, who had written a spirited defense of Ariosto (*Parere in difesa dell'Ariosto*) in 1585, Tasso came out openly as a thorough Aristotelian: "Aristotle's principles are proper, and true, and sufficient to teach us the art of poetry and to form poems, and to show us the way in which to judge them."<sup>471</sup> One could be no greater champion of Aristotle than Tasso when he insisted that "no other one is needed, nor is there any species of good poetry which cannot be discovered through the *differentiae* that Aristotle sets down and for which correct judgment cannot be given in the way that he teaches us."<sup>472</sup>

The relationship between truth and verisimilitude, i.e. between history and poetry, are dealt with by Tasso in his answer to Lombardelli's critique (*Risposta al Discorso del Sig. Oratio Lombardelli*), dated 1586. As Weinberg makes clear,

throughout his argument, he uses the art of history as a point of comparison with the art of poetry (answering Lombardelli's views), and the following conclusions result from the comparison: History and poetry differ essentially in the absence and presence of imitation. Tasso has some difficulty with the term...but in a broader sense it seems to mean the vivid placing of things and actions before our eyes, and this occurs in poetry; whereas history gives merely a simple narrative of events. One consequence of this distinction is that the customary statement to the effect that history treats the truth and poetry treats verisimilitude is not valid. For Tasso, both arts are equally concerned with the truth. In fact, he sees truth as a necessary foundation for poems in whatever genre, and the hierarchy which he establishes descends from genres which are based entirely on the truth to those which represent it only slightly.<sup>473</sup>

The underlined sentence reveals Tasso's conviction that truth and verisimilitude have to be combined in any worthwhile poem, and above all, in the epic poem which he had called in his annotations to Castelvetro's commentary, "magnificent", i.e. capable of *maraviglia*, of a more marvelous quality. As Weinberg comments, "the poet must add something to the truth (otherwise there would be no opportunity for his 'invention') and...the marvelous is a necessary ingredient."<sup>474</sup> As Tasso sums it up, "the poem reaches the highest degree of perfection when these two things (the marvelous and verisimilitude) are joined together, and they may be conjoined in various ways."<sup>475</sup> How does Tasso define marvelous? *As supernatural, but credible phenomean, i.e. those believed as true because accepted on Christian faith, e.g. miracles.*

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<sup>471</sup> B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. II, 602.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 602.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 629.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 629.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 629-630.

Weinberg is absolutely right when he claims that Tasso's view represents a return to Aristotelianism.<sup>476</sup> In his second attempt to apply Aristotle's precepts to epic poetry, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (*Discorsi del Poema Heroico*), in the first three books he set out to propound a theory which was at the same time based on the best examples of epic poetry since Homer, and on the observations of the precepts of the venerable ancients. Tasso chose to expand and in effect totally rewrite his early *Discourses on Poetic Art* (*Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica*) in order to justify *in theory* what he believed he had already achieved *in practice*: an epic that could vie with the best in the epic tradition since Homer. The latter was his *Jerusalem Delivered*, completed in 1575. By the time the *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* were finally published in an imperfect form in 1594, a year before he died, Tasso had gone through a very acrimonious debate over his epic, and had reworked his masterpiece into a more "Christian" version entitled *La Gerusalemme Conquistata* (*Jerusalem Conquered*), published in 1592.<sup>477</sup> There is thus more than a casual connection between the *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* and Tasso's epic. As Irene Samuel put it, "the *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* has as its chief impulse to justify the epic poem Tasso had himself written; but Tasso had written *Jerusalem Delivered*—and revised it into *Jerusalem Conquered*—out of the same convictions he elaborates in the *Discourses*: the theory in some measure generated the epic poem, as surely as the completed epic poem finally generated the theory."<sup>478</sup>

In Book One of his *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* Tasso starts with Aristotle's notion of *mimesis*, of imitation: "We may therefore affirm that poetry is nothing other than imitation."<sup>479</sup> But imitation of what? "Of human and divine actions...It follows that those who do not sing human or divine actions are not poets."<sup>480</sup> Note that Tasso included divine actions as well: of course, he had a solid reason for doing so since Homer and Virgil both included divine interventions in human affairs as essential aspects of their epics. But Tasso has somebody else specifically in mind: Dante. Tasso regarded Dante's poem as an epic and was determined to defend him against his critics. Nevertheless, he was fully aware of the quarrel over Dante's *Divine Comedy* as to whether it was indeed an epic. Accordingly, he starts on a neutral ground, so to speak, by claiming that "acts of contemplation can also be imitated by poets. Some indeed contend that the subject of Dante's poem is a contemplation because that voyage of his to Hell and Purgatory has no meaning other than the speculations of his mind."<sup>481</sup> This provides Tasso with a welcome excuse to attack this view as

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<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 632.

<sup>477</sup> Tasso's *La Gerusalemme Conquistata* is available in Bonfigli's edition (Bari, 1934), 2 vols., which is somewhat deficient due to the death of the editor.

<sup>478</sup> DHP, xxiii.

<sup>479</sup> DHP, 7.

<sup>480</sup> DHP, 7.

<sup>481</sup> This was the position of Jacopo Mazzoni in his *Difesa della Commedia di Dante* (Cesena, 1587).

expressed by Mazzoni and to claim that "no divine action is imitated as such, since, so far as it is divine, it cannot be imitated by any of the means proper to poetry. I would therefore conclude that poetry is nothing but an imitation of human actions, which are properly imitable."<sup>482</sup>

At first it would seem that Tasso had effectively excluded Dante's poem in so far as it is "divine", but one should remember that Dante's masterpiece was called by its author a "comedy" because, unlike a tragedy, it has a happy ending, and that Dante himself never called it "divine". The epithet was added to it by later generations who saw it as particularly lofty. What Tasso has in mind is his crucial concept that distinguishes the epic from other forms of poetry: which is "to move wonder" (*mover meraviglia*). Tasso thus specifically includes divine action by pointing out that "in the epic gods and angels frequently descend from heaven and participate in human actions, giving counsel and help, as Apollo and Minerva do in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer..., Venus in Virgil's *Aeneid*... So too the angel Michael descends in *Orlando Furioso* and the angel Palladio and Nettunio in the *Italia Liberata*..."<sup>483</sup> Then he offers the angelic descent in Canto IX of Dante's *Inferno*, when an angel opens the Gate of Dis to Virgil and Dante, as another example.<sup>484</sup>

Tasso's betrayed his own deep admiration of Dante's work when he placed the "Christian" epic above "pagan" ones—and he did this in a curiously theological manner: "The most excellent poem belongs exclusively to the most excellent form of government. This is monarchy, but monarchy cannot be best governed under a false religion. The true religion is then necessary to the best monarchy; and where there is a false piety and a false worship of God there can be no perfection in prince or principality."<sup>485</sup> The notion that monarchy is the best form of government is Aristotle's from his *Politics*<sup>486</sup>; but the rest is a Renaissance interpolation.

Tasso again placed Dante above the ancient poets when he brought up, in one of his numerous digressions, the question of love. Tasso started by quoting Proclus<sup>487</sup>, "the great philosopher of the Platonic school", who stated that heroes were especially prone to two feelings, wrath and love: "If one of these is appropriate to the heroic poem, the other surely cannot be inappropriate. Wrath indeed strikes everyone as eminently suitable: Homer himself made the wrath of Achilles the subject of his supremely lofty poem... We may regard actions performed for the sake of love as beyond all others heroic."<sup>488</sup> At this point it should be pointed out that Tasso is here using the word *amor* in its two

<sup>482</sup> DHP, 8.

<sup>483</sup> DHP, 15; Poma, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>484</sup> There is a study of the angelic descent by Thomas M. Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: a Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven, 1963).

<sup>485</sup> DHP, 37.

<sup>486</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, Ch. 7, 1279a 23ff. and 1279b 1ff.

<sup>487</sup> On Proclus and his view of Homer see Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 162-232.

<sup>488</sup> DHP, 45-46, 47.

accepted medieval and Renaissance meanings of “love”: first as carnal love, and second as a higher spiritualized love (sometimes referred to as *caritas* in a scholastic jargon). Tasso based his preference for the latter on the opinion of St. Thomas Aquinas, but he clearly had Dante’s poem in mind when he held it against the ancients that they only knew the former: “But if love is not merely a passion and a movement of the sensitive appetite, but a highly noble habit of the will, as St. Thomas held, love will be more praiseworthy (than wrath) in heroes and consequently in the heroic poem. *This kind of love the ancients either did not know or did not wish to describe in their heroes...*”<sup>489</sup> Only thus can we fully appreciate Tasso’s turning to Dante to justify his view of Love as the most fitting sentiment of the heroic poem:

...the opinion of Dante...may afford the basis for our opinion. In his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* he says that three things should be sung of in the highest style: salvation, love, and virtue—salvation because it is useful, love because it is delightful, and virtue because it is honourable. But if the highest style is the tragic, to the extent that it is identical with or includes the heroic, assuredly love may be sung of in the heroic poem. Dante regards love as delightful, and we might regard it also as honourable or as a chivalric virtue, that is *as a habit of the will*.<sup>490</sup>

The last phrase which I emphasized betrays Tasso’s reference to that higher form of Love described by St. Thomas.

Tasso’s *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* were above all a defense of his new version of his epic called *La Gerusalemme Conquistata* (*Jerusalem Conquered*). The major reason for the revisions of *La Gerusalemme Liberata* was to make Tasso’s epic more “relevant” for the Counter-Reformation purpose of reviving the idea of a crusade as an anti-Ottoman weapon following the Council of Trent (1563) and the great naval victory at Lepanto (1571). When we look at the actual revisions of the epic, barring major and minor stylistic improvements and restructuring of the order of the minor episodes, what strikes us immediately is the fact that the revised version (*La Gerusalemme Conquistata*) consists not of 20 cantos, as does the original version (*La Gerusalemme Liberata*), but of 24. It seems to me that Tasso chose this number because of the significance, primarily metaphysical, he attached to the number eight, as explained in the last section of Book VI of his *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*. Looking at it from the mystical point of view, number 24 is the product of 3 x 8. And, of course, his entire epic was made up of *ottava rima*, of stanzas of eight. The divisions of *Jerusalem Conquered* correspond to the significance of number eight: its first eight cantos correspond to the first seven cantos of *Jerusalem Delivered*, and thus there is no major added chunk of narrative in what we may call Part One of the revised version. The all-important intervention of the Forces of Hell, originally found in Canto VIII, is now put into new Canto IX: it should be emphasized that it was the intervention of the demonic forces on behalf of the “Saracens” that

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<sup>489</sup> DHP, 47.

<sup>490</sup> DHP, 48-49.



prolonged the battle of Jerusalem. Appropriately, this intervention figures at the beginning of Part Two of the revised version.

Part Two of *Jerusalem Conquered* includes cantos VIII-X of the original version, plus new cantos XII and XIII fashioned out of cantos XIV-XVI of *Jerusalem Delivered*, as well as new cantos XIV-XVI made out of material originally found in cantos XI-XIII of the first version. Part Two of the second version thus includes major transpositions of the original material and its themes. By the end of Canto XVI of the revised version just about all the action found in the original sixteen cantos had been incorporated. This was necessary in order to start Part III of the revised version with the important Canto XVII, somewhat expanded from its original version. In other words, all the transpositions and additions of new material found in Parts One and Two of *Jerusalem Conquered* were necessary in order to provide ample space for a totally revised Part Three, now of equal length with the preceding two parts, i.e. consisting of 8 cantos. Part Three starts with Canto XVII's brief history of the Caliphate of Egypt. It should be pointed out that it was the army of the Caliph of Egypt that is the major force confronting the Crusaders and defending Jerusalem in the final stage of the conflict.

Part Three thus deals with the final confrontation between the Egyptians and the Crusaders before the walls of Jerusalem. And it is in Part Three that Tasso tried to give his epic a new Counter-Reformation veneer. Minor stylistic and structural interventions throughout the first two parts could give its tone and narrative a more suitable "Christian" gloss, but that was not enough: in order to redeem his epic from the charge of "paganism", so dangerous in the Age of the Counter-Reformation, Tasso tried, and tried very hard, to provide *Jerusalem Conquered* with an ideological meaning absent in the original version. First of all, in the new Canto XVIII God Himself now favors the fight against the Moors; and in new Canto XIX God Himself commands that a new course of affairs, favorable to the Crusaders, should start. Thus Divine Intervention is directly incorporated into the final stage of conflict between the Christians and the Infidels.

Yet, great as these two interventions might appear to a reader they pale in comparison with the new Canto XX which can be seen as not only the most important new addition to the revised version as a whole, but in many ways the ideological culmination of *Jerusalem Conquered* as such. In it the leader of the Crusaders who is also the Instrument of Divine Intervention in History, Goffredo (of Bouillon) had a dream in which he was transported to Heaven. This idea was already expressed in Canto XIV of the original version, but there it was only an embryo of what it became in new Canto XX: Goffredo has a vision of the Old Testament and the history of Judea, followed by that of the New Testament, and then the entire spectacle of the Church Triumphant—the Hosts of Angels, the ranks of the Saints, and the procession of the *future* popes. This is followed by prophecies regarding *future* events: the fall of Jerusalem (still to come in the epic itself) and of Constantinople. All this is capped with a vision of Philip II and of the

Battle of Lepanto, with panegyrics to minor Italian princely families thrown in for good measure.

With the exception of a few lines at the beginning and end of the new Canto XX, taken from the original Canto XIV, Goffredo's vision of the *future* events, above all, of the future victories of Christianity over Islam, was the major ideological addition that Tasso felt he had to make to appease his critics and find favor, above all, with the new Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605) who typified the new Counter-Reformation view of poetry as, to put it bluntly, another medium of Catholic propaganda. Again, while he introduced some new action in cantos XXI-XXIV of the revised version, it represents a mere "filler", i.e. suitable material for expanding Part Three and thus achieving the harmony of  $3 \times 8 = 24$ . But at the very end of the revised version Tasso introduced a new element: the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army, Emireno, curses "his Prophet", i.e. Muhammed, and calls him a "deceiving idol" (*idol bugiardo*). The final vindication of Christianity as the true, and of Islam, as a false, religion is thereby powerfully restated.

It was necessary to go through the details of Tasso's revision of his original epic in order to emphasize the absolute necessity, felt by the Catholic authorities in the Age of the Counter-Reformation, and dutifully incorporated into the new version by Tasso himself, of making an epic above all a "Christian" poem. And what that meant in the context of the already written *Jerusalem Delivered* was, above all, endowing the epic with a prophetic purpose, i.e. re-orienting it from the past to the future. This is what Goffredo's dream in the all-important Canto XX of *Jerusalem Conquered* was designed to do. *Jerusalem Conquered* was to be a manifesto of the future victories over the Ottoman Turks as well as a poetic rendition of the already accomplished capture of Jerusalem by the First Crusade. The Counter-Reformation wanted an epic to be "relevant" to its own struggle against the Infidels.

All the revisions incorporated into *Jerusalem Conquered* were designed to downplay the autonomous value of the romance parts of the new epic. This was necessary in order to imbue it with a new dogmatic, ideological and prophetic spirit. In his *Judgment on His Jerusalem Revised by Himself* (*Giudizio sopra la sua Gerusalemme da lui medesimo riformata*) Tasso made it quite clear that he regarded the first version of his epic, i.e. *Jerusalem Delivered*, as imperfect:

The narration of that first canto was indeed imperfect, and obscure, and similar to those opaque and shadowy places, in which passages are hard and the road uncertain, unless they are illuminated by new light.

The new light is, of course, allegoresis.