

“Uno sarà il fine”:

Tasso's Domestication of Allegory

Probably sometime in the early-to-mid 1560s, Torquato Tasso wrote a series of discourses on epic poetry, the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*.¹ In June of 1575, he wrote a letter to Luca Scalabrino in which he indicated his intention to include these *Discorsi* as a preface to his nearly completed poem – the *Gerusalemme Liberata* – with the hope that they “prevengano l'offese, e facciano alcuna buona impressione ne l'opinione degli uomini; perché so molto bene quanto possa la prima impressione” (88-89). When the first version of the poem over which Tasso had some editorial control appeared in 1581, however, the *Discorsi* had been replaced by a brief treatise: the “Allegoria del Poema,” which he had written as he was completing the poem, probably in late 1575 and early 1576.² Despite the fact that Tasso privileged this allegorical account of the poem, it has, until relatively recently, occupied a marginal place in the Tasso canon.³

The reasons for this traditional marginalization are not hard to discern. Primary among them is Tasso's own confession that when he began his poem he had no thought of allegory, since it seemed to him a “soverchia e vana fatica,” and that he only began to consider an allegorical reading midway in his writing due to “la strettezza de' tempi” (*Lettere*, 192-93). Taking Tasso at his word, then, critics have often viewed the “Allegoria” as a late and unfortunate imposition on an Aristotelian epic, which was motivated by his fear of Counter-Reformation censorship. And even with more recent attempts to take the “Allegoria” seriously, critics often contrast Tasso's Aristotelianism, as revealed in the early *Discorsi*, with his later allegorical understanding of the poem; thus, Tasso's move toward allegory represents a radical shift towards a discourse alien to the original conception of the epic.⁴ This view no doubt receives further reinforcement from our post-Romantic antipathy to allegory in favor of the more “organic” symbol, a view still widely held despite post-modernist attempts to undercut the perceived difference between the two.⁵ In this essay, I will argue that the movement away from the early *Discorsi* towards the “Allegoria” constitutes a shift that is much less extreme than it first appears.

Many critics have suggested that Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* are key to understanding Tasso's epic,⁶ and it is often noted that Aristotle is the pre-

dominant influence on these early discourses, a statement that proves at best half true. Stephen Halliwell has observed that sixteenth-century Italy did not turn "the *Poetics* easily or automatically into an unquestioned source of doctrinal orthodoxy," despite the fact that it was often quoted as an authority ("The *Poetics* and its Interpreters," 413). As Guido Baldassarri has argued, it was difficult for Tasso or any other sixteenth-century literary theorist to look to Aristotle as an unquestioned authority on epic simply because *The Poetics* actually contains very little discussion of epic poetry. What it does contain is located primarily in two chapters (23 and 24) near the end of the treatise. And as many scholars have noted, Aristotle's definition and treatment of epic derives largely from his consideration of tragedy, the genre he preferred.⁷ Thus for many *cinquecento* theorists, the task was not to reiterate Aristotelian orthodoxies, but rather to flesh out Aristotle's definition and treatment of epic in order to formulate a coherent definition of the genre.⁸ Part of this process of extrapolation involved mining the discussions of epic in other ancient authors, most notably Horace, but part also derived from poetic self-interest. Many of the prominent critics in the *cinquecento* were also practicing poets who wrote theoretical works to justify their own poems, and in many ways Tasso's own critical writings illustrate this impulse toward self-authorization.⁹ In addition, Tasso's theory arose to a considerable degree as response to the success of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and the romance theorists who attempted to legitimate Ariosto's achievement (and their poetic productions) by arguing for the validity of romance as a genre.¹⁰

Ultimately, then, while Tasso repeatedly appeals to Aristotle as an authority in his critical writings, his theory of epic draws on a variety of sources and responds to a number of different concerns; the result is a theory that possesses a greater degree of originality than is commonly acknowledged. I wish to argue here that his critical writings reveal a rhetorical conception of literature; Tasso designs his theory and his poem to create a moral response in his readers, and thus his treatment of characterization and unity of plot aims to move the readers appropriately to create a rhetorically effective poem.¹¹

In the first discourse, for example, Tasso discusses the choice of an epic subject matter, a choice of primary importance, since the subject will determine the way in which readers respond to the poem. Tasso insists that the subject be taken from history:

Ma molto meglio è, a mio giudicio, che da l'istoria si prenda: perché dovendo l'epico cercare in ogni parte il verisimile (presupongo questo, come principio notissimo), non è verisimile ch'una azione illustre, quali sono quelle del poema eroico, non sia stata scritta e passata a la memoria de' posterì con l'aiuto d'alcuna istoria. I successi grandi non possono esser incogniti; e ove non siano ricevuti in iscrittura, da questo solo argomento gli uomini la loro falsità; e falsi stimandoli, non consentono così facilmente d'essere or mossi ad ira, or a terrore, or a pietà; d'esser or allegrati, or contristati, or

sospesi, or rapiti; ed in somma non attendono con quella espettazione e con quel diletto i successi delle cose, come farebbono se que' medesimi successi, o in tutto o in parte, veri stimassero.

Per questo, dovendo il poeta *con la sembianza della verità ingannare i lettori*, e non solo persuader loro che le cose da lui trattate sian vere, ma sottoporle in guisa a i lor sensi che credano non di leggerle ma di esser presenti e di vederle e di udirle è necessitato di guadagnarsi nell'animo loro questa opinion di verità, il che facilmente con l'autorità dell'istoria gli verrà fatto. (1.5; emphasis mine)

Tasso's verisimilitude is a rhetorical concept, as it is primarily concerned with the response of the reader; the poet must write something his reader will believe, his subject must be one that the reader *deems* true. The appeal to history (in opposition to Aristotle's distinction between history and poetry in chapter 9 of *The Poetics*) similarly derives not from a concern for historical truth, but from consideration for the reader's response to the subject.¹² Since it seems unlikely that an illustrious action would go unrecorded, it is difficult to convince readers of the truth of a heroic action unknown to history. To produce a believable narrative, therefore, the poet must look to history. We should see no contradiction in Tasso's insistence on both a historically true subject and the poet's freedom to embellish that subject; the issue here is not truth but authority and believability. Once a subject has been *accepted* as true by the reader, the poet can feel free to embroider it, because the perception of truth will survive the poet's "corrections" of history. The unhistorical subject must be rejected not because it is false, but because it will not produce the desired response in the readers, who will dismiss it as so much fiction. The poet's aim, according to Tasso, is to *deceive* ("ingannare") his readers into believing that they witness the truth. This concern with reader response remains Tasso's preeminent concern throughout the discourses; like a good rhetorician, he gauges the effects each word will have on his intended audience.

Tasso does not address the question of why the verisimilitude (in this rhetorical sense) of the subject is so crucial beyond stating that "presupongo questo, come principio notissimo." He does, however, hint at an explanation later in the first discourse, when he begins to discuss epic's relationship to tragedy. In one of his divergences from Aristotle, Tasso holds that tragic and epic actions are dissimilar. The reason for their dissimilarity is telling: they have different effects on their readers. "Se le azioni epiche e tragiche fossero della istessa natura, produrrebbono gl'istessi effetti; però che da le medesime cagioni derivano gli effetti medesimi; ma non producendo i medesimi effetti, ne seguita che diversa sia la natura loro" (1.13). Tragedy produces, as Aristotle also noted, pity and fear ("l'orrore e la compassione"), emotions derived from witnessing the actions of characters of moderate virtue ("d'una condizion di mezzo"). The characters of heroic poetry, however, represent the greatest extremes of virtue and vice:

l'epico, a l'incontro, vuole nelle persone il sommo delle virtù, le quali eroiche da la virtù eroica sono nominate. Si ritrova in Enea l'eccellenza della pietà; della fortezza militare in Achille; della prudenza in Ulisse [...]. Ricevano ancora gli epici non solo il colmo della virtù, ma l'eccesso del vizio con minor pericolo assai che i tragici non sono usi di fare. (1.14-15)

Epic heroes, in other words, are exemplary. The great heroes of Homer and Virgil are epic because each exemplifies the archetype of a certain virtue or vice.

Tasso further insists on the exemplary nature of epic characters in his later discourses, the greatly expanded *Discorsi del poema eroico*. In the third discourse, he expands the discussion found in the earlier *Discorsi* by drawing on Renaissance, Medieval, and Classical critics to make the claim that one of epic poetry's functions is to praise virtue and blame vice: "Laonde errò senza dubbio Castelvetro quando egli disse che al poeta eroico non si conveniva il lodare, perciò che se il poeta eroico celebra la virtù eroica dee inalarla con le lodi sino al cielo [...]. Ultimamente s'a l'istorico è lecito a lodare [...] molto più dovrebbe esser lecito al poeta" (2.254-55). Epic poets must ultimately serve as guides to the paths of virtue, and they will accomplish this, it seems, by praising the virtue and blaming the vice of exemplary heroes. Tasso goes on to criticize Homer for his portrayal of Achilles, who fails the test of exemplary decorum because, while he is a great warrior, he is also avaricious and cruel in his failure to restore Hector's body to the Trojans for the proper burial rites. Virgil, however, creates a superior protagonist in Aeneas, who demonstrates greater decorum and exemplifies fully the virtues of "la pietà, la religione, la continenza, la fortezza, la magnanimità, la giustizia e ciascun'altra virtù di cavaliere" (2.262-63). In the later *Discorsi*, then, Tasso makes explicit his earlier concern with exemplary epic heroes; his criticisms of heroes such as Achilles are leveled for moral reasons, while he praises Aeneas as an exemplar of virtue and decorum and hence worthy to be the protagonist in an epic poem. And while Tasso's earlier discourses are not as explicit in their advocacy of a rhetorical function for his heroes, his insistence on their exemplary nature and his linking of that exemplary nature to the effect of the poem on the reader implicitly call for such a reading. We should also recall here that Tasso's insistence on a poetry of praise and blame was a critical commonplace in his day and was often specifically applied to epic poetry.¹³

In the second discourse of the early *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, Tasso continues to reveal his underlying preoccupation with the effect of the poem on its readers. While in the first discourse he argued for the necessity of a subject taken from history, in this second discourse he emphasizes the poet's freedom of invention which allows him both to demonstrate his mastery of the poetic art and to make his historical subject more fit for epic. Tasso begins his discourse by repeating Aristotle's observation (in chapter 9 of *The Poetics*) that poetry

differs from history in that it considers things "non come sono state, ma in quella guisa che dovrebbero essere state."¹⁴ The poet then adjusts history accordingly: "e tutti i successi che si fatti troverà, cioè che meglio in un altro modo potessero essere avvenuti, senza rispetto alcuno di vero o d'istoria a sua voglia muti e rimuti, e riduca gli accidenti delle cose a quel modo ch'egli giudica migliore, co 'l vero alterato il tutto finto accompagnando" (1.20). The poet should nevertheless take care not to alter the essential truth of his historical subject, as this will deprive poetry of the authority that comes from history. The poet's task is not to change history simply for his own pleasure; he must, rather, change it so as to raise the limited particulars of history to a universal level. Historical reality is characterized by "accidenti"; the poet alters his subject so as to eliminate the accidental and make all events in the poem causally related. Tasso is not only interested in poetic structure for its own sake, but, given the rhetorical context established by the first discourse, his conception of causality and probability is also infused with moral significance. By remaking certain events of his historical subject, Tasso argues that he is able to free it from the particular limitations of history and create a *moral* causality in his plot that renders it universal. Immediately before discussing the importance of unity in the plot, he summarizes the steps the epic poet must take in order to make his subject universal: "Or poiché avrà il poeta ridotto il vero ed i particolari dell'istoria al verisimile ed a l'universale [...]" (1.22).

Tasso was not alone in arguing that the historical subject required correction before it was fit for poetry. Giraldis Cinzio, for example, expresses a similar view in his *Discorso intorno al comporre dei romanzi*. Although on the one hand he argues a thesis contrary to Tasso's, namely that a romance constitutes a legitimate genre distinct from epic, on the other hand Giraldis Cinzio believed as did Tasso that the end or *telos* of poetry was the improvement of men's lives and that poetry best accomplished this end by improving on history:

E disse Aristotile che il fine del poeta era indurre buoni costumi negli animi degli uomini; e però pur ch'egli questo fine conseguia con la sua composizione, sia ella di cose false o di cose vere con le finte mescolate, ha egli fatto ciò che a lui si apparteneva. Perché ove l'istorico dee solo scrivere i fatti e le azioni vere e come in effetto sono; il poeta, non quali sono, ma quali esser debbano le mostra ad ammaestramento della vita. (77)

In his own note to this passage, Giraldis Cinzio further delineates his theory of how idealized history improves readers; while perfection does not exist in nature or in humanity, a poet is able to feign perfection in poetry. This feigned perfection, he argues, has a sustained rhetorical effect: "Perché ancora questa perfezione in fatto non si trovi, si può essa non dimeno fingere da ingegno umano e supporre agli occhi altrui, non per dir menzogna ma per accender gli uomini al meglio ed a chiamargli in tal guisa alle azioni degne di loda, aciocché

si avvicininno, quanto più sia possibile, a quella perfezione" (275). For both Tasso and Giraldis Cinzio, then, verisimilitude and necessity require the creation of plot that is not only well constructed and logical in its development, but one that also reveals a moral causality brought about by the poet's correction of the accidents of history.

Later in the second discourse, Tasso argues for the necessity of unity in the epic plot, attempts to demonstrate that romance does not constitute a genre in itself, and asserts that Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* cannot, therefore, be classified as a romance (since the genre does not exist) and must be considered a failed epic. Through all of his discussion of epic unity, Tasso continuously leads the discussion back to a consideration of the reader's experience. In discussing the appropriate size for an epic poem, for instance, he writes: "Grande è convenevolmente quel poema in cui la memoria non si perde né si smarrisce; ma tutto unitamente comprendendolo, può considerare come l'una cosa con l'altra sia connessa e dall'altra dependa, e come le parti fra loro e co'l tutto siano proporzionate" (1.25). The reader's experience of the poem is again the standard by which the epic poet judges his subject; he or she must grasp the causal relation of the poem's events, or the effect of the poem will be lost.

Tasso uses the same criteria to judge the *Orlando Furioso*; Ariosto's poem is too long and contains multiple plots, which pose a danger because they lead to confusion and engender multiple meanings, an effect that Tasso equates with indeterminacy or lack of meaning altogether (he does not seem to distinguish between the two): "Aggiungo che da la moltitudine delle favole nasce l'indeterminazione; e può questo progresso andare in infinito, senza che le sia da l'arte prefisso o circoscritto termine alcuno." Unity of plot, on the other hand, ensures unity of meaning: "s'una sarà la favola, uno sarà il fine; se più e diverse saranno le favole, più e diversi saranno i fini," and multiple ends produce "distrazione nell'animo ed impedimento nell'operare" (1.28). The plot of the poem must be "complete," must have a beginning, middle, and end, because only then will the poem be understandable, only then will the moral causality of the poem's events become clear. Tasso talks of searching for "perfection" in the plot ("Tutta o intiera deve essere la favola perch' in lei la perfezione si ricerca" [1.22]), and some critics tie this concern with Neo-Platonic metaphysics. Andrew Fichter, for example, writes the following: "What is real is also necessarily an integral part of the unity that characterizes divine creation; what the poet would make truthful he must also make whole" (121). But Neo-Platonism is only part of what is at issue here for Tasso. Unity becomes necessary because of rhetorical concerns; the lack of a determinate ending, for example, would be problematic as it would limit the reader's ability to understand the poem. Unity of meaning is not only true to Tasso's conception of the structure of the universe, but it is also necessary if he is to ensure that his epic will have the proper effects on its readers.

Tasso's early *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, therefore, have a problematic relationship to *The Poetics*. While he appeals to Aristotle's treatise frequently and at various points extrapolates from Aristotle's discussion of epic, at other moments Tasso contradicts the treatise or bends it to serve his own purposes. Even in the second discourse, where structural issues seem paramount, Tasso continuously justifies his theory by appealing to the experience of the reader.¹⁵ His early *Discorsi* present a rhetorical theory of poetry that envisions a successful epic as one able to move its readers in the proper fashion and to a correct end. Tasso's early "Aristotelianism" is compromised, as he works toward a moralistic theory of poetry. The relationship of the early *Discorsi* to Aristotelianism is analogous to the relationship of the later "Allegoria del Poema" to the allegorical tradition; both contradict and at times compromise their authoritative sources, and both do so in the interests of a rhetorically effective poetry. Ultimately, the views of the poetry presented in the two treatises prove similar.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the "Allegoria del Poema" is Tasso's strong emphasis at the beginning of the treatise on the importance of imitation in poetry. He asserts that heroic poetry possesses a dual nature: "d'imitazione e d'allegoria è composta." Through its imitations "alletta a sé gli animi e gli orecchi degli uomini, e maravigliosamente gli diletta; con questa [l'allegoria] nella virtù o nella scienza, o nell'una e nell'altra, gli ammaestra" (301). This explanation of poetic fiction was quite common in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, as writers often appealed to allegory to defend the morality of a fictional literature. These appeals differed from the "Allegoria," however, in that they often characterized the literal sense of fiction as apparently frivolous or even immoral; the immoral husk needed to be stripped away to reveal the kernel of moral truth within.¹⁶ Tasso himself seems to draw on this view at the beginning of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, when he echoes Lucretius' comparison of poetry to deceitful medicine:

'l vero, condito in molli versi,
i più schivi allettando ha persuaso.
Così a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
di soavi licor gli orli del vaso:
succhi amari ingannato intanto ei beve,
e da l'inganno sua vita riceve. (1.3.3-8)

This tradition of seeing allegory behind a discarded literal sense extended into the late sixteenth century, since, as Robert Montgomery has shown, late Renaissance critics tended to associate allegory only with non-mimetic narratives or portions of narratives and viewed allegory as a mode of reading or narration reserved for specific instances of the fantastic or the marvelous. Tasso departs from the allegorical tradition of discarding the literal sense, however, by emphasizing the importance of the imitative aspect of poetry.

His description of the literal, mimetic aspect of the poem differs strikingly from what we might expect in a treatise claiming allegorical meaning: "l'imitazione riguarda l'azioni dell'uomo, che sono a i sensi esteriori sottoposte; ed intorno ad esse principalmente affaticandosi, cerca di rappresentarle con parole efficaci ed espressive, ed atte a por chiaramente dinanzi a gli occhi corporali le cose rappresentate" (301). Tasso's imitations are not beautiful lies, written to be discarded. Instead, he asserts the importance of poetry's mimetic powers, its ability to represent physical reality vividly (before "*corporeal eyes*"). He makes no suggestion that the poem's narrative needs to be rejected in order to understand the allegory. He continues to affirm, in other words, the centrality of the literal sense even in this allegorical reading; for, according to Tasso, allegory becomes thoroughly intertwined in the literal, verisimilar narrative.¹⁷

In the "Allegoria," Tasso makes of his poem a figure for the "uomo virile," and he designates each character as a representative of one of the soul's faculties. Goffredo thus represents the "intelletto," while Tancredi and Rinaldo signify "la concupiscibile e l'irascibile virtù." This extended reading of the poem may appear similar to the tradition of reading *The Aeneid* that began in late antiquity and extended into the Renaissance, in which *The Aeneid* is read as an allegorical narrative of human development.¹⁸ A closer consideration of this tradition indicates, however, how widely Tasso's allegory departs from it. In his "Exposition of the Content of Virgil according to Moral Philosophy," for example, Fulgentius explains book one of *The Aeneid* with its narrative of shipwreck "as an allegory of the dangers of birth, which include both the pangs of the mother in giving birth and the hazards of the child in its need to be born" (125). In book four, Aeneas, the exemplary maturing man, comes to embody "the spirit of adolescence, on holiday from paternal control, [who] goes off hunting, is inflamed by passion and, driven by storm and cloud, that is, by confusion of mind, commits adultery" (127). In the commentary of Virgil by the Renaissance Neo-Platonist Landino, the journeys of the Virgilian hero are made to correspond to his moral development in a way that similarly disregards the poem's literal narrative. Troy signifies, for Landino, "the innocent sensuality of childhood"; after learning to abandon his sensual values, Aeneas then confronts the perils of civic life in Carthage; his arrival in Italy signifies the attaining of the contemplative life (Murrin 198). As Murrin remarks, "Such an exegesis ... is finally very impressive, even though we might feel that Landino has used Virgil's narrative as a scaffold for another poem of his own making" (201). The difference between this kind of extended allegorical reading and the allegorical account that Tasso provides in the "Allegoria," proves to be profound, therefore, despite the ostensible similarities. For unlike Fulgentius and Landino, Tasso consistently ties his allegorical reading to the poem's literal narrative. A closer analysis of two examples will help to illustrate how closely he attempts to unite these two senses.

In canto 7 of the *Gerusalemme*, Goffredo decides to hazard his life in a duel with Argante. Raimondo, however, rebukes him for his wish, since by doing so he will put the entire army at risk: "Ah non sia vero / ch'in un capo s'arrischi il campo tutto" (7.62.1-2). While Raimondo's reference to Goffredo as the "capo" recalls Tasso's allegorical identification of him as the intellect, Goffredo as the head of the army also makes sense within the literal narrative of the poem. The Christian army finds itself unable to function when it fails to unite itself under his leadership; therefore, Raimondo's warning concerns itself with the fate of the army, not with the ideal man. Nevertheless, in the words of the "Allegoria," "l'essercito in cui già Rinaldo e tutti gli altri cavalieri, per grazia d'Iddio e per umano avvedimento, sono ritornati e sono ubidienti al Capitano, significa l'uomo già ridotto nello stato della giustizia naturale, quando le potenze superiori comandano come debbono, e le inferiori ubidiscono" (307). Thus Tasso continuously works to tie the literal and allegorical together in the "Allegoria," as he often equates the literal events of the poem and the allegorical meaning that he seeks to derive from them. When he elaborates on Goffredo's identity, to cite another example, he notes that he, "per voler d'Iddio e de'principi, è eletto capitano in questa impresa. Però che l'intelletto è da Dio e da la natura costituito signore sovra l'altre virtù dell'anima, e sovra il corpo; e commanda a quelle con potestà civile, ed a queste con imperio regale" (303). Tasso works to make the two senses seem virtually inseparable.¹⁹ Tasso's allegory thus coexists with the literal narrative in a way altogether unusual for traditional allegorical discourse.

Another example is Tasso's identification of two of his pagan characters, Ismeno and Armida, whom he describes in the following way in the "Allegoria": "Ismeno significa quella tentazione che cerca d'ingannare con false credenze le virtù (per così dire) opinatrice; Armida è la tentazione che tende insidie a la potenza ch'appetisce: e così da quell procedono gli errori dell'opinione, da questa quelli dell'appetito" (304). If the reader comes to the treatise after having read the poem, however, he or she immediately senses the superfluity of the analysis; Tasso's allegorical gloss is hardly needed to point out that Ismeno attempts to deceive the intellects of the Christian army while Armida tempts their carnal appetites. Nevertheless, a consideration of the difference between Ismeno and the character of Error from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* demonstrates that Tasso does not create characters so transparently allegorical that they verge on personification. When Redcrosse comes upon *Errours den*, he sees a creature "Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine" (1.1.14). When Redcrosse attacks, she retreats from the light, for, we are told "light she hated" while preferring in "desert darknesse to remaine." When Redcrosse finally gains the upper hand by choking Error, we are told that Error "spewd out of her filthy maw / A floud of poyson horrible and blacke" and that "Her vomit full of bookes and papers was" (1.1.20).

These details derive from the allegorical nature of the character; they exist to define the character in abstract terms, not to individualize the monster in any way. Many of the details are simply not "verisimilar" (in Tasso's sense). When we compare this description to the introduction of Ismeno at the opening of the second canto of Tasso's poem, we sense a profound difference. Here we learn that Ismeno has magical powers, including the ability to make a corpse breathe and feel. We also learn that "or Maccone adora, e fu cristiano" (2.2.1) and that he now practices a diabolically syncretic ritual. While Ismeno is certainly not one of the more individualized characters in the poem, all of the details do help to individualize him. In addition, they are all verisimilar details; a Christian reader can accept that a pagan magician had the power to raise bodies from the dead. It is difficult, however, to imagine any reader accepting Error as anything but an allegorical construct.

Tasso's characters, that is, are simply not sufficiently abstract to embody the kind of personification typical of the tradition of poetic allegory. This is not to say, however, that the kind of moral allegorization that Tasso provides in his treatise would have been unknown to his readers. In some sixteenth century Italian editions of the *Orlando Furioso*, for example, editors prefaced each canto with *allegorie* that interpreted the actions of the character within the canto in a moral sense, similar to the kinds of interpretations that Tasso provides of his own characters.²⁰ Tasso, like these readers of Ariosto, emphasizes the *exemplary* status of his characters. Thus, Armida may exemplify the temptations of the flesh while not becoming so abstract as to disappear entirely into her allegorical identification. When viewed in this way, as a narrative of exemplary figures, Tasso's allegory accords well with his earlier insistence, in the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, that epic actions and characters be defined in exemplary, universal terms. As noted earlier, Tasso suggested in his early discourses that a character could be considered an epic character in so much as he or she exemplified some virtue or vice, a theory of character that resembles the way in which, in the "Allegoria," Tasso assigns a faculty of the mind or a limb of the body to each character. There exists, in other words, an underlying consistency in Tasso's conception of his epic and its moral meaning from his early discourses through the "Allegoria." Whereas in the discourses he constructed a rhetorical theory of epic poetry that, by presenting a convincing and unified narrative, would move readers, in the "Allegoria" he elaborates on the moral meaning of his character's actions, *how* they should move the reader. The *Discorsi* and the "Allegoria" represent not a shift of fundamental conception but of emphasis. For rather than abandoning Aristotelian mimesis in favor of personification allegory, Tasso propenses a moral allegory that concentrates on the exemplary status of his characters, which is used in the service of a poem based on an "Aristotelianism" that insists on an epic's rhetorical effectiveness, is partially achieved through the creation of exemplary characters. In both treatises

tises, that is, Tasso describes the same kind of poem: an epic where mimesis serves morals.

During the composition of *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Tasso wrote to Scipione Gonzaga that he objected to allegory because it gave readers a license to interpret according to their own capricious inclinations, a practice that leads to an unacceptable multiplicity of readings.²¹ Indeed, Gerald Bruns has characterized allegory as a method of "radical interpretation," which allows an interpreter to accommodate a sacred text to new ideas and newly perceived truths. Allegory frequently provided a way of reading that proliferated and multiplied meanings, even when wielded by authoritarian and orthodox interpreters, a fact evident from St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and medieval texts such as St. Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs. The same is true for allegorical poetic texts; for example, the clearly allegorical narrative of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* seems to multiply meanings much as Errour vomits books. Similarly, in a passage that Harrington will translate (unacknowledged) into the preface of his translation of the *Orlando Furioso*, Leone Ebreo, as part of a defense of poetry's seriousness and veracity in the second of his *Dialoghi di amore*, interprets the myth of Perseus on several levels; he distinguishes between the myth's "senso historiale" and how it "significa [...] moralmente" and "significa ancor allegoricamente." He then further divides the allegorical sense into the "allegoria naturale," "un'altra allegoria celeste," and the "allegoria theologale" (58r-58v). Tasso's objections to allegory's proliferation of meanings become clearer in the light of this tradition, as is his decision to write an allegory that works to eliminate that multiplicity, that eliminates all but a particular kind of moral allegory, which he could tie closely to the actions of his characters and thus to the literal sense of the poem. Tasso, that is, "domesticates" allegory, strictly delimiting allegorical meaning to a single moral reading in order to undercut the multiplicity of interpretations – the uncontrollable, capricious "wildness" – that allegory invariably encourages.

In both treatises, then, Tasso works to eliminate multiplicity through an exercise of authorial control. In his second discourse, he objected to the multiple, digressive plots of romance that produce "distrazione nell'animo e impedimento nell'operare" (1.28). Instead, he proposed the creation of epic with a single "end"; in the "Allegoria" he spells out that end for his readers:

Ma per venir finalmente a la conclusione; l'esercito in cui già Rinaldo e tutti gli altri cavalieri, per grazia d'Iddio e per umano avvedimento, sono ritornati e sono ubidienti al Capitano, significa l'uomo già ridotto nello stato della giustizia naturale, quando le potenze superiori comandano come debbono, e le inferiori ubidiscono: ed oltre a ciò, nello stato della ubidienza divina, allora facilmente è disincantato il bosco, espugnata la città, e sconfitto l'esercito nemico; cioè, superati agevolmente tutti gli esterni impedimenti, l'uomo consegue la felicità politica. Ma perchè questa civile beatitudine non deve esser ultimo segno dell'uomo cristiano, ma deve egli mirar più alto a la cristiana

felicità; per questo non desidera Goffredo d'espugnar la terrena Gerusalemme per averne semplicemente il dominio temporale, ma perchè in essa si celebri il culto divino, e possa il Sepolcro liberamente esser visitato da' pii e devoti peregrini. (307-8)

In this passage, Tasso attempts to spell out the univocal meaning he envisaged in the *Discorsi* as proper to epic.²² He locates that end in the symbiotic merger of political and religious felicity brought about by "the state of divine obedience," which finds a parallel in Tasso's linking of the literal and allegorical senses.²³ Just as the wandering crusaders must return both physically and morally under the banners of their captain, the readers must avoid the erring fate that awaits the readers of romance. The "Allegoria" does not contradict Tasso's theory of an effective epic that he delineates in his *Discorsi*; rather, it leads wandering readers back to the single end *he* had envisioned, under his own banners, moving them towards a political and religious felicity.

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NOTES

- 1 Weinberg states that the early *Discorsi* were begun around 1565 (2.646), though others date them as early as 1561. For a consideration of the question, see Baldassarri, "Ancora sulla cronologia."
- 2 As early as 15 June 1576, however, Tasso expected to preface the poem with the prose "Allegoria"; on that day he wrote to Scipione Gonzaga, informing him that he intended "di far stampare l'allegoria in fronte del poema" (194).
- 3 Attempts to use the "Allegoria" as a guide to reading the poem include Roche, Derla, Murrin 87-127, and Fichter 112-55.
- 4 See the following: De Sanctis 2.150; Rhu, "From Aristotle to Allegory"; Treip 53-94; Teskey 126-27; and, with a related view, Hallyn.
- 5 The most recent version of the traditional disparagement of allegory is presented by Gordon Teskey, who argues that allegory enacts a violent imposition of meaning on a disordered, chaotic reality.
- 6 See, for example, Kates 51-65 and Rhu "Tasso's First Discourse".
- 7 See, for example, the discussion of relevant chapters in Halliwell's commentary on the *Poetics* (164-76).
- 8 See Baldassarri, "Introduzione," and, for an extended consideration of the ways in which Tasso's theory expands upon and at times contradicts Aristotle's, see Javitch, "Dietro la maschera."
- 9 See Javitch, "Self-justifying Norms"; Baldassarri also considers the issue in "Introduzione."
- 10 Baldassarri suggests the attempts, first, to extend Aristotle's analysis of epic and, second, to respond to the *cinquecento* defenders of romance constitute the primary strands of the early *Discorsi*. He also notes that the defenders of romance also appealed to Aristotle and attempted to extend his poetic theory so as to include romance. See "Introduzione".
- 11 It is also worth noting, in this regard, that much Renaissance thinking on Aristotle was heavily influenced by the interpretive tradition that derived from Averroes' medieval commentary on the treatise (through the Latin translation of Hermannus Alemannus), in which Aristotle is said to hold a rhetorical view of poetry, that it is either praise (*laudatio*) or blame (*vituperatio*). See Minnis ans Scott 277-313.
- 12 Cf. Rhu's comment in *The Genesis*: "Veracity is not verisimilitude; but once the value of truth

yields to the needs of rhetorical efficacy, this distinction can easily get lost" (34). I would argue that Tasso wants his readers to miss the distinction; verisimilitude is essential precisely because a reader will accept verisimilar events as true.

- 13 See Vickers.
- 14 It is interesting to note how Tasso invokes chapter nine of *The Poetics*. While in the second discourse he elaborates on Aristotle's distinction *between* poetry and history, he ignores it in the first discourse in order to claim the historical subject for epic.
- 15 Cf. Rhu's sense of this discourse: "continuity and unity of plot are the real issues. [...] and they are more matters of narrative structure than aspects of meaning and moral interpretation" ("From Aristotle to Allegory" 117). I would argue, however, that the issues of plot structure are inseparable from rhetorical considerations for Tasso. Unity of plot is crucial precisely because of its impact on meaning and moral interpretation.
- 16 Consider, for example, Dante's discussion of literal and allegorical meaning in the *Convivio*: "L'uno [senso] si chiama litterale, e questo è quello che non si stende più oltre che la lettera de le parole fittizie, sì come sono le favole de li poeti. L'altro si chiama allegorico, e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna" (2.1.3). Dante's emphasis on the fictional nature of the literal narrative and the necessity of stripping away this "beautiful lie" in order to arrive at the "hidden truth" is echoed by Boccaccio's discussion of poetic truth in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, where he declares that poetry "veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction," and that fiction "is a form of discourse, which, under guise of invention, illustrates or proves an idea; and, as its superficial aspect is removed, the meaning of the author is clear. If then, sense is revealed from under the veil of fiction, the composition of fiction is not idle nonsense" (39, 48). In both the Dante of the *Convivio* and Boccaccio, the "truth" of poetry lies beneath the surface, and it is necessary to discard the literal sense to get at it.
- 17 Montgomery argues that Tasso's view "seems to veer drastically away from the views of his contemporaries for whom the fundamental opposition of the credible, verisimilar surface of fiction to allegory is not even a point of debate" (54).
- 18 See, e.g., Treip 55.
- 19 For a consideration of how thoroughly Tasso weaves the metaphor of the body into the narrative of the poem, see Savoia.
- 20 Javitch discusses, as an example of this practice, the 1553 edition of Ariosto's poem by G. A. Valvassori in *Proclaiming a Classic* 36-39.
- 21 "Perché ciascuno de gli interpreti suole dar l'allegoria a suo capriccio; né mancò mai a i buoni poeti chi desse a i lor poemi varie allegorie" (192-93).
- 22 When I argue that Tasso sought to create a univocal poem, I do not mean to suggest that he achieved it. One of the most interesting aspects of the poem is precisely where such unity and univocality break down. See Zatti for a consideration of these issues. For the argument, however, that "the *Gerusalemme* belongs to the order marked by Homer, Virgil, and Milton, where allegory plays no important role" and that the "only kind of allegory that operates to any degree is oblique and problematic moral exemplification," see Kennedy.
- 23 It also, of course, finds a parallel in Counter-Reformation ideology. In his recent book on epic and empire, Quint has argued that there are definite ideological, religious, and moral underpinnings to the unity and teleology of epic narrative (21-46); he explores the relationship of Tasso's poem to Counter-Reformation political and religious ideology at 213-47.

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