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The Orphan-Hero in Italian Renaissance Epic

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Italian

by

Sarah Sixmith Vogdes Cantor

2020

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2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Orphan-Hero in Italian Renaissance Epic

by

Sarah Sixmith Vogdes Cantor

Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Andrea Moudarres, Chair

“The Orphan-Hero in Italian Renaissance Epic” investigates a commonplace present in epic poetry from antiquity to the Renaissance: the orphan-hero, a protagonist who grows up without the guidance of biological parents. The study traces this figure from its origins to the early modern period, beginning with classical epic in the introduction and focusing on 16<sup>th</sup>- and early 17<sup>th</sup>- century Italian poems in the body of the dissertation, namely Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* (1532), Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), Tullia d’Aragona’s *Il Meschino* (1560), Moderata Fonte’s *Floridoro* (1581), Margherita Sarrocchi’s *Scanderbeide* (1623), and Lucrezia Marinella’s *L’Enrico* (1635). Through analysis of these works, I address the following critical questions: 1) What links orphanhood and heroism? 2) Why might poets deem this tradition worthy of continuation? 3) Do modifications to the orphan-hero by different Renaissance authors reveal or emphasize shifts in thinking during the period? In particular, to what extent do the female authors fashion their orphan-heroes to fit an early modern feminist purpose?

I propose that the vulnerability inherent in the parentless state is significant to the subsequent development of heroic qualities in Renaissance epic heroes. Authors of epic choose orphanhood for their heroes not only to continue with tradition, which is all-important for the genre, but also to give certain heroes distinctive upbringings and acknowledge the social circumstances of contemporary orphans. I postulate that the prevalence of the orphan-hero in Renaissance epic speaks to a general anxiety about familial legitimacy during the period, a relevant issue in epic given its emphasis on genealogy and family dynasties. Lastly, using a comparative approach between the orphan-heroes of the two canonical male poets under consideration and those of their four lesser-known female counterparts, I elucidate how the female authors envision an alternative role for contemporary women, both inside and outside the family. The female authors modify their characters to give more agency, skill, and independence to women than were supplied by the canonical poets. For the female epic hero, as for the Renaissance female author, proving one's legitimacy is more difficult and therefore even more crucial.

The dissertation of Sarah Sixmith Vogdes Cantor is approved.

Massimo Ciavolella

Lucia Re

Eleonora Stoppino

Andrea Moudarres, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

*For the second Dr. Cantor, from the third*

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I am grateful to the community of scholars who work on female authors of Renaissance epic, who have been so welcoming and have offered me advice. I am especially indebted to Julia Hairston and John McLucas for kindly allowing me access to their translation of Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino* prior to its publication (*The Wretch, Otherwise Known as Guerrino*, edited and translated by Julia Hairston and John McLucas, forthcoming in *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* series by Iter and ACMRS Press). Your generosity was of great assistance to me in writing Chapter 2.

Thank you to the UCLA Graduate Division and the Mellon Foundation, which provided me with fellowships in the last two years. I appreciate the financial support that has enabled me to prepare and complete the dissertation.

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To my colleagues at UCLA: it is rare to find such a supportive group of graduate students, and even rarer to count among them some of one's closest friends. To Viola Ardeni and Adele Sanna, I could not have asked for better allies with whom to embark on and share this entire experience. To Adriana Guarro Romero, it is hard to express the extent of my gratitude for having found a sister in you. To Federica Di Blasio, thank you for being my comrade-in-arms during this last year. To Megan Tomlinson, I am grateful you have taken up the torch.

Lastly, I wish to thank my dear family. To my mother, who is always right there back of me, your constant cheerleading and comfort have meant so much. Thank you for listening to every little thing. To my father, my very own Coach Taylor, who has poured almost as many hours into this dissertation as I have, your meticulous editing skills and your professional and emotional support throughout graduate school have been of monumental importance to this project and to me. (I still don't know how to play football, though.) To my brother, nothing overly hilarious would be entirely appropriate to write in this venue but rest assured I am thinking about it; thank you for passing that impulse on to me and for the many belly laughs and fulfilling conversations.

To my husband: the incredible part about all of the dinners, dishes, packing our stuff and driving eighteen hours across the country is not that you did those things because I was busy writing my dissertation—it's that you would have done them anyway. Thank you for everything.

This is a strange time to be submitting a dissertation, a task which feels personally important in a year when the public wellbeing should be the main priority (my own form of epic digression, if you will). Like many who have been able to work from home during the pandemic, I have been reflecting on the societal systems and structures that have allowed me to pursue this career.

There is an inherent privilege born of race that has contributed, in ways seen and unseen, to my reaching this milestone. My hope and commitment for the future is that as academics we will do the work within our institutions and beyond to ensure that people of color have the same opportunities that I have had. Everyone deserves a chance at this experience.

Thank you all.

Sarah S.V. Cantor

October 25, 2020

Lubbock, TX

## VITA

### EDUCATION

- 2015                    **University of California, Los Angeles**, Los Angeles, CA  
MA in Italian
- 2010                    **Vassar College**, Poughkeepsie, New York  
BA in Italian Studies, *Cum Laude in Materia Subiecta*

### PUBLICATIONS

“Francesca da Rimini: icona del femminismo di Edith Wharton?” in “Atti del convegno internazionale: Francesca da Rimini tra fantasia e realtà: spazi e luoghi dell’immaginario romantico,” Giornate Internazionali Francesca da Rimini, September 28–29 2018, Gradara, Italy. Ed. Ferruccio Farina, Centro Internazionale di Studi Francesca da Rimini (conference proceedings, forthcoming).

### TRANSLATIONS

“Iconography and Philology: From Manuscripts to Print.”  
Angelo Eugenio Mecca. Conference paper, Dante and the Visual Arts Summer Symposium August 22–24, 2016, J. Paul Getty Center and University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

Poems of Gianni D’Elia. *Journal of Italian Translation* X, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 264–281.

Poems of Gianni D’Elia and Patrizia Vicinelli in Ballerini, Luigi and Beppe Cavatorta, eds. *Those who from Afar Look Like Flies: An anthology of Italian Poetry from Officina to the Present*, Volume II. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (forthcoming).

Article “Did Giotto bring down the Florentine banks?”  
Feniello, Amedeo, Fulbright Scholar, Northwestern University and faculty, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto di Storia dell’Europa Mediterranea, Rome, Italy.

### SELECTED CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

- 2020                    “Becoming a Heroine: Female Origin Stories in Marinella’s *L’Enrico*”  
Renaissance Society of America Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA (cancelled)
- 2018                    “Francesca da Rimini: icona del femminismo di Edith Wharton?”  
Invited Speaker, Giornate Internazionali Francesca da Rimini, Gradara, Italy
- 2018                    “Risamante’s Father: Guardianship and Heroism in Moderata Fonte’s *Floridoro*”  
Renaissance Society of America Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA

- 2017 “The Image of the Garden in Renaissance Epic Poetry”  
Invited Speaker, Italian undergraduate seminar, Vassar College, NY
- 2017 “The Myth of the Sirens in Matilde Serao’s *Leggende Napoletane*”  
UCLA Department of Italian Graduate Student Conference, Los Angeles, CA
- 2016 “The Enigma of Armida: Interpreting Floral Imagery in Tasso’s Garden”  
American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS), Baton Rouge, LA

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE/EMPLOYMENT

- 2020–present **Instructor of Italian and Italian Language Foundations Director,**  
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX
- 2014–2019 **Teaching Assistant/Associate/Fellow,** UCLA Department of Italian  
Lead instructor, elementary through advanced Italian language  
Teaching assistant, Italian 42A: Saints and Sinners in Early Modern Italy

## AWARDS

- 2020 Graduate Student Summer Fellowship,  
UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
- 2019–2020 Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA Graduate Division
- 2019 Franklin D. Murphy Chair in Italian Renaissance Studies Award, UCLA
- 2018 Mellon Pre-Dissertation Fellowship, Mellon Foundation and UCLA
- 2016 Ahmanson Italian Studies Fellowship, UCLA CMRS
- 2015–2016 Graduate Research Mentorship, UCLA
- 2015–2016 George T. and Margaret W. Romani Fellowship, UCLA CMRS
- 2015 Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA

## SERVICE

- 2018–2019 **Conference organizer,** “Women as Writers of Heroic Poetry in Renaissance Italy: An Epic Micro-Tradition?” UCLA CMRS and Department of Italian
- 2017–2020 **Co-Editor-in-Chief,** *Carte Italiane*  
UCLA Graduate Student Journal of Italian Studies
- 2015 **Conference organizer,** *La guerra e l’Italia: Italian Identities through War*  
2015 UCLA Italian Graduate Student Conference

## *GENS ORPHANI: GENDER, GENRE, AND GENEALOGY IN RENAISSANCE EPIC*

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Rooted in the great works of Homer and Hesiod (c.9<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup>-century BCE), the composition of epic poetry has traditionally been based on the use of patterns and rules to which authors have adhered, partly in order to signify their genre. The poet typically invokes a Muse, dedicates the work to a patron, begins the poem *in medias res*, employs standard plot devices and themes or *topoi*, and follows formal conventions for rhyme and meter. In the repetition and reformulation of these elements, poets build upon a literary tradition of exceptional longevity, allowing critics to perform comparative studies from epic to epic. Many epic *topoi* have been recognized and commented upon by scholars: the hero's descent to the underworld, his discovery of his future illustrious descendants through a prophecy, the secret night expedition into the enemy camp, the interrupted truce that leads to renewed hostilities, and the final duel between the protagonist and antagonist, for example. These mechanisms, originating with ancient epic, were transmitted to early modern Italy largely through Virgil's *Aeneid* (c.19 BCE), which utilizes all of them and serves as the primary model for early modern epic poetry. Re-elaborations of classical *topoi* are the focus of a large part of the critical literature on early modern epic. This dissertation adds to this critical corpus a new *topos*, which I call the orphan-hero, who, while present in classical epic poems, becomes a fundamental character in their Renaissance descendants.

The orphan-hero is defined as a protagonist who grows up without the guidance of biological parents. "The Orphan-Hero in Italian Renaissance Epic" traces this motif from its origins to the early modern period, beginning with classical epic in the introduction and focusing on 16<sup>th</sup>- and early 17<sup>th</sup>- century Italian poems in the body of the dissertation, namely Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532), Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), Tullia

d'Aragona's *Il Meschino* (1560), Moderata Fonte's *Floridoro* (1581), Margherita Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide* (1623), and Lucrezia Marinella's *L'Enrico* (1635). Through analysis of these works, I address the following critical questions: 1) What links orphanhood and heroism? 2) Why might poets deem this tradition worthy of continuation? 3) Do modifications to the orphan-hero by different Renaissance authors reveal or emphasize shifts in thinking during the period? In particular, to what extent do the female authors fashion their orphan-heroes to fit an early modern feminist purpose?

The genre of epic embodies a fundamental aspect of what we term the Renaissance, because each author refers back to her classical predecessors, which lends authority to her work, but she also makes modifications which reflect the historical, cultural, and religious context in which she lives. In other words, there is a simultaneous revival and reappraisal of the classics. Because of the encomiastic nature of the epic, whereby poets are duty-bound to praise the patrons who commissioned their work, and because epic concerns itself with the foundation of dynasties, we are given a view not only into the events that the poem depicts but also into the current state of the author's society, including information about her patrons and political affairs. My comparisons of the representation of the orphan-hero among these six epics permits me to draw conclusions about these larger issues within the early modern period.

Critical questions #1 and 2 above pertain to the general significance of the orphan-hero. First, I propose that the vulnerability inherent in the parentless state is significant to the subsequent development of heroic qualities. According to Marina McCoy in her book *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy*, vulnerability is an essential attribute of the ancient hero.<sup>1</sup> I extend McCoy's argument to include Renaissance

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<sup>1</sup> Marina McCoy, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), viii.



heroes. Considering the question of nature and nurture in the development of the character, I contend that the role of the non-parent mentor has a great influence on the formation of the hero. Second, my assertion is that authors of epic choose orphanhood for their heroes not only to continue with tradition, which is all-important for the genre, but also to give certain heroes distinctive upbringings and acknowledge the social circumstances of contemporary orphans. A hero's lack of parents may raise questions of legitimacy and inheritance rights, relevant issues in epic given its emphasis on genealogy and family dynasties.

Matters of legitimacy carry over into the third critical question regarding the broader implications of orphans becoming heroes in a historical context. During the period in which these works were written, Italy was experiencing the effects of the Counter-Reformation, which meant the reaffirmation of Church principles including the expectation that children should be legitimate (especially those who were in line to take political power).<sup>2</sup> In fact, the push toward keeping power in the hands of legitimate children had its roots earlier than the Council of Trent. As Eleonora Stoppino has pointed out in her book *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando Furioso*, even the Este family in Ferrara, notorious for their numerous bastard dukes, began to show increased concern for legitimacy, placing their first legitimate heir in the seat of power in 1471.<sup>3</sup> I submit that in keeping with this trend, moments of self-discovery—whether that is the realization of noble origins or religious conversion—become

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 13–14; Virginia Cox, *A Short History of the Italian Renaissance* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 27–30; Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 131–137; Thomas Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> This is Ercole I d'Este, Duke from 1471–1505. Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando Furioso* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 4.

vital to the epic genre. These moments are a dramatic way of proving both the familial and religious legitimacy of the hero, which verifies his worthiness as a heroic subject.

For the female epic hero, as for the Renaissance female author, proving one's legitimacy is more difficult and therefore even more crucial. The female authors under consideration thoroughly revise the orphan-hero character from its standard version. Their modifications reflect decisions on the part of the female authors to give more agency, skill, and independence to women than were supplied by the canonical poets. In the case of Fonte and Marinella, this argument is supported by the fact that they also wrote extensive treatises on male-female relationships, showing that questions of female agency were very much a part of their thinking.

In order to clearly delineate the differences between the authors' treatments of the orphan-hero, the dissertation is divided into five chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. The introduction first explains my understanding of the term epic, followed by a brief history of early modern women's relationship with the genre. I present McCoy's concept of vulnerability and show how it applies to the orphan-heroes of classical epic for later comparison to those of the Renaissance. The first chapter then addresses the two best known Italian Renaissance epics, Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. My study of the depiction of the orphan-hero by these canonical male poets, whose poems are familiar to most scholars of epic, lays the foundation for what follows: four chapters devoted to the four female authors, d'Aragona, Fonte, Sarrocchi, and Marinella, respectively. By beginning with Ariosto's presentation of the twin orphan-heroes Ruggiero and Marfisa and Tasso's presentation of the orphan-hero Clorinda, I am better equipped to demonstrate how the female authors deviate from tradition in the later chapters. These female authors are underrepresented in the scholarship and merit further study, especially given their contributions to the overwhelmingly male genre that is

the epic. The conclusion will return to the three critical questions I have posed here, proffering more fully developed responses and suggesting possibilities for further exploration of the orphan-hero figure in other genres.

## GENRE

### *EPIC AND ROMANCE IN THE RENAISSANCE*

Referring to Fonte's *Floridoro*, Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide*, and Marinella's *L'Enrico*, Virginia Cox writes that "although they are assimilable based on their chivalric subject matter, the three poems [...] cannot be unproblematically described as belonging to the same genre."<sup>4</sup> The six poems considered here encounter the same issue: half seem to fall into the category of chivalric romance, while the other half are more accurately described as historical epic. The differences are not subtle. Romances are composed of multiple, interlaced plot lines, continually digressing from one episode to another. They are entirely fictional and contain an abundance of fanciful elements, as in *Orlando furioso*, *Il Meschino*, and *Floridoro*; historical epics are instead devoted to one single action with few digressions and are based on real events, as in *Gerusalemme liberata*, *Scanderbeide*, and *L'Enrico*. While I do not dispute these disparities, I nevertheless do not see them as obstacles to considering these poems collectively as epics. For all of their points of divergence, they have fundamental similarities that impede their separation into two distinct genres: both use the form of *ottava rima*, both hold up the ideal of heroism as exhibited through martial efforts and a devotion to home, family, and religion, and both look to the classical epics of Homer and Virgil as their original models.

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<sup>4</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 165.

The *Aeneid* stood as the most correct form of historical epic against which poets like Tasso, Sarrocchi, and Marinella measured their works. 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian critics such as Giovambattista Giraldi Cinzio and Giovan Battista Pigna used the two Homeric poems as a point of reflection for contemporary debates on the nature of the genre, aligning the wanderings of Odysseus with romance and comparing the martial exploits at Troy with historical epic.<sup>5</sup> Yet there is no question that these iconic poems have defined our understanding of epic since their creation; the *Odyssey*'s romantic elements do not preclude it from being labeled as epic. The *Aeneid* itself, hailed in the Renaissance as the template for unadulterated historical epic, combines features from both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*.<sup>6</sup> The juxtaposition of Aeneas's travels after the Trojan War with his eventual conquering of Latium has long interested scholars: in Patricia Parker's words, "commentators from Servius to the present have noted the way in which Virgil's poem incorporates not just the epic *agon* of the *Iliad* but also the 'errores' of the *Odyssey*."<sup>7</sup> If, according to some Renaissance thinkers, the paragon of historical epic encompasses both components, it is hard to argue that romance and historical epic should be classified as separate genres. Even Tasso, who took umbrage at what he saw as Ariosto's bastardization of the genre, nevertheless considered the *Furioso* an epic, if an epic-gone-awry: "Ma il romanzo imita le medesime azioni, imita col medesimo modo, imita con gli stessi istrumenti; è dunque della medesima spezie."<sup>8</sup> These three categories of qualities shared between romance and epic refer to the illustrious deeds of heroes, narration rather than representation on

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<sup>5</sup> David Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 376n1. The two works in which this discussion appears are Pigna's *I romanzi* (1554) and Giraldi Cinzio's *Discorso intorno al comporre dei romanzi* (1554).

<sup>6</sup> Quint, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 42–43.

<sup>8</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi del poema eroico* (Milan: Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1824), 111, Google Play Books.

stage, and the use of plain verse, respectively. Although Ariosto departs from Virgil's unity of action, the *Furioso* may inherit more from the *Aeneid* than Tasso and other proponents of historical epic give it credit for, given its merging of Odyssean errancy and Iliadic battle.<sup>9</sup> The structure of Ariosto's poem is undoubtedly a new invention, however; his use of *entrelacement* to interweave romance and epic generic elements further problematizes their separation into two distinct genres. The *Furioso* opened up the possibility of including both romantic and historical influences in one epic poem during the Cinquecento: while some authors were staunch in their adherence to one variation or the other (particularly after Tasso's contribution to the debate), Ariosto forged the path for those like Moderata Fonte who wished to blend them. After Ariosto, making a hard distinction between romance and epic poetry seems regressive. For this reason, I consider these poems as variations within the same genre. While some critics use the term "heroic poetry" to refer collectively to these poems, I find that this descriptor has a chivalric connotation which does not apply to the Homeric and Virgilian poems; my preference is therefore to place them under the umbrella term "epic" in order to recall the long history of the genre.

#### *WOMEN'S WRITING IN THE GENRE*

The new format of the *Furioso* contributed to its popularity at every echelon of Italian society in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Even those who did not have access to books or could not read were familiar with its stories, having listened to recitations in piazzas and seen *commedia dell'arte*

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<sup>9</sup> "The alternation of epic and romance episodes was the element in the *Orlando furioso* most frequently cited in Cinquecento criticism as proof of Ariosto's departure from Homeric and Virgilian authority, and the orthodoxy of strict generic lines." Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 42.

performances of the poem.<sup>10</sup> A particularly avid audience of readers of the *Furioso* and other chivalric epics were women: Cox writes that “chivalric literature [...] does not appear to have suffered from the moral opprobrium which placed Boccaccio’s *Decameron* out of many respectable women’s reach.”<sup>11</sup> Respectability, for women defined by their chastity and silence, was paramount from the medieval period in Italy. Authorities like Aristotle, whose *Treatise on Government* (also known as *Politics*) theorizes that men must govern women, and the Bible, which portrays Eve as the primary perpetrator in original sin, contributed to the belief that women were naturally inferior beings.<sup>12</sup> Subordinated to men in the household, in the church, in legal, medical, and educational matters, women were expected to lead their lives in the private sphere, either marrying and producing children or devoting themselves to God by entering the convent. Any foray into public life was perilous, leaving women open to allegations of lasciviousness and eliciting comparisons with prostitutes, since this was the only class of women to venture into the street. Those elite women who were educated enough to read the *Decameron* were nevertheless warned against doing so because of its bawdy themes and examples of female characters engaging in sexual exploits and intellectual trickery, both antithetical to the ideal of purity to which women were held. With the dawn of humanism in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, the question of a woman’s place surfaced as one of the many cultural issues to be reevaluated, at least in literary debate, if not to implement actual societal change. In what came to be known as the *querelle des femmes*, many authors vociferously argued for maintaining the status quo,

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<sup>10</sup> Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 9–10.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Cox, “Women as Readers and Writers of Chivalric Poetry in Early Modern Italy,” in *Sguardi sull’Italia: miscellanea dedicata a Francesco Villari*, ed. Gino Bedoni, Zygmunt Baranski, Anna Laura Lepschy, and Brian Richardson (Exeter: Society for Italian Studies, 1997), 135.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *A Treatise on Government*, trans. William Ellis (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1888), 5, Google Play Books; Genesis 3:3–16 (New Revised Standard Version).

praising only those women who were paragons of chastity and obedience.<sup>13</sup> Others believed that some women could exhibit “masculine virtues,” attributing them with Amazon-like qualities.<sup>14</sup> Women themselves began to enter the literary scene more broadly at this point, where earlier only nuns or otherwise extremely devout women had written on religious topics. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, works by women expanded to include not only sacred writings, but also letters, diaries, and even responses to the *querelle*, most famously the French Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405).<sup>15</sup> Italian contributions to this discussion included treatises by Laura Cereta, Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele, and Olympia Morata.<sup>16</sup>

As time passed into the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, women authors also found their footing in further genres, most notably lyric poetry, which attracted such well-known authors as Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Franco, and Gaspara Stampa, to name a few. For women to be active producers of epic poetry, however, remained contentious, even if their reading of the genre was acceptable. Cox divides women’s publications in the 16<sup>th</sup> century into two periods: prior to 1580, when they mostly wrote Petrarchan lyric and familiar letters, and after 1580, when fiction became a more acceptable mode of writing for women.<sup>17</sup> The Renaissance epic subjects of love and war were viewed as improper for a woman’s hand, especially in the earlier period, because the former was often depicted as lustful and the latter was considered a male pursuit, whether in

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<sup>13</sup> The *querelle* spanned four centuries, from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup>. Three prime examples of books that praise women on the basis of their chastity are Giovanni Boccaccio’s catalog of famous women, *De mulieribus claris* (1361), Francesco Barbaro’s *De re uxoria* (1415), and Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della famiglia* (1434–1437). Baldassar Castiglione’s manual on proper courtly behavior, *Il cortegiano* (1528), includes a debate that engages both sides of the *querelle*.

<sup>14</sup> Virginia Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), xv; Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series,” in *Floridoro: A Chivalric Romance*, ed. Valeria Finucci and trans. Julia Kisacky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), xxvii.

<sup>15</sup> King and Rabil, xx–xxi, xxiv.

<sup>16</sup> King and Rabil, xxiv.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Cox, “Fiction 1560–1650,” in Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, eds., *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 52.

writing or in deed.<sup>18</sup> Cox postulates that d’Aragona may only have been able to publish *Il Meschino* as early as 1560 because she was already a courtesan by profession, so accusations of ill repute could not inflict much damage.<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically, d’Aragona uses her poem to try to clear her name; she views its emphasis on religiosity as a contrast to other, more lascivious literature like the *Decameron* and expresses regret for her former career in the preface of *Il Meschino*, discussed further in Chapter 2. The relaxation of attitudes toward women’s engagement with fiction writing ironically came with the tightening of moral restrictions during the Counter-Reformation: according to Cox, because men’s writing in these areas became more decorous, fiction was considered a safer territory into which women could venture.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, because women had been publishing their writing for more than a century at this point, their expansion into other genres was natural.<sup>21</sup>

This is not to say, however, that female authorship of epic poetry became commonplace; few epic poems were written by Italian women in this period. The four female authors of the poems studied here are well-established, known in most cases for works other than their epics: Tullia d’Aragona for her lyric poetry and Neoplatonic dialogue, Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella for their treatises in defense of women. Margherita Sarrocchi’s *Scanderbeide* was recognized during the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a significant accomplishment in epic poetry, but its reputation faded as time passed. Other than the poems by these women, Laura Terracina (c.1519–c.1577) contributed her *Discorso sopra il principio di tutti i canti dell’Orlando Furioso dell’Ariosto* (1549), part commentary on and part revision of Ariosto’s text; Terracina’s poem is examined at length in Deanna Shemek’s *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in*

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<sup>18</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 165–166.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> Cox, “Fiction 1560–1650,” 53–54.

<sup>21</sup> Cox, “Fiction 1560–1650,” 53.



*Early Modern Italy*.<sup>22</sup> A few later, minor epics by women have also been discovered, such as Francesca Turina Bufalini's *Il Florio* (1640) and Barbara degli Albizzi Tagliamocchi's *Ascanio errante* (1640). The existence of epics by Isabella Andreini and Veronica Franco has been noted, but they remain unrecovered.<sup>23</sup>

Thus despite the opening of the gateway to fiction, epic poetry in particular remained an unusual undertaking for female authors. Epic was understood to be virile primarily because of its martial themes; women with no experience of war were not supposed to be able to imagine and describe it. Gerry Milligan points out that the *Iliad* creates the mold for a male-centered genre by leaving very little room for female characters to take active part in the poem's main event, which is of course war: "[...] the Homeric Amazons are inconsequential in the story and are so brief an allusion that they likely confirm male dominance in warfare by creating the exception that proves the rule."<sup>24</sup> Female characters were increasingly permitted greater roles in combat beginning with Virgil's Camilla, but in keeping with Milligan's observation, these warriors tended to be portrayed as something unusual at which to marvel. In addition, the length of epic was deemed too much for female poets to tackle, as well as its breadth; politics and history were fields in which women's participation and education were generally lacking. Cox notes that the skepticism of women's ability to write epic is evident in "the gendered language with which Tasso characterizes the austere magnificence of epic style, by contrast with the refined and delicate charms of the lyric," as well as in Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni's shocked tone as he praises his niece, Moderata Fonte, for her epic.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 126–157.

<sup>23</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 164; Cox, "Fiction 1560–1650," 60.

<sup>24</sup> Gerry Milligan, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 45.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, "Fiction 1560–1650," 58.

To some extent this perception that epic is a male pursuit persists even today, in another cultural context: the first translation into English by a woman of *The Aeneid* was published in 2009, *The Iliad* in 2015, and *The Odyssey* only very recently, in 2018.<sup>26</sup> We have also recently seen a deluge of revisionist popular fiction in which the stories of these epics are told from the perspective of a female character.<sup>27</sup> Long before this trend, however, the early modern Italian women considered here were already experimenting with ways to empower the female character in epic. As we shall see, one common method they used was to alter the depiction of female warriors, making them exceptional not for their gender, but for their great prowess in war. The figure had evolved by this time from the lone Volscian queen Camilla in the *Aeneid* to several female knights based on Carolingian characters who had more prominent roles in their storylines.<sup>28</sup> These new *guerriere* were rife with poetic opportunity to promote proto-feminist values, since by definition they already blurred traditional gender lines. Though rare in history, their presence in literature allowed women to imagine themselves in a transgressive role.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, by writing epic poetry, female authors in fact did transgress a boundary. As we shall see, they themselves often make this same comparison between female combatants and female authors in their poems.<sup>30</sup> Although studies of the *querelle des femmes* often interpret proto-feminist assertions in literature as mere thought experiments and not overt demands for societal change, certain narratorial statements and comparisons like these do indicate a

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<sup>26</sup> These are Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Sarah Ruden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Homer, *The Iliad: A New Translation by Caroline Alexander*, trans. Caroline Alexander (New York: HarperCollins, 2015); Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York, W.W. Norton, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> For example, Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia* (Orlando: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008); Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (New York: Doubleday, 2018) and Madeline Miller's *Circe* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> For more on earlier iterations of the female knights in different traditions, see Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*.

<sup>29</sup> The topic of the relationship between historical women warriors and their fictional counterparts is addressed further in Milligan, *Moral Combat*, particularly in pages 120–228.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

particularly personal concern on the part of the authors.<sup>31</sup> For example, in the proem to Canto 4 of *Floridoro*, Moderata Fonte makes the case for training women in skills that were reserved for men at the time, including writing.<sup>32</sup> The poet argues that there are no innate differences between the genders that would prevent women from learning such skills and cites women warriors as proof of women's potential. By referencing the mentor who aids her protagonist to become a *guerriera*, she implicitly acknowledges her own situation as a female author who needs the approval and the connections of a male intellectual in order to publish her work, in her case her uncle, Doglioni. The other female poets here were also enabled by male advocates in some form: the writer Girolamo Muzio aided in publicizing d'Aragona's works, the Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto ensured Sarrocchi's intellectual development as she grew, and similarly Marinella's father and brothers probably encouraged her literary studies.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, three of the four poets had familial circumstances that are closely related to those of the characters I examine in the following chapters. As a courtesan with a noble surname whose father's identity was disputed, d'Aragona was suspected of bastardy. Her unchaste profession was also seen as disruptive to the family lines of the nobility, since it had the potential to introduce illegitimate heirs into their dynastic power struggles. Sarrocchi lost her father at a young age and had to start a new life in Rome as Cardinal Sirleto's ward. Shedding connections to her biological family ultimately had an enormous influence on her career, since as a result of her position in Rome she rose to great literary heights. Fonte and her brother were also orphaned as children and relied on their uncle to sustain them. She explicitly refers to the hardship of being an orphan in the proem to Canto 3 of her poem and recognizes the lawyers who helped her in her time of need.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, 134.

<sup>32</sup> Moderata Fonte, *I tredici canti del Floridoro*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Modena: Mucchi Editore, 1995), 4.1–5.

<sup>33</sup> See the authors' biographies in Chapters 2, 4, and 5, respectively.

<sup>34</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 3.3–6.

Probably not coincidentally, all of these authors include heroes who are orphans in their poems. While the precedent of the orphan-hero in classical epic preempts the conclusion that these stories are autobiographical, I nevertheless find it pertinent that d'Aragona would borrow a plot concerning the legitimation of an orphan prince, that Sarrocchi would write of a young woman abandoned by her father who emerges from the wilderness to excel in the company of male colleagues, and that Fonte would concoct a woman warrior removed from her parents' care who succeeds at her craft because of the influence of her adoptive father. I am not the first to note some of these similarities, but I would draw attention to the orphanhood of these characters to understand how it shapes their heroism within the poems, how it is relevant to the lives of the authors, and how it might relate to the greater historical context of these epics.

## VULNERABLE HEROES

The phrase "vulnerable heroes" might appear at first to be an oxymoron; heroes and heroines are usually defined by their strengths and their virtues, both in classical and Renaissance epic. Achilles is wrathful, Odysseus clever, and Aeneas dutiful, but all are supreme warriors who claim victory in their battles. Likewise, Ruggiero and Marfisa, and Clorinda (Chapter 1), Meschino (Chapter 2), Risamante and Floridoro (Chapter 3), Scanderbeg and Silveria (Chapter 4), and Meandra, Emilia, and Claudia (Chapter 5) all have individual differences as we will observe, but their commonality lies in the extraordinary bravery and military prowess that makes them heroes and heroines. The moments when they do not display the utmost chivalry and leadership skills or achieve the heights of military glory are rare, or in Ruggiero's case, conceived to question our understanding of epic heroism, which otherwise adheres to these tenets.

In her book, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy*, Marina McCoy makes the argument that there is a lesser-studied side to these characters that is equally important to their status as heroes: their vulnerability.<sup>35</sup> Being vulnerable—literally having the capacity to be wounded, from the Latin *vulnus*—is part of what makes us human; vulnerability to mortal wounds is precisely what separates humans from immortal gods in classical epic. Heroes are seen as elevated humans because they achieve epic glory, or *kleos*, by performing magnificent feats in battle. *Kleos* as an outcome is well understood, but what McCoy highlights is the motivation behind *kleos*: the human vulnerability to mortality.<sup>36</sup> It is the will to directly face this vulnerability that makes a hero. In *Iliad* 11.482–485, Odysseus gives a similar definition of heroism, distinguishing heroes from cowards according to who is willing to be wounded: “Cowards, I know, would quit the fighting now / but the man who wants to make his mark in war / must stand his ground and brace for all he’s worth— / suffer his wounds or wound his man to death.”<sup>37</sup> The appeal of this challenge is that *kleos* guarantees the only form of immortality possible for a mortal: the passing down of his name from generation to generation. Classical epic heroes thus confront the threat of physical death in order to achieve a figurative immortality, making their heroism a direct result of their vulnerability. In some cases, like that of Achilles which we will examine further below, heroes even choose vulnerability and a figurative immortality over a very long, secure life. By making this choice Achilles, the premier example of the epic hero, shows that vulnerability is a crucial component of heroism.

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<sup>35</sup> Marina McCoy, *Wounded Heroes*, viii.

<sup>36</sup> McCoy, viii–ix.

<sup>37</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Adult, 1990), 11.482–485.

McCoy's contention also applies to our early modern epic heroes, who likewise grapple with the question of immortality. In their Christian context, they have a double goal of earthly and heavenly glory, since their souls will live on beyond the deaths of their bodies.<sup>38</sup> To attain Paradise, Christian heroes on earth must emulate the actions of the central figure of Christianity. Although the line between human and god is blurred in the person of Jesus, he nevertheless has the human trait of vulnerability, which plays an essential role in the story of his crucifixion and resurrection. His forbearance in the face of agony sets the ultimate example for his followers. According to Tamara Neal in *The Wounded Hero: Non-Fatal Injury in Homer's Iliad*, how a Homeric character reacts to his vulnerability is an indicator of his heroism.<sup>39</sup> If he is worthy of glory, he can more easily endure suffering. She maintains that this is why, for example, in the *Iliad* many Trojans faint when they are wounded while Greeks are able to withstand the pain; the latter are physically and perhaps also morally superior.<sup>40</sup> While Jesus is not an epic hero, his acceptance and endurance of profound suffering heighten his already powerful image, endowing him with heroic qualities by Neal's definition.<sup>41</sup> Christ's acceptance of his crucifixion and the Greeks' tolerance of their wounds provide two models of confronting vulnerability that converge in the Renaissance heroes. The heroes studied here are certainly cognizant of their vulnerability

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<sup>38</sup> Fonte's *Floridoro* is the only one of these poems that, while written in a Christian context, narrates a story that takes place in ancient Greece and Armenia.

<sup>39</sup> Tamara Neal, *The Wounded Hero: Non-Fatal Injury in Homer's Iliad* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 15–16.

<sup>40</sup> Neal, *The Wounded Hero*, 84–88.

<sup>41</sup> "Christ's suitability as an epic hero...is complicated by his two natures, mortal and divine. That an epic hero must be mortal is a constant of the tradition from its Homeric origins...In one sense, Christ fulfills this requirement beyond question...since it was precisely through Christ's death that he performed his greatest and most consequential heroic act." Tobias Gregory, *From Many Gods to One: Divine Action in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 81–82.

to physical injury like the Greek heroes, but they approach death with less fear because they believe that a greater glory awaits them.<sup>42</sup>

More striking than their physical vulnerability in the development of their heroism, then, is the psychological vulnerability that these protagonists share: the loss of their parents. Though the deprivation of a father alone sufficed in the early modern period for a child to be considered an orphan, the orphan-heroes in these poems grow up either without any parental figure at all or are raised by mentors who are not their biological parents.<sup>43</sup> McCoy considers emotional injury as another form of vulnerability, writing that “[her] focus on works in which physical wounds are prominent features of the story [...] serves as a trope for delving more deeply into psychological, ethical, and interpersonal vulnerabilities and their place in the community.”<sup>44</sup> She also specifically examines psychological vulnerability in other genres, as in her Chapter 3 discussion of Sophocles’ tragedy *Philoctetes*, whose protagonist is socially isolated like some of the orphan-heroes we will discuss here.<sup>45</sup> I would clarify that while this dissertation in some respects examines epic characters from an emotional or psychological perspective, I am not proposing a psychoanalytic reading of the orphan-hero. Rather, insofar as family and genealogy are on equal footing with war as the weightiest themes in epic, I take the absence of parents as hugely significant for its protagonists, and I interpret the emotional effects of that loss through textual analysis within the context of each poem. I treat these protagonists as individuals rather than purely as epic archetypes; even if they do not necessarily have the depth of the characters in

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<sup>42</sup> The technical exception to this is the non-Christian protagonists of the *Floridoro*, but despite the purportedly ancient setting of the poem, its jousting knights and the feudal construction of its society are decidedly medieval in character.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 74.

<sup>44</sup> McCoy, *Wounded Heroes*, ix.

<sup>45</sup> “Pity as a Civic Virtue in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*,” in McCoy, *Wounded Heroes*, 63–87.

modern novels, they do have distinct personality traits and are further developed than we often give them credit for.<sup>46</sup> Their differing genders, races, and in many cases changing religious identities also contribute to the variation of their characters.

For all of these heroes, however, the fact that they must confront their emotional vulnerability with the same determination they exhibit when facing their physical vulnerability helps to establish their heroism. Most are aided in their formation by non-parent mentors: Ruggiero is trained for combat by the wizard Atlante and Clorinda is raised by the servant Arsete (Chapter 1), Meschino has several sets of foster parents (Chapter 2), Risamante's training by the wizard Celidante echoes that of Ruggiero (Chapter 3), Scanderbeg is raised in the court of the sultan Amuratte (Chapter 4), and Meandra's aunt trains her in martial skills (Chapter 5). Ruggiero and Marfisa, Clorinda, and Silveria (Chapter 4) also have the distinction of having been nursed as infants by wild animals rather than by their biological mothers. These features of the narratives have a significant bearing on the nature versus nurture question—whether heroism is innate or has developed as a result of a character's environment—which is addressed throughout the dissertation. The figure of the heroic mentor and the consumption of animal breastmilk are *topoi* that originate in classical epic. The ancient orphan-hero serves as the original point of comparison for its literary descendants, and is therefore the point of departure for the dissertation proper.

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<sup>46</sup> See Peter Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto's Tapestry: Character and Design in the Orlando Furioso* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 1–16. He writes that the characterization in the *Furioso* is strong enough that the poem might actually be “the novel already on its rise into being” (16). For the classic discussion on the epic versus the novel, see Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3–40.



As the protagonist of the *Iliad* who kills more opponents than any other combatant on the field, Achilles is the most famous of the Greek warriors and the prototype for all epic heroes to follow.<sup>47</sup> The mythology of his upbringing occurs in three phases: he is born to the Nereid Thetis and the mortal Peleus, he is given into the centaur Chiron's keeping, and lastly he is hidden on the isle of Scyros before he sets out to fight for the Greeks in the Trojan War. Although his parents do not die, they are absent during his formative years, which allows Chiron to act as his foster parent. In the *Achilleid*, which recounts part of Achilles's youth, the poet Statius describes a close relationship between the hero and his foster father. Under the tutelage of the centaur, Achilles learns to hunt and to use his father's spear, preparing him for the war to come. Even when his mother comes to visit, Achilles turns to Chiron to provide protection: "The huge Centaur / collapses onto stone, and Achilles snuggles / into his shaggy shoulders and arms, preferring, though his faithful mother is there, that familiar chest."<sup>48</sup> Although her presence is welcome, his mother is unfamiliar to him in comparison to his guardian. When Thetis takes her son to Scyros, at first he is completely disoriented by his removal from Chiron and "isn't sure he recognizes his mother," which draws another clear contrast between the two relationships.<sup>49</sup> Chiron, for his part, becomes tearful at the loss of his young companion.<sup>50</sup> Achilles also worries about his mentor's opinion when his mother reveals her plan to disguise him as a girl. Thetis knows the source of her son's reluctance, and asks him:

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<sup>47</sup> Neal, *The Wounded Hero*, 223.

<sup>48</sup> The English translation I cite here is P. Papinius Statius, *Achilleid*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2015), 1.220–223, EBSCOhost. The original lines are "saxo conlabitur ingens / Centaurus blandusque umeris se innectit Achilles, / quamquam ibi fida parens, adsuetaque pectoramavult." P. Papinius Statius, *Statius II: Thebaid V–XII, Achilleid*, trans. J.H. Mozley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 1.195–197.

<sup>49</sup> *Achilleid*, Lombardo translation, 1.283. "dubitatque agnoscere matrem," 1.250 in the original.

<sup>50</sup> *Achilleid*, original text, 1.234.

“What are you thinking? Are you ashamed to be soft  
in this dress? I swear, dear child, by the sea I was born in,  
Chiron will never know.”

With words such as these  
she coaxed his bristling heart. Working against her  
were his father, his great tutor, and the raw ingredients  
of a noble nature.<sup>51</sup>

Achilles’s mental pairing of his father and tutor shows that they hold similar positions: he regards them both as paternal figures who have the same expectations of him. Chiron, however, has taken a more active role in raising the young warrior, while his father has left him with only his spear as a token of his affection. Indeed, Achilles will refer to Chiron simply as his “pater” later on in the poem.<sup>52</sup> The centaur’s training is a significant factor in the heroism of Achilles for two reasons. First, it instills in him the will to fight. This is clear from Thetis’s lament early in the poem, when she realizes that the Greeks will want to recruit Achilles for the war:

[...] soon they will be  
scouring land and sea for my son Achilles,  
and he will want to go with them! Oh why  
did I trust Pelion and the grim Centaur’s cave  
to be my son’s nursery?<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Lombardo translation, 1.310–316. “quidve parant oculi? pudet hoc mitescere cultu? / per te, care puer, cognata per aequora iuro, / nesciet hoc Chiron. sic horrida pectora tractat / nequiquam mulcens; obstat genitorque roganti / nutritorque ingens et cruda exordia magnae / indolis,” 1.272–277.

<sup>52</sup> “sic dabat ille pater,” 2.102.

<sup>53</sup> Lombardo translation, 1.43–47. “iam pelago terrisque meus quaretur Achilles. / et volet ipse sequi. quid enim cunabula parvo / Pelion et torvi commisimus antra magistri?” 1.37–39.

She attributes Achilles's interest in war to the influence of his foster parent. The youth's willingness to confront his mortality—his ultimate physical vulnerability—forms part of his heroism. He recounts his many adventures in training in 2.94–167 (original text). Second, Chiron stands in as a substitute for Thetis and Peleus, allowing Achilles to adapt to the emotional wound of his parents' abandonment. According to Apollonius Rhodius in the *Argonautica*, Peleus entrusts his son to the centaur in order to protect him from Thetis, who, dissatisfied with her son's mortal state, repeatedly burns him over a fire to rid him of his mortal parts.<sup>54</sup> In Statius's version, Thetis dips her son into the river Styx to assure his immortality, but she is unable to submerge him entirely, leaving his heel exposed to danger.<sup>55</sup> In both cases, Achilles ironically needs protection from his mother's attempts to protect him, which is where Chiron becomes involved. He is able to care for the child when the parents cannot successfully do so. Stanley Lombardo points out that Statius underscores Thetis's poor parenting: when she first encounters Chiron without his ward nearby, she chastises him for neglecting her son, "but as the scene evolves, it becomes clear that Thetis' accusations are more than a little hypocritical: she has been away for so long that she still remembers her fully-grown son as a helpless child."<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, evidence that Achilles is still attached to his parents, and therefore affected by their absence, can be seen in his reaction to his mother's arrival on Mount Pelion:

And he happened to be happy [...],  
for his spear had just killed a lioness,  
newly whelped, under Pholoe's cliff; he'd left her there

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<sup>54</sup> Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, trans. William H. Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4.865–879.

<sup>55</sup> *Achilleid*, Lombardo translation, 1.150–151, 1.306–307.

<sup>56</sup> Lombardo, "Introduction," in P. Papinius Statius, *Achilleid*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2015), xv.

in her empty cave but brought the cubs home  
and was now provoking their claws. But when he saw  
his mother there on the familiar threshold  
he threw them aside and wrapped her in his eager arms,  
his embrace already serious, his height now matching hers.”<sup>57</sup>

His excitement at seeing his mother overpowers his happiness at his hunting triumph. He casts aside the cubs in favor of greeting his mother. Since his training for war has entailed hunting animals, the cubs as spoils of the hunt are precursors to the spoils he will later win in war. This is, in fact, the one moment in which Achilles prioritizes his mother’s interests over his glory in warfare, as represented by the lion cubs. His choice highlights his emotional needs in a context where his physical survival is the most consistent concern. The joy of the reunion scene is dampened by its inherent reminder of the fact that mother and son are ordinarily separated. The length of time that Thetis has been away is indicated by the amount Achilles has grown; that he should “already” (“iam”) be able to give a serious embrace and that he is “now” (“iamque”) as tall as she is implies that these are unexpected developments. As Lombardo notes above, she has not kept track of her son’s growth. Moreover, the disturbing image of the empty cave in which Achilles has left the dead lioness, who had just given birth to the cubs, also recalls his own separation from his mother. When he tells Odysseus and Diomedes about his upbringing in Book 2, he says,

In my tender years, when I was still crawling  
and the old Centaur received me on his stark mountain,

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<sup>57</sup> *Achilleid*, Lombardo translation, 1.191–194. “forte et laetus adest [...] / fetam Pholoes subrupe leenam / perculerat ferro vacisque reliquerat antris / ipsam, sed catulos adportat et incitat ungues. / quos tamen, ut fido genetrix in limine visa est, / abicit exceptamque avidis circumligat ulnis, / iam gravis amplexus iamque aequus vertice matri,” 1.167–173.

I didn't eat regular food or nurse from a breast  
but tore at tough lion innards and sucked marrow  
from half-alive she-wolves. That was my first Ceres,  
those were the gifts of happy Bacchus, that is the food  
my foster-father would feed me."<sup>58</sup>

Like the warriors mentioned at the end of the previous section, Achilles is deprived of his mother's breastmilk as an infant. Neil W. Bernstein observes that "Achilles' reference to the substitution of raw flesh in place of the maternal breast in the *Achilleid* evokes the false etymology of his name from ἀ- (privative) and χείλη (lips), connoting 'an infant brutally weaned and separated from his mother's milk.'"<sup>59</sup> Achilles replicates his brutal weaning by removing the newborn lions from their mother. Their placement in the background of the reunion scene serves as a reminder of his own trauma. Another sign of Achilles's reaction to his pseudo-orphanhood is his constant use of his father's spear. Thetis imagines that he creates a childish game of measuring his height against it, but because he is now a young man, he has graduated to hunting with it and uses it to kill the mother lion.<sup>60</sup> He will later use it in battle, measuring himself against his father in a figurative, rather than literal, sense. Lastly, before Achilles, Thetis, and Chiron go to sleep on Mount Pelion, the youth sings several ballads. He narrates the legends of the heroes Hercules, Pollux, and Theseus, but then incongruously adds the tale of his parents' wedding. His inclusion of this last story among those of "glory's great seeds" affirms his

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<sup>58</sup> Lombardo translation, 2.110–116. "dicor et in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis, / Thessalus ut rigido senior me monte recepit / non ullos ex more cibos hausisse nec almis / uberibus satiasset famem, sed spissa leonum / viscera seminianimisque lupae traxisse medullas. / haec mihi prima Ceres, haec lacti munera Bacchi, / sic dabat ille pater," 2.96–102.

<sup>59</sup> Neil W. Bernstein, *In the Image of the Ancestors: Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 122.

<sup>60</sup> *Achilleid*, Lombard translation, 1.49.

reverence for his parents, despite their absence.<sup>61</sup> His nostalgia is somewhat misplaced, however: not only was the wedding disrupted by Eris, who throws an apple into the midst of the celebration, telling the most beautiful goddess to pick it up and thus setting off the chain of events that leads to the Trojan War, but also the marriage did not last, reinforcing the disconnect between Achilles and his parents. In response to his song, “Thetis’ anxiety gave way to a smile.”<sup>62</sup> Her reaction is not quite logical, considering that the story of her wedding should remind her of exactly why she is filled with anxiety in the first place. Furthermore, her smile reflects her misunderstanding of her son: she does not see that his nostalgia for his once-united parents reflects the emotional damage inflicted by their absence.<sup>63</sup>

Ignoring her son’s emotional vulnerability, Thetis has concentrated all of her efforts on prolonging Achilles’s survival, a central issue for him because of his semi-divine status and the choice that he must make between two fates. As he says in *Iliad* 9.497–505,

Mother tells me,  
the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,  
that two fates bear me on to the day of death.  
If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,  
my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.  
If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,  
my pride, my glory dies...  
true, but the life that’s left me will be long,

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<sup>61</sup> Lombardo translation, 1.209–219. “canit ille libens immania laudum semina,” 1.188–189.

<sup>62</sup> Lombardo translation, 1.219. “hic victo risit anxia vultu,” 1.194.

<sup>63</sup> Lombardo succinctly sums up all of Thetis’s errors: “Thetis failed to completely protect her son in the Styx, handed the baby over to Chiron (or claims to have done so), and forgot about him. She has belatedly realized that she completely missed her opportunity to kill Paris before he arrived in Greece: all of her actions on behalf of her son are too little, too late.” “Introduction,” xv.

the stroke of death will not come on me quickly.<sup>64</sup>

His preference for death and glory on the battlefield is a result of Chiron's influence. However, his heroism is further determined by "the raw ingredients of a noble nature," as cited in 1.310–316 above. Chiron's teaching alone does not account for certain heroic instincts; Achilles's ancestry also endows him with inborn traits that lead to his heroism. Family origin is a significant issue for both classical and Renaissance epic heroes. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, a tragic hero, and thus by extension an epic hero, should be of noble parentage.<sup>65</sup> This is true of all the heroes studied here, but the classical heroes have knowledge of their ancestry, while many of the Renaissance heroes do not. They discover their parentage in the course of their journeys, adding an element of surprise and confirming that they deserve to be in their heroic position. Their emotional vulnerability is greater than that of their classical predecessors because they are generally unaware of their destinies. Achilles, on the other hand, has foreknowledge which complements his training with Chiron. Statius argues for a combination of nature and nurture as necessary factors in the creation of a hero, but as Bernstein elucidates, the emphasis in the *Achilleid* remains on the role of Chiron as the most important determinant of Achilles's heroism.<sup>66</sup>

The nurturing of Achilles includes not only his tutelage by Chiron, but also the replacement of human breastmilk with sustenance derived from animals. Although in the case of Achilles, exceptional savagery is indicated by his devouring of strange meats, the suckling of human infants by animals can be found in several Roman myths and subsequently in three of the

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<sup>64</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles, 9.497–505.

<sup>65</sup> Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature*, trans. Leon Golden (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1982), 2.15. "Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level." Though he differentiates between the genres of epic and tragedy, Aristotle often uses examples from Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* to illustrate points he is making about tragedy.

<sup>66</sup> Bernstein, "Statius' *Achilleid*: Nature and Nurture," in *In the Image of the Ancestors*, 105–131.

Renaissance epics. The quintessential example of this category of orphan-hero comes in the form of Remus and his twin Romulus, the mythological founder of Rome. In the first book of the *Aeneid*, Jupiter reassures Venus about her son Aeneas's fate, explaining that his descendants will include these twins, abandoned at birth and nursed by a she-wolf, "lupae nutricis."<sup>67</sup> The imbibing of animal milk at such an early age is supposed to confer upon the children an animalistic aggression that will aid them in their future heroic pursuits.<sup>68</sup> In the case of Romulus and Remus, only one twin will be successful in this venture: Romulus kills Remus in order to be the sole founder of the Roman Empire. Though they have the same upbringing, their abilities diverge, suggesting that nature rather than nurture determines their identities. Other epic twins are portrayed differently: both the twins in the *Furioso*, Marfisa and Ruggiero, and the twins in the *Floridoro*, Risamante and Biondaura, are raised separately and develop different characteristics, supporting the effect of nurture as greater than that of nature in their identity formation. For example, after their mother dies, the wizard Atlante initially raises both Marfisa and Ruggiero. In adherence to the wild animal-nurse *topos*, the infant twins drink the milk of a lioness. They are then separated and Marfisa must survive her childhood on her own, while her brother retains the guidance of his foster father. Both twins are ferocious in combat because they drank the lion's milk, but as a result of her self-reliance, Marfisa becomes the superior warrior. Stoppino points out that the pattern of animals functioning as wet-nurses to female warriors is related to gender: it is often the female children who are unwanted and therefore abandoned in

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<sup>67</sup> Virgil, *Virgil, Volume I: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid Book 1–6*, ed. G. P. Goold and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.275.

<sup>68</sup> Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 46, 58–59; Eleonora Stoppino, "'Lacte ferino': donna guerriera e immaginario animale nella letteratura epico-cavalleresca italiana," *Letteratura cavalleresca italiana*, no. 2 (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2020): 25–26. Stoppino writes: "La natura eccezionale di eroi e eroine nutriti da belve risiede nel patto con la natura sigillato nell'infanzia, che comporta uno scambio di caratteristiche. L'animale, addomesticato e potenzialmente umanizzato, presta dei tratti sovrumani all'eroe attraverso l'alimento eccezionale costituito dal latte ferino. Tale forza superiore può favorire, in direzione opposta, un avvicinamento eccessivo dell'eroe alla natura bestiale, visibile, ad esempio, nell'ira funesta di Achille," 26.



the wilderness, as Marfisa is here.<sup>69</sup> The linking of female children to wild animals is part of a misogynistic tradition that starts with Aristotle, in which women are considered more bestial than men.<sup>70</sup>

The connection between animal breastmilk and the warrior woman that Stoppino establishes originates with Camilla, the Volscian queen whose story is told in Book 11 of the *Aeneid*. The goddess Diana recounts that when Camilla's tyrannical father Metabus is ousted by his people, he goes into exile with his young daughter in tow. When their flight is hindered by an overflowing river, Metabus ties her to a spear and launches her to the other side with a prayer to Diana to protect her, sealing her fate as a devotee of Diana and foreshadowing her figurative attachment to weapons as she grows. Camilla's childhood is spent in the forests and caves of wild animals with her father, who teaches her to hunt and feeds her the milk of a mare.<sup>71</sup> She is not an orphan in the fullest sense of the word due to her father's presence, but at the same time she is motherless and lives on the margins of society. Even when she emerges from the wild to participate in the battle for Latium as an ally of Turnus, she remains marginalized because of her gender ambiguity; neither the precedent of the Amazons in Homer nor Camilla's own command of a small troop of women are sufficient to normalize her role as female warrior. Virgil shows her difference initially by pointing out that she does not wear feminine clothing as a child. Her father is the first to arm her:

As soon as the baby had taken her earliest footsteps, he armed her hands with a pointed lance, and hung quiver and bow from the little child's shoulder. In place of gold to clasp her hair, in place of long trailing robe, there hung from her head and down her back a

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<sup>69</sup> Stoppino, "Lacte ferino," 26.

<sup>70</sup> Stoppino, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Virgil, *Virgil: Aeneid Books 7–12, Appendix Vergiliana*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11.535–584.

tiger's spoils. Even then with tender hand she hurled her childish spears, swung round her head the smooth-thonged sling, and struck down Strymonian crane or snowy swan.<sup>72</sup>

Her preference for wearing the spoils of her hunt over hair accoutrement and dresses at an early age already shows her departure from a traditionally female appearance, and her choice to stay loyal to Diana—that is, to remain a virgin—further sets her apart. The futile hope of mothers in nearby cities that she might become their daughter-in-law underscores the rarity of her wish not to marry, which will be echoed in future generations of women warriors like Marfisa and Silveria.<sup>73</sup> By joining the war, however, she distances herself from Diana, who comments that if Camilla had stayed in the forest “she would still be my darling and one of my companions.”<sup>74</sup>

The war brings further disparagement of Camilla's gender. As she defeats opponent after opponent, she is accused of womanly vanity and Tarchon uses the fact that she is a woman to spur on his troops, telling them that it would be shameful to be defeated by her: “Does a woman drive you in disorder and rout your ranks?”<sup>75</sup> Her successes on the battlefield give the lie to these kinds of taunts until her death, which results from her distraction by the glittering arms and armor of Chloreus. Virgil writes that she hunts him down in an effort to retrieve these objects “with a woman's passion for booty and spoil,” assigning her a stereotypically female reaction that will be her downfall.<sup>76</sup>

Camilla's manner of death could either be interpreted as a confirmation of her womanhood—that is, that her interest in gold and other so-called feminine behaviors are

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<sup>72</sup> “utque pedum primis infans vestigia plantis / institerat, iaculo palmas armavit acuto / spiculaque ex umero parvae suspendit et arcum. / pro crinali auro, pro longae tegmine pallae / tigridis exuviae per dorsum a vertice pendent. / tela manu iam tum tenera puerilia torsit / et fundam terete circum caput egit habena / Strymoniamque gruem aut album deiecit olorem,” *Aeneid* 11.571–580.

<sup>73</sup> *Aeneid* 11.581–584. The significance of the virginity of the woman warrior will be discussed in Chapters 1 and 5.

<sup>74</sup> “cara mihi comitumque foret nunc una mearum,” *Aeneid* 11.585–586.

<sup>75</sup> The accusation of vanity takes place in *Aeneid* 11.708. Tarchon's line is in 11.734: “femina palantis agit atque haec agmina vertit?”

<sup>76</sup> “femineo praedae et spoliolum ardebat amore,” *Aeneid* 11.782.

characteristic of her sex—or it could be understood as an implication that she should exhibit only masculinity, because any entrance into the realm of the feminine is a risk for a warrior. Becoming masculine in both behavior and physiology, however, is unattainable for her, leaving her in an unresolvable dilemma. In either case, the ambiguity of her gender identity is a factor in her vulnerability.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, this ambiguity helps her to overcome her vulnerability as a child living in the wilderness, where learning to hunt allows her to survive. Her father's encouragement and Diana's protection both contribute to her development as a skilled huntress, which then translates into her talent as a warrior. Her progression from the forest to the battlefield will be repeated by Sarrocchi's Silveria and Marinella's Emilia, as we will see in the last two chapters of the study. This transition is depicted as progress in the evolving heroism of each of these characters. It is clear that Camilla regards confronting human adversaries as a greater challenge than the hunt. During her *aristeia*, she scoffs at one of her victims, the hunter Ornytus: "Tuscan, did you think you were chasing beasts in the forests?"<sup>78</sup> She belittles her former occupation, considering its aims unfit for the battlefield, although it did provide her the preparation she needed to become a warrior. The progression from killing animals to killing people is also consistent with Ruggiero's training in the *Orlando furioso*, which will be discussed in Chapter 1. By re-entering society, Camilla elevates her heroic stature.

The other major influence on Camilla's development, as mentioned above, is the fact that as a baby she is nursed by a wild mare. The mare transfers her ferocity to Camilla through the milk. In general this absorption of the animal's traits is understood from Camilla's relentlessness in combat, but it is also specifically referenced when she takes on the son of Aunus. He attributes

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<sup>77</sup> For more on Camilla's gender identity, see Giampiera Arrigoni, *Camilla amazzone e sacerdotessa di Diana* (Milan: Cisalpino Goliardica, 1982); Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 44–49, 57–60; Valeria Viparelli, "Camilla: A Queen Undeclared, Even in Death," *Vergilius* 54 (2008): 9–23.

<sup>78</sup> "silvis te, Tyrrhene, feras agitare putasti?" *Aeneid* 11.686.

her strength to the fact that she is on horseback and challenges her to meet him on foot. Instead of dismounting as she does, however, he remains in the saddle and turns his horse away in flight. Camilla chases after him, catches him, and slaughters him.<sup>79</sup> Her ability to outpace a galloping horse comes from her childhood association with the mare. The taunt of her opponent, “What great glory have you, woman, if you put your trust in your strong steed?” becomes ironic in this context, since it is precisely because of Camilla’s connection with horses that she does earn epic glory.<sup>80</sup> Though animals are considered subhuman and viewed as easier targets than humans as evidenced by their use in a warrior’s training, as Stoppino mentions, their milk infused into a human body creates a superhuman strength.<sup>81</sup> While bestial aggression is generally contrasted with humanity, as discussed further in Chapter 5, it also has the power to fortify heroes.

Camilla’s vulnerable childhood creates the conditions for her to become a hero. Like Achilles, she is both physically vulnerable, succumbing to death at the end of Book 11, and emotionally vulnerable due to her isolated upbringing and ambiguous gender. Virgil shows that the influence of Metabus, Diana, and the mare’s milk together enable her to overcome these adversities, suggesting nurture’s greater role in the development of her heroism. At the same time, Aeneas as the protagonist of the poem is born with the traits necessary to achieve his heroic goals, primarily his *pietas*, which is passed down from his father.<sup>82</sup> He will continue the transmission of his noble qualities through the furthering of his genealogical line, which becomes an essential aspect of epic: from Virgil onward, heroes must found dynasties and settle new lands for their descendants to inhabit.<sup>83</sup> These descendants and newly established cities often coincide

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<sup>79</sup> *Aeneid* 11.699–724.

<sup>80</sup> “quid tam egregium, si femina forti / fidis equo?” *Aeneid* 11.705–706.

<sup>81</sup> See note 68.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1, note 42.

<sup>83</sup> The exception to this rule is found in those female heroes for whom virginity is a prized quality, such as Marfisa, Silveria, and Emilia.

with the patrons of the poems' authors and the territories over which they preside, allowing the patrons to celebrate their nobility through the feats of their legendary ancestors. Therefore, while the dissertation emphasizes the nurturing of heroes because of the vulnerabilities imposed on them in their childhood environments, the influence of nature on their development remains significant. Each author addresses the interplay between nature and nurture differently, allowing for nuance within the character of the orphan-hero.

While this figure originated in classical mythology, it became common in early modern epic, as suggested by the presence of ten orphan-heroes in the six poems examined here. This cultural shift was accompanied by a shift in the character's portrayal, with more emphasis placed on the hero's emotional vulnerability. Ariosto's twins are the first example of this emphasis. In Chapter 1, I show that the deaths of Ruggiero and Marfisa's parents and their subsequent social isolation makes them both psychologically vulnerable, but to different degrees. Ruggiero is taken in by a mentor who guides him and Marfisa is left to fend for herself. Because Marfisa must work harder to overcome her vulnerability, she is better prepared for the heroic exploits of her adult life, while Ruggiero flounders in his ventures despite his training. The contrast between the twins ultimately corresponds to the contrast between dignified historical epic, as represented by Marfisa, and flightier romance, as represented by Ruggiero. While as we have seen Ariosto includes both of these elements in his poem, his successor Tasso, whose *Gerusalemme liberata* is studied in the second part of Chapter 1, prefers historical epic. His warrior Clorinda experiences vulnerability as a child, since she is rejected by her parents on the basis of her skin color, which does not match theirs, and grows up without knowledge of her Christian origins. The odd cause of her racial difference and her conversion to her family's religion as she dies lead me to conclude that she is an unlikely figure of Christ in the poem.

Chapter 2 explores the childhood vulnerability of the orphan Meschino in Tullia d'Aragona's epic, *Il Meschino*. Because Meschino spends the majority of the poem searching for the identity of his parents, and consequently his own identity, the link between orphanhood and heroism is made very clear. Each of his three sets of foster parents helps him progress to the next stage of his development. By the end of the poem his first foster mother serves as the point of connection that reunites him with his biological parents; in this way, both his natural parents and his nurturing parents are represented at the crucial moment that confirms his heroism.

In Chapter 3, as noted above Fonte's *Floridoro* expresses a strong preference for the influence of nurture in heroic development, using the twins Risamante and Biondaura to illustrate the difference that can be made by growing up in separate environments. Risamante, in a vulnerable position as a result of her removal from her family, trains as a knight, while Biondaura resides in their family's palace with no heroic traits to speak of. In arguing for the primacy of nurture's role, Fonte asserts that with the right education, women can be successful in any traditionally male vocation. She underscores her support for the impact of nurture through her portrayal of the young knight Floridoro, who also rises to heroic prominence aided by mentors.

Chapter 4 considers Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide*, analyzing two orphan-hero characters: the protagonist, Scanderbeg, and the intriguing female huntress, Silveria. Scanderbeg's childhood is marked by tragedy. The sultan murders his brothers and takes him to live at the Turkish court as his captive and protégé, until Scanderbeg garners the strength to rebel and convert to Christianity. Likewise, Silveria grows up far away from her family on the mountainside where her father abandoned her. Her vulnerability, compounded by a rape attempt, also engenders the heroism she exhibits, first in her assassination of her attackers and then as a warrior.

Scanderbeg's conversion and Silveria's return to society are new forms of epic homecoming that depart from the traditional epic ties to *patria*, or homeland.

Chapter 5 examines three warrior women in Marinella's *L'Enrico*. The first, Meandra, is an orphan raised by her aunt, a former warrior herself who passes down her skills to her niece. This is a singular occurrence in epic because both the mentor and the warrior are female. Meandra's strength, produced in part by her vulnerability, is evident in her leadership on the battlefield. It is not quite clear whether the second character, Emilia, is an orphan, but as a huntress who becomes a warrior, she is certainly modeled on the figures of Camilla and Silveria. She survives the war but unlike the others returns to her forest home. The fact that she occupies a blend of sylvan and urban spaces contributes to the hybridity of her character, which defies epic archetypes. Finally, the warrior Claudia is not an orphan, but she does embody Marinella's call for a new understanding of women's roles; echoing Fonte, the poet shows that Claudia's martial abilities are proof that only nurture dictates what a woman can and cannot do.

The nature of a hero as defined by her ancestry can also bolster her claim to heroism. The early modern epic hero usually has no knowledge of her parentage until such time as the poet sees fit to reveal it, heightening the drama of the plot. When the orphan-heroes discover their patrician bloodlines, they substantiate their right to be labeled as heroes. Not only are they confirming their own legitimacy, but they are also honoring the patrons of the poet, the supposed descendants of the noble heroes. As we shall see in the following chapters, the revelatory moment simultaneously looks backward toward the heroes' ancestors and forward toward their descendants, perfectly encapsulating the nature of the epic poem itself.

## CHAPTER 1: ARIOSTO AND TASSO'S ORPHANS

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to provide some insight into the role of the orphan-hero in the two most celebrated Italian Renaissance epics, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532) and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581). Chapter 1 will serve as a backdrop for the investigation in chapters 2–5 of the orphan-hero in female-authored poems, which were modelled on Ariosto and Tasso's work.

The study begins with the *Orlando furioso*, focusing on its two protagonists who belong to the category of orphan-hero: the twins Ruggiero and Marfisa. I argue that their disparate upbringings shape their development into two distinct heroic types, Marfisa conforming to the standard of epic warrior woman and Ruggiero creating a new classification for himself. These two character types parallel the two genres that Ariosto combines to conceive his poem: the classic, historical epic in the vein of the *Aeneid* that Tasso would later embrace, and Ariosto's version of the chivalric romance, riddled with irony and the *entrelacement* for which he is known. Starting with a description of each hero, I discuss their respective relationships with the magician Atlante and the role that fate plays in their careers. The majority of the first section is then devoted to the analysis of the separate educations of the twins through the major episodes that define their heroic progress, including both of their upbringings, Ruggiero's journey on the hippogriff to the realms of Alcina and Logistilla and his rescue by Melissa, and the twins' reunion toward the end of the poem which leads to their conversion. Ruggiero's progress is hazy and circular, intentionally difficult to categorize, whereas Marfisa's is clear and linear and easily identifiable. This contrast, I conclude, serves to show how Marfisa, who must overcome greater vulnerability as the female twin who is kidnapped and enslaved as a child, becomes the more



stable knight of the two. In addition, the difference between the twins complicates the definition of an epic hero.

I then turn to Tasso's Clorinda. I discuss the role of what I argue are the multiple parental figures who influence her formation and I analyze the major episodes in which she is involved in Canto 2 and Canto 12. Although she is a renowned fighter, it is Clorinda's personal story to which Tasso devotes the most attention. Her upbringing, conversion and death, as well as her non-violent rescue of the maiden Sofronia and her lover Olindo, depict a hero whose feats are about religious sacrifice rather than driven by chivalric glory. I show that Clorinda's ambiguous identity as a result of her childhood vulnerability associates her with Jesus and allows her to become a religious epic hero, though only briefly; her multiplicity prevents her from achieving the status of true protagonist.

### *ORLANDO FURIOSO*

In Ariosto, the story of Ruggiero and Marfisa's beginnings is told for the first time in Canto 36, when their true relationship is finally revealed to them by the ghost of the magician Atlante. While readers are privy to the fact that Atlante is Ruggiero's foster father for the whole poem, the events surrounding the adoption of the hero and his sister are not detailed until this point: their mother, Galaciella, is abandoned by her brothers at sea and dies after giving birth to the twins. Atlante takes both children in, but their paths fork at age seven, when Marfisa is stolen by a band of Arabs and sent into slavery. Ruggiero continues on with Atlante, training to become a warrior, while Marfisa must find her own way to adulthood. Until Canto 36, both twins believe themselves to be of Muslim ancestry. In addition to disclosing their relationship to one another, Atlante's shade also surprises Marfisa with the news that their family is, in fact, Christian, which

means Ruggiero has been fighting on the wrong side in the war between Agramante and Charlemagne. This discovery and Marfisa's decision to convert delights Bradamante, Ruggiero's Christian bride-to-be, and shapes the course of the rest of the poem.

Although Ruggiero, along with the titular hero Orlando, is considered the protagonist of the *Furioso*, Marfisa nevertheless plays an important role because she serves as a counterpoint to Ruggiero, an example of what or how he could have been if circumstances had been different. Marfisa is characterized by her impressive military valor and capability, staunch adherence to the chivalric code, and her vow of chastity. I agree with Ita Mac Carthy that, while she is based on Boiardo's Marfisa, Ariosto's version of the character is less of a comedic figure than her predecessor, who in Mac Carthy's example devotes her time to such absurd activities as a fruitless fifteen-day pursuit of the thief Brunello in an attempt to reclaim her sword.<sup>1</sup> I disagree, however, with her claim that Marfisa becomes less of a religious zealot in Ariosto: as Jo Ann Cavallo points out, Marfisa's immediate desire to be baptized and join Charlemagne against Agramante demonstrates a more intensely religious bent to her character in Ariosto than in Boiardo, where she never involves herself in any religious conflict.<sup>2</sup> Ariosto indicates Marfisa's defining features when he introduces her:

La vergine Marfisa si nomava,  
di tal valor, che con la spada in mano  
fece più volte al gran signor di Brava  
sudar la fronte e a quel di Montalbano;  
e 'l dí e la notte armata sempre andava

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<sup>1</sup> Ita Mac Carthy, "Marfisa and Gender Performance in the Orlando Furioso," *Italian Studies* 60, no. 2 (October 1, 2005): 180–81, <https://doi.org/10.1179/007516305X71906>.

<sup>2</sup> Jo Ann Cavallo, review of *Review of Women and the Making of Poetry in Ariosto's Orlando furioso*, by Ita Mac Carthy, *Renaissance Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2008): 880, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.0.0225>.

di qua di là cercando in monte e in piano  
con cavalieri erranti riscontrarsi,  
et immortale e gloriosa farsi.<sup>3</sup>

She is first of all a virgin, secondly a fighter who strikes fear into the hearts of her opponents such as Orlando and Rinaldo, and thirdly she is keenly dedicated to her duties as knight errant, wearing her armor day and night and always striving for immortal fame. In this first scene she encounters her old friend Astolfo with the knight Sansonetto, and upon hearing their plans to go to Damascus for a tournament, she immediately wants to join. In keeping with the above description of her, she is “sempre a far gran pruove accesa.”<sup>4</sup>

Ruggiero’s entrance, on the other hand, is somewhat less dignified. Though labeled by Pinabello as “giovene forte, / pregiato assai ne l’africana corte” and by Atlante as “disio d’onore e suo fiero destino,” the first time he actually appears in the poem, neither of these descriptions applies.<sup>5</sup> In fact he is presented not as an admirable warrior, but as a befuddled lover. He struggles initially to recognize Bradamante, which creates a comedic contrast with her dogged search for him.<sup>6</sup> Once he realizes who she is, however, he reacts with overwhelming joy. The narrator dedicates the next *ottava* to describing Ruggiero’s strong feelings for Bradamante: he loves her “più che la propria vita,” which is fitting given that he is destined to sacrifice his life as a result of marrying her.<sup>7</sup> Directly following this loving reunion, Ruggiero fails in his attempt to capture Atlante’s wandering hippogriff. Its stubbornness forces the knight to dismount from his own horse and climb onto the winged one, which carries him off into the sky. Ruggiero’s first act

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<sup>3</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 18.99.

<sup>4</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 18.102.

<sup>5</sup> Ariosto, 2.45, 4.30.

<sup>6</sup> Ariosto, 4.40.

<sup>7</sup> Ariosto, 4.41.

in the poem is a mishap and the contrast between the twins already becomes evident. Marfisa is the warrior par excellence who immediately does what a knight errant should do, setting off on a quest of her own volition, whereas Ruggiero blunders as a knight, not electing to go on a journey like his sister but instead having the journey thrust upon him. His forfeiture of his horse in favor of the hippogriff symbolically points to a (temporary) relinquishing of his knighthood, and as he moves from an animal of war he can easily steer to a whimsical animal which chooses its own course, we receive our first indication that Ruggiero will grapple with the issue of control.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the hippogriff carries Ruggiero away by command of Atlante, who wants desperately to protect his ward. Ariosto follows Boiardo's lead in his representation of Atlante as the foreteller of the future who makes futile attempts at delaying the inevitable, since he knows that Ruggiero's venturing into Europe will mean his eventual death. Bradamante mocks Atlante for his overprotectiveness. She is positioned as the opposing force to Atlante, since her goal is to free Ruggiero both to perform heroic deeds and to form his illustrious dynasty. When Atlante asserts that he has learned of Ruggiero's fate from the stars ("il ciel mi mostra"), Bradamante replies,

Tu di' che Ruggier tieni per vietarli  
il male influsso di sue stelle fisse.  
O che non puoi saperlo, o non schivarli,  
sappiendol, ciò che 'l ciel di lui prescrisse."<sup>9</sup>

Either he cannot know what he claims to know, or if it is true, there is nothing to be done about it. Her professed skepticism toward Atlante's prophecy is somewhat surprising, given that she

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<sup>8</sup> See A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 62–75.

<sup>9</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 4.29, 4.35.

has just readily accepted another prophecy about Ruggiero in Merlin's cave. She may be more willing to embrace a happy vision of the future for the progeny of her union with Ruggiero than she is to accept a foretelling of his death. If, on the other hand, the prediction is true, she does not see the point in trying to thwart the inalterable plans of the fixed stars. Atlante wants to prolong the knight's life at all costs while Bradamante instead accepts that his life may be cut short; the chivalric code places more value on bravery in the face of death than on hiding away. Because of his methods of illusion and trickery, Atlante is portrayed as a pretender and a coward in a world where courage exhibited without magical aid is prioritized. The fulfillment of fate is thus represented as the preferable alternative.

It is actually a combination of fate and free will that brings Ruggiero both to his heroic deeds and subsequently to his death. In Canto 36, when Atlante's shade announces to Ruggiero and Marfisa that they are siblings, he explains to Ruggiero why he was constantly delaying the knight's progress:

Ruggier, se ti guardò, mentre che visse,  
il tuo maestro Atlante, tu lo sai.  
Di te senti' predir le stelle fisse,  
che tra' cristiani a tradigion morrai;  
e perché il male influo non seguisse,  
tenertene lontan m'affaticai:  
né ostare al fin potendo alla tua voglia,  
infermo caddi, e mi mori' di doglia."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ariosto, 36.64.

The stars informed Atlante of Ruggiero's destiny and provoked his efforts to keep Ruggiero hidden, but it was Ruggiero's "voglia" that eventually overcame these efforts, resulting in Atlante's falling sick and dying of grief. It is not only Bradamante who wants Ruggiero to follow the path that the heavens prescribe for him; he himself chooses to move toward death in his escapes from the magician, following in the footsteps of Achilles who makes the same choice, defying his mother by joining the Trojan War.<sup>11</sup>

Atlante uses the hippogriff twice to capture Ruggiero, first in the time that passes between the end of Boiardo's poem and the beginning of Ariosto's, as recounted by Pinabello in Canto 2, and second after the hero's entrance in Canto 4. The magician also traps his ward in the palace of illusion in Canto 12, where he stays for ten cantos. When Bradamante successfully overcomes Atlante in Canto 4, he defends his actions in locking up Ruggiero, explaining that he is motivated by love and a desire to keep Ruggiero away from danger.<sup>12</sup> He describes his relationship with the young knight, saying that Ruggiero "da piccolino / da me nutrito fu...et io, che l'amai sempre più che figlio, / lo cerco trar di Francia e di periglio."<sup>13</sup> Despite the lack of blood relation between them, Atlante considers Ruggiero to be his son, having nourished him as a child and brought him up. This tallies with the fact that Atlante dies of grief at the thought of Ruggiero's impending death. The prison Atlante conjures, he argues to Bradamante, is not a prison at all: like a father, he provides everything Ruggiero could ever need or want within it, including companions. The magician creates three such enchantments to cloister Ruggiero: the pleasure palace where the hippogriff takes him on their first journey together (referenced in Canto 2), Alcina's island (Cantos 4–6), and the palace of illusion (Cantos 12–22). All three

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<sup>11</sup> P. Papinius Statius, *Achilleid*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2015), Books 1–2. EBSCOhost.

<sup>12</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 4.29–31.

<sup>13</sup> Ariosto, 4.30.

substitute the dangers of war with apparent pleasure and comfort, arresting Ruggiero's movement and therefore also the advancement of the plot.<sup>14</sup> As long as Ruggiero dawdles, he delays his union with Bradamante, which, as we know, will be the happy conclusion of the poem.

In addition, these diversions accentuate the heroic difference between the twins. While Atlante is a mentor figure for Ruggiero, not only raising him but also training him to fight, he also stifles Ruggiero's heroic potential by coddling him in sheltered spaces. Marfisa, without the influence of Atlante, can skillfully navigate the adventures of a knight errant, but at the same time she has less martial talent than her brother, as seen when the two duel briefly and he comes out victorious in Canto 36. Atlante's guidance is thus simultaneously helpful and detrimental to Ruggiero's heroism, creating a push-pull effect which is unique to his development among the orphan-heroes studied here. Ultimately, both Ruggiero and Marfisa are officially destined for greatness according to Atlante's shade who explains, "Ma Fortuna che voi, ben che non nati, / avea già eletti a gloriose imprese."<sup>15</sup> They were chosen even before they were born to effect the "imprese" that Ariosto proclaims as the subject of his poem in Canto 1.<sup>16</sup> They each attain their fate differently, and how they do so will be the focus of the rest of the section on Ariosto.

### *RUGGIERO*

Ruggiero has all the tools to be a great hero. He has advanced martial training, enthusiasm for fighting, and is elected by fate, but he differs from Marfisa and from most other epic orphan-heroes in one area: he lacks the maturity necessary to make appropriate heroic

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<sup>14</sup> For Atlante as the figure of the poet in his role of delaying or impeding the movement of the plot, see Attilio Momigliano, *Saggio sull'Orlando furioso* (Bari: Laterza, 1928), 7–50 and David Quint, "The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poem," *MLN* 94, no. 1 (1979): 77–91, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2906331>.

<sup>15</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 36.61.

<sup>16</sup> Ariosto, 1.1.

decisions. While the development of characters in most of the other poems studied here takes place off-stage, Ariosto exposes the process of Ruggiero's education to the reader.<sup>17</sup> This is a departure from the standard epic formula, wherein heroes are fully developed and fit for duty from the outset of the poem. As Stoppino writes, Ariosto's poem creates "a frontier territory between the modern subjective character and the typified, functional character."<sup>18</sup> Ruggiero perfectly exemplifies this liminal space between two character types. When he initially emerges from Atlante's protection, he is physically equipped for heroism, but, unlike his sister, not quite mentally equipped. The experienced reader of epic assumes that once a hero has completed his formal training, he is fully prepared for what lies ahead. For Ruggiero, this is not necessarily the case.

Ruggiero's journey to Alcina and Logistilla's kingdoms provides the first evidence of his immaturity. In Canto 6, the hippogriff flies him to a beautiful island full of delights. Though a myrtle bush that was formerly the knight Astolfo cautions Ruggiero against entering Alcina's home, he fails to heed the warning. The young knight resists learning from another's mistakes, even when the evidence of Alcina's cruelty clearly presents itself to him in the form of Astolfo's changed shape. Just like Astolfo, Ruggiero is quickly captivated by Alcina's pleasure-palace and her physical charms, forgetting his love for Bradamante until the enchantress' haggard, deformed, and ill-intentioned self is revealed, belying her apparent beauty and kindness.

Alcina is usually read as an allegory for the danger of judging by appearances and being distracted from duty by pleasurable pursuits, to which Ruggiero falls prey.<sup>19</sup> He only escapes the

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<sup>17</sup> The exception to this is Meschino, whose entire life, including childhood development, occurs within the timeframe of d'Aragona's poem.

<sup>18</sup> Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando Furioso* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Russell Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 121–135; Ita Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2007), 18.



island of the enchantress as a result of the benevolent enchantress Melissa's intervention. Melissa, in a role akin to Mercury's in *Aeneid* 4.265–276 when he reminds Aeneas that he must move on from Carthage to fulfill his destiny, appears to Ruggiero in the form of Atlante and urges him to leave Alcina behind.<sup>20</sup> Melissa gives him the magic ring that dispels all enchantment and he is finally able to see Alcina's true nature. It is notable that Melissa disguises herself in order to convince Ruggiero of the truth for two reasons. First, because like the ring, which employs magical artifice in order to eliminate magical artifice, it is an example of Ariosto's use of irony and his constant manipulation of fiction versus truth and appearances versus reality throughout the Alcina episode. If Melissa is the bearer of truth, why should she use exactly the same duplicitous tactic that Alcina uses in order to convince Ruggiero of her trustworthiness? Even if Melissa appears to be in the right, her deception may not be so admirable: it invites a comparison between Melissa and Alcina, who on the face of it are supposed to be opposites, Melissa the "good witch" and Alcina the "bad" one. Ariosto refuses to create straightforward ethical distinctions throughout these cantos, requiring of his readers the same ability to look beneath the surface that Ruggiero purportedly learns here.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, Melissa's choice of Atlante to impersonate shows not only that she believes the wizard, as Ruggiero's mentor, to be the only one capable of influencing the knight's decisions, but it also underscores Ruggiero's lack of critical thinking skills. Ruggiero knows that Atlante's main objective is to protect him, in other words to do exactly the opposite of what Melissa-as-Atlante suggests, and yet he takes her at her word. She spins quite an impressive tale while chastising

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<sup>20</sup> Virgil, *Virgil: Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1–6*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> As Mac Carthy notes, "This refusal to simply duplicate his models has the extra-diegetic function of involving the reader in the education of Ruggiero. Just as the knight's first lesson on Alcina's island is that nothing is as it seems, readers also learn of the deceptive nature of appearances." *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 24.

Ruggiero, mentioning various scenes from Ruggiero's childhood that should be unique to Atlante's memory: how he fed Ruggiero the meat of bears and lions, how he taught him to fight such animals, and how Ruggiero is now rejecting his teachings and breaking his promise, as well as the promise of the stars, that he would become a renowned hero. Melissa evokes classical heroes whom Ruggiero should emulate, and reminds him of his duty to future generations.<sup>22</sup> Although the real Atlante has explicitly expressed fear of Ruggiero's fulfilling the predictions of the fixed stars, rather than anxiety for his ward to achieve his destiny as Melissa expresses here, Ruggiero does not doubt Melissa's authenticity as his guardian. He feels ashamed and hastens to do as she says, thus finally propelling the plot forward. The fact that Melissa uses Atlante's form to convince Ruggiero to take action that the true Atlante would prevent reminds us again that in the chivalric world, the wizard is considered weak and dishonorable for his desire to protect Ruggiero, while Melissa is Ruggiero's savior paradoxically because she puts him in harm's way. At the same time, we are asked to question Melissa's behavior insofar as it imitates Alcina's. Among these three magical beings, therefore, there is no such thing as a one-dimensional "good witch" or "bad witch."

Alcina's sister Logistilla, on the other hand, as her name suggests, represents Logic and Reason, presenting an unembellished version of herself to the world. After escaping Alcina, Ruggiero visits her sister, an encounter which presumably would point to his increasing maturation; he learns from his mistake in falling for Alcina's deception and is ready to absorb Logistilla's wisdom. Indeed, in Canto 10, Ariosto writes that any person looking at the bejeweled walls of Logistilla's castle as Ruggiero does begins to know himself: "se stesso, conoscendosi, prudente."<sup>23</sup> Logistilla gives Ruggiero a special bridle for the hippogriff and teaches him how to

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<sup>22</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 7.61–69.

<sup>23</sup> Ariosto, 10.59.

use it. When he takes his leave of the enchantress, he can now easily steer the hippogriff, “potendogli or far batter le penne / di qua di là, dove più gli era a grado.”<sup>24</sup> Symbolically, Ruggiero has regained control of his direction, and his decision to pursue a new route, different from the one that brought him to the sisters, seems to indicate a commitment to change. Yet, as critics have noted, immediately after this apparent educational experience, Ruggiero attempts to rape Angelica, once again forgetting all thought of Bradamante as he had done with Alcina.<sup>25</sup>

Has Ruggiero really learned anything? The answer is unclear. Ruggiero’s educational journey is almost impossible to pin down or fit into neat categories, although many have tried, particularly by dividing it into three linear phases. Peter Wiggins views Ruggiero’s three stages of development as three symbolic deaths and rebirths, wherein the character first sees only himself (until the palace of illusions is destroyed in Canto 22), then tries to become dedicated to a greater cause (until he is baptized in Canto 41), and lastly finds the object of his faith (until he kills Rodomonte).<sup>26</sup> Both Peter Marinelli and Ita Mac Carthy bring up Neoplatonism as a motivating factor in the construction of Ruggiero’s education. Mac Carthy sees the three enchantresses who also represent the three stages of education as corresponding to Pico’s scheme of *amore bestiale*, sexual desire (Alcina), *amore umano*, rational love (Melissa), and *amore celeste*, love of wisdom (Logistilla).<sup>27</sup> Marinelli points to the echoes of Virgil in Ariosto and the Neoplatonic interpretations of the *Aeneid* which see Aeneas as the soul passing through three phases: uncontrolled passion (his relationship with Dido), withdrawn contemplation (his trip to

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<sup>24</sup> Ariosto, 10.69.

<sup>25</sup> Ariosto, 11.2–10. Ascoli, *Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony*, 132–133, 199–224; A. Bartlett Giamatti, “Headlong Horses, Headless Horsemen: An Essay in the Chivalric Romances of Pulci, Boiardo and Ariosto” in *Italian Literature: Roots and Branches*, edited by Kenneth Atchity and Giose Rimanelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 299; Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 112–113, 126–128.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto’s Tapestry: Character and Design in the Orlando Furioso* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 68.

<sup>27</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 28.

the underworld), and return to dutiful action (his military/political career). Though these phases could fairly easily also be applied to Ruggiero, Marinelli warns against a direct comparison between Ruggiero and Aeneas in these Neoplatonic terms, reminding us that Ariosto combines medieval Christian and classical pagan cultures to come up with a new perspective.<sup>28</sup> Ascoli finds the inspiration for Ruggiero's development in the medieval Christian world of Dante, categorizing Alcina's island as equivalent to hell, while Logistilla's realm is linked to paradise, with an "intermediate purgative period" between.<sup>29</sup> I agree with Mac Carthy that this interpretation does not entirely align with Ariosto's depiction of his characters. While Astolfo does quote Francesca to Ruggiero and he has allowed his reason to be overcome by desire like the shades in *Inferno* 5, the knight-turned-bush is nevertheless portrayed as a victim of Alcina, rather than a guilty sinner.<sup>30</sup> The blame lies with Alcina. Similarly, the narrator absolves Ruggiero of blame when he regresses into lustful action with Angelica.<sup>31</sup> Mac Carthy explains the connection with Dante, writing "Ariosto calls on Dante's system of moral judgment only to replace it with his own system of humanist investigation."<sup>32</sup> Even the word "system" implies an organization that I believe is intentionally lacking when it comes to Ruggiero's education. It seems futile to try to establish a consistent pattern for his development, especially because it continues beyond these few cantos concerning Alcina and Logistilla, usually the focus of critical debate on these issues.

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<sup>28</sup> "In attempting to rival Vergil, Ariosto re-creates the epic in its intellectual and moral essence, but not at all in its structure, décor, and 'furniture,' which originate in Carolingian romance. The *Furioso* therefore represents a marvelous fusion of highly unlike components." Peter V. Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo: The Origins of Orlando Furioso* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 127.

<sup>29</sup> Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 144.

<sup>30</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 1: Inferno*, edited and translated by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Mac Carthy, 22.

Even much later in the poem, after Ruggiero has engaged in many heroic conquests, whether he has intellectually and emotionally progressed remains a question. When the ghost of Atlante in Canto 36 makes it known to Ruggiero and Marfisa that they are twins, and Marfisa learns that Agramante's family killed their mother, she is shocked that Ruggiero has not exacted revenge on Agramante: "Perché, vivendo tu, vive Agramante? / Questa è una macchia che mai non ti levi / dal viso."<sup>33</sup> Ruggiero has violated one of the most basic precepts of knightly honor, despite his heroic stature. Marfisa's harsh words indicate that her brother's mistake can never truly be corrected; even if he does eventually kill Agramante, the fact that he waited so long is a stain he can never wash off. It can be inferred that similar indiscretions on Ruggiero's part, like his dalliance with Alcina and his rape attempt with Angelica, would also be irrevocable according to Marfisa because they do not adhere to the chivalric code. His apparent progress therefore does not amount to any real transformative education. Indeed, Ruggiero's response to his sister is a lame excuse:

Ruggiero accortamente le rispose  
che da principio questo far dovea;  
ma per non bene aver note le cose,  
come ebbe poi, tardato troppo avea.<sup>34</sup>

He acknowledges that she is right, but that he waited too long because he did not quite realize what the facts were at first. As Eleonora Stoppino writes with regard to the many prophecies that are fully revealed to Bradamante about their offspring, while mostly obscured from Ruggiero, "the *Furioso* presents the male character as shielded from knowledge."<sup>35</sup> Just as he does not quite

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<sup>33</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 36.77.

<sup>34</sup> Ariosto, 36.80.

<sup>35</sup> Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 120.

understand the information about his future, neither has he absorbed the facts of the past, a significant lack in an epic hero, whose established goal is always to respect the household of his forbears and propel it forward to the next generation. Ruggiero's inaction and his delay in converting to Christianity are in direct violation of these precepts, which are perfectly expressed by the image of Aeneas leaving Troy with his father on his back and his son by his side.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas Marfisa performs a religious about-face as soon as she learns of her background, Ruggiero does not abandon Agramante even after Marfisa has rebuked him for being loyal to the enemy. In Canto 40, he promises Rinaldo that he will leave Agramante if he learns that the pagan army was first to break the truce during their duel. This is indeed the case, and Ruggiero is faced with the decision of whether to remain loyal to Agramante or respect his pledge to Rinaldo.

Ariosto describes Ruggiero's thought process:

Tra sé volve Ruggiero e fa discorso,  
se restar deve, o il suo signor seguire.  
Gli pon l'amor de la sua donna un morso  
per non lasciarlo in Africa più gire:  
lo volta e gira, et a contrario corso  
lo sprona, e lo minaccia di punire,  
se 'l patto e 'l giuramento non tien saldo,  
che fatto avea col paladin Rinaldo.

Non men da l'altra parte sferza e sprona  
la vigilante e stimulosa cura,

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<sup>36</sup>*Aeneid* 2.707–711.

che s' Agramante in quel caso abbandona,  
a viltà gli sia ascritto et a paura.

Se del restar la causa parrà buona  
a molti, a molti ad accettar fia dura.

Molti diran che non si de' osservare  
quel ch'era ingiusto e illicito a giurare.

Tutto quel giorno e la notte seguente  
stette solingo, e così l'altro giorno,  
pur travagliando la dubbiosa mente,  
se partir deve o far quivi soggiorno.

Pel signor suo conclude finalmente  
di fargli dietro in Africa ritorno.

Potea in lui molto il coniugale amore,  
ma vi potea piú il debito e l'onore.<sup>37</sup>

In both the length of time the knight ruminates, two days and a night, and in the amount of space taken up by this debate, drawn out into three stanzas, we observe Ruggiero's struggle and understand that he lacks the instinctive *pietas* of his model Aeneas and of his own sister. His decision-making is entirely based on the influence of others. Bradamante is the restraining bridle (*morso*) stopping him from returning to Africa; this image of his beloved holding him back indicates an underlying preference to remain with Agramante's army, but he nevertheless allows thoughts of her to pull him in one direction. Abandoning Agramante, however, would leave him open to accusations of *viltà* and *paura*, an idea that pulls him in the opposite direction. He is led

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<sup>37</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 40.66–68.

by fear of what others may think. The repetition of the word *molti* in ottava 67 emphasizes his dependence on the opinion of others to make his decision. As James Shulman writes, “[Ruggiero] faces what should not be an extremely difficult decision: on the one side is Bradamante, to whom he has repeatedly pledged his love; his destiny to found the Este; his promised conversion; the spirit of his betrayed parents; his newfound sister, Marfisa; and now a recent oath. The other choice is to remain with Agramante and the pagan cause.”<sup>38</sup> The last two lines of ottava 68 are puzzling. Why does Ruggiero reduce thought of his future wife to *il coniugale amore*, given the clear link between Bradamante, *il debito*, and *l’onore* as outlined by Shulman? Choosing Bradamante will ultimately bring Ruggiero more honor as the Christian founder of the Este than would staying loyal to Agramante. Shulman sees Ruggiero’s continual delay of his marital union and favoring of the pagan leader as a way for the knight to put off his prophesied death while at the same time not allowing himself complete autonomy: “He follows the provisional code of chivalry as a buffer between the larger shame complex of epic fate and the terrifying possibilities of freedom.”<sup>39</sup> He can mitigate his guilt for not taking the epically correct course of action by engaging in this *via di mezzo*, which permits him to act as a knight without thinking of his impending fate. It is a way for Ruggiero to remain in the present, neither acknowledging his past nor proceeding toward his future. Ruggiero’s indecision and delay, then, are due both to a lack of education and an unwillingness to move forward; like Atlante, Ruggiero also postpones the conclusion of the poem. Shulman points out that Ruggiero continually chooses Agramante because he does not otherwise have a figure of authority to lead him. Without his biological father and with Atlante’s tendency to smother him, Ruggiero turns to the

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<sup>38</sup> James L. Shulman, *The Pale Cast of Thought: Hesitation and Decision in the Renaissance Epic* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Shulman, 29.



Saracen king for guidance.<sup>40</sup> Had Ruggiero the First lived, perhaps the young Ruggiero would have attended to his epic duties earlier and with more conviction. Just as much as it shapes his heroism, Ruggiero's orphanhood also shapes his heroic mistakes.

*MARFISA*

In the reunion scene in Canto 36, Marfisa shows what a contrast she is to her brother. She is affronted by his lack of action and reacts immediately by stating how she will comport herself, now that she knows her family's history:

Io fo ben voto a Dio (ch'adorar voglio  
Cristo Dio vero, ch'adorò mio padre)  
di questa armatura non mi spoglio,  
fin che Ruggier non vendico e mia madre.<sup>41</sup>

The idea that she will not remove her armor until justice is done is humorous in its hyperbole. Ariosto is poking fun at Marfisa's correctness. It also nods to the importance of armor for female knights to maintain their identities as such; Marfisa must continuously wear her armor to avoid being mistaken for a lady, which happens with Mandricardo in Canto 26, the only time that Marfisa removes her armor in the poem. The first two lines of the octave show that Marfisa takes the issue of family loyalty extremely seriously; so much so that as soon as she learns her origins, she immediately announces her intention to convert to Christianity. She states that she will adore Christ, the true God, as her father did. The repetitive wording "ch'adorar...ch'adorò" shows how willing Marfisa is to parrot the beliefs of Ruggiero the First without hesitation. Her about-face

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<sup>40</sup> Shulman, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 36.78.

both mocks and perpetuates the epic value that children should become near copies of their parents, as exemplified by Aeneas, who emulates his father through his devotion to the gods.<sup>42</sup>

While respect for the father as the head of the household was a standard principle at the time, for Marfisa his role may be particularly significant because she grew up without his presence.

Marfisa recounts the story of her youth in Canto 38. She reports to Charlemagne that she recently found out that “l bon Ruggier di Risa” was her father, and that he was betrayed by his evil brother.<sup>43</sup> Her mother died shortly after giving birth to her, and Atlante took care of her until she turned seven, when she was kidnapped by Arabs who sold her into slavery to a Persian king. Marfisa swiftly explains the events that brought her into adulthood:

E mi vendero in Persia per ischiava  
a un re che poi cresciuta io posi a morte:  
che mia virginità tor mi cercava.  
Uccisi lui con tutta la sua corte;  
tutta caccai la sua progenie prava,  
e presi il regno; e tal fu la mia sorte,  
che diciotto anni d'uno o di duo mesi  
io non passai, che sette regni presi.<sup>44</sup>

Over the course of one short ottava, Marfisa lists a series of accomplishments more impressive than anything Ruggiero could hope to aspire to, having killed first one king and his court and

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<sup>42</sup> While Troy is burning, Anchises refuses to escape with his son, citing his age. Aeneas in turn refuses to leave without his father, in a similar show of righteous stubbornness. The stalemate is only resolved when they appeal to the gods, who confirm that leaving together is the right course of action. Aeneas takes his father on his back as they depart, noting that they are tied by “one common peril, one salvation” (“unum et commune periculum, / una salus ambobus erit.”) Both father and son exhibit absolute piety in this respect throughout the poem, deferring to the will of the gods. Virgil, *Aeneid*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, 2.634–729.

<sup>43</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 38.14.

<sup>44</sup> Ariosto, 38.15.

then having overtaken seven different kingdoms by the age of eighteen. Part of her success, I would argue, is due to the extreme circumstances she had to overcome as a child. While Ruggiero was sheltered by Atlante, Marfisa learned to defeat her oppressors on her own. Ruggiero had formal training, fighting animals over whom his mentor had some level of control in preparation for facing human opponents. Ironically, despite this specific training dealing with animals, as we have seen he later fails to overpower the hippogriff.<sup>45</sup> Marfisa was instead forced to bypass training, beginning her heroic journey by immediately confronting her enemies. Her ability to gain control over human adversaries without formal training shows her superiority to her brother. Furthermore, Marfisa must vanquish her master, whose role is an inverted form of Atlante's role as mentor. She overcomes the Persian king without difficulty. It will instead take Ruggiero much of the poem to disentangle himself from Atlante's overprotective actions, even though Atlante is his advocate and presumably easier to grapple with than Marfisa's master, who wishes to do her harm. This contrast serves to further emphasize Ruggiero's ineptitude when compared with his sister.

Marfisa's gender also factors into the hardships she endures. Although they are twins and therefore genetically nearly identical, Ruggiero is physically stronger than Marfisa, even at a young age. The reason that Marfisa was taken from Atlante as a child rather than Ruggiero is that he was able to flee with greater speed.<sup>46</sup> Marfisa's kidnapping and subsequent lack of parenting is a result of her slower running pace. If gender is the only difference between the twins, then it stands to reason that Marfisa's gender may be the cause of her slower speed. Her attempted rape by the king by whom she was enslaved also results from the fact that she is a young woman, and

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<sup>45</sup> Ariosto insists that the hippogriff is a naturally occurring animal and not a mythological or enchanted creature in Ariosto, 4.18–19.

<sup>46</sup> Ariosto, 36.63.

specifically a virgin, which makes her more desirable. Her virginity is the defining marker of her identity, so it doubly makes sense that she would react with such vehemence when it is threatened.

She kills not only the king, but his court and also his entire “progenie prava,” his depraved progeny. The assumption is that if the *paterfamilias* is a problem, then his whole family is contaminated, just as the opposite holds true for the family of a positive figure like the father of Marfisa and Ruggiero, “l bon Ruggier.” Despite the fact that Agramante himself did not murder Ruggiero the First, killing Agramante would nevertheless settle the debt because he is related to the murderers. Marfisa plans to take all of the hatred she once had for Charlemagne and direct it instead not just against Agramante, but against his whole family: “...contra Agramante io lo riservo, / e contra ogn’altro che sia al padre o al zio di lui stato parente.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, in the chivalric world, the reputations of parents and their children are equivalent. Here I disagree with Wiggins, who writes

Ruggiero’s continued allegiance to Agramante at this point is misguided, but it would be difficult to admire him if he turned against Agramante for the reason Marfisa now does. There are better reasons for Agramante to lose the allegiance of his best warriors than any accident of lineage or history. [...] It is a blot on the generosity of [Marfisa’s] character that she requires the pretext of her parentage to bring her to a repudiation of Agramante.<sup>48</sup>

In epic there is nothing so important as lineage, since one of the main objectives (if not *the* main objective) of the genre is to narrate the foundation of dynasties. In the chivalric setting, family loyalty is an excellent reason to pursue vengeance. Part of Marfisa’s identity was lacking before

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<sup>47</sup> Ariosto, 38.17.

<sup>48</sup> Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto’s Tapestry*, 191–2.

she knew who her father was, and now that it has been restored to her, her desire to convert and her frustration with Ruggiero for not avenging him is all the more urgent.

When she presents herself to Charlemagne to swear her allegiance and to request baptism, there is a familial element at play, in addition to the religious and political. The import of the occasion for Marfisa is apparent in the fact that she kneels to the king:

Questo fu il primo dí (scrive Turpino)  
che fu vista Marfisa inginocchiarsi;  
che sol le parve il figlio di Pipino  
degno, a cui tanto onor dovesse farsi,  
tra quanti, o mai nel popul saracino  
o nel cristiano, imperatori e regi  
per virtú vide o per ricchezza egregi.<sup>49</sup>

Marfisa has never before kneeled to anyone, despite the many encounters she has had with other kings and noblemen. Only Charlemagne is worthy of this honor. Ariosto chooses to identify the king as “il figlio di Pipino” here, highlighting that part of the reason for his worth in Marfisa’s eyes comes from her respect for his father. After explaining her background, she proclaims her fealty to Charlemagne: “E come il padre mio parente e servo / ti fu, ti son parente e serva anch’io.”<sup>50</sup> She declares herself both his servant and his relative, just as her father had been, again creating an equivalency between father and child while also underlining the familial bond between herself and the king.

Charlemagne responds enthusiastically to Marfisa’s appeal:

L’imperator, che non meno eloquente

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<sup>49</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 38.10.

<sup>50</sup> Ariosto, 38.17.

era, che fosse valoroso e saggio,  
molto esaltando la donna eccellente,  
e molto il padre e molto il suo lignaggio,  
rispose ad ogni parte umanamente,  
e mostrò in fronte aperto il suo coraggio;  
e conchiuse ne l'ultima parola  
per parente accettarla e per figliuola.  
E qui si leva, e di nuovo l'abbraccia,  
e, come figlia, bacia ne la fronte.<sup>51</sup>

Her respect for his father mirrors his respect for hers, as he explains here. He accepts her not only as a relative, but specifically as his daughter. His view of her as a daughter is repeated twice in the course of a few lines, as he embraces her again and kisses her forehead. Ariosto also notes that Charlemagne responds to each part of Marfisa's story "umanamente," which suggests sympathy on his part for the struggles she has experienced. The next day during her baptism, it is Charlemagne who lifts Marfisa out of the baptismal font.<sup>52</sup> This gesture, usually reserved for the parent or the godparent of the person being baptized, affirms the king's role as a new father figure and religious guide for Marfisa, replacing the one she lost in Ruggiero the First.

Although Galaciella's role is generally diminished compared to her husband's, Marfisa also includes her mother in her speeches both in Canto 36 and 38, implying that she, too, should be avenged. Ita Mac Carthy points to Marfisa's lack of a mother as being the root cause of her decision to be a virginal knight; without a mother as a model as Bradamante had, she cannot

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<sup>51</sup> Ariosto, 38.19–20.

<sup>52</sup> Ariosto, 38.23.

aspire to become a wife and mother or live in a domestic space.<sup>53</sup> I would go further to say that Marfisa's rejection of stereotypical female roles is born of necessity. Because she was enslaved as a child and deprived of both parents and her foster father, the possibility of a normal family life in her future was never available. Her only option was to fight to break free and in so doing she became a warrior. To demonstrate the difference between someone who grew up observing a mother/wife figure and someone who did not, Mac Carthy compares Bradamante's acceptance of Ruggiero's amorous intentions with Marfisa's violent reaction to the king's provocation. The comparison is problematic, however, because Ruggiero, at least with regard to Bradamante, is not a rapist, and he has not enslaved her.<sup>54</sup> The relationship dynamics between Ruggiero and Bradamante, two lovers who are destined to be together, and Marfisa and the king, a slave and her abusive captor, are significantly different.

Marfisa has had to contend with a greater degree of vulnerability than Ruggiero. He has always had a guide in Atlante, who sheltered his ward from the kinds of dangers to which Marfisa was exposed as a child. Their divergence ultimately makes Marfisa into the more admirable warrior, despite her brother's superiority in physical strength. In the scene that immediately precedes their identification as siblings, the two knights fight, and Ruggiero has the upper hand. He is about to defeat Marfisa when Atlante's ghost intervenes and explains the situation. But it is Marfisa who acts more appropriately in accordance with chivalric code. She immediately wants to correct Ruggiero's mistake and avenge her parents. She and Bradamante decide how Ruggiero will defect from Agramante's army, effectively removing his agency in the

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<sup>53</sup> Mac Carthy, "Marfisa and Gender Performance," 193–4.

<sup>54</sup> Mac Carthy, "Marfisa and Gender Performance," 194.

matter because he has proved himself so incapable of addressing it.<sup>55</sup> Marfisa assures Bradamante that she will handle the situation:

Lascialo pur andar (dicea Marfisa  
a Bradamante), e non aver timore:  
fra pochi giorni io farò bene in guisa  
che non gli fia Agramante piú signore.<sup>56</sup>

Marfisa is clearly the leader in this scenario. She also has an impressive list of feats behind her, as many of Charlemagne's men recall when they congratulate her for joining the Christian army.<sup>57</sup> Ruggiero performs many acts of courage in the poem, but because he was sequestered with Atlante, he cannot catch up to Marfisa, who had already conquered seven kingdoms in her adolescent years.

Marina McCoy notes that there is a particular brand of vulnerability that comes with social isolation, as experienced by Philoctetes in Sophocles's eponymous play.<sup>58</sup> It could be said that in the *Furioso* both twins experience a type of social isolation as a result of their orphanhood: Ruggiero is spatially isolated from society, kept hidden away in Atlante's fortress, while Marfisa occupies a liminal societal space, balancing her double identity as woman and knight. Of Marfisa, Wiggins writes: "The pity of her early experiences as a woman is that they have permanently armored her against that crucial abandonment of autonomy required by trust and hence necessary to any meaningful intercourse with other human beings. In the *Furioso* she is a loner, an isolated being."<sup>59</sup> Both knights must conquer their vulnerability as orphans to

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<sup>55</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 36.77–84.

<sup>56</sup> Ariosto, 36.83.

<sup>57</sup> Ariosto, 38.20–21.

<sup>58</sup> Marina McCoy, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xi.

<sup>59</sup> Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto's Tapestry*, 186.



become heroes, but Marfisa has been subject to a harsher upbringing and consequently develops into a more consistently heroic figure.

While the foregoing may paint Marfisa as Ruggiero's "better half," I would argue that the contrasting heroic styles of the twins are both essential to the construction of Ariosto's masterpiece. The duality of the twin heroes speaks to the duality of the poem itself. Critics have observed that the *Furioso* combines both the romance epic and historic epic to create a hybrid genre.<sup>60</sup> On this topic, Deanna Shemek comments that "A great problem was that Ariosto's poem adopts *both* a more extreme centrifugal narrative structure than the interlace of earlier romances *and* a historicizing, epic argument, a double-voiced generic structure in which, I will argue, Bradamante plays a crucial role."<sup>61</sup> I believe Marfisa and Ruggiero play an equally vital part in the doubling of Ariosto's generic structure, as Shemek puts it. While Shemek contends that "Bradamante, more than any other character, keeps track of the latent epic 'thread' in Ariosto's romance tapestry," I would argue that Marfisa is a more appropriate marker of the historical epic side of the *Furioso*.<sup>62</sup> Marfisa is the upstanding knight who lives her life according to unwavering chivalric principles, seeking vengeance for her parents' deaths and ensuring the proliferation of the family line by intervening in Ruggiero's favor when Leone threatens his marriage to Bradamante. It is true that Bradamante repeats Aeneas's experience of witnessing the prophecy of her future progeny, and that she doggedly pursues the fulfillment of this destiny, while Marfisa's line ends with her. However, it is hard to view Bradamante as Aeneas' equivalent because she becomes the prize to be awarded to the winner of the proposed duel

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<sup>60</sup> See Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 70; Tobias Gregory, *From Many Gods to One: Divine Action in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 103; David Quint, "The Figure of Atlante," 87.

<sup>61</sup> Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 81, emphasis hers.

<sup>62</sup> Shemek, 77.

between Ruggiero and Leone.<sup>63</sup> Though she once chooses her identity as a knight over her identity as a lady at the Rocca di Tristano, she ultimately loses heroic status, taking up the role of a wife.<sup>64</sup> Shemek maintains that we should not give interpretive priority to the ending of the poem, given that the poem is “closure-resistant,” but the fact is that Marfisa never once relinquishes her role as hero at any point, not even when Mandricardo attempts to see her as a love interest.<sup>65</sup> Ariosto intimates that Marfisa and Bradamante will avenge Ruggiero’s death in the future, which means that Bradamante will eventually return to heroic deeds. Her role, however, switches back and forth, whereas Marfisa’s stays the course, a constant representative of historical epic. Because Marfisa is female, the moment she engages in any romantic relationship would be the moment she sacrifices her identity as pure knight, becoming subordinated to her partner as Bradamante does. Thus Marfisa cannot be both the hero and the progenitor of the Este; this position is reserved for Ruggiero, despite his sometimes poor performance as a hero.

The fact that Marfisa and Ruggiero are twins invites a comparison between the two. If Marfisa represents historical epic, Ruggiero represents romance. He is the embodiment of two possible meanings of the term “knight errant,” as he both physically and mentally wanders, forgetting about his duties to his king, to his lady, to his forebears and to his descendants. His sometimes comedic exploits demonstrate, in Shemek’s words, “the *Furioso*’s sustained questioning of the epic heroic values it also praises.”<sup>66</sup> Ruggiero introduces a new type of character who is simultaneously heroic in his accomplishments and mock-heroic in his failures, again a contrast to the typified epic persona found in his antithesis Marfisa (whose solidity of

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<sup>63</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Ariosto, 32.44–110.

<sup>65</sup> Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> Shemek, 92.

character can nevertheless be humorous in the context of Ariosto's writing). Thus these two orphan-heroes encapsulate the duality of the poem: the double heroes with double genders who represent the double genre, or the two sides of the same coin that is the *Furioso*.

This section of the chapter has established that the childhoods of Ruggiero and Marfisa contribute to their formation as heroes. Though they both lack parents, they diverge in their relationships with mentor figures, which has a significant effect on how each twin approaches his or her heroic duties. Marfisa's dedication associates her with historical epic, while Ruggiero's errancy links him to romance. They function as a pair to underscore Ariosto's intertwining of two genres within one poem.

#### *GERUSALEMME LIBERATA*

Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, by contrast, resides firmly within the constraints of historical epic. The poem recounts the struggle between Christians and Muslims for possession of the Holy City during the First Crusade. Tasso uses Virgil as his primary model, representing the Christians' conquest of Jerusalem as an echo of the Trojans' battle for Latium and subsequent founding of the Roman Empire. Tasso's protagonist, Goffredo, parallels Aeneas in his piety, but directs his devotion toward the Christian God so as to conform to Tasso's Counter-Reformation viewpoint. One of the more striking representatives of the Christian faith in the poem, however, is actually a character who spends the majority of her time in the poem as a Muslim. This is the woman warrior Clorinda, whose childhood and conversion will be the subject of this section of the chapter.

Because, as we have seen, the female orphan-hero Marfisa represents historical epic in the *Furioso*, one might expect the female orphan-hero Clorinda, who exists in the solely

historical epic context of the *Liberata*, to mimic her predecessor. While she certainly embodies all the same markers of martial prowess, chivalric honesty and determination exhibited by Marfisa, Clorinda occupies a middle ground between Ruggiero's twin and his wife, Bradamante. On the one hand, she is an upstanding knight, devoted to chivalric pursuits, who converts to Christianity and remains unmarried throughout her time in the poem. On the other hand, she does experience a romantic entanglement with one of the most important male warriors in the poem, Tancredi, though their romance never comes to fruition. Tasso's recast of the figure of the female warrior is part of an overall effort to distance himself from Ariosto's mocking ways.<sup>67</sup> Ariosto indeed may have selected a *guerriera* to represent historical epic in his poem precisely because it is the ironic choice: as will be discussed in Chapter 4, Virgilian epics were considered much more masculine in scope than their romance counterparts.<sup>68</sup> Tasso's handling of his women warriors confirms their alterity in the world of historical epic. Clorinda and the Christian woman warrior Gildippe may provide temporary intrigue in the poem, but they are both ultimately slain by men, just as Camilla is in the *Aeneid*.<sup>69</sup> Of the Volscian queen, Valeria Viparelli writes that "Role and gender ambiguity—ambiguity between the world of the female huntress that is marginal to masculine society and the masculine world of war, between the *miles Phoebes* and the Amazon, between the huntress *virgo* and the *bellatrix* queen—these identify Camilla's

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<sup>67</sup> For Tasso's reception of Ariosto's poem, see Anthony Welch, *The Renaissance Epic and the Oral Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 28–30.

<sup>68</sup> For Ariosto's feminism or lack thereof, see Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 44; Gerry Milligan, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 62–64, 68–69; Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 77–125; Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 2, 7, 131–32. On the masculinity of Virgilian epic, see Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 166.

<sup>69</sup> Camilla dies in *Aeneid* 11, Clorinda dies in *Gerusalemme liberata* 13, and Gildippe dies in *Gerusalemme liberata* 20.

character.”<sup>70</sup> Though Clorinda is not a huntress, she nevertheless echoes Camilla’s conflicting representation of gender. The masculinity of female warriors in epic must be suppressed in order to allow the male characters to assert their dominance, since in the constructions of both Virgil and Tasso the men are the true protagonists of the war.

As we shall see in this section, Clorinda’s position is fraught with contradictions. She performs a precarious balancing act in the poem, not only due to her conflation of her Ariostan forebears, or to her gender, but also due to her parentage, which complicates two other elements of her identity, her race and her religion. While Ruggiero converts to Christianity to fulfill his duty of marriage with Bradamante, and Marfisa converts as soon as she learns of her parentage, Tasso’s Clorinda only converts as she is dying on the battlefield, though she has discovered her Christian heritage earlier in Canto 12 of the *Gerusalemme liberata*. Like the twins in Ariosto, Clorinda is also in effect an orphan, not because of her parents’ death but because of the strange circumstances in which she is born. The eunuch Arsete reveals this story in an attempt to prevent her from venturing out on the nighttime *sortie* which will result in her unfortunate death. Clorinda is born to the Ethiopian king Senapo and his wife, both Christians. Although her parents are black, she is born with white skin. The queen knows that her jealous husband will suspect betrayal upon seeing his daughter’s complexion and sends the baby away under the care of her servant, Arsete, asking him to baptize her as a Christian. Arsete fails to do this, preferring instead to raise the child as a Muslim like himself, until he has a dream vision of St. George who informs him that Clorinda will die on her night excursion into the enemy camp. This information finally motivates Arsete to explain Clorinda’s origins to her, just as Atlante is moved to do the

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<sup>70</sup> Valeria Viparelli, “Camilla: A Queen Undeclared, Even in Death,” *Vergilius* 54 (2008): 11. The opposition between the world of the huntress and that of war that Viparelli touches on here will be explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.

same for Ruggiero and Marfisa when Ruggiero is about to dispatch his sister. The story of Clorinda's unusual birth is based on a similar story in the Byzantine author Heliodorus's work, *Aethiopica* (c.4<sup>th</sup> century CE), wherein the female protagonist Charicleia is born white to Ethiopian royals. The queen, Persinna, gives up her daughter and Charicleia is raised in Greece ignorant of her origins.<sup>71</sup> This model for Tasso will serve as a key for interpreting Clorinda's identity and her formation by her multiple foster parents.

Clorinda has three potential parental figures other than her biological parents. Arsete is the first. He was permitted to be in Clorinda's mother's service because he cannot reproduce and is therefore not a threat to Senapo; in fact he tells Clorinda that he was dressed in "feminil mestiero" along with her mother's ladies-in-waiting so as to complete the portrait of him as sexually unviable.<sup>72</sup> Ironically, then, he does end up replacing Senapo as Clorinda's father figure, and he makes clear that he considers himself as such: "E sai non men che servo insieme e padre / io t'ho seguita fra guerriere squadre."<sup>73</sup> Arsete is both her servant and her father, which makes for a tricky power dynamic, and he does prove somewhat ineffectual in his paternal duties. In Clorinda's early days, they encounter two life-threatening situations, modeled on Camilla's experience in Book 11 of the *Aeneid*, the first an incident with a tiger and the second an escape from robbers via a rushing river. When the tiger appears, Arsete jumps up into a tree out of fear, irresponsibly leaving the child Clorinda in the grass.<sup>74</sup> The baby simply laughs and pets the tiger, which then permits her to suckle at its breast. While it is Arsete's express assignment to "nudrir" or nourish Clorinda, the tiger unexpectedly takes on that role, leaving Arsete to look on "timido e

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<sup>71</sup> Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Romance*, trans. Moses Hadas (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. Franco Tomasi (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2009), 12.21.

<sup>73</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.38.

<sup>74</sup> Tasso, 12.30.

confuso, / come uom faria novi prodigi orrendi.”<sup>75</sup> He is neither able to protect nor feed her in this situation. In the second situation, he cannot successfully swim against the current while holding the baby, so he lets her go. She is miraculously saved by the water and the wind, which push her in the same direction to the shore, perhaps a result of her mother’s fervent prayers for Clorinda’s protection when she and her child parted.<sup>76</sup>

Clorinda’s exposure to the tiger, another pseudo-parent, has a direct effect on her development. When she becomes a warrior, she chooses this animal as the emblem on her helmet, a symbol of ferocity meant to intimidate her enemies. The fact that she was nursed by an actual tiger suggests that it passed on some of that quality to the future *guerriera*, again framing the relationship between beast and human as that of a parent and child who reflect one another.<sup>77</sup> In addition, Clorinda mirrors another attribute of the tiger: that of not being what she appears to be, one of the many instances of misleading appearances found in the poem.<sup>78</sup> The tiger is at first glance a threat which turns out to be docile, and Clorinda not only is a knight who would generally be assumed to be male, but also a white person born to black parents, and a Christian by birth who presents herself as a Muslim. It is another mistaken assumption about her identity which will be the cause of her tragic death.

Arsete’s decision not to baptize his ward as instructed also stems from the confusion between appearances and reality (reality according to the Christian Tasso).<sup>79</sup> The first time that a

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<sup>75</sup> Tasso, 12.26, 31.

<sup>76</sup> Tasso, 12.35.

<sup>77</sup> On the animal nursing of female warriors, see Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 46, 64 and Stoppino, “‘Lacte ferino’: donna guerriera e immaginario animale nella letteratura epico-cavalleresca italiana,” *Letteratura cavalleresca italiana*, no. 2 (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2020): 25–35.

<sup>78</sup> See Sergio Zatti, “Epic in the Age of Dissimulation: Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*” in Valeria Finucci, ed., *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 115–145.

<sup>79</sup> As David Quint notes, Tasso explains in *Dubbi e risposte* that the reason Clorinda’s mother could not immediately baptize her daughter upon birth is because the Ethiopians practiced Coptic Christianity, in which babies were not baptized until forty or sixty days after birth, depending on their sex. Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 234–247.

dream vision of St. George commands him to baptize Clorinda, Arsete refuses to heed the message. His reasoning is that

ma perché mia fé vera e l'ombre false  
stimai, di tuo battesimo non mi calse  
né de i preghi materni; onde nudrita  
pagana fosti, e 'l vero a te celai.<sup>80</sup>

He deems his faith to be the truth and the shade to be a false representation, when in Tasso's construction the opposite is correct. In the next canto, more shades appear: the malicious wizard Ismeno conjures demons in the forest of Saron to dismay the Christian soldiers and deter them from cutting down trees to build war machines. One demon takes on the likeness of Clorinda and causes Tancredi to flee in fear, although he seems to realize that it cannot truly be the person he killed (...“non crede / a i falsi inganni”).<sup>81</sup> Tasso here gives two opposing examples of spirits intervening on earth, one Christian appearing to a Muslim and one Muslim appearing to a Christian. In both cases, the witnesses of these shades doubt their veracity. It is hard to fault Arsete for not believing what he sees when Tancredi makes the same judgment. That Arsete's estimation is wrong and Tancredi's right is due to their difference in religion, but at the same time the scenarios are so similar as to suggest that Tasso finds a certain equivalency between the two faiths. Arsete's aforementioned line, “'l vero a te celai,” repeats the language of concealment that he uses throughout the tale of Clorinda's birth. His attempt to now reveal the truth backfires, as Clorinda responds, “Quella fé seguirò che vera or parmi.”<sup>82</sup> She chooses to follow the faith that seems true to her, just as Arsete erroneously did. Just as when his ward was a child, Arsete

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<sup>80</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.37–38.

<sup>81</sup> Tasso, 12.44.

<sup>82</sup> Tasso, 12.41.



does not quite manage to adequately guide Clorinda as an adult. He is a hindrance to his foster-child's progress and the cause of her confusion in her religious identity. The encounter with the tiger and survival tactics she learned by his side, isolated from society like Marfisa and Ruggiero, however, were vital in her formation as a hero. Had she grown up with her parents, she would have simply been a princess.

Scholars of Tasso's predecessor Heliodorus also comment on the role of orphanhood in the life of his character Charicleia.<sup>83</sup> Though Ethiopian, Charicleia is completely assimilated into Greek culture as a result of her removal from her parents. According to classicists, her Greekness forms part of Heliodorus' argument in favor of external influence in the fundamental debate over whether a person's identity is determined by birth or by environment.<sup>84</sup> Another indicator is the fact that Charicleia's male counterpart, Theagenes, presents himself as a descendant of Achilles despite the minimal literary genealogical evidence to support this claim; he does not fit the mold of his supposed ancestor.<sup>85</sup> In Heliodorus' construction of identity, the effect of genealogy is reduced compared to that of environment.

Tasso takes his cue from Heliodorus in the creation of a female character whose identity is overwhelmingly shaped by her upbringing far from her biological parents. In her book *Gender and Genealogy in Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata*, Marilyn Migiel postulates that there may be a third parental figure for Clorinda in addition to Arsete and the tiger, one which may have actually played a role in Clorinda's conception, albeit through *meraviglia*, the marvelous or

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<sup>83</sup> "The wanderings of the lovers take us through a succession of false fatherlands and false fathers, until we reach the truth at the end. [...] Charicleia must make do with an 'apparent father.'" Tim Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel: Returning Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126.

<sup>84</sup> See Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel*, 125 and Koen De Temmerman, *Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 277.

<sup>85</sup> Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity*, 125–6.

magical element of epic, rather than through a physical union. This is the fresco in the Ethiopian queen's tower depicting St. George, her patron saint, rescuing a maiden from a dragon:

D'una pietosa istoria e di devote  
figure la sua stanza era dipinta.  
Vergine, bianca il bel volto e le gote  
vermiglia, è quivi presso un drago avinta.  
Con l'asta il mostro un cavalier percote:  
giace la fèra nel suo sangue estinta.  
Quivi sovente ella s'atterra, e spiega  
le sue tacite colpe e piange e prega.<sup>86</sup>

Critics have read this image several ways: Clorinda could be variously represented by any of the three figures in the painting: she is white and virginal like the maiden, heroic like St. George, and monstrous like the dragon in her difference from her parents.<sup>87</sup> Migiel attributes Clorinda's whiteness to the painting: "Clorinda is born white because her pregnant mother lives in the presence of an image that includes a white virgin."<sup>88</sup> Indeed, this hypothesis is supported by Tasso's model *Aethiopica*, which goes into more detail about why exactly Charicleia's skin color is so different from her mother's. Her mother explains:

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<sup>86</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.23.

<sup>87</sup> Migiel notes that this is actually the word used to describe Clorinda's mother's reaction to her daughter's whiteness in 12.24. Marilyn Migiel, *Gender and Genealogy in Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 32–33. Others who analyze the painting include Naomi Yavneh, "'Dal rogo alle nozze': Tasso's Sofronia as Martyr Manqué" in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 270–294; David Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 244; Michael Paschalis, "Did Torquato Tasso classify the *Aethiopica* as epic poetry?" in *Fictional Traces: Receptions of the Ancient Novel*, Marília P. Futre Pinheiro and S. J. Harrison, eds. (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing and Groningen University Library, 2011), 177–178; Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 64–67.

<sup>88</sup> Migiel, *Gender and Genealogy*, 31.

When I brought you to birth I found you white, a complexion alien to the native Ethiopian tint. I knew the reason for this: when I consorted with my husband I was looking at the picture which represented Andromeda just as Perseus had brought her down from the rock, and my offspring unhappily took on the complexion of that naked body. I resolved to deliver myself from a shameful death, persuaded that your complexion would entail a charge of adultery and that no one would credit my story of the transformation.<sup>89</sup>

For Charicleia, the influential painting shows the classical myth of Perseus and Andromeda rather than its Christian descendant, but the effect on the child born is the same: she physically reflects the woman depicted in the painting. Where Tasso leaves us guessing about the reason for Clorinda's surprising skin tone, Heliodorus makes the connection between the painting and Charicleia explicit. Because her mother looks at the white Andromeda while Charicleia is being conceived, the embryo is formed in imitation of the figure in the painting.<sup>90</sup>

Since Tasso uses Heliodorus as the inspiration for Clorinda's story, the cause of her white complexion can be understood to be similar to the cause of Charicleia's. However, as Michael Paschalis points out, Heliodorus concentrates much more on the erotic aspects of both the scene between Charicleia's parents and the scene between Perseus and Andromeda, which takes place after Perseus has defeated the sea monster, rather than during the fight. Tasso, by contrast, highlights the heroic action of St. George as he rescues the maiden from the dragon.<sup>91</sup> Not only

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<sup>89</sup> Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Romance*, trans. Moses Hadas (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4.8.5–6. I added the word “naked,” following the translation in Paschalis, 176.

<sup>90</sup> Andromeda herself is another Ethiopian princess and an ancestor of Charicleia. As here, she is often depicted as white in artistic and literary portrayals. Heliodorus mentions the blood ties between Charicleia and Andromeda just a few lines before the above excerpt in Book 4 without acknowledging that Andromeda's whiteness, like Charicleia's, would also be unexpected. For a discussion of this, see Elizabeth McGrath, “The Black Andromeda,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/751417>.

<sup>91</sup> Paschalis, “Did Torquato Tasso classify the *Aethiopica* as epic poetry?,” 176–177.

does this emphasis on battle demonstrate Tasso's turn toward epic and away from the romance of Heliodorus, as Paschalis says, but by avoiding acknowledgement of any sexual activity between Clorinda's parents, it also completely obscures any mention of King Senapo.<sup>92</sup> In fact, despite the queen's faithfulness to her husband, Clorinda's father apparently has very little to do with her conception. Tasso does not refer to Senapo in his announcement of the queen's pregnancy, a passive statement of "Ingravida fra tanto," which occurs immediately following the description of the painting.<sup>93</sup> It is not remarkable in the context of the Counter-Reformation that Tasso would prefer not to describe the act of sex between Senapo and his wife (especially since the speaker is Arsete, a eunuch). Senapo's absence is, however, noteworthy since the parentage of the child is the subject at hand, both within the story told by Arsete (since fear of perceived illegitimacy is what motivates the queen to send her daughter away) and outside the story, since Arsete's goal is to relay to Clorinda the true identity of her parents. After he reports the queen's pregnancy, Tasso through Arsete comments on the baby's coloring and it is clear that there is an implicit connection between the virgin's whiteness in the painting, described in the previous ottava, and Clorinda's skin color.

Because of its influence on Clorinda's coloring and its accompanying symbolism, Migiel views the painting as a rival father figure for the knight. She writes, "This image assumes a crucial role in Clorinda's life as it puts into doubt the primacy of her biological father. The uneasy relationship between natural fathers and symbolic ones generates a model for the confusion of sexual, spatial, linguistic axes in Clorinda's life."<sup>94</sup> Giampiero Giampieri agrees that the painting has an effect on Clorinda's birth: "Clorinda nasce, più ancora che dal padre, dal

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<sup>92</sup> Paschalis, 177.

<sup>93</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.24.

<sup>94</sup> Migiel, *Gender and Genealogy*, 10–11.

quadro, davanti a cui prega la madre prigioniera [...] Clorinda assorbe le presunte virtù dell'immagine."<sup>95</sup> Naomi Yavneh, on the other hand, does not go so far as to say that the painting is like a father to Clorinda, but she does believe that Clorinda is white as a result of her mother's excessive piety. Since the painting is the object of the queen's religious devotion, it can be inferred that the painting is an actor in the creation of Clorinda's physical features.<sup>96</sup>

I want to extend Migiel's argument to show that the painting is not just a generic father figure, but specifically a representation of God, the Holy Father. For Clorinda's mother, this clearly holds true, since the queen uses the image as a devotional tool, praying to it and confiding in it. Locked in the tower, she has no access to a church, so the fresco in her room is the nearest approximation to a place of worship. When Clorinda is born, her mother prays to God and the St. George represented in the painting in the same speech. She cries:

O Dio, che scerni  
l'opre più occulte, e nel mio cor t'inerni,  
s'immacolato è questo cor, s'intatte  
son queste membra e 'l marital mio letto  
[...]  
salva il parto innocente, al qual il latte  
nega la madre del materno petto.<sup>97</sup>

Referring to the surprise of her child's appearance, she addresses God as the one who can make sense of these most mysterious works, since presumably he had a hand in them. Indeed, this

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<sup>95</sup> Giampiero Giampieri, *Il battesimo di Clorinda: eros e religiosità in Torquato Tasso* (Fucecchio: Edizioni dell'Erba, 1995), 115.

<sup>96</sup> Yavneh, "Dal rogo alle nozze," 290. Giampieri agrees: "Il candore della figlia è proprio la miracolosa testimonianza del candore della sua bellissima fede interiore." *Il battesimo di Clorinda*, 113.

<sup>97</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.27.

shocking birth brought about by God parallels another such birth: that of Jesus. When the angel Gabriel arrives in Luke 1.26–38 to announce Mary’s impending pregnancy, she is, like Clorinda’s mother, puzzled: “But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.”<sup>98</sup> Just as Clorinda’s mother appeals to God in her prayer, Mary asks the angel for clarification: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>99</sup> Mary is described as a virgin three times during the Annunciation.<sup>100</sup> This emphasis on chastity is echoed in the prayer of the Ethiopian queen, who also uses the language of virginity three times to describe herself. She asks God to save Clorinda as long as she has proven to him that her own heart is “immaculate” and that her “membra,” or her body, is “intact.” She even refers to Clorinda as “il parto innocente,” the innocent birth, which recalls how Jesus himself was born without original sin. Giampiero Giampieri also sees a reference to Mary and Jesus in the queen and her daughter, adding that Clorinda’s death serves to complete the maiden Sofronia’s “missed martyrdom” in Canto 2 and is the event most similar to the death of Jesus in the poem.<sup>101</sup> Giampieri, however, rather than aligning the painting with God, interprets the jealous king Senapo as a tragic parody of the deity. At the same time, he asserts that the queen’s tower is an infernal prison because of her husband’s jealousy, which would connect him more closely with Satan, and the dragon depicted on the wall. I suggest that Senapo is a disgraced father for Clorinda, perhaps a failed version of Joseph in this scenario. His jealousy prevents any sort of relationship with his daughter. In contrast to Marfisa, Clorinda does not immediately trust what she has been told about her parents’ religion, and nor is she moved to convert at first. She has no reverence for her father, nor does she associate him with worshipping God; Senapo does not serve as a spiritual guide for Clorinda the

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<sup>98</sup> Luke 1:29 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>99</sup> Luke 1:34.

<sup>100</sup> Luke 1:27 (twice), Luke 1:34.

<sup>101</sup> Giampieri, *Il battesimo di Clorinda*, 112.

way that Marfisa's father does for her. As Giampieri writes of Senapo's potential reaction to his white daughter, "Ciò che Dio sceglie è spesso motivo di scandalo per chi non ha fede sufficiente per vedere. E il re Senapo non vede."<sup>102</sup>

Clorinda's death immediately following her conversion allows her soul to return to her newly accepted father figure, the Christian God. Tancredi, not realizing she is his beloved, kills her in a duel after she and Argante burn the Christians' war machine in the nighttime raid. As she lies dying, she requests that Tancredi baptize her, and when he lifts her helmet to do so he discovers his mistake, recognizing her. The description of her conversion is filled with religious symbolism. She first speaks words

ch'a lei novo un spirto ditta,  
spirto di fé, di carità, di speme:  
virtù ch'or Dio le infonde, e se rubella  
in vita fu, la vuole in morte ancella.<sup>103</sup>

God speaks through her, infusing her with the three theological virtues of Catholicism. Where she was a rebel in life, God will have her as a handmaiden in death. This imagery originates with Mary's acceptance of her duty to bear Christ in Luke 1.38, when she says to the angel Gabriel "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."<sup>104</sup> Though Clorinda repeats Mary's words here, it is she who will be born again through her conversion. The coincidence of her physical death with her rebirth corresponds to Christ's death and resurrection. In both Clorinda's and Christ's deaths, a friend is implicated. Although Judas betrays Jesus intentionally and Tancredi's attack on Clorinda is a case of mistaken identity, there are nevertheless parallels between the two

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<sup>102</sup> Giampieri, 113.

<sup>103</sup> Tasso, 12.65.

<sup>104</sup> The Latin with which Tasso would have been familiar is "Ecce ancilla Domini," as noted by Franco Tomasi, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 779n65.7-8.

occurrences. Jesus addresses Judas as “friend” at his moment of betrayal, resignedly telling him “Friend, do what you are here to do.”<sup>105</sup> Clorinda’s language and reaction to her approaching death are similar. She says defeatedly to Tancredi in ottava 66: “Amico, hai vinto.” In both cases there is an acknowledgement of the former alliance between perpetrator and victim, coupled with the recognition on the part of the betrayed that they have no recourse in the situation. Furthermore, both Jesus and Clorinda exhibit forgiveness. In Luke 23:34, when Jesus is being crucified, he says, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing,” referring to everyone who has conspired against him to bring him to the cross.<sup>106</sup> Clorinda forgives Tancredi more specifically: “io ti perdon...perdona / tu ancora, al corpo no, che nulla pave, / a l’alma sì; deh!”<sup>107</sup> Her act of forgiveness mimics that of Christ, exemplifying Christian behavior and foreshadowing her request for baptism, which immediately follows.

In the moment of death, Clorinda is described thus:

D’un bel pallore ha il bianco volto asperso,  
come a’ gigli sarian miste viole,  
e gli occhi al cielo affisa, e in lei converso  
sembra per la pietate il cielo e ‘l sole.<sup>108</sup>

Here the virgin from the painting is recalled again with reference to Clorinda’s whiteness, as well as to Mary, whose symbol is the lily. Clorinda gazes up toward God, and the heavens and the sun regard her with pity. As Franco Tomasi notes, “...la volta del cielo sembra rispecchiarsi negli occhi di Clorinda, quasi a rispondere al suo devoto sguardo.”<sup>109</sup> Heaven’s turn toward Clorinda

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<sup>105</sup> Matthew 26:50.

<sup>106</sup> Luke 23.34.

<sup>107</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.66.

<sup>108</sup> Tasso, 12.69.

<sup>109</sup> Franco Tomasi, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 781–2n69.3–4.



in compassionate response to her conversion and death is an indication of God, the Holy Father, welcoming her home. Thus God, Mary, and Jesus are all represented during Clorinda's death, just as they are represented at her birth by the painting, her mother, and herself.

The painting has further significance for Clorinda when we also consider the other major episode in which she is included in the poem. We have outlined Clorinda's childhood vulnerabilities and her relationships with her foster parents above, and we now turn to the Sofronia episode, which introduces Clorinda and depicts her heroism. In Canto 2, Aladino and Ismeno steal a religious icon from the Christian church and hide it in their mosque. The icon somehow disappears from the mosque, and the king threatens to punish the Christian population of the city, not realizing that the disappearance may have been an act of God. The young maiden Sofronia tries to take the blame so as to save others from Aladino's wrath, but a young man Olindo then confesses in order to protect Sofronia, with whom he is in love. Both are condemned and tied to the stake, but Clorinda, "un guerriero / (ché tal pare) d'alta sembianza e degna" arrives on the scene and intervenes on their behalf, offering her services as knight to the king in exchange for the young couple's freedom.<sup>110</sup> Of Clorinda's motivation for helping these youths, who, unlike Clorinda at this point in the poem, are Christian, Tomasi writes, "Segrete ragioni di affinità psicologica e, come si scoprirà, religiosa, legano Sofronia a Clorinda, che si convince immediatamente, quasi per istinto, che la giovane cristiana è innocente..."<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the two characters are linked also by the role that images play in their lives. Clorinda's birth has been affected by the fresco of St. George in her mother's bedroom, while Sofronia comes close to death as a result of the disappearance of the Christian icon. The icon, not coincidentally, is an image of the Virgin Mary.

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<sup>110</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 2.38.

<sup>111</sup> Tomasi, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 113.

Yavneh sees Sofronia's purity, both in her virginity and near-martyrdom, as reflective of the purity of Mary represented in the icon.<sup>112</sup> I would argue as above that it is the Ethiopian queen who most closely resembles this portrait of Mary. Sofronia instead represents the maiden needing rescue in the painting of St. George, who also refers back to Andromeda in Heliodorus' version of this story. Andromeda, like Sofronia, is punished for a crime she did not commit: she is the sacrifice for her mother's boast that her beauty is greater than that of the Nereids.<sup>113</sup> As told in Jacopo de Voragine's thirteenth-century work *Legenda Aurea*, the maiden in the story of St. George is also set to be sacrificed based on a parental mistake. Once their city runs out of sheep with which to satiate the hunger of the dragon who lives nearby, the maiden's father, who is king, decrees that young men and women will be chosen by lottery as substitutes for the sheep, not realizing that eventually his own daughter will be selected for this task.<sup>114</sup>

Clorinda most obviously resembles Perseus and St. George in her role of rescuer, saving Sofronia from the perils of the pagans, in parallel with the common interpretation of St. George's story in Tasso as representing the defeat of the pagans by the Christians, or of the devil by Christ.<sup>115</sup> She also, however, is tied to Sofronia and her mythological and Christian predecessors, not only because of her gender and coloring but also because her parent makes the decision to cast her out, which will have a profound effect on her. Whereas Andromeda's mother and the maiden's father both make decisions which will (barring the interference of Perseus and St.

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<sup>112</sup> Yavneh also makes a connection between these two images. She links the adjectives describing Clorinda's whiteness in death to the virgin's purity in the queen's fresco, as well as to the pure Sofronia and to the pallor of the Ethiopian queen herself when she reacts to her daughter's surprising skin tone ("Dal rogo alle nozze," 291).

<sup>113</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.687. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller and G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Ariosto also models his stories of Angelica and Olimpia on Andromeda.

<sup>114</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 238–39.

<sup>115</sup> Paschalis, "Did Torquato Tasso classify the *Aethiopica* as epic poetry?," 177.

George) result in the deaths of their respective daughters, the decision of Clorinda's mother ultimately leads to Clorinda's death but at the same time to her rebirth in the form of baptism.<sup>116</sup>

Sofronia, acting as the intermediary who draws Clorinda into the situation and allows her subconsciously to recognize her birth religion, can remind Clorinda of the Ethiopian queen. Discussing the purity of Clorinda's mother, Giampieri holds that "Quell'amore troppo umano trasforma la regina in qualcosa di profondamente affine all'immagine della Madonna e a Sofronia. In questo senso in II,43 è come se Clorinda riuscisse a vedere in Sofronia, senza saperlo, l'immagine di sua madre."<sup>117</sup> However, in my view the image of Clorinda's mother is more apparent in the missing icon of Mary than in Sofronia, and there is a correspondence between Clorinda's confusing religious status and the sequence of events leading to her heroic rescue of Sofronia. Just as Mary's portrait, a symbol of Christianity, is hidden in a mosque, so is Clorinda a Christian hidden in Muslim guise. As Yavneh points out, despite being Muslim at the time, Clorinda is the only one to understand that the unexplained disappearance of the Christian icon may be an act of God to protect it from its unhappy fate in the mosque.<sup>118</sup> The preservation of the image through its removal from the Muslim temple is also a foretelling of Clorinda's conversion: no longer will her Christianity, the religion of her birth mother who is represented in the painting, be enclosed within a Muslim form.

Thus Clorinda's parentage is linked to two paintings, the paternal image of St. George and the maternal image of Mary. Given that, as she herself points out in 2.50, Islam strictly

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<sup>116</sup> Clorinda's baptism at the point of death also ties her story to St. George. After he slays the dragon, according to the *Legenda Aurea*, George attempts to spread Christianity in Persia, where the king, Dacian, is in the midst of a persecution campaign against Christians. George succeeds in convincing the queen that his is the better faith. When she admits to her husband that she wants to convert, he tortures her, and George fulfills her request to be baptized as she dies, telling her, "The shedding of your blood will be both your baptism and your crown." Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 59.

<sup>117</sup> Giampieri, *Il battesimo di Clorinda*, 115.

<sup>118</sup> Yavneh, "'Dal rogo alle nozze,'" 274.

forbids the worship of images, these parental figures further underscore the Christianity into which she was born. Clorinda proves herself on the battlefield, wounding Goffredo with an arrow in Canto 11, but her true heroism derives from her religious development. Her surprising birth, her compassionate rescue of Sofronia, her childhood guidance from varying spiritual advisors, and her ultimate conversion and forgiveness of Tancredi in death create an epic religious hero similar to Jesus, supporting the *Gerusalemme liberata*'s overall aim to advocate Christian values.

The paintings also emphasize how much of Clorinda's identity both relies on and at the same time is confused by the interplay of what is apparent and what is beneath the surface. As Gerry Milligan writes, "The origin story of Clorinda creates a dynamic of waiting, even if unknowingly, to have an authentic identity restored. [...] She is quintessentially hybrid: Muslim and Christian, black and white, and warrior (nursed on tiger's milk) and non-militant (descendant of Andromeda and St. George's maiden)." <sup>119</sup> With Clorinda's conversion, Tasso seems to suggest that no matter how far we travel from our roots, it is inevitable that we return to them. In this way, Clorinda's journey may also be compared to that of Odysseus, the prototypical epic hero whose main objective is to return to his beginnings. The story of Odysseus is continually present throughout Tasso's source text, the *Aethiopica*. <sup>120</sup> The voyager himself makes an appearance to Calasiris in a dream in Book 5, predicting that the priest "will experience afflictions like mine, and encounter enemies both by sea and by land." <sup>121</sup> Critics have identified the protagonist Charicleia, however, as the clearest representative of Odysseus in Heliodorus, because her journey concludes both with a return home and with an act of recognition that

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<sup>119</sup> Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 65.

<sup>120</sup> See Clinton Walker Keyes, "The Structure of Heliodorus' 'Aethiopica,'" *Studies in Philology* 19, no. 1 (1922): 42–51, and Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in Ancient Greek Novels*, 112–13.

<sup>121</sup> Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Romance*, 5.22.

restores her to her royal identity.<sup>122</sup> Clorinda, partially based on Charicleia, also experiences a moment of recognition just before her death, when Tancredi realizes whom he has slain. Through her conversion, her original identity is then similarly reinstated. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the ancient Greek idea of epic homecoming, *nostos*, of which Odysseus's voyage is the most important example, is tied to the concept of the soul's passage through the afterlife. Clorinda's conversion, like Scanderbeg's in the *Scanderbeide*, constitutes a form of *nostos*; her death immediately after conversion reforms this Greek understanding into a Christian one, affording her soul immortalization in the company of Christ.

Geographically, however, Clorinda is far from her birthplace when she dies. Her physical movements are linear, since she comes from Ethiopia, traditionally viewed as "the edge of the world" in Greek texts, and travels to Jerusalem to join the Muslims in their fight against the Christians.<sup>123</sup> Odysseus, on the other hand, moves in a circle: he comes from Greece, the center of the Hellenistic world, and in Homer's telling he returns to Ithaca at the end of the *Odyssey*. Tasso directly engages with the Greek character in the *Liberata* but makes his movement linear like Clorinda's, using the version of the story available through Dante, *Inferno* 26. Here Odysseus sails past the Pillars of Hercules in his explorations, illicitly crossing the boundaries of the world and incurring God's wrath.<sup>124</sup> Clorinda represents the geographical opposite of Odysseus because she starts at the world's edge and moves inward, whereas he starts at the center and moves outward until he reaches and goes beyond the world's edge.

According to Whitmarsh, Heliodorus also employs a geographic reversal by choosing Ethiopia as the site of return in his novel, rather than Greece, making the viewpoint less

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<sup>122</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, "Writes of Passage: Cultural Initiation in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (London: Routledge, 2002), 22.

<sup>123</sup> Most notably, Homer treats Ethiopia as a faraway land (*Odyssey* 1.21–25).

<sup>124</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 15.25–26.

Hellenocentric. The foreign, usually marginalized land of Ethiopia becomes instead the focal point: “the *Aethiopica* sites its joyous, celebratory ending on the side of the ‘other.’”<sup>125</sup> Clorinda, an ‘other’ herself in so many ways, instead must conclude her story by dying in the arms of Tancredi. While she can return to her origins metaphorically through conversion, she has to remain at a distance from Ethiopia, whose people, although Christian, nevertheless have a different skin color and engage in practices considered heretical to the Christians of the west, as David Quint explains.<sup>126</sup> For Tasso, Clorinda’s baptism by Tancredi serves as a corrective both to her Muslim faith and her parents’ errant version of Christianity. While the discovery of her parentage and consequent association with Jesus are crucial to legitimating Clorinda, the fact remains that her overlapping white-black, masculine-feminine, Christian-Muslim identities prove to be too much for Tasso to allow her character to continue past Canto 12. The only solution is to put a decisive end to her ambiguity by killing her. Where Odysseus’s venture past the edge of the world on his “*volo audace*” is forbidden by God and results in his death, Clorinda’s boundary-crossing conversion is willed by God, but despite her act meriting heavenly praise, she receives the same punishment he does.<sup>127</sup> Rather than fully attaining her goal of a new Christian life, Clorinda stops just short of it, forever stuck at a threshold.

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<sup>125</sup> Whitmarsh, “Cultural Initiation in Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*,” 23. For more on this see the chapter “Hellenism at the edge” in Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel*, 108–135.

<sup>126</sup> Quint, *Epic and Empire*, 234–247.

<sup>127</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 15.26.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT'S IN A NAME? D'ARAGONA'S  
*IL MESCHINO, ALTRAMENTE DETTO IL GUERRINO*

INTRODUCTION

Tullia D'Aragona (c.1501–1556) was a Roman author and courtesan. Her *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino*, an adaptation of a prose romance by the Florentine Andrea da Barberino (c.1370–1432) into a romance epic poem, has received little scholarly attention for two reasons: first, because there does not yet exist a modern critical edition of the text, and second, because her authorship of the epic has been contested. Both of these issues should be resolved with the forthcoming publication of the volume *The Wretch, Otherwise Known as Guerrino*, in the series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*.<sup>1</sup> This translation by Julia Hairston and John McLucas will make the text widely accessible and the question of authorship will be addressed in depth in the introduction.<sup>2</sup>

I follow Hairston and McLucas in their contention that d'Aragona is the author of the poem. Proof of authorship is not my concern here; rather, the purpose of the chapter is to show how *Il Meschino* provides a prime example of the Renaissance epic orphan-hero, despite some major distinctions between this work and others included here. It is the oldest work of Italian epic poetry by a female author and stands out from the other five poems in the dissertation because it follows the quest of just one protagonist. It is also unique in that the object of the quest is personal, not public like traditional epic goals of nation-building or religious missions, although these both form part of the narrative. Lastly, while all epic poetry is to some extent an adaptation of its predecessors, this is the only poem here whose plot is entirely modeled upon a pre-existing

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<sup>1</sup> The volume will be published by Iter and the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Press, and edited and translated by Julia L. Hairston and John C. McLucas.

<sup>2</sup> Julia L. Hairston, introduction to *The Poems and Letters of Tullia d'Aragona and Others. A Bilingual Edition*, by Tullia D'Aragona, ed. Julia L. Hairston (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014), 47.

work. d'Aragona does, however, make some changes from da Barberino's version, as noted by Hairston and McLucas throughout.<sup>3</sup> The biggest change, of course, is that she has versified his prose narrative, which means her language, though often similar to da Barberino's, can nevertheless be analyzed as her own.

This chapter will begin with a brief biography of the author and a consideration of the poem's preface, which provides insight into how the author regarded both her written work and her work as a courtesan. I then turn to the poem, specifically examining the extensive treatment of the protagonist Meschino as an orphan who develops into a hero during the course of his journey to find his parents, related in twenty-nine cantos. In the section "Il Meschino as Orphan," I outline Meschino's upbringing, introducing the issue of his name as a primary indicator of his unclear identity, and then describing his struggle to come to terms with his orphanhood and how his three sets of foster parents contribute to the different stages of his development. Following McCoy, I argue that Meschino's lack of identity creates an emotional vulnerability which he must overcome. His ultimate conquering of a perceived weakness is what strengthens Meschino and makes him an unparalleled hero. The subsequent section, "Il Meschino as Hero," elaborates the protagonist's heroic traits, including strength, talent, honor, faith, reason, and determination to complete his quest. I then consider *Il Meschino* in terms of epic conventions, examining how his particular mission fits the genre and discussing the question of d'Aragona's feminism by comparing her poem with those of her male models. I conclude with the contention that

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Julia L. Hairston and John C. McLucas, who have very kindly allowed me access to their manuscript prior to its publication. In Canto 1.76n33, they note that the proems and conclusions to each canto are original to d'Aragona, since Andrea da Barberino's text is divided into eight parts rather than 36 cantos. McLucas also highlights the differences between the two works in his article "Renaissance Carolingian: Tullia D'Aragona's 1560 *Il Meschino*, *Altramente Detto Il Guerrino*," *Olifant* 25, no. 1-2 (2006): 313-320.



Meschino's orphanhood influences his decisions even late in life, which in turn affects the formation of the Durazzo dynasty.

#### A COURTESAN-POET

The facts of Tullia d'Aragona's early life have been difficult to establish, given that scholars must rely mostly on literary rather than historical documents for information on her birth and parentage.<sup>4</sup> It is generally accepted that she was born between 1501 to 1510 to a woman named Giulia, whose last name has been variously rendered as Campana, Ferrarese, and most recently, Pendaglia. In her introduction to *The Poems and Letters of Tullia d'Aragona and Others*, which offers the most comprehensive recent biography of the poet, Julia Hairston published archival findings indicating that Tullia's mother was actually born to a Sienese noble family, the Pendaglia.<sup>5</sup> It is unknown whether Giulia was a legitimate child of this family, but she did marry a nobleman who bequeathed to her daughter Tullia some financial assets in a notarial document. According to Hairston, this document, as well as Tullia's marriage certificate, both name her father as Costanzo Palmieri d'Aragona.<sup>6</sup> The eclogue *Tirrhena* written by Girolamo Muzio (1496–1576), upon which much biographical information on Tullia is based, however, claims that her father was instead Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona, a relative of the king of Naples.<sup>7</sup> Multiple scholars postulate that the cardinal may have been Tullia's biological father and that Costanzo

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<sup>4</sup> Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Hairston, 11. In this section I use d'Aragona's first name for the sake of clarity, since there are multiple family members being discussed. Going forward, the author will be referred to by her last name.

<sup>6</sup> Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 12–14.

<sup>7</sup> Girolamo Muzio, "Tirrhena," in Tullia d'Aragona, *The Poems and Letters of Tullia d'Aragona and Others. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Julia L. Hairston (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014), 178–179, lines 296–308.

was used to cover up the cardinal's indiscretion.<sup>8</sup> In any event, her acquisition of the royal name d'Aragona seems to be legitimate.

Hairston notes that Tullia herself is labeled as a legitimate child in a second archival document.<sup>9</sup> Questions about her legitimacy nevertheless arise for modern scholars because of her father's uncertain identity, and for her contemporaries because her profession as courtesan seemed to be at odds with her noble name. Georgina Masson speculates that Tullia's legal father Costanzo may himself have been an illegitimate member of the d'Aragona family who was permitted to use the name, pointing out that the cardinal's father was also illegitimate: "In order to give his bastard daughter a name, Luigi d'Aragona—who was himself the son of a royal bastard—could well have married his mistress off to a poor relation who had also been born on the wrong side of the blanket."<sup>10</sup> Additionally, several commentators raise the idea that Tullia's sister Penelope, born at least twenty-five years after her, may have actually been her daughter who was bestowed with the last name d'Aragona for similar legitimating reasons.<sup>11</sup> While modern critics may ponder the many possibilities of Tullia's lineage, more important for this study is the fact that the author's contemporaries doubted her family history. John McLucas writes that "in a class-conscious society's eyes she may have been considered at best a brilliant bastard, and some detractors [...] accused her of using the cardinal's name without having any legitimate right to it."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps her own experience being suspected of bastardy contributed to

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<sup>8</sup> Salvatore Bongi, "Rime della Signora Tullia di Aragona; Et di diversi a lei," in *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari*, Vol. 1 (Rome: Principali Librai, 1890), 152, Google Play Books; Enrico Celani, "Introduzione," in *Le rime di Tullia d'Aragona cortigiana del secolo XVI* (Bologna: Romagnoli Dall'Acqua, 1891), xxxi–xxxiii, Google Play Books; Georgina Masson, "Tullia d'Aragona, the Intellectual Courtesan," in *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 98; John McLucas, "Renaissance Carolingian," 313.

<sup>9</sup> Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 14. Georgina Masson also mentions that Giulia was "presumably married" to Costanzo Palmieri d'Aragona in "Tullia d'Aragona, the Intellectual Courtesan," 98.

<sup>10</sup> Masson, "Tullia d'Aragona, the Intellectual Courtesan," 98.

<sup>11</sup> Masson, 98; Bongi, "Rime della Signora Tullia di Aragona," 161; Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> McLucas, "Renaissance Carolingian," 313.

her interest in the story of Meschino, whose search for his real name and parentage comprises the majority of the epic poem.

As an adult, Tullia had a long-term romantic entanglement with the banker Filippo Strozzi (1489–1538) and married a certain Silvestro Guicciardi in 1544.<sup>13</sup> She held literary salons in her residences in Rome and Florence and engaged with many intellectuals of the day. Her most ardent literary admirers were the abovementioned Girolamo Muzio and the historian, art theorist, and poet Benedetto Varchi, though many others dedicated works to her, including Sperone Speroni and Bernardo Tasso.<sup>14</sup> Her most famous work is the *Dialogo dell'infinità d'amore* (1547), in which she and Varchi debate the merits of different types of love. In the same year, she published her *canzoniere*, entitled *Rime della Signora Tullia d'Aragona e di diversi a lei*. Her epic poem *Il Meschino* was published posthumously by the Sessa brothers in 1560.

Tullia's position as courtesan was presumably inspired by her mother's similar circumstances, although as Hairston explains, how Giulia Pendaglia went from minor aristocrat to courtesan is currently a mystery.<sup>15</sup> Tullia's two roles as courtesan, or educated sex worker with upper class clients, and poet are seemingly compatible since courtesans entertained their patrons with their musical, literary, and oratorical talents. However, biographers often describe Tullia's identity as dual, or even two-faced, as in the case of Guido Biagi, who compares Tullia to a coin, writing "ogni medaglia ha il suo rovescio."<sup>16</sup> Contemporary law also saw poet and courtesan as opposing pursuits: Tullia was indicted in Florence for not complying with the law mandating that courtesans wear a yellow veil to identify themselves, then acquitted and

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<sup>13</sup> Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 15, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Hairston, 16, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Hairston, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Hairston, 6; Masson, "Tullia d'Aragona, the Intellectual Courtesan," 88; Guido Biagi, *Un'etèra romana: Tullia d'Aragona* (Florence: Roberto Paggi, 1897), 34, Google Play Books.

exempted from this law on the grounds that she was a poet. As Hairston outlines, Tullia wrote the petition for exemption with the help of Varchi and included poems in praise of her by other poets as evidence of her worthiness.<sup>17</sup> Duke Cosimo I de' Medici's exemption stated that he wanted to recognize "la rara scienza di Poesia et filosofia, che si ritrova con piacer de' pregiati ingegni la Dotta Tullia Aragona."<sup>18</sup> Literary talent somehow mitigated her otherwise less-than-proper behavior by the standards of the time.

It seems Tullia herself felt pulled in two directions by her chosen careers because toward the end of her life she took pains to change her image, hoping to be seen solely as a poet.<sup>19</sup> The preface of *Il Meschino* addresses this desired transformation when Tullia explicitly refers to her profession as courtesan, couching it in terms of a past life: "Io adunque, la quale ho ne' primi miei anni avuta più notizia del mondo, che ora con miglior senno non vorrei aver avuta, e la quale in me stessa, ed in altre molte ho veduto di quanto gran danno sia nei giovenili animi il ragionamento, ma molto più la lezione delle cose lascive e brutte [...]"<sup>20</sup> She expresses regret and seems to blame her choices on the influence of inappropriate literature she has read, identifying Boccaccio's *Decameron* as one example. Though her literary goal is similar to that of Boccaccio's in the sense that she wants to present "vaga e dilettevole lezione" to all people, and especially to women, she distances herself from the earlier author because he falls into two errors, as she sees it. Boccaccio "avria pienamente asseguito l'intento suo di far cosa gratissima alle vere donne, e per rispetto loro," save that he did not write in verse and he included a lot of

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<sup>17</sup> Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Hairston, introduction to *Poems and Letters*, 24. The original source is from the Archivio di stato di Firenze, Magistrato supremo 4307, 69v–70r.

<sup>19</sup> See Gloria Allaire, "Tullia d' Aragona's *Il Meschino* Altramente Detto *Il Guerrino* as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work," *QI Quaderni d'Italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 16, no. 1 (1995): 37.

<sup>20</sup> Tullia d' Aragona, *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino* (Venice: Sessa, 1560), preface, Google Play Books. I also referred to G. Antonelli's 1839 edition of the poem for ease of legibility on Google Play Books and Hairston and McLucas's translation and very helpful notes.

vulgar material. She declares such subject matter unsuitable in an effort to reform her image.<sup>21</sup> Gloria Allaire makes the case for viewing Tullia's words as sincere by considering historical context and comparing the language of the preface to that of other works by the poet. Allaire breaks with the judgment of previous d'Aragona scholars, who "interpreting these comments ironically, have seemed unwilling to believe that a woman who practiced an 'immoral' profession could express honest, moral concepts in her literary works," instead maintaining that Tullia's sentiments make sense given the continual pressure courtesans were under to establish themselves as *oneste*.<sup>22</sup> Tullia's multiple infringements of laws meant to identify prostitutes speak to her desire to be seen as a respectable woman: in addition to the incident of the yellow veil, she was also indicted and eventually acquitted for living outside the area designated for prostitutes and wearing clothing unapproved for women of this class, despite her married status at the time of the indictment.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Allaire points to the use of the word *disonesto* as evidence of Tullia's sincerity, because it "is in complete concordance with the definition of *amore disonesto e onesto* found in her *Dialogo* and voiced by the interlocutor called 'Tullia.'"<sup>24</sup> In the preface to *Il Meschino*, Tullia uses this word to disparage many contemporary works of epic poetry as having similar pitfalls to the *Decameron*. They are problematic reading for all women,

—non solamente monache, donzelle, o vedove, o maritate, ma ancora le donne pubbliche,  
[...] non essendo però cosa nuova, che ad una donna per necessità o per altra mala ventura

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<sup>21</sup> d'Aragona, preface to *Il Meschino*.

<sup>22</sup> Allaire, "Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino Altramente Detto Il Guerino* as Key to a Reappraisal of Her Work," 35–37.

<sup>23</sup> Allaire, 36–37.

<sup>24</sup> Allaire, 37.

sua sia avvenuto di cader in errore del corpo suo, e tuttavia si disconvenga non men forse a lei che all'altre, l'esser dionesta, e sconcia nel parlare e nell'altre cose.<sup>25</sup>

Here the author speaks of prostitution as if she were completely removed from it, again trying to remove any stain from her reputation. She does, however, include this seemingly unnecessary aside acknowledging that prostitution can be an unavoidable circumstance, indicating some degree of sympathy for the plight of the sex worker. She asserts that such a class of women should behave as modestly as possible. It may even be more important for them to act decorously than for other women; just as writing poetry was her salvation from the repercussions of breaking sumptuary law as a courtesan, so here does Tullia imply that reading “correct” literature could be a remedy for a tarnished name, including her own.

She offers *Il Meschino* as an example of such literature: “è poi tutto castissimo, tutto puro, tutto cristiano, ove nè in esempi, nè in parole nè in alcuna altra guisa, è cosa, la quale da ogni onorato e santo uomo, da ogni donna maritata, vergine, vedova e monaca non possa leggersi a tutte l'ore.”<sup>26</sup> She claims to have found the text in its Spanish translation, though scholars have since determined that she must have read the original by Andrea da Barberino and based her version on his, changing it to verse (“Ma vedendo io che a questo libro mancava quella importantissima perfezione, ch'io dissi avanti, cioè la vaghezza del verso [...]).<sup>27</sup> She then explains that she writes with a style not too learned, nor too crass, and therefore accessible to “ogni sorte di persona onesta e buona.”<sup>28</sup> Though she follows authors like Pulci, Boiardo, and

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<sup>25</sup> d'Aragona, preface to *Il Meschino*.

<sup>26</sup> d'Aragona, preface.

<sup>27</sup> d'Aragona, preface. Allaire, “Tullia d'Aragona's *Il Meschino*,” 40–41; McLucas, “Renaissance Carolingian,” 314–315.

<sup>28</sup> d'Aragona, preface to *Il Meschino*.

Mambriano in taking the “via di mezzo,” she “non [è] restata di far prova d’avanzare in quelle cose,”<sup>29</sup> showing her ambition and intention to stand out from her predecessors.

The plot of the poem is as follows. *Il Meschino altramente detto il Guerrino*, translated by McLucas as *The Wretch, Otherwise Known as Guerrino*, is a child born into nobility who is kidnapped by pirates early in life and spends the next thirty years on an adventure in search of his birth parents, traveling to places as near to his Italian-Albanian origins as Constantinople and as far as Hell itself. Along the way he meets the oracle of the Trees of the Sun, which informs him that his father is Christian, and he runs up against countless obstacles, including giants, jousts, dragons, and eventually crusades in which he takes an active part. These exploits culminate in a battle between the Muslim Albanians and the Christian Italians that ends in Canto 29. Like other confrontations in the poem, this one sees the protagonist victorious and finally reunites him with his parents, who were imprisoned by the Albanians when he was an infant. He then goes on to promote Christianity throughout as many lands as he can before he retires with his wife and children. Upon the death of his wife, Antinisca, he decides to give his children into the care of a cousin, and he retreats into the life of a hermit, soon after which he dies, his soul ascending immediately to heaven.

#### IL MESCHINO AS ORPHAN

As is clear from the title of the work alone, the protagonist’s orphanhood and resultant name change provide the framework for d’Aragona’s text. In her proem to the first canto, which differs from da Barberino’s introduction, d’Aragona writes:

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<sup>29</sup> d’Aragona, preface.

L'origin di tant'uomo, e sì stupendo,  
 Prima ch'altro di lui cominci a dire,  
 Brevemente narrar da capo intendo  
 Per meglio il passo de l'istoria aprire.<sup>30</sup>

The narrator believes that the hero's origins must be recounted first, taking precedence over every other aspect of his story, though in fact his origins remain the subject of the majority of the poem. He is baptized twice, first given his great-grandfather's name, Guerrino, by his father, Milone, knight of Charlemagne, and mother, Fenisia, the sister of Turkish dukes who converts to Christianity upon her marriage to Milone.<sup>31</sup> Guerrino becomes Meschino at his second baptism, after he has been stolen by pirates, sold to a group of merchants, and relocated to Constantinople. His foster mother, the merchant Epidonio's wife, chooses this name for him because of his miserable state. At his birth a warrior, Guerrino, he becomes a wretch with his second baptismal name, Meschino.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 1.6. In *The Wretch*, Hairston and McLucas point out the difference to Da Barberino's introduction in note 7.

<sup>31</sup> Guerrino's baptism occurs in 1.73–74, while his mother's conversion is in 1.68–71. Though baptizing a person multiple times was frowned upon by Western Catholics, d'Aragona, following Da Barberino, makes no issue of his double baptism, simply explaining that he was baptized a second time because his foster mother assumed he had not yet received the sacrament. Indeed, d'Aragona and Da Barberino do not appear to differentiate between certain types of Christianity as Marinella will; presumably Guerrino's second baptism occurs under the auspices of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Constantinople, but this is not made explicit. He actually takes his double baptism as a point of pride, proclaiming it to his enemy Finistauro in Canto 14: "Io son cristiano, e per distrugger nato / (Come te vedi) di Macon la setta, / E son stato due volte battezzato / Sotto la fede cristiana perfetta; / E per dir chiaro, il Meschin son chiamato / Ch'a undici figliuoli diei la stretta / D'Astilador, già tuoi cugin fratelli: / Or si, ch'invano al padre tuo m'appelli (71, also quoted below). In addition, as David Quint explains in *Epic and Empire* when discussing Clorinda's origins in the *Liberata*, Ethiopian Christians engaged in several practices of baptism that differed from those of Roman Catholics, including a yearly baptism of adults during the feast of the Epiphany and re-baptism of those whose faith had lapsed (David Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 234–247). The legendary leader of the Ethiopian Christians was Prester John, who makes several appearances in *Il Meschino*, as in 17.49–78 where D'Aragona treats him with reverence and ignores his religious differences, referring to him as the "Pontiff" in a comparison to the Pope. She writes, "Guerrin mangiava in un tempo medesimo / Col pontefice insieme, e coi baroni, / Però che tutti avevano il batesimo, / Il Prete Gianni gran consolazioni, / Prendeva a ragionar del cristianesimo / Con Guerrino, d'Europa, ed ogni giorno / Volea parlar col cavaliere adorno" (17.57). The fact that Guerrino, Prester John, and his companions were all baptized is enough to unite them.

<sup>32</sup> Mauro Cursietti writes in his footnote 1 of his critical edition of Andrea da Barberino's *Il Guerrin Meschino* that "il nome *Guerrino* ('uomo di guerra') e il soprannome *Meschino* ('sventurato') obbediscono certamente al principio



It is not until Canto 12 that he learns his original name from the oracle of the Trees of the Sun, which he uses for the first time in Canto 13 in conversation with the Sultan.<sup>33</sup> d'Aragona writes,

A lui, disse il Soldan: Come ti chiami?  
Corona, in vita io mi chiamo Guerrino,  
Diss'egli, poichè 'l nome saper brami,  
Nè dir gli volse il nome di Meschino  
Acciò che la fortuna non si sfami,  
Che qualcun per Cristiano in quel confine  
Nol riconosca, e prese per partito  
Il nome dir, ch'ha dal demon sentito.<sup>34</sup>

Though both names are Christian, Meschino counterintuitively feels more comfortable revealing his “real” name, that is, Guerrino, to his potential enemy than the secondary name given to him by his foster family. The fact that he learned of the name Guerrino from the oracle of the Trees of the Sun, a pagan source, gives the name less credibility; instead of regarding it as his true name, he merely considers it “the name he heard from the demon.” In fact, throughout the poem the name Meschino seems to carry more weight than the name Guerrino. He employs the same tactic of using Guerrino as a cover name in 36.36. In 14.71, despite knowing his birth name, he declares himself to the Turkish prince Finistauro as they begin their duel thus:

Io son cristiano, e per distrugger nato  
(Come tu vedi) di Macon la setta,

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medievale dell'*interpretatio nominis*,” Andrea da Barberino, *Il Guerrin Meschino*, ed. Mauro Corsi (Roma-Padova: Editrice Antenore, 2005), 3.

<sup>33</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 12.67.

<sup>34</sup> d'Aragona, 13.21.

E son stato due volte battezzato  
Sotto la fede cristiana perfetta;  
E per dir chiaro, il Meschin son chiamato  
Ch'a undici figliuoli diei la stretta  
D'Astilador, già tuoi cugin fratelli:  
Or sì, ch'invano al padre tuo m'appelli.<sup>35</sup>

The name Meschino is here associated with crusading strength and valor, whereas “Guerrino” is instead associated with dissemblance of his faith.<sup>36</sup> In Canto 32 during the final war of the poem, Meschino/Guerrino discovers that his enemy Lionetto has conferred upon himself the second name of “Meschino” to mislead the public:

Per la memoria, che di Guerrin era,  
Detto Meschino, Lionetto Meschino  
Chiamavan Lionetto in quel confino.

Erasi attribuito tal cognome  
Quando Guerrino co'suoi persiani  
Combattendo in favor de la ragione  
Ammazzò tanti turchi, e de le mani,  
Persepoli gli tolse; onde si pone  
L'onor a sé, acciò che molti insani  
Pensin che quel sia stato il Meschin vero

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<sup>35</sup> d'Aragona, 14.71.

<sup>36</sup> In *The Wretch*, Hairston and McLucas underline other occasions on which the protagonist dissembles his faith, in 12.45, 13.14, 13.57, and 25.29.

Che di Persepol racquistò l'impero.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the fact that this canto takes place near the end of the poem, long after the discovery of his birth name and three cantos after the hero has been reunited with his parents, the name Meschino still ironically connotes so much glory that even the high-positioned Lionetto, son of the Sultan, covets it. Those “insani” who believe his ruse are convinced that Lionetto is the “Meschin vero,” the true wretch. This is a surprising moniker for the hero, since it is exceedingly clear at this point that the truth of his identity is far from wretched.

Lionetto's desire to emulate Meschino is perhaps less surprising if we consider the former's given name. Because d'Aragona duplicated da Barberino's characters, it would be anachronistic to say that “Lionetto” is a direct derivation of Leone from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. However, the female poet may have had Ruggiero's enemy-turned-friend in mind when she versified the story. Whereas da Barberino explains Lionetto's nickname as one imposed on him by the people, “E questo soprano li aveano posto quelli di Persia per la guerra che 'l Meschino fece co' Turchi per li Persiani quando afrancò Persopoli ad Antinisca,” d'Aragona portrays Lionetto's new name as a choice he himself makes in search of a better reputation.<sup>38</sup> She explicitly connects the name change to the question of honor, emphasizing Lionetto's yearning to be similar to Meschino. In some respects this mirroring of enemies echoes the relationship in Cantos 44–46 of the *Furioso* between Ruggiero and Leone, whose physical similarities allow one to disguise himself as the other (45.69) and who are also rivals for the hand of the female progenitor of the dynasty in question. In addition, Bradamante's parents consider Ruggiero an unsuitable match for their daughter because he lacks wealth and a title, just as Meschino is

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<sup>37</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 32.34–35.

<sup>38</sup> da Barberino, *Il Guerrin Meschino*, 7.24.17.

denied opportunities on the basis of his unestablished identity (in the case of Antinisca, the hero denies himself the opportunity to marry her until he has sought out his parents and ascertained the facts of his background).<sup>39</sup> Lastly, Lionetto's admiration of Meschino's prowess reproduces Leone's attitude toward Ruggiero's bravery: "egli s'innamorò del suo valore."<sup>40</sup> d'Aragona recalls the rivals from the *Furioso* in her elaboration on da Barberino's text in order to underscore Lionetto's treachery. In falsifying his reputation by borrowing Meschino's name, Lionetto proves himself dishonorable in his attempt to be seen as honorable. Similarly, Leone's love and ensuing rescue of Ruggiero from prison appears honorable, but in fact by the standards of chivalry he betrays his father and his country by aiding their foe.<sup>41</sup> The parallel between Ruggiero and Meschino also demonstrates Meschino's superiority to Ariosto's hero, since Meschino never falls into the trap of befriending a sworn enemy. This contrast supports d'Aragona's purpose as stated in her preface, where she includes Ariosto in her list of unsuitable authors.<sup>42</sup>

Returning to the issue of names, the title of the poem contributes to the sense that the protagonist's prefers to be called Meschino. Because Guerrino is his first given name, we might expect the title to be reversed as it is in ottava 34, above: "Guerrin...detto Meschino," especially since Meschino, an unflattering adjective, sounds more like a nickname. Indeed, the original text by Andrea da Barberino opens with the lines "Qui comincia il primo libro chiamato *Il Meschino*

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<sup>39</sup> The commonalities between Meschino and Lionetto, and Ruggiero and Leone, as well as their pursuit of the same objective, show that each pair adheres to René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, whereby two enemies reflect one another precisely because they desire the same object. While not relevant to the overall argument of this chapter, I will explore this topic further in chapter 3, on Moderata Fonte's *Floridoro*. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 45.

<sup>40</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 44.91.

<sup>41</sup> See Marc Schachter, "Egli s'innamorò del suo valore": Leone, Bradamante and Ruggiero in the 1532 'Orlando Furioso,'" *MLN* 115, no.1 (2000): 64–79.

<sup>42</sup> d'Aragona, preface to *Il Meschino*.

*di Durazzo*: e questo nome, Meschino, fu soprano, ché suo primo nome diritto fue Guerrino, del sangue e legnaggio de' Reali di Francia."<sup>43</sup> Though da Barberino's title evolved through reprintings to become the more obvious *Il Guerrin Meschino*, both his original title and d'Aragona's title give pride of place to the nickname Meschino. This emphasis on the hero's wretchedness through the consistent preference for his less honorable name indicates that Meschino's vulnerability as an orphan is a key factor in the formation of his identity. His removal from his birth parents is in fact the reason for his second naming.

The story behind his kidnapping begins before his birth, when his father, Milone, king of Taranto, travels to Durazzo in Albania to conquer the city and take Fenisia as his wife. Shortly thereafter, her brothers, the vanquished dukes Napar and Madar, seek revenge by retaking the city and imprisoning their sister and her new husband. The newborn Guerrino is saved by his two brave nurses, who escape by jumping off a wall with him and booking passage on a ship bound for Constantinople. The ship is then attacked by pirates, the nurses are thrown overboard, and Guerrino is sold to merchants in Greece. One of these, Epidonio, takes him to live with his wife in Constantinople, where, as mentioned, he is renamed Meschino. He then attracts the attention of the emperor's son, Alessandro, to whom Epidonio willingly gives custody of his foster son, and from there Meschino eventually departs on his journey to find his father.

Meschino thus is cared for by three sets of foster parents, each one at a higher social rank than the last and each corresponding to a further phase of his development. Meschino is unique among epic heroes in that the reader is shown, not just told about, his childhood and adolescence, perhaps owing to the fact that the prose narrative on which the poem is based is similar to a novel.<sup>44</sup> We meet Meschino as an infant, rather than as a fully-grown hero. His first caregivers

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<sup>43</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino* 1, proem.

<sup>44</sup> Mauro Cursietti labels it "un romanzo 'medievale'" in his introduction to *Il Guerrin Meschino*, xiii.

other than his parents, the two nurses, are providers of life to the hero in two fundamental ways: first, because their job is to keep him nourished, and second, because they rescue him when he otherwise would have been killed or imprisoned. One of the nurses, Seffera, is given special mention even prior to her rescue of the hero, because she was also Fenisia's wet-nurse.<sup>45</sup> Though she no longer can serve in that function physically, she is entrusted to hire others for this task: "La qual di molte, ed esperte nutrici / Provvide e pose ogni sua diligenza / Per farlo bene nudrir."<sup>46</sup> She is loyal to the family and remains in the role of chief nurturer and stand-in for the hero's mother until her untimely death at the hands of the pirates.

The importance of Seffera and her nameless companion is underscored when they become protagonists for seven *ottave* in the second canto, and this story is retold three times by other characters at later points in the poem. These two nurses unexpectedly become the characters in *Il Meschino* most similar to the strong female knights of romance epic convention; though they lack martial skills, their short adventure is crucial to the progression of the story and the fulfillment of Guerrino's destiny. They are described as courageous in their escape with the baby, undertaken as their own decision rather than in response to an order from their employers, "E mentre che nessun non lo disdice / L'impresa seguitar con tanto ardire, / Che l'una e l'altra si calar d'un muro / Con Guerrin, e gli dier luogo sicuro," and as faithful when the narrator laments their loss, "Oh donne sì fedeli, a che veniste?"<sup>47</sup> They thus embody two important chivalric traits. In a departure from da Barberino, d'Aragona eliminates the participation of a male servant in this episode, rendering it a solely female heroic endeavor. When the story is later retold by the Sybil, d'Aragona reinserts Seffera's servant as an afterthought, only mentioning him as an

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<sup>45</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 1.74.

<sup>46</sup> d'Aragona, 1.75.

<sup>47</sup> d'Aragona, 2.8, 2.11.

additional victim of the pirates (“Gettarvi un servo ancor, ch’ella v’aveva”).<sup>48</sup> When Seffera’s story is twice recalled elsewhere, d’Aragona once omits mention of this servant and once includes him.<sup>49</sup> The Sybil’s retelling becomes vital information later on when Meschino is finally reunited with his parents, newly freed prisoners. He asks them a series of questions to ensure he has correctly identified them, the last being the name of his wet-nurse. It is Fenisia’s description of Seffera that clinches their mutual recognition:

Tra i profondi singhiozzi non potea,  
Milon dar così pronta la risposta.  
Ma Fenisia in suo luogo rispondea,  
E disse: Quella balia avea preposta,  
Che me lattò; perchè fidanza avea  
In lei, non ch’ella fusse già disposta  
Da poterlo allattar, ma perch’avesse  
Di lui sol cura, quanto si potesse.

Seffera si chiamò, la qual nutrire,  
Il faceva ad un’altra balia eletta.<sup>50</sup>

Hairston and McLucas point out several instances during this reunion in which d’Aragona pays more attention than da Barberino to the character of Fenisia.<sup>51</sup> I add to their observations Ottava 97 above, in which Meschino’s mother answers her son when her husband cannot, because he is sobbing uncontrollably. This is another example of d’Aragona’s occasional inversion of

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<sup>48</sup> d’Aragona, 25.69.

<sup>49</sup> d’Aragona, 5.39, 29.109.

<sup>50</sup> d’Aragona, 29.97–98.

<sup>51</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 29.101n392, 29.103n395.

traditional gender stereotypes, also found elsewhere in the poem in descriptions of Meschino's beauty; here it is the woman who keeps her composure and answers the question stoically while the man cannot master his emotions.<sup>52</sup> It is fitting that Fenisia should respond, reiterating Seffera's trustworthiness and diligence, given that Seffera was a mother figure for her son as well as for her. Seffera thus serves both as Meschino's first adoptive mother in his infancy and as the mechanism through which Meschino finally encounters his birth mother once again. The use of Seffera's name contrasts with Odysseus's homecoming in *Odyssey* 19.383–466, in a scene we will explore further in Chapter 4. When he returns to Ithaca, Odysseus is recognized by his former nursemaid Eurycleia because of a scar on his leg. He quickly swears her to secrecy because he wants to prolong his anonymity, preventing her from revealing his identity to his wife. In d'Aragona's poem, a nursemaid is also involved in the recognition episode, but instead of separating the hero from his family, she unites them. She is also referred to with reverence, rather than being dismissed as Eurycleia is. Through these distinctions, d'Aragona upholds the importance of both of Meschino's early mother figures.

Meschino's next set of foster parents, Epidonio and his wife, see him through his adolescence. They adopt the young Meschino because they had been unable to have a child of their own. When Epidonio's wife unexpectedly becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, Enidonio, Meschino is relegated to the role of enslaved companion to Enidonio. While Meschino was physically vulnerable as an infant on his sea journey, he becomes emotionally vulnerable with Epidonio's family in Constantinople. d'Aragona pinpoints the exact moment he undergoes this change. At first, though

[...] Meschin

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<sup>52</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 10.9–10.



Senza padre restò, posto in oblio;  
Egli di ciò non si prese alcun duolo,  
Né conosceva alcun suo caso rio  
Ma crescendo fu guardia d'Enidonio  
Così chiamato il figlio d'Epidonio.”<sup>53</sup>

Because he is ignorant of his orphanhood, it does not bother him. When, however, the emperor's son Alessandro takes an interest in him and inquires as to his family, Meschino is shocked, since he assumed the answer was obvious:

Poi fatto questo Alessandro si volta  
In presenza di tutti al buon Meschino,  
E domandogli, come gli fu tolta  
La libertade, e presso a qual confine  
Nascesse, e chi fu 'l padre; a questo molta  
Acerba ammirazion prese Guerrino,  
Oimè, dicendo, signor io credeva  
Epidonio per padre, e lui teneva.<sup>54</sup>

As Sefferia substituted for his mother, so Epidonio acts as Meschino's father, to the extent that Meschino initially believes Epidonio to be his biological father. Epidonio recounts to Alessandro the little he knows about Meschino's background. His foster father's lack of information upsets the protagonist:

[...] nè sapea dir il resto;

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<sup>53</sup> d'Aragona, 2.20.

<sup>54</sup> d'Aragona, 2.28.

Onde prese Guerrin gran duol di questo;

E se n'afflisse tanto, che di corto

Morto se ne sarebbe senza forse,

S'ei non prendeva pur qualche conforto,

Che suo padre a cercar poteva porse

Per tutto il mondo, o fosse vivo o morto.<sup>55</sup>

The vulnerability Meschino feels at this sudden loss of what he had understood to be his identity directly results in his decision to venture into the world to seek out his father. His pain is so intense that the narrator says he would have died if it were not for the glimmer of hope provided by the possibility of this search. His exploration will ultimately create a hero of him; thus his orphanhood is the catalyst for his heroism.

Meschino is equipped for his eventual journey because of how Epidonio raises him. Despite his reduction to the status of household slave, Meschino nevertheless receives training from Epidonio:

Verò è, ch'ancora che di grado stesse

Del fanciullo Enidonio, un passo a drieto;

Pur parve ad Epidonio, ch'ei dovesse

Imparar le virtù, che nel segreto

L'amava ancora, e col figlio lo messe

A studier, di che molto egli era lieto,

E fece in breve ne gli studi cose

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<sup>55</sup> d'Aragona, 2.29–30.

Stimate da ciascun miracolose.<sup>56</sup>

Epidonio believes Meschino should be educated because he loves him as a son, though they are not related by blood and though technically this is a privilege Meschino should not be afforded as a slave. Accordingly, Meschino must stay one step behind his foster brother Enidonio in his schooling for the sake of propriety, but he nevertheless has great success in all subjects. In addition to this general statement, d'Aragona specifies that he excels at languages, including Latin and Greek.<sup>57</sup> His language skills are useful during his later adventures, suggesting that intellectual as well as physical training forms an integral part of a hero's education.<sup>58</sup>

Epidonio ensures Meschino's physical training by taking him to sea as a laborer and to court where

Cominciovvi egli ancora a mostrar molta  
Prestezza in armeggiare, e in ogni sorte  
Di giochi, in trar gran pietre e lanciar pali,  
Di se mostrando stupendo segnali.  
  
D'ogni sorte di salti, e lotte, dove  
S'interpone destrezza, forza e ingegno  
Vinceva già 'l Meschin tutte le prove.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> d'Aragona, 2.21.

<sup>57</sup> d'Aragona, 2.22.

<sup>58</sup> d'Aragona, 12.54.

<sup>59</sup> d'Aragona, 2.23-4.

Meschino outstrips all the other participants in every sport he plays. Like Atlante with Ruggiero in the *Orlando furioso*, Epidonio serves as Meschino's non-parent mentor for the second phase of his development and begins to cultivate the seeds of heroism in his foster son.

The third phase of the protagonist's development solidifies his heroic attributes and allows him to finally set off on his quest. Meschino's burgeoning talents at court prompt the emperor's son to request custody of him, which Epidonio grants on the condition that Alessandro set the youth free from slavery.<sup>60</sup> This liberty is essential because it permits Meschino to make his own choices. As we have seen in the previous chapter and will continue to see, the way that individual heroes approach decision-making helps us determine how well they measure up to codes of chivalry, particularly with regard to the choice between duty and personal pleasure. Wishing to please his liberator Alessandro and the emperor, Meschino first carefully builds an impressive reputation in his new home. He outshines all others at jousting and dazzles with his polite behavior: "Di liberalità, di cortesia, / D'umanità, di gentilezza ognuno / Superò sempre, e grata leggiadria."<sup>61</sup> He soon falls secretly in love with the emperor's daughter, Elisena, for whose hand in marriage the emperor arranges a joust. Unfortunately for Meschino, the emperor forbids anyone who is not noble from jousting, which provides another opportunity for the hero to reflect on his grief at not knowing his origins:

Questo fu il bando, ch'al Meschino il core

Afflisse, sol perch'a lui fu vietato

Il potervi giostrar, per quello errore

Di non saper mostrar di chi sia nato;

Elisena, a la quale a tutte l'ore

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<sup>60</sup> d'Aragona, 2.26–27.

<sup>61</sup> d'Aragona, 2.32.

Egli serviva, veggendol turbato,  
Domanda la cagion perch'ei si mostra  
Sì mesto al far di quella nova giostra.

A cui Meschino con un gran sospiro,  
Disse: Per non saper di chi sia figlio,  
L'onore, al qual de la gran giostra aspire  
Vietato m'è, né mi giova consiglio,  
Non è poco il mio mal, s'io dunque miro  
Che fortuna mi tenga in tale artiglio;  
Da che virtute non mi può far grande  
Indarno dunque nei pover si spande.<sup>62</sup>

He has worked hard to develop many virtues, but, he laments, these qualities do not have the power to ennoble him. Only knowledge of his parents' identity, unattainable at this point, or some deception can allow him to join the joust. Eventually, his foster brother Alessandro helps to disguise him so that he may enter the contest, in which he is of course victorious.

Hairston and McLucas explain that d'Aragona extends the conversation between Alessandro and Meschino in which Meschino convinces Alessandro to help him, thus “developing the psychological motivations of the characters as well as the bond between the two men” further than da Barberino does.<sup>63</sup> Alessandro is worried about the risk to Meschino's life, not believing that Meschino can prevail over the other strong contenders. In response, Meschino

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<sup>62</sup> d'Aragona, 2.45–46.

<sup>63</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 2.52n42. The conversation takes place in d'Aragona, 2.52–59.

says “[...] morendo con onore / Non curo far di me la terra rossa.”<sup>64</sup> When Alessandro insists that the joust is not a good idea, Meschino responds, “[...] io vi chieggo aiuto, e non conseglio.”<sup>65</sup> This is the first time we see Meschino assert himself in the face of authority, a privilege he now has as a free man. It is also the first time we see evidence of the extent to which Meschino values and aspires to chivalric honor. These are both vital steps in his path to heroism, but he has not quite achieved it yet, since he uses his newfound freedom to make a choice purely for his own benefit. His choice also involves a dishonorable lack of transparency, since he must feign nobility in order to accomplish his task.

Meschino is soon given the opportunity to correct these missteps, assuming his own identity to perform valorous feats for the welfare of others. While he wins the joust, he is unable to take the prize—that is, Elisena as his bride—because he has to remain anonymous. As a consequence, all of the jousters go home unhappily without reward. Two of these complain to their father, King Astiladoro of Turkey, with the result that the latter brings war against Constantinople. Again Meschino’s unclear background causes problems for him. Rather than acting fearful like the others in preparation for the impending war, he is confident and excited at the prospect of defending the emperor in battle. This difference in behavior coupled with his mysterious origins causes the others to suspect he may be allied with the opposing army (4.3–4). When he tries to allay Elisena’s fears about the war, she lashes out at him:

Or levati di qua, villan, poltrone;  
Che non sii turco già negar non puoi:  
E pensiti or con tua presunzione  
Conforto darmi con gli inganni tuoi,

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<sup>64</sup> d’Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 2.55.

<sup>65</sup> d’Aragona, 2.58.

Levamiti dinanzi, furfantone,  
Schiavaccio, vil, vas ta tra i pari tuoi,  
Chi speranza vuol darmi, e chi consiglio?  
Un che non sa chi sia, un vil famiglio.<sup>66</sup>

She deems him unworthy of comforting her on the basis that he is identity-less; not even he knows who he is. The only certainty is that he is below her in class, “un vil famiglio.” He could be Turkish, which would also divide him from Elisena in religion, reducing him further in her eyes. Unlike da Barberino, d’Aragona explores Meschino’s thoughts in response to this:

Gli è ver, disse tra sé, tutto smarrito  
Il misero Meschin, ch’io non so cui  
Figliuolo io sia, o donde, e di qual lito  
In queste bande trasportato fui.  
Così partissi tutto sbigottito,  
Ahi, Ciel dicendo, come in casa altrui  
Son vilipeso, e tanto più da quella  
Che per nume avea tolta e per mia stella!<sup>67</sup>

Elisena, whom he had loved, intensifies his feelings of vulnerability with her speech. Her insults offend him even more because they could be true; he does not know whose son he is. His confidence is shaken to the point that he considers leaving Constantinople.

But Meschino stays for the sake of Alessandro and the emperor, to whom he is indebted, and so as not to abandon the city in its time of need, marking the first time he makes an independent decision for the good of the greater public. Following this decision, the war begins,

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<sup>66</sup> d’Aragona, 4.7.

<sup>67</sup> d’Aragona, 4.9.

and Alessandro is taken prisoner after losing in single combat to one of Astiladoro's sons. Meschino offers himself in Alessandro's place, but is denied again on the basis of his social status. His adversary says,

[...] Per altro non ti campo  
Che per la cura ch'ho de l'onor mio  
A giostrar con famigli non vengh'io.

Fossi pur (disse) fatto cavaliere  
Ch'avrei pur qualche scusa, perch'ho voglia  
Veder (se come mostri) sei sì fiero.

Disse Guerrino: Adunque non ti doglia  
Aspettar, perch'io spero di leggiero  
Come de la città dentro a la soglia  
Sarò entrato, farmi anche barone,  
Se pur sei di sì vana opinione.<sup>68</sup>

There is no honor for his enemy in battling someone of a lower class than he, such as Meschino. Rather than let this rejection upset him, as previous ones did, Meschino takes action to rectify the situation, replying without hesitation and with no one's permission that he will soon become a baron. He returns to the citadel and reports his exchange with the Turkish prince to the emperor, who responds to Meschino's issue of rank by stating simply, "È poco male / Questo."<sup>69</sup> Meschino is then presented with luxurious garments by the empress (Elisena also attempts to give him a gift, but he does not accept it) and the implication is that he is now a proper knight.

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<sup>68</sup> d'Aragona, 4.42–43.

<sup>69</sup> d'Aragona, 4.45.



He then fulfills his promise to protect the city by routing all of Astiladoro's sons and freeing Alessandro. The new knight is rewarded for his deeds upon his reentrance to the city, when the emperor kneels to him and gives him a second new identity:

Deh, diceva 'l Meschin pur or m'avveggio,  
Verso l'imperator, ch'io non son vostro  
Servo, di poi ch'inginocchiar vi veggio,  
Se ben da servo l'opre mie dimostro;  
Io non so, signor mio, che farmi peggio  
Possa vostra corona. Tu sei nostro  
Disse l'imperator, ma non ti piglio  
Per servo già più no, ma per mio figlio.<sup>70</sup>

This episode is a turning point for Meschino. From when he first learned of his orphanhood until Elisena's verbal attack on him, he has felt extremely limited by his obscure origins. Because of this unknown past, he is at first denied liberty, then once freed he cannot joust without Alessandro's assistance, and winning that joust brings him no comfort because he cannot marry Elisena (and soon realizes he does not want to, given her low opinion of him, which only exacerbates his lack of self-respect). In contrast to his first experience of combat during the joust, his second foray onto the battlefield supplies Meschino with two aspects of the social status he has been seeking: knighthood and a royal father figure. He gains these attributes of a hero because he has now proven himself worthy of them. In the second instance, as mentioned, Meschino chooses to fulfill a public duty rather than let private concerns overwhelm him; he could have left Constantinople in shame after Elisena accused him but instead felt honor-bound

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<sup>70</sup> d'Aragona, 4.71.

to stay. He relies on no one other than himself to ensure his presence on the battlefield, confident enough to assume that the emperor will grant him knighthood and then winning it openly, rather than disguising himself and breaking the rules as he did before. Lastly, he acknowledges that he is no longer a servant but still remains humble in the face of royalty when his efforts are being recognized. In summary, we see Meschino evolve from a vulnerable youth, capable of making errors in judgment, to an adult who has overcome his weaknesses and mistakes. He becomes a hero by the standards of chivalric code and the title of knight is accordingly bestowed upon him.

The title of son also given to him by the emperor not only further elevates Meschino's status, but also reinforces the importance of this third and last set of foster parents for Meschino. This is the environment that allows him to finally flourish as a hero—he goes on to captain the emperor's army and win the broader war for him in the next canto—and this provides the catalyst for the rest of his story. As the emperor and the nobles celebrate their victory with a feast, Meschino realizes that he still yearns to discover his family's history. Alessandro inquires as to the source of his distress, and he replies:

[...] Come  
Poss'io con gli altri mescolarmi insieme,  
S'ogni altro sa di qual patria si nome  
E di chi nato sia, non dubbia o teme?  
Sol io non so dir pur mio proprio nome:  
Non che la patria, o 'l sangue, ora mi preme  
Il dolor più che prima il tristo petto:  
Sai quel che da Brunor pur mi fu detto.

Poi mi ricordo, anzi pur sempre in core  
Lo tenni, e lo terrò, poi ch'Elisena  
Tra tante gentil donne, con furore  
Mi disse ingiuria, pur troppo ripiena  
Di veleno, oimè, che s'al dolore  
Refrigerio non fusse, e a la gran pena  
Il pensar pur che 'l tempo che mi resta  
Cercar pel mondo debbo la mia gesta.

Credo, che fino ad or tardi venuto  
Sareste, signor mio, per rallegrarmi,  
Ne però di proposito mi muto,  
Nè di questo pensier penso levarmi:  
Anzi mi dolgo d'aver già perduto  
Qualche dì, ch'io potea deliberarmi;  
Ma qualche cosa ne vedeva 'l Cielo  
Di quanto oprar dovea per l'Evangelo.<sup>71</sup>

He reiterates his sense of vulnerability because he still lacks knowledge of his background, the last piece necessary to his understanding of himself as a knight. Now, however, his concern is accompanied by a determination to resolve the questions about his origins. He also has the reassurance that he has first attended to his public duty, which he views as sacred, so that he may set off on his personal adventure without guilt. This he finally does at the end of Canto 6.

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<sup>71</sup> d'Aragona, 6.21–23.

## IL MESCHINO AS HERO

Meschino's heroism includes traditional classical epic traits such as strength and matchless martial talent, as well as traits specific to Carolingian knights including a deep commitment to acting honorably and an unwavering Christian faith. As Hairston and McLucas mention, there is also a strong emphasis on Meschino's ability to act rationally and prioritize reason over impulse in the poem.<sup>72</sup> For example, in Canto 12, Meschino is on a ship with sailors who threaten him after he tries to disabuse them of their pagan beliefs; his instinct is to kill them, but he refrains since he is advised that it would be folly to leave himself without a crew onboard.<sup>73</sup> In cases such as this one, he sees the logic of his companion's argument and suppresses his natural impulse.

Rational thinking generally exemplifies Christian behavior in the text. One instance involves Meschino's mother, who shows herself worthy of her conversion to Christianity when she disparages the Muslim practice of polygamy:

Vengo a la vostra fè tanto più intenta  
Quanto d'una sol moglie vi contenta.

La nostra no, che quante un può ne tiene  
Nè so come ragion questo comporti,  
Tanto che non sappiam che si sia bene:  
Non ricevon le vostre questi torti.<sup>74</sup>

Fenisia's preference for monogamy is an addition to the text by d'Aragona. This is a rare statement regarding the wellbeing of women within the poem, though it does not go as far as to

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<sup>72</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 12.84n280.

<sup>73</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 12.84.

<sup>74</sup> d'Aragona, 1.68–69.

disagree with the status quo; instead, d'Aragona focuses on the dichotomy between Christianity and Islam as another way to praise the practices of her own faith. The driving difference for d'Aragona between the two religions in this case is "ragion," which d'Aragona links to morality: according to the author, monogamy is rational, and therefore right, while polygamy is wrong. This view of marriage is appropriate for Fenisia as the mother of the poem's hero because it eliminates the possibility of other legitimate claims to the throne. There is only one pair of royal progenitors, which means that should Meschino eventually pursue an ascent to power, it will go uncontested. As we will see below, having any siblings at all to contend with would pose a threat to the hero's claim.<sup>75</sup> Being born to a polygamous family would have the more disastrous effect of splintering Meschino's lineage, further complicating his reentry to Taranto. The poet's choice to highlight the monogamy of the hero's parents reinforces not only that Meschino's mother belongs with the Christians, but also that he is the sole heir, confirming his right to rule.

Meschino's ability to reason is also prominently displayed in Canto 33. When his army is besieged by Lionetto's forces, in an attempt to bolster his troops' spirits Meschino explains that his reason mitigates his fear:

Poi la ragion ch'ogni alta deitate  
In noi discerne, fa che nulla temo,  
Pur che da voi s'abbracci e che s'intenda,  
E come far si deve, si difenda."<sup>76</sup>

Both of the foregoing declarations are consistent with Thomas Aquinas' judgment that the use of reason signifies human goodness:

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<sup>75</sup> Sibling rivalry will also be examined in Chapter 3 with regard to the heroine Risamante in Fonte's *Floridoro*.

<sup>76</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 33.86.

Now in human actions, good and evil are predicated in reference to the reason; because as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv), “the good of man is to be in accordance with reason,” and evil is “to be against reason.” For that is good for a thing which suits it in regard to its form; and evil, that which is against the order of its form. It is therefore evident that the difference of good and evil considered in reference to the object is an essential difference in relation to reason; that is to say, according as the object is suitable or unsuitable to reason.<sup>77</sup>

By employing rational thinking at every turn, Meschino exhibits Christian goodness as defined by one of the medieval Church Fathers. Eleonore Stump argues that “Aquinas’s analysis of the moral badness of human action identifies it fundamentally as irrationality, since irrationality is an obstacle to the actualization of a human being’s specifying potentialities, those that make *rational* the differentia of the human species. In this as in every other respect, Aquinas’s ethics is reason-centered.”<sup>78</sup> Both d’Aragona and da Barberino’s texts support this kind of Aquinian thinking. In the very first few lines of Canto 1 in d’Aragona, the narrator proclaims one of the main benefits of the story to be the understanding of reason, in conjunction with religion:

Chi di religion, che ogni or governa

La terra e ‘l ciel, si trova il core acceso;

Chi com’ogni pensier la patria eterna

Ha sempre in mente, e ‘l suo rettore immenso;

Chi con alta virtù vuol che si scerna

Tener il fren l’alma ragione al senso,

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “First Part of the Second Part (Prima Secundæ Partis),” in *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (second and revised edition, 1920), 2.18.5. New Advent, online edition copyright 2017 by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2002), 24.

Da questo libro il pensier mai non mute,  
Pien di religion, fede e virtute.<sup>79</sup>

Though their introductions to the narrative are different, d'Aragona draws her emphasis on reason from da Barberino's text, which addresses the issue of rationality as a specifically human feature to which Stump refers:

Spècchiate nella piena libertà data al primo padre Adamo: ché, con tutto che Iddio gli comandasse non peccare, non gli tolse però il pieno albitrio di fare come a llui piacesse, e così non tolse mai a nessuno: e però siamo chiamati animali razionali. E uscendo della ragione siamo simili agli animali irrazionali, ciò è bestiali, e però si conviene a noi la punizione del fallo. Per questo niuno altro animale è soggetto a llege di punizione che noi: perché non hanno la ragione, e per questo sono chiamati animali irrazionali, ciò è senza ragione.<sup>80</sup>

This Aristotelian definition of humanity proposed at the outset of the narrative sets up the reader to view Meschino as the most human of humans because he has such a strong sense of reason, which, in keeping with the views of Aquinas, endows him with a high level of Christian morality. Here da Barberino also links reason to the freedom of the will; humans are rational animals precisely because we can make our own choices, and our ability to do so is condoned by God, who first bestowed Adam with free will. It is important for the authors to connect reason with religion in this way in order to excuse the hero in certain circumstances from his potentially problematic behavior, as when he occasionally conceals his faith to ensure he is getting the most reliable information from pagan sources.<sup>81</sup> Because rational thinking underlies these acts, they

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<sup>79</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 1.3.

<sup>80</sup> da Barberino, *Il Guerrin Meschino*, 1.1.9–11.

<sup>81</sup> See note 36, above.

are forgivable. For example, when Meschino approaches the oracle of Apollo at the Trees of Sun, he kneels:

Prima che 'l pie' mettiate in la sagrata  
Piazza, v'inginocchiate, allor rispose  
Colui, al quale era tal cura data,  
E che poi si scalzasser loro impose.  
Ben che 'l Meschin tal fede scellerata  
Conosca, acciò non si turbin le cose  
Fingeva riverenza per vedere  
A che fin de' poi la cosa cadere.<sup>82</sup>

Although he realizes he is bowing before a pagan god, he nevertheless feigns devoted participation in the ritual so as to avoid possible setbacks. His commitment to continuing his journey prevails over his instinct not to engage with other forms of religion. Likewise, in the next canto, he is forced to bow before the tomb of Mohammed, an act more difficult for Meschino to accept than his encounter with Apollo. This time, he uses his reason to circumvent worshipping the Muslim prophet by bowing, but turning his back to the tomb. At first his companions, including the Sultan, take offense, but Meschino explains that he feels unworthy of facing the tomb and he is soon forgiven and praised for his humility (13.57–63). His deft maneuver allows him to inwardly stay true to his faith while outwardly preventing conflict that would prolong his mission.

Meschino's rational thinking also helps him to avoid falling prey to distraction as easily as his counterparts in other poems do. There are numerous instances in *Il Meschino* when the

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<sup>82</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 12.45.



protagonist frets about delays in his progress toward finding his parents or insists that he must complete this objective before attending to other requests.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, Ruggiero in the *Furioso* is reluctant to follow through with his task, choosing instead to take up other opportunities. Fonte's *Risamante*, on the other hand, does choose pursuing her vengeance over another's request for help, but because the *Floridoro* is unfinished we do not know how consistently this occurs. Meschino, by contrast, obsesses over completing his endeavor, departing as soon as possible from the other knightly escapades in which he gets embroiled:

E gli provò per tutte le ragioni  
Che non poteva senza sua vergogna  
Quivi restar, perch'altre regioni  
Per suo padre trovar cercar bisogna;  
Per questo, ordinar lor molti gran doni,  
Ma egli, ch'altro che Tesoro agogna,  
Due guide chiese sol, nè altro volse  
E con pochi denar commiato tolse.<sup>84</sup>

Here d'Aragona shows that Meschino uses his reason to convince others of his need to proceed, and that he remains honorable in refusing gifts since they do not help him achieve his true purpose.

Meschino's reason and faith also prevent him from succumbing to sexual temptation, unlike other heroes of romance epic. As described in Chapter 1, Ruggiero is successfully seduced by the enchantress Alcina, and can only escape by traversing the realm of her sister, Logistilla,

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<sup>83</sup> d'Aragona, 12.93, 15.87–88, 18.7 and Hairston/McLucas, *The Wretch*, 18.7n422; d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 20.100, 21.19–20, 27.71, 32.80.

<sup>84</sup> d'Aragona, 12.93.

who represents reason (*Orlando furioso* 6–10). Lust, one of the seven deadly sins, and reason are established as opposing forces in Canto 5 of Dante’s *Inferno*, when Dante observes that the sinners in the second circle of hell are there because “la ragion sommettono al talento.”<sup>85</sup> d’Aragona and da Barberino reproduce Dante’s punishment for the lustful later in their accounts when Meschino travels through St. Patrick’s Purgatory (28.125–126 in d’Aragona). When Meschino enters the world of the Sibyl in Cantos 25–26, he is presented repeatedly with the choice between reason and lust, and he always chooses correctly. He first encounters three beautiful women, but immediately realizes that they are there to distract him and does not engage with them: “Tra sè dicea Guerrin: Presto date opra, / Per metter la mia impresa sottosopra.”<sup>86</sup> The Sibyl similarly tries to seduce him, unsuccessfully. He asks the Sibyl repeatedly about his father, but he is denied each time because he refuses to sleep with her. She even forces him to stay in her world for an entire year, with the hope that he will accede to her wishes, but he never does.<sup>87</sup> One of his strategies is to delay making contact with her when she sprawls out on the bed in front of him: “Guerrino indugiando si difende.”<sup>88</sup> This is ironic given that ordinarily the function of the enchantress is to delay the hero, not the other way around. This scene gives d’Aragona the opportunity to distance herself even further from her disreputable image because it involves exactly the activity for which she has been disparaged, and yet her protagonist goes to extreme lengths to avoid it. He refuses to engage in what she herself calls *amore disonesto* in her *Dialogo*:

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<sup>85</sup> *Inferno* 5.39. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>86</sup> d’Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 25.22.

<sup>87</sup> d’Aragona, 26.28, 30, 48–52.

<sup>88</sup> d’Aragona, 25.60.

Il disonesto, che non è se non degli uomini volgari e plebei, cioè di quelli che hanno l'animo basso e vile e che sono senza virtù o gentilezza, qualunque essi si siano, o di picciolo legnaggio o di grande, è generato dal disiderio di goder la cosa amata; ed il suo fine non è altro che quello degli animali brutti medesimi, cioè di aver quel piacere e generare cosa simigliante a sé, senza pensare o curare più oltra.

[...]

L'amore onesto, il quale è proprio degli uomini nobili, cioè che hanno l'animo gentile e virtuoso, qualunque essi siano, o poveri o ricchi, non è generato dal disiderio, come l'altro, ma dalla ragione...<sup>89</sup>

d'Aragona explicitly counterposes lust and reason, writing that dishonest love is motivated by the former and honest love is instead motivated by the latter. Meschino demonstrates his mastery of *amore onesto*, and therefore of reason, by refraining from sexual diversion with the Sibyl. As with his maneuvering of prayer at Mohammed's tomb, he finds a clever way to pursue his goal without yielding to her wishes. When in another situation he is forced to comply with the desires of a different woman, d'Aragona provides another hint that her own biography influences Meschino's decisions. He only accedes to this woman's sexual advances because the other choice is death: "L'animo fin ad or mio casto, e puro / Son contento a chinar, poi che vuol sorte / Che mi minaccia d'oltraggiosa morte."<sup>90</sup> Hairston and McLucas read this statement as an echo of d'Aragona's aside in the preface about how women, including the poet herself, are sometimes forced to turn to sex when they have no other recourse: "ad una donna per necessità o per altra mala ventura sua sia avvenuto di cader in errore del corpo suo."<sup>91</sup> In both cases, d'Aragona

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<sup>89</sup> d'Aragona, *Della infinità d'amore, Dialogo di Tullia d'Aragona* (Milan: G.Daelli Editore, 1864), 61–62, Google Play Books.

<sup>90</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 10.33.

<sup>91</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 10.33n224; d'Aragona, preface to *Il Meschino*.

presents *amore disonesto* as something to be avoided at almost any cost, presumably in order to reflect her reformed attitudes.

Meschino's other defensive strategy against the Sibyl is to call on Christ:

L'aure soave, i vaghi fior, le rose  
V'abbondan, perché sempre è sua stagione  
In simil luogo: là giù sono ascose  
Le tempeste, le nevi e l'aquilone,  
La cui vaghezza, quasi in oblio pose  
Al buon Guerrin la prima intenzione,  
A non voler, che 'l van desio gli scocchi,  
Gli converrebbe andato esser senz'occhi.

Pur veggendo l'errore, in che cadere  
Potrebbe, ne la mente sua ricorre  
A Cristo Nazareno, ond'ha potere  
Quel nome sì, che quell'incanto abborre,  
Guidando le tre belle messaggere  
In certe logge adorne, donde corre  
D'ogni frutto si può, che del giardino,  
Vi surgon sì, che fan vago confino.<sup>92</sup>

Like many epic gardens before it, this Edenic space is enchanted. Its effect can only be countered by the recollection of Christ, who represents truth and transparency. Again the importance of

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<sup>92</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 25.24–25.

names resurfaces; calling for Christ is a way for Meschino to ground himself in his faith and remind himself why he has entered this pagan world of temptation, whose false charms fall away as soon as he names the true God. Because he successfully resists the seductress at the center of the garden, he avoids being magically transformed into part of it, unlike the character Malco, whom the Sybil changed into a snake. Meschino accidentally treads upon Malco, just as Dante the pilgrim unwittingly plucks at the bush-formed Pier della Vigna in *Inferno* (13.46–51) and Ruggiero tethers his hippogriff to the tree-formed Astolfo in the *Furioso* (6.27–53).<sup>93</sup> Malco serves as a further indicator of Meschino’s religious rectitude, not only setting d’Aragona’s protagonist apart from Astolfo and Ruggiero because he is impervious to his enchantress, but also allowing Meschino to demonstrate important similarities to Dante. Like Dante’s passage through hell, Meschino’s voyage through this other world is undertaken for morally upright purposes. Mauro Cursietti and Hairston and McLucas respectively note that both da Barberino and d’Aragona in fact directly reference *Inferno* 8.37–38 in Meschino’s rebuke of Malco. Just as Dante the pilgrim chides Filippo Argenti (“Con piangere e con lutto, / spirito maladetto, ti rimani”), so does Meschino take the opportunity to chastise this sinner (“E così maledetto ti rimani”).<sup>94</sup> The scene with Malco also recalls Aeneas’ treatment of the plant-formed spirit of Polydorus in *Aeneid* 3.13–65, reinforcing the episode’s general reference to *Aeneid* 6, in which Aeneas enters the underworld with the Sibyl as his guide. The Dante reference acts as a Christian mediator between this ancient source and its early modern descendant, reminding the reader that the protagonist takes his cue more from the pilgrim than from the pagan. In addition, unlike Aeneas (*Aeneid* 4.265–276) and Ruggiero (*Furioso* 7.61–69), Meschino requires no prompting or rescue by an aide to emerge from the world of this wily woman.

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<sup>93</sup> d’Aragona, 25.8–19.

<sup>94</sup> Dante, *Inferno* 8.37–38; Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 25.17n81.

Another cause for Meschino's rare determination and steadfastness in his mission is the fact that it is personal. Meschino is extremely motivated to achieve his aim since it directly benefits him. Finding his parents will either confirm or deny his worth as a hero, depending on whether they are noble (as he mentions in 2.45–46 above, Meschino firmly believes that virtue is wasted in people of low social status). The personal nature of Meschino's quest is what differentiates it from every other epic at hand here. While there is a personal aspect to quests like Ruggiero's and Risamante's, his to marry and hers to obtain revenge for her sister's wrongdoing, the broader goal in each case is to create a people or a nation, a goal that is achieved through war. For Meschino, war is instead a distraction from his target. Each time he gets involved in a war prior to Canto 29, he delays finding his parents. He does generally agree to fight other people's battles, since this is his duty as a knight, and because he wishes to convert as many people as he can to Christianity along his journey, but he often becomes frustrated by the deferment of his goal.

How does *Il Meschino* qualify as epic if his goal is of a personal rather than public nature? First, because Meschino's quest is endorsed by God, like that of Dante in the *Divina Commedia*. The act of seeking out one's father is considered holy since the male parent is a representative of the Father of the Holy Trinity, on a microcosmic level.<sup>95</sup> In Canto 16 Meschino is confessed by a priest who urges him to stop being sidetracked by wars and instead focus on the task at hand:

Or non sai tu, ch'onorar padre e madre  
Dei diece, è il primo tal comandamento;  
Niente fin qui hai fatto per tuo padre

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<sup>95</sup> Though as mentioned above, d'Aragona does insert or emphasize Meschino's mother where da Barberino does not, she still alternates between referring to both parents and referring just to his father.

Lassandoti occupar dal pentimento.<sup>96</sup>

By not completing his quest, Meschino has neglected to obey the first of the Ten Commandments; speaking through the priest, God urges Meschino to press on. Another priest first refuses to give Meschino communion because he plans to see the Sibyl, but then relents when he hears his reason:

Ma domandando esser comunicato,  
Il prete al tutto gli l'avea vietato;

Con dir, che mentre che 'l pensiero avea  
D'andar tra gente, ch'è del Ciel rubella,  
Comunicarlo già mai non potea:  
Ma Guerrin prega, e così gli favella,  
Che sol per caritate che gli ardea  
Di saper chi per suo padre s'appella.  
Ed onorarlo quand'ancor sia vivo;  
Lo fa gir pronto in luogo sì cattivo.

Communicollo il sacerdote alfine;  
Non trovando pensier malvagio in esso.<sup>97</sup>

The love that Meschino has for his father is characterized as *caritas* (“caritate”), one of the three theological virtues. His mission is not selfish, it is one of sacred duty, and one for which he was

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<sup>96</sup> d’Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 16.83.

<sup>97</sup> d’Aragona, 24.36–38.

baptized not once, but twice.<sup>98</sup> d’Aragona underlines three more times that Meschino’s reason for going to the Sibyl is pure and holy, in 24.48, 55–56, and 59–61. Meschino also repeats that his entrance to her pagan realm is motivated by *caritas* in ottava 60: “L’opra di carità potrà scusarmi / Appresso a chi vede i nostri pensieri,” showing that God will be amenable to this otherwise unseemly decision. The hermit to whom he is speaking is in agreement, invoking the Ten Commandments again in ottava 62. In keeping with the Christian perspective, however, Meschino does not get a full answer to his question from any pagan source, neither from the Sibyl nor the Trees of the Sun. Instead, he must embark on a miniature Dantesque journey through St. Patrick’s Purgatory as repentance for having relied on these problematic oracles. According to legend as described in the poem, St. Patrick’s Purgatory is a cave in Ireland where the living can experience a vision of all three realms of the afterlife so that they may either be convinced of the truth of Christianity or so that they may purge their sins before death (27.65–82). As Hairston and McLucas explain, “The fiction of St. Patrick’s Purgatory is complex, in that the suffering souls whom Guerrino sees and with whom he interacts ‘really are’ dead and in Purgatory, whereas he and anyone else fortunate and courageous enough to be granted a visit to it has the opportunity to expiate at least some of his or her sins while still alive.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, because of this episode, Meschino’s soul remarkably ascends immediately to Heaven when he dies at the end of the poem, confirming that he has already atoned for his sins in life. Since this direct access to Heaven is ordinarily an impossible feat for a human soul, Hairston and McLucas note that d’Aragona has conferred upon Meschino a divine status at the time of his death.<sup>100</sup> His quasi-deification, absent in da Barberino, shows d’Aragona’s emphasis on the holiness of his

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<sup>98</sup> See footnote 31 above regarding Meschino’s pride in his double baptism.

<sup>99</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 28.27n303.

<sup>100</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 29.111n563.



mission to locate his parents. Meschino's patience is finally rewarded after he travels through Hell and Purgatory, when he approaches the Earthly Paradise outside of the gates of heaven. This is where he is permitted to see an apparition of his parents, enabling him to later recognize them in the flesh in Canto 29; again the connection is made between the family and the sacred.

The prominence of such religious imagery in the text is clearly a reason that d'Aragona chose it for her subject, given her wish to revise her own image. She certainly recognized in da Barberino's text the reference to Dante, who would fit into the category of a respectable literary model as she defines it in the preface, since he promotes a Christian agenda, excludes any lascivious material, and writes in verse.<sup>101</sup> Meschino's purifying adventure rectifies not only the character's errors, but it also shields the author from blame in the event that Meschino's earlier involvement with pagan constructs is viewed as problematic. Furthermore, for d'Aragona in particular, the absolution of Meschino's sins highlights one of the appeals of Christianity; God will forgive her past vices just as he has forgiven Meschino, even if she does not belong to the poetic world of epic heroes.

A second reason this poem can be considered an epic is that although the creation of a future dynasty is not a primary concern, Meschino re-establishes his lineage. Finally able to "ritrovar...sua genealogia," the hero restores his parents to their former royal state.<sup>102</sup> The kingdom belongs once more to them:

Con le sue terre, tutto il principato  
Di Taranto fu reso al buon Milone,  
E di Durazzo duca confermato  
Fu dal fratello, e perch'ogni ragione

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<sup>101</sup> See pp. 6–9.

<sup>102</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 30.7.

Riconoscesse del primiero stato,  
Accompagnati da più d'un barone  
Fur Milone e Fenisia, insieme in tanto  
Nel principato posti di Taranto.<sup>103</sup>

As an additional result of Meschino's adventure, the rulership of Taranto changes, returning to its origins just as Meschino has. It is rare, and perhaps even unique, in epic poetry that the hero should return the rule of his lands to his parents. The hero's successful seizure of territory usually coincides with the end of the poem, and the parents, in particular the fathers, do not survive to that point (and indeed many are dead before the poem's beginning, hence the figure of the orphan-hero). Aeneas creates the template for this ending when he wins Latium, establishing himself as its leader and beginning his dynasty with Lavinia in Book 12 of the *Aeneid*; Anchises has died and passed the reins to his son much earlier, in Book 3. d'Aragona's departure from this formula speaks further to how the poem looks backward in time to a pre-established genealogy, rather than putting the emphasis on the future. The conferring of the kingdom on Milone and Fenisia returns us to the state of affairs in Canto 1, when d'Aragona shows in detail Milone and his brother Guicciardo's attack on Durazzo and winning over of Fenisia. Meschino is not even born until the end of that canto, and Canto 2 continues the conflict between Fenisia's brothers and the two Christian brothers. When Milone has been reinstated as king of Taranto and Durazzo in Canto 30, the citizens suspect that his brother may contest his ownership of the lands.<sup>104</sup> Any question of competition is quashed by Guicciardo's joy at the return of his family, but the fact that the issue is raised underscores both the importance of legitimate rule and the continued depiction of Meschino's elders as main players on the epic stage. During their reunion, Milone

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<sup>103</sup> d'Aragona, 30.9.

<sup>104</sup> d'Aragona, 30.2–4.

also supplies the requisite famous ancestor for the hero, telling Meschino he is descended from Constantine. Meschino's nobility is confirmed, reassuring him that he is legitimate and verifying his heroism. The poem thus achieves two important epic aims, one religious, and the other genealogical.

Another distinction is that the poem does not end once Meschino has completed his original quest. Instead of staying in his family's reclaimed lands, he continues on to fulfill other purposes, living up to the comment made earlier by one of his hosts on his journey that it is the need to wander that makes a man.<sup>105</sup> This observation coupled with Meschino's continued journey recalls Odysseus, whose thirst for adventure supposedly spurred him to return to the sea even after his reunion with Penelope. Dante recounts this tale in *Inferno* 26, condemning Odysseus to hell in part because he and his companions go beyond the Pillars of Hercules, crossing a boundary set by God. Meschino, however, will not be punished for his travels, because he continues to fulfill holy missions: first, to marry Antinisca, the woman to whom he had become betrothed in Canto 15, and second to go on a crusade and convert many peoples to Christianity.

D'Aragona's ability to make these changes while remaining within the constraints of epic proved that female authors could make their mark on a genre traditionally reserved for men. Her undertaking was especially ambitious considering that Meschino's story was already established in a prose form as written by da Barberino, leaving ample room for critical comparisons. Her own boldness is, however, rarely reflected in the depiction of women in the poem. When women appear, they are not often portrayed favorably, with the exception of mothers and mother figures like Seffera. By valuing the mother-child relationship but undermining most of the young women

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<sup>105</sup> d'Aragona, 24.12.

characters with whom Meschino has liaisons, perhaps d'Aragona seeks to further dissociate herself from her reputation as a former prostitute. Young women like Elisena are depicted as cruel, and others usually adhere to the stereotype of excessive lustfulness, as shown in 28.126 during Meschino's journey through hell, where there are more women than men among the lustful. This is the case for the Sibyl and two other women who express wanton desire for Meschino against his wishes. One of these is a nameless black princess who sleeps with a reluctant Meschino after convincing her father (whose own advances Meschino has rejected) to release him from prison. Although she appears transiently empowered, Meschino impregnates her and leaves. She is never again mentioned nor given a name.<sup>106</sup>

Antinisca's role is perhaps one of the few instances where we can find some evidence of proto-feminism in the text. In contrast with the plight of the pregnant princess, Meschino requests that Antinisca be granted governance of her kingdom when her family is killed, allowing her an unexpected political role. As Hairston and McLucas observe, d'Aragona, unlike da Barberino, specifies that Antinisca is motherless, making her a foil to Meschino:

Condotta a braccia più morta che viva,  
Ci fu sì favorevole la sorte  
Mutando insegna, che l'abbiamo schiva  
Da servitù, da vituperio e morte,  
Sperando noi s'ella di vita priva  
Non fosse, a qualche tempo, a qualch'uom forte  
Chiedendo aita, o seco apparentarsi,  
Potere un dì quel regno racquistarsi.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> d'Aragona, 10.35–48. Meschino's lack of honorable actions here are not commented upon in the text.

<sup>107</sup> d'Aragona, 13.82. Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 13.82n310.

Like Meschino, Antinisca is enslaved, loses her family and seeks to reinstate herself on her throne. She accomplishes this temporarily but does require “l’aita di qualch’uom forte,” that is, Meschino. D’Aragona also expands on the role of another female character with respect to da Barberino’s original text. This is Diareina, who similarly seeks to be reunited with her father and, as Hairston and McLucas note, is described as *meschina*, like the protagonist.<sup>108</sup> She also, however, needs Meschino’s help to find her father, and so does not stand out as an independent female character. The last suggestion of proto-feminism is d’Aragona’s aforementioned emphasis on Meschino’s beauty, so striking that the king noted above who desires to sleep with him claims to have mistaken him for a woman.<sup>109</sup> In 3.26, he also wears white armor, the traditional color of female knights, to avoid being recognized. This androgyny is echoed in Fonte’s portrayal of her young hero, Floridoro, and may indicate that for d’Aragona, manliness is not the most important of knightly traits.

The focus, however, remains on the male line in the last crusade of the poem. Though Meschino has already reunited with his parents, d’Aragona continues to present the theme of fathers and sons in the remaining cantos. Hairston and McLucas show that in Cantos 33 and 34, multiple fathers fight to avenge their sons, followed by sons fighting to avenge their fathers.<sup>110</sup> When the knight Trifalo informs Meschino of another soldier’s betrayal, he refers to Meschino as his father since his actual father died in battle: “Morse in battaglia il mio buon genitore, / Or voi sol ho per padre e per signore.”<sup>111</sup> Just as Meschino relied on so many foster parents, so now has he become the foster parent. The poem actually ends with the widowed Meschino’s decision to give his own children into the care of his cousin Girardo. This is unexpected given his own

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<sup>108</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 36.63n549.

<sup>109</sup> d’Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 10.9–10. Hairston and McLucas also note this ambiguity in *The Wretch*, 23.52n126.

<sup>110</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 33.61n481 and 33.76n483.

<sup>111</sup> d’Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 34.50.

trials in seeking out his parents, but is perhaps less surprising when we consider how learning from adoptive parents shaped him to his benefit; he may wish the same for his children.

Thus, over the course of the poem, Meschino emerges from orphanhood, achieves heroic status, and finally renounces the world and becomes a hermit. His final rejection of the earthly glory that is ordinarily a primary goal of epic heroes shows his true devotion to heavenly pursuits. This turn toward God, Hairston and McLucas reflect, may mirror d'Aragona's own decision late in life to devote herself to only religiously acceptable matters as outlined in her preface.<sup>112</sup> Meschino dies alone in the hermitage and his soul ascends straight to heaven, bypassing Purgatory. The last ottava is dedicated to his children:

Furon cinquantasette i bene spesi  
Anni che 'l corpo gli nutriro in terra:  
Girardo di Taranto, e suoi paesi  
Restò signor, con ciò che vi si serra,  
Fin che i figliuoli, a viril grado ascési  
Fusser da governare in pace e in guerra:  
E lungo tempo i discendenti suoi  
Fur detti duchi di Durazzo poi.<sup>113</sup>

Meschino does not relinquish his children without ensuring that they will retain their rights to land and governance, for which he overcame many obstacles, including the fundamental challenge of discovering his own identity. His legacy ultimately leads to the creation of the dynasty of Durazzo, just as d'Aragona's legacy opens the door for the many female epic poets who follow her.

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<sup>112</sup> Hairston and McLucas, *The Wretch*, 36.108n561.

<sup>113</sup> d'Aragona, *Il Meschino*, 36.112.

### CHAPTER 3: NATURE AND NURTURE IN FONTE'S *FLORIDORO*

#### INTRODUCTION

In Canto 10 of Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, the knight Risardo observes the future of Venice through an enchantment that enumerates renowned Venetian poets, artists, and intellectuals of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The author inserts herself among this series of venerable figures:

Ne l'ultima facciata che scolpita  
Di dietro fu, dove era poca luce;  
Una giovane stavasi romita,  
E non ardia con gli altri uscir in luce;  
Vergonandosi assai, che troppo ardità  
Aspirasse a la via, ch'al Ciel conduce;  
Havendo tanto basso, e fosco ingegno,  
Quanto sublime, e chiaro era il disegno.

Bianca avea in dosso, e lunga la gonnella  
Come a lo stato virginal conviensi,  
E pareva in età verde, e novella  
Haver nel petto alti pensieri accensi.  
Non havea breve alcun questa donzella,  
Che la fesse palese a gli altrui sensi,  
Ch'a lo sculptor, che la sua effigie espresso,  
Grato non fu, che 'l nome si sapesse.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moderata Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Modena: Mucchi Editore, 1995), 10.36–37.

The poet portrays herself as shy, virginal, and humble, wishing to hide her identity and remain veiled by the shadows. This extreme modesty—appropriate for a woman born with the name Modesta—obscures the fact that the poet’s endeavor is actually quite daring. Boldly including herself in such a prestigious list of men draws attention to the audacity of the very act of writing an epic poem as an early modern woman. Though Tullia d’Aragona’s *Meschino* was published twenty-one years before the *Floridoro* appeared in 1581, d’Aragona based her storyline on Andrea Barberino’s prose romance, making Fonte’s poem the first romance epic with an original plot written by an Italian woman. It is no wonder that she changed her name from Modesta da Pozzo (“modest well”), to Moderata Fonte (“moderate fount”) when she published her work.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that the *Floridoro* is incomplete, the thirteen available cantos are rich with opportunity for analysis of the orphan-hero figure. Because the central orphan-hero is a twin separated at birth from her sister, as with Ruggiero and Marfisa in the *Furioso* we are afforded a clear view into the effects of nature and nurture on the heroic development of each sibling. Fonte adds another dimension by making both twins female, which allows her to comment on the relationship between how girls are raised and their abilities as women. The poem’s portrayal of a secondary hero also invites a discussion of gender and orphanhood, two topics that are personal to Fonte, as we shall see.

This chapter starts with a brief biography of the author in the introduction, considering elements of her life that are pertinent to her work. It is then divided into two sections, one for each protagonist. In the first section on the female warrior Risamante, I argue that her heroism stems from the fact of her orphanhood for two reasons. The first is that the mentorship and training of Celidante the magician shapes her identity as a knight, separating her life’s trajectory

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<sup>2</sup> Valeria Finucci, “Fonte and the Genre of Women’s Chivalric Romances,” in Fonte, *Floridoro: A Chivalric Romance*, trans. Julia Kisacky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.



from that of her sister, Biondaura. Fonte favors the role of nurture over nature in determining the characters of both twins. Using René Girard's theory of mimetic desire as a starting point, I also maintain that Risamante and Biondaura deviate from the dominant classical tradition of enemy twins who inflict violence on one another; they are able to avoid this pitfall because despite their physical similarities, their personalities remain at a sharp contrast with one another.<sup>3</sup> They also ultimately pursue different goals. Because of these differences, their situation does not entirely conform to the idea of mimetic desire, the lack of which has broader implications for how a polity may be formed.

Secondly, following critic Marina McCoy's thinking in her book *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy*, I propose that the vulnerability associated with Risamante's loss of her parents at a young age helps her to develop the qualities of a hero.<sup>4</sup> The absence of nurturing by her parents creates a space for Celidante to fill, helping her to overcome her vulnerability by training her in heroic enterprises. The chapter compares Fonte to her predecessor Ariosto, particularly by showing differences between Fonte's depiction of the hero and her mentor and Ariosto's portrayal of Ruggiero and Atlante, and contending that Fonte's divergences from her model are often statements of feminism in accordance with views expressed in *Il merito delle donne*.

In its second section, the chapter examines the young prince Floridoro and his three alternative parental figures, two of whom intervene in his simple quest to compete in a tournament. Like Risamante, Floridoro's vulnerability is engendered by the absence of his mother as well as his position between childhood and adulthood. Celidante aids the youth in his

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<sup>3</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Marina McCoy, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

heroism, although on a much smaller scale than he does for Risamante. The character of Floridoro is also analyzed in terms of gender, with consideration of the difference between portrayals of Risamante who occupies most of the existing cantos of the poem and Floridoro, who is the titular character but whose role is diminished in comparison. Fonte's support for the primacy of nurture over nature, exhibited through the characterizations of Risamante and Floridoro, serves to bolster the proto-feminism of her two major works and illuminate the needs of contemporary orphans. As a woman and an orphan herself, Fonte finds a way to apply two issues close to her heart to a figure already well-established within the epic tradition.

#### FRONTE'S LIFE IN 16<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY VENICE

Moderata Fonte (1555–1592) was born Modesta da Pozzo to a moderately well-off Venetian family of *cittadini originari*, those who were born in Venice and could prove that their fathers and grandfathers had also been born there.<sup>5</sup> Fonte's socioeconomic status is unique among published female writers of the time, given that she was neither of high nobility nor employed as a courtesan like several of her compatriots, such as Veronica Franco (1546–1591) or Tullia d'Aragona (c.1501–1556). Her story is known to us through her uncle, the notary Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni, who provides a short biography with the posthumous publication of her most famous work, the dialogue in defense of women, *Il merito delle donne: ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e più perfette de gli uomini* (1600). Doglioni tells us that

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<sup>5</sup> John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano, *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 343.

Modesta was devoted to reading and writing from a young age.<sup>6</sup> As a girl in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian society, she was deprived of formal schooling but would often rely on her brother's school lessons to educate herself. Doglioni relays several anecdotes that convey her precociousness, including a witty retort to a visitor during her stay in a convent and her determination in once rewriting from memory all of the work she lost over the side of a carriage.<sup>7</sup>

The most relevant part of the biography for the purposes of this project is Doglioni's outline of Modesta's changing guardianship. As an infant, she became an orphan when her parents, Girolamo and Marietta da Pozzo, died. While the cause of the da Pozzo deaths is unrecorded, Paola Malpezzi-Price believes it was the plague; the loss of parents was a frequent occurrence at the time.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Modesta's father had a similar experience as a child, growing up in the care of his grandmother after his own parents died.<sup>9</sup>

According to Doglioni, the death of Modesta's parents left other relatives in charge, who feuded over control of the baby, her brother, and their finances. This struggle is in contrast with the experience of their father Girolamo da Pozzo, who, being the sole heir and male, was "ricco di conveniente rendite."<sup>10</sup> As will be discussed below, Fonte later expresses frustration about the lack of financial rights for both orphans and women in her writing. She and her brother first were cared for by their grandmother and her husband, and then, in an incident conveyed only vaguely by Doglioni, another unnamed relative suddenly took Modesta and put her in a convent: "quasi in un punto lor fu da un altro la fanciulla nascosamente levata e posta a spese nel Monasterio di

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<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Niccolò Doglioni, "Vita della Signora Modesta Pozzo de Zorzi nominata Moderata Fonte," in Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne: ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e più perfette de gli uomini*, ed. Adriana Chemello (Mirano, Venice: Editrice Eidos, 1988), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Doglioni, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Paola Malpezzi-Price, *Moderata Fonte: Women and Life in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Doglioni, "Vita della Signora Modesta Pozzo," 3.

<sup>10</sup> Doglioni, 3.

Santa Marta di questa città.”<sup>11</sup> The hidden nature of this maneuver suggests kidnapping, though the motives remain unclear. Modesta lived in the convent until age nine, learning routine skills deemed appropriate for young girls such as music, some rudimentary reading, and sewing.<sup>12</sup> She then left the convent and returned to her grandmother’s house, where she became close with the daughter of her step-grandfather, the lawyer Prospero Saraceni. Saraceni was the first to encourage Modesta to practice her writing. When she and her friend had both grown, Doglioni decided to marry Modesta’s companion and Modesta moved with her into Doglioni’s household. Doglioni then became Modesta’s second literary mentor and advocate, publishing the short biography of his niece posthumously along with *Il merito*.

Fonte’s advocates are acknowledged in her major works. At the beginning of Canto 3 of the *Floridoro*, Fonte as narrator laments the plight of the orphans of the time who lost their inheritances when their parents died:

Quanti orfani oggi son cui sono oppresse  
Le facultà che de lor padri foro  
Per non aver (non chi al morir s’appresse)  
Ma chi opri pur la lingua in favor loro;  
Come fusse il parlar grande interesse  
Se lor prima la man non s’empie d’oro,  
Pochi avvocati son che tor l’impresa

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<sup>11</sup> Doglioni, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Cox, “Moderata Fonte and *The Worth of Women*” in *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, ed. and trans. Virginia Cox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 33, 33–34n9.

Voglian d'aprir la bocca in lor difesa.<sup>13</sup>

She complains that orphans are denied their inheritance and have no one to speak in their defense because they do not have the gold with which to pay potential lawyers. While she devotes the second and third *ottave* to criticism of these lawyers, her tone changes in the next three *ottave*, when she praises those who do aid orphans in need:

Ma fra quei pochi ho da lodar il cielo  
Ben io di tai che non di questi sono,  
I quai cercan con fede e amico zelo  
Di sollevarmi ove sì oppressa sono;  
Di cui mai cessarò di alzar al cielo  
L'immensa cortesia, l'officio buono,  
Riconoscendo le grate opre sole  
A mio porter con fatti e con parole.<sup>14</sup>

She thanks heaven for lawyers who advocate for orphans, with a nod in particular to those who helped her when she was young. She switches from using the third person to speak generally about orphans in 3.3 to using the first person in 3.4, noting that her advocates try to lift her up (“sollevarmi”) where she is so oppressed (“ove sì oppressa sono”). The repetition of the word “oppressed” used to describe orphans in the previous *ottava* suggests that when she refers to herself as oppressed, she is thinking specifically of her experience as a parentless child. She does not name Saraceni or Doglioni here, but her gratitude in the latter half of 3.4 for the immense courtesy and good works of those who helped her seems to indicate praise for both of these

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<sup>13</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 3.3. She also alludes to the difficulty of dealing with greedy family members who betray one another for financial gain in 10.2.

<sup>14</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 3.4.

mentors. This attitude is also reflected in Fonte's positive portrayal of the magician who acts as an adoptive parent to one of the protagonists of *Floridoro*.

Although the poem's two protagonists, Risamante and Floridoro, are in fact both orphans of sorts, the context in which Fonte presents her opinion on the predicament of orphans is completely removed from those characters. Instead, she ties this discourse to the plot only loosely, noting in the first few *ottave* of the canto that knights of yore were willing to go to much further lengths to assist strangers than she believes her contemporaries would. She concludes her speech about orphans with a reference to the kindness of one of her characters, the knight Risardo, who has offered his services to a stranger in need at this point in the poem.<sup>15</sup> This parallel between the fictional character Risardo and non-fictional supportive lawyers emphasizes Fonte's gratitude. Rather than drawing an explicit connection between herself and the orphan heroes in the poem, she instead focuses on Risardo as a way to paint her lawyer advocates as chivalrous knights.

In her treatise *Il merito delle donne*, Fonte presents a dialogue between seven women, who each occupy different social roles (married, unmarried, widowed, younger, older), passing days together in the countryside. Here she does directly mention Doglioni, citing him not only as extremely knowledgeable about the various subjects on which he has written, but also as a man who (unlike other men, according to Fonte) is endowed with "una bontà e lealtà incredibile," and about whom books of praise should be written, such were his merits: "tali erano i degni costumi e le rare qualità di quell'onorato gentiluomo."<sup>16</sup> Fonte does not give specific examples of his goodness and loyalty or directly reference his assistance with her financial situation as an

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<sup>15</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 3.7.

<sup>16</sup> Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne: ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e più perfette de gli uomini*, ed. Adriana Chemello (Mirano, Venice: Editrice Eidos, 1988), 84.

orphan, but she does have her characters discuss inheritance as one of the many issues faced by women of the time. Ordinarily, if a father's money was provided to a daughter in the form of a dowry, she had no legal authority over it; either her husband or her brothers controlled it, a fact about which Fonte's character Cornelia complains in *Il merito*.<sup>17</sup> This same character also avows "Che dovrebbero tutti gli accorti ed amorevoli padri provveder a buon'ora di locar le loro figliuole; e se per disgrazia occorre loro di mancar prima che se le trovino aver locate, debbono almanco ordinar in tempo i casi loro, acciò le poverine non restino dopo la lor morte, veggendosi così diseredate, a bestemmiar le anime loro."<sup>18</sup> As Virginia Cox has noted, this statement advising fathers in case of their unexpected demise to secure their daughters' future, thereby avoiding their daughters' frustration, could certainly be related to Fonte's reaction to her own father's lack of planning for her inheritance.<sup>19</sup>

The complicated particulars of orphanhood, inheritance, and adoptive parenting surface in both of Moderata Fonte's major works, but in *Floridoro*, the choice to create two orphan-hero protagonists is not only an autobiographical reference. Fonte is also following a long-established tradition of the epic genre, as we have seen. What follows outlines the orphan-hero's presence in *Floridoro*, aiming toward an understanding of how Fonte adhered to or changed this tradition.

#### *I TREDICI CANTI DEL FLORIDORO: RISAMANTE*

*Floridoro* is a chivalric epic that takes as its model Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. Though set in pre-Christian Greece and Armenia, the plot winds its way through the quests of various knights

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<sup>17</sup> Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, "Moderata Fonte and *The Worth of Women*," 63n28.

errant, following Ariosto's technique of *entrelacement*, pausing one character's story to take up another's often enough to keep the reader engaged. The two main threads of the story concern the knight Risamante's struggle to win back her inheritance from her twin sister, Biondaura, and the young knight Floridoro's attempt to enter a tournament for which he is not qualified.

Risamante's story begins in the second canto at the Athenian court, where she successfully kills the giant Macandro, whom no other contender has been able to defeat.<sup>20</sup> Macandro's aim is to prove, in single combat, that his queen Biondaura's beauty surpasses that of Celsidea, the Greek princess whose acclaim has spread throughout the kingdoms. He hangs a portrait of his beloved in a tree outside the city walls and waits there as knight after knight unsuccessfully attempts to unhorse him. Finally, an unknown knight approaches and kills Macandro. This is Risamante, whose identity is at first hidden. As in Ariosto, whose character Bradamante, after whom Risamante's name is modeled, experiences similar misidentifications, it is assumed Risamante is a man until the Greek king requests that she remove her helmet.<sup>21</sup> When she does, all the onlookers are astonished, not just by her gender, but also by the fact that she appears to be the woman for whose honor Macandro was fighting, Biondaura. Despite her talent as a warrior, in Fonte's description we are assured that Risamante's physical qualities are perfectly feminine, and perfectly matched to Biondaura's:

Come chi fosse alla presenza quando

Tiensi donna talor lo specchio inante,

E ora il viso natural mirando

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<sup>20</sup> Fonte mimics Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* 1.1 in beginning her poem with the arrival of an enemy giant at court. Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando innamorato*, ed. Andrea Canova (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the gender ambiguity associated with Bradamante and her helmet, see Valeria Finucci, "Undressing the Warrior / Re-dressing the Woman: The Education of Bradamante," in *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 227–253.



Venisse, ora in quel vetro il suo semblante.

Non saprebbe ogni parte esaminando

Qual cosa fusse in lor dissimigliante,

Così parve costei del re de'Parthi

L'amata in tutte assimigliar le parti.<sup>22</sup>

The sisters are so alike that it is as if Risamante were gazing at her own reflection when she looks at the portrait, and the spectators believe her to be Biondaura who irrationally has struck down her own loyal servant.

The confusion is cleared up when Risamante relates her story to the crowd. Though in the context of the poem her decision to speak is not noteworthy (and in fact the king has invited her to do so), public speaking was an act of rebellion against early modern cultural norms that prescribed women's silence, especially in public venues. During her first appearance, Risamante has already violated two expectations for her gender, signaling that she will be the primary representative of proto-feminism in the poem. Through these transgressions she has also begun to demonstrate her divergence from her sister, who, as Francesca D'Alessandro Behr writes, "is beautiful and silent to the point where a picture can be substituted for her."<sup>23</sup> Risamante explains that Biondaura is her twin sister, queen of Armenia, from whom she was separated at birth. A magician, Celidante, predicting Risamante's bright future, takes her away from her parents to raise her, only informing her of her family origin when she turns seventeen. Much like Ruggiero's experience with Atlante in the *Orlando furioso*, Risamante learns to be a knight under the tutelage of the wizard. Meanwhile, Risamante's father, his wife having predeceased

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<sup>22</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.28.

<sup>23</sup> Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 40.

him, bequeaths his kingdom to Biondaura alone, leaving Risamante out of his will. When Risamante writes to her sister to request her half of the estate, she is coldly refused. The choice of one daughter to inherit over the other also occurs in Ariosto, when the father of the two sorceresses Alcina and Logistilla leaves his land to Logistilla, his legitimate child, only. However, as Valeria Finucci describes, the common features between the pairs of sisters end there: Risamante could reasonably be likened to Logistilla as the “good” sister, but Biondaura, though portrayed as selfish in her political motivations because she will not share her land, is not evil like the seductress Alcina, who steals land back from her sister.<sup>24</sup> Comparisons might more appropriately be made between Biondaura and Logistilla, since these are the legitimate daughters who inherit, and Risamante and Alcina, the two who are left without assistance. Rather than create a vindictive character like Alcina who would go to such dishonorable lengths as theft to restore her rights, Fonte gives us Risamante, who instead proceeds as an honorable knight (truly the opposite of Alcina, who makes it her goal to distract such heroes from their missions). Fonte’s heroine provides an alternative female response to conflict, one that does not resort to pettiness or dishonorable tactics to accomplish her goals.

Risamante thus sets out on a quest to regain her inheritance, gaining allies by helping others in need along the way, which is what brings her to the duel with Macandro in Greece.<sup>25</sup> Despite the similarity of the twins, their initial separation has a profound impact on their identities: Biondaura, raised at home in her family palace, does not develop the heroic virtues of her sister. Celidante the magician’s mentorship and training is a key differentiator between the

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<sup>24</sup> See Finucci, “Moderata Fonte e il romanzo cavalleresco al femminile” in Fonte, *I tredici canti del Floridoro*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Modena: Mucchi Editore, 1995), xxxi–xxxii.

<sup>25</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.30–36.

twins. Additionally, Risamante's loss of her parents contributes to a certain vulnerability that ultimately plays a part in her development of heroic qualities.

Fonte's repeated comments in Canto 2 on the likeness between the portrait of Biondaura and Risamante herself contribute to this argument because the insistence on the twins' general similarity makes their one difference more significant. The image of the mirror in 2.28 above in conjunction with the dispute between the twins creates a situation that appears consistent with philosopher René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, which has been applied to other epic scenarios, most notably Virgil's *Aeneid*, the prototype *par excellence* of epic for Italian Renaissance poets.<sup>26</sup> Mimetic desire occurs when two rivals, desiring the same object, become mirror images of one another: "*The subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires.*"<sup>27</sup> In other words, one person, seeing that another desires a certain object, decides that he, too, will desire that object. In their mutual desire, they become reflections of one another. According to Bandera and Hardie, in the *Aeneid*, this situation occurs in the final duel between Aeneas and Turnus, whose object is political control of the land that will become Rome. Ariosto mimics their struggle in the *Furioso* with that of Rodomonte and Ruggiero, whose conflict is ideological (Rodomonte accuses Ruggiero of betraying the Saracens) with political implications (Ruggiero's conversion and

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<sup>26</sup> For mimetic desire and the sacrificial crisis in the *Aeneid*, see Cesáreo Bandera, "Sacrificial levels in Virgil's *Aeneid*," *Arethusa* 14, no. 2 (1981): 217 and Philip Hardie, "Tales of unity and division in imperial Latin epic," *Nottingham Classical Literature Studies*, vol. 1: *Literary Responses to Civil Discord*, ed. J.H. Molyneux, (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1993), 58–9. D'Alessandro Behr discusses Girard with regard to Fonte's poem in *Arms and the Woman*, 54–55, and Finucci also references him, although in the context of Celsidea as the object of desire. See Finucci, "Moderata Fonte e il romanzo cavalleresco al femminile," xxvi.

<sup>27</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 45, emphasis his.

marriage to Bradamante will result in the Este line). For Biondaura and Risamante, the obvious mutually desired object is the governance of Armenia. While Biondaura already has possession of the kingdom, learning that Risamante wants a share causes her to tighten her grasp on it and intensifies her desire to be the sole ruler of the land.

In all three of these cases, the outcome of combat has political and societal repercussions. Girard's theory states accordingly that the conflict between subject and rival develops into "the sacrificial crisis"; that is, the destruction of order in a society and the ensuing collective violence that only ends when a chosen scapegoat dies, whereupon societal order can be reestablished.<sup>28</sup> Epic poetry is a fitting genre for the sacrificial crisis, given that it mythologizes the beginnings of dynasties.

Indeed, Risamante and Biondaura's clash conforms to this schema insofar as it will eventually develop into war, the potential breakdown of social order in Armenia, and a change in political leadership that will begin a new dynastic line. In addition, according to Girard, when the two antagonists already share characteristics because they are related by blood, violence becomes all the more imminent. Twins, who "invariably share a cultural identity, and... often have a striking physical resemblance to each other" are even more likely to engage in violent conflict, Girard suggests.<sup>29</sup> Because they are identical twins, Risamante and Biondaura reflect each other even before they come into conflict. Their trajectory, however, does not follow Girard's formula precisely for two reasons: first, no one dies in the end because the twins never engage in direct violent conflict with one another, and second, their objects of desire upon closer examination actually differ, as we shall see later in this section.

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<sup>28</sup> Girard, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Girard, 57.

In the final duel, Risamante must face off with a representative of Biondaura because Biondaura herself is not a warrior.<sup>30</sup> The twins, who are otherwise so alike, have this one fundamental difference: “...una è molle e delicata / E l’altra va come guerriero armata.”<sup>31</sup> Biondaura is soft and delicate, while Risamante travels as an armed knight. The choice of verbs used to describe each sister is significant: while Biondaura simply *is*, Risamante *goes*. As a knight she is afforded the possibility of movement, whereas Biondaura, like Fonte and her Venetian contemporaries, is restricted to her own domestic sphere. As with the female knights Deanna Shemek examines in her book, *Ladies Errant*, Risamante’s movement is a statement of defiance in the context of the early modern “powerful cultural logic dictating that any woman who insists on her mobility—whether of mind or of body—invites on herself the suspicious denomination of ‘wayward’ and ‘errant.’”<sup>32</sup>

Fonte presents this difference between the strong Risamante and the weak Biondaura to be a direct effect of their childhoods spent in two different environments. Risamante has learned to be a knight because she did not grow up in a palace with her parents like Biondaura; instead, she was trained to be a warrior by her mentor Celidante. Fonte’s interest in the role of one’s upbringing in the shaping of identity appears at several points in the poem. She famously makes the argument in the beginning of Canto 4 that if women were given the same education as men, they would be equally as capable.

Le donne in ogni età fur di natura

Di gran giudizio e d’animo dotate,

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<sup>30</sup> Biondaura’s proxy, as we will see below, survives this final duel.

<sup>31</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.30.

<sup>32</sup> Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 2.

Né men atte a mostrar con studio e cura  
Senno e valor degli uomini son nate;  
E perché se comune è la figura,  
Se non son le sostanze variate,  
S'hanno simile un cibo e un parlar, denno  
Differente aver poi l'ardire e 'l senno?

Sempre s'è visto, e vede pur ch'alcuna  
Donna v'habbia voluto il pensier porre  
Ne la militia riuscir più d'una,  
E 'l pregio, e 'l grido a molti huomini torre:  
E così nelle lettere, e in ciascuna  
Impresa che l'huom pratica, e discorre  
Le donne sì buon frutto han fatto e fanno,  
Che gli huomini a invidiar punto non hanno.<sup>33</sup>

Women are born with the same set of faculties as men, but, as she goes on to say, women are not taught to use these faculties and therefore they go unnoticed. For Fonte, though nature bestows great judgment and spirit upon women, it is nurture that governs development of skills and that would allow women to prove their abilities under the right circumstances. While scholars have rightly highlighted this ottava as the poem's fiercest declaration of women's equal worth to men,

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<sup>33</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 4.1–4.2.

the focus here is instead on the reasoning behind Fonte's argument—that is, the importance of nurture in drawing out and fostering those innate skills.<sup>34</sup>

Fonte insists that

E benché di sì degno e sì famoso  
Grado di lor non sia numero molto,  
Gli è perché ad atto eroico e virtuoso  
Non hanno il cor per più rispetti volto,  
L'oro che sta nelle miniere ascoso  
Non manca d'esser or, benché sepolto,  
E quando è tratto e se ne fa lavoro  
È così ricco e bel come l'altro oro.

Se quando nasce una figliola il padre  
La ponesse col figlio a un'opra eguale,  
Non saria nelle imprese alte e leggiadre  
Al frate inferior né disuguale,  
la ponesse in fra l'armate squadre  
Seco o a imparar qualche arte liberale,  
Ma perché in altri affar viene allevata  
Per l'educazion poco è stimata.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Valeria Finucci, "Fonte and Women's Chivalric Romances," 22–23; Paola Malpezzi-Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 109–110.

<sup>35</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 4.3–4.4.

She compares women to gold, contending that just as gold must be mined and refined before it shines, so must women be instructed in order to cultivate their otherwise hidden talents. The key actor in determining a person's development is the parental figure, specifically the father, who chooses how his children should be educated. Fonte draws on the role of the father in 4.4, comparing brother and sister and perhaps thinking of her own childhood using her brother's school materials to educate herself. The same idea, however, can be applied to sister and sister: Biondaura, raised in other pursuits, cannot compete with her sister's military skills because she was never taught them. As all women, she perhaps had the capacity to demonstrate valor, but was never given the opportunity to do so, and thus her potential abilities lie dormant. As in other female-authored epic poems of the period, such as Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide* and Marinella's *Enrico*, in ottava 4.2 and in lines 5–6 of 4.4 Fonte places martial arts adjacent to the liberal arts, two fields then dominated by men in which, according to the author, women had also proved themselves capable. Their juxtaposition also suggests a parallel between the power of the written word and that of military prowess; though she cannot fight physically, Fonte's writing is a way for her to express political views, lamenting that girls are not trained to be warriors or writers but rather they are raised "in altri affar."<sup>36</sup>

In the fifth *ottava* of the canto, Fonte returns to Risamante's case, in which the magician Celidante intervenes:

Se la milizia il mago a Risamante  
 Non proponea né disponeale il core,  
 Non avria di sua man condotto tante  
 Inclite imprese alfin col suo valore."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Finucci, "Fonte and Women's Chivalric Romances," 22.

<sup>37</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 4.5.



It is Celidante's influence that creates the warrior in Risamante. He brings her to live with him and inclines her heart toward military pursuits, just as Fonte's uncle Doglioni brought her into his household and encouraged her literary aspirations. Stephen Kolsky makes a similar assessment of Celidante's role: "Celidante's removal of Risamante from the patriarchal family with its fixed gender values allows him the liberty of remolding and developing her character in ways that would have been impossible under the family regime. The text implies that Risamante's potential would not have been fulfilled if she had remained with her family."<sup>38</sup> And indeed her twin Biondaura, who has remained with her family, cannot escape her prescribed gender role.

There is one other factor in Risamante's development which, though only mentioned briefly, should be noted: Celidante chooses the baby Risamante over Biondaura because he knows that "le stelle / La inclinavano ad opre alte e leggiadre."<sup>39</sup> As a magician, he has foreseen her success in the stars; there is an element of predestination in the fact that Risamante is the chosen twin, which poses a challenge to the argument that Celidante's "nurture" is the main factor in developing Risamante's strengths. Fonte addresses both the scientific aspect of Renaissance astrology and its more fantastical counterpart, "le influenze celeste," in *Il merito delle donne*.<sup>40</sup> The women of the dialogue subscribe to a compromise commonly held at the time between the conflicting beliefs in the influence of the stars and free will, a vital component of Christianity.<sup>41</sup> In a discussion of women's tendency to fall in love with unsuitable men, Corinna, the most learned of the group, states, "si dice con retta opinione che i cieli inclinano ma

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte's *Tredici Canti del Floridoro*. Women in a Man's Genre," *Rivista di studi italiani* 17 (1999): 176.

<sup>39</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.30.

<sup>40</sup> Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, 40-41, 81-85.

<sup>41</sup> Cox, *The Worth of Women*, 122n2.

non isforzano”—while the heavens can dispose people toward certain behaviors, they do not have the power to force them to any action. She repeats this affirmation a second time in the course of the conversation, citing free will: “Né vi dico perciò, che ancor noi che abbiamo il voler libero, siamo sforzate da essi no, ma che ci inclinano maggiormente.” It is then rephrased a third and final time in the voice of the older Lucrezia, who agrees with Corinna, saying, “Voi dite il vero...che questi aspetti hanno una gran forza però condizionata sopra di noi.”<sup>42</sup> In the repetition of the idea that the influence of the stars is limited, Fonte makes ample space for the exercise of free will in human decision. As Cox states, Fonte’s stance on the various debates within the dialogue is hard to decipher, given that there is no character whose argument is ever obviously favored.<sup>43</sup> The fact that there is general agreement about this particular point on the Second Day, which includes an encyclopedic range of topics for discussion, however, shows that Fonte probably considered the coexistence of free will and the influence of the stars to be beyond question. The same balance between the two beliefs easily applies to Risamante’s situation in *Floridoro*, especially because Fonte uses the same verb, *inclinare*, to describe the role of the stars in both works; the stars incline Risamante toward great works as cited above, but, as asserted in *Il merito*, that does not give them sole power over her actions.

Indeed, Fonte accentuates Risamante’s upbringing over predestination as an essential determinant of her heroism. Although the epic is unfinished at only thirteen cantos long, compared to her model Ariosto’s forty-six, the poet finds occasion to repeat the story of Risamante’s childhood twice, telling it once in Canto 2, once briefly in Canto 6, and a third time in Canto 13. In Canto 6 and 13, Celidante’s role is further elaborated than it is the first time, while the influence of the stars is not mentioned at all. He is initially introduced in Canto 1,

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<sup>42</sup> Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Cox, “Moderata Fonte and *The Worth of Women*,” 18–19.

where he serves as savior to the queen of Dacia, capturing through his magic the Duke Amandriano and his associate and imprisoning them in a crystal pyramid, thereby preventing the queen's rape.<sup>44</sup> As Finucci points out, Celidante is depicted as a protector of women in need from the outset of the poem.<sup>45</sup> He later proves helpful again, in Canto 6 reassuring an innkeeper, Nicobaldo, that his captive wife will be saved (by Risamante, in fact) and in Canto 13 aiding Risamante to quickly summon her army. In Canto 2, the first time Risamante's story is told, Fonte describes Celidante as the "gran mago" who took Risamante from her father, but not for the sake of money; when the king leaves everything to Biondaura, Celidante continues to raise her sister "con diligenza e con paterno amore."<sup>46</sup> This love is wholeheartedly returned by Risamante. When she hears in Canto 6 that it was Celidante who told Nicobaldo the innkeeper she would rescue his wife, Risamante becomes "molto lieta," very happy, and reminisces about her childhood with him:

Però che 'l mago che costui narrava  
Era quel suo che come padre amava.

Quel che l'avea allevata da bambina  
Poi che la tolse al re suo genitore,  
Quel da cui ricevè la disciplina  
Di vestir arme e di mostrar valore.<sup>47</sup>

In speaking with Nicobaldo, Risamante recognizes the magician in his story as "quel suo," her magician, the possessive pronoun denoting the ownership she feels over her adoptive parent

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<sup>44</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 1.56–96.

<sup>45</sup> Finucci, *Floridoro*, 13n18.

<sup>46</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.32.

<sup>47</sup> Fonte, 6.82–3.

whom she loves as a father. It is a consequence of Celidante's loving care, Fonte writes, that Risamante becomes who she is. Fonte explicitly connects Risamante's martial training with Celidante, writing in the last two lines above that it is from him that Risamante learned how to bear arms and display valor. Fonte spells out this connection again in Canto 13:

Risamante dal mago fu allevata  
In ogni prova e arte militare  
Dentro una rocca ch'è nel mar fondata,  
Ma dove non si sa che non appare.  
Quindi (poi che benissimo informata  
L'ebbe del esser suo) la fé passare  
In terra firma e gire alla ventura  
Provvista di cavallo e d'armatura.<sup>48</sup>

Here, even the initial suggestion to go on a quest comes from the wizard: "la fé passare," or, he allowed her to leave behind the castle in the sea in favor of land and adventure, providing her with a horse and armor for her travels. This is at odds with the mentor/mentee relationship in chivalric epic as portrayed by Boiardo and Ariosto, whose magician Atlante does everything in his power to keep his ward Ruggiero from any possible danger. As we have seen in Chapter 1, because Atlante knows Ruggiero is destined to die after the he has converted to Christianity and married his lady Bradamante, he devises many schemes to prevent Ruggiero, and therefore the plot of the poem itself, from advancing.<sup>49</sup> Celidante, by contrast, propels the plot forward. He chooses to tell Risamante about her family and encourages her to become independent. Where Atlante attempts to thwart the fate he has foreseen for Ruggiero, Celidante sees it as his duty to

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<sup>48</sup> Fonte, 13.53.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 1, 7–8.

help Risamante realize hers. In making Celidante a mature enough parent to permit Risamante to flourish without him, Fonte avoids the constant delays Ariosto creates with Atlante, which allows for better clarity in the story. Celidante supplies his ward with skills “in ogni prova e arte militare” and equips her with physical tools, “cavallo e armatura,” the two most important symbols of the world into which she is about to enter, so that she may fulfill her potential and blossom into a valorous hero.

Demonstrations of the heroic qualities Celidante instills in Risamante abound. In her first appearance in the poem, she is the only knight able to defeat the giant Macandro; Fonte writes that she outstrips all other knights in talent and honor: “a tutti gli altri inante / Andò nell’arme e n’ebbe eterno onore.”<sup>50</sup> The duel in Canto 2 lasts from 8 to 22, with harsh blows sustained on both sides, but Risamante reacts more honorably than Macandro does and recovers more quickly from any setbacks she suffers. Macandro is described as “fier,” “irato,” and “disdegnoso,” adjectives that imply a problematic superiority complex (when Risamante demonstrates “sdegno” in 2.36, Fonte qualifies her feeling with the adjective “giusto,” whereas Macandro’s contempt remains unqualified) and he shows a lack of control over his anger.<sup>51</sup> He does not adhere to the ever-important rules of chivalry, since Fonte states that Macandro “ch’usar seco [con Risamante] / alcuna cortesia già non intende.”<sup>52</sup> Risamante, on the other hand, is “l’esperto guerrier” and “del gioco maestro.”<sup>53</sup> Fonte compares her to a bending tree that straightens again after she is struck:

Ma come altera e ben fondata pianta

In cui gran vento ogni sua forza impiega,

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<sup>50</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.32.

<sup>51</sup> Fonte, 2.12, 2.14, and 2.20, respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Fonte, 2.18.

<sup>53</sup> Fonte, 2.19 and 2.9, respectively.

Che non però dal piè la svelle o schianta  
Ma gli alti rami alquanto inchina e piega,  
Cessato quel furor con altrettanta  
Forza la chioma al ciel dirizza e spiega,  
Così il guerrier, dal colpo che gli porse  
Macandro e 'l fé piegar, tosto risorse.<sup>54</sup>

She is buffeted by the wind, but her roots remain firmly planted in the ground and her strength cannot be overpowered. This simile has a predecessor in Virgil's description of Aeneas in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*. Aeneas, unmoved by Anna's pleas on behalf of her sister Dido, is likened to an oak with roots too strong to be moved by the wind.<sup>55</sup> Linking Risamante to Aeneas reinforces the idea that she is a mighty warrior. By contrast, when Risamante strikes Macandro "Sotto lo scudo, e dar si fece loco / Che l'usbergo il gran colpo non sostenne," he is described as a mountain whose blood is like a spring that spurts up, runs down the mountain and joins with a river, spreading into a lake.<sup>56</sup>

In challenging Macandro, Risamante repeats the choices of Ariosto's Bradamante at the Rocca di Tristano. There, the rule is that if a knight wants a room to spend the night and it is already occupied, he must conquer the current occupant to win the lodging. The rule for women is similar, except that rather than a contest of arms, it is a contest of beauty that decides the room's occupant. Bradamante, as a knight, fights the other knights staying in the castle and wins the room for herself. When another woman comes along in search of hospitality, however, the host wants to deny her lodging, since, having discovered Bradamante's gender, he believes her to

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<sup>54</sup> Fonte, 2.15.

<sup>55</sup> Virgil, *Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid Book 1–6*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2001, 4.437–449.

<sup>56</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.9–10.

be more beautiful than the newcomer. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Bradamante disagrees, arguing that because she won the room as a knight, not a woman, she should still be considered such and the other woman should be allowed to stay.<sup>57</sup> In her duel with Macandro, Risamante's situation is similar in that she identifies herself as a knight and in the process stands up for another woman. She chooses to fight to defend Celsidea's honor and title as the most beautiful woman in the world, despite the fact that this means she is fighting to prove that Biondaura, and therefore she herself, is less beautiful. Like Bradamante, Risamante denies her own beauty in favor of another woman's. Indeed, in another demonstration of knightly courtesy, after her win Risamante "l'onor tutto alla [figlia del re] rese, / Tutta la lode a lei conceder volve."<sup>58</sup> She graciously insists that it is due to Celsidea's beauty that she has won the fight and will not accept praise for herself.

Though she has dual identities, Risamante prefers to be seen and to act as the gallant knight. She only removes her armor once in the poem, when her Greek hosts put her in "femminile l'abito" at the post-duel banquet they have for her.<sup>59</sup> This one evening, she allows herself to be seen as a woman, but only on the occasion of her knighthood being celebrated. Her two identities are coupled together in this line: "come donna avea tanta bellezza / Quanto valor come guerrier in sella."<sup>60</sup> Like Bradamante, she excels in both arenas. The next morning, however, Risamante immediately dons her armor again and the role of woman is assigned solely to Celsidea: "L'una si cinse la feminea vesta, / L'altra il solito acciar fuorché l'elmetto."<sup>61</sup> Knight and lady become once again two distinct entities, and Risamante elects to be the former.

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<sup>57</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Turin: Einaudi, 2015), 32.

<sup>58</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.25.

<sup>59</sup> Fonte, 2.38.

<sup>60</sup> Fonte, 2.39.

<sup>61</sup> Fonte, 2.40.

Fonte includes two other scenes besides the duel with Macandro in which Risamante defeats an adversary, one in which she kills a monstrous snake, and the other the final duel of the poem. In Canto 3, Risamante finds herself in a beautiful garden and lies down to sleep when a giant dragon-like snake suddenly approaches her.<sup>62</sup> At first she is frightened, but quickly bolstering her courage like any valorous knight, she picks up her weapons and prepares to defend herself.<sup>63</sup> She strikes the snake through the mouth with her lance. She twists the lance and the creature falls backward into the hole from whence it issued and disappears. Fonte compares Risamante with Cadmus, the Phoenician hero of antiquity who also defeats a giant snake. She writes:

Simil battaglia in quella antica etade  
Cadmò fé già col drago orrendo e diro,  
Che viste l'ossa dei compagni amate  
Li scorse giunti all'ultimo martiro.  
Poi che non men di membra ismisure  
Era questo di quel che uccise il Tiro,  
Né men ha Risamante arte e valore  
Del generoso figlio di Agenore.<sup>64</sup>

The female warrior is no less courageous than Cadmus in her vanquishing of the snake. The myth of Cadmus is also relevant to Girard's idea of the sacrificial crisis, given what happens immediately following the death of the giant serpent: Cadmus plants the dragon's teeth in the

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<sup>62</sup> This episode also references St. George and the dragon, with a virgin dragon slayer rather than a virgin being saved from the dragon by a male knight, as Virginia Cox notes in *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 180.

<sup>63</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 3.14.

<sup>64</sup> Fonte, 3.16.



ground, from which spring up brothers who fight and kill one another when Cadmus throws a stone in their midst. Those few who survive help Cadmus to found the city of Thebes.<sup>65</sup>

Risamante, like Cadmus, will be involved in the political future of her country as a result of strife between siblings; she will become queen of Armenia once Biondaura is overcome. Although the poem ends before Armenia's government changes hands, the implication that the new *polis* may follow in the footsteps of Thebes does not bode well. Cadmus's act of killing the snake, sacred to Mars, instigates a series of negative consequences that cause him and his family suffering. Among his descendants are Oedipus and his twin sons who, in another parallel with *Floridoro*, enter into conflict over the rule of Thebes, as foretold in *Metamorphoses* 9 and related in Statius's *Thebaid*. In keeping again with the sacrificial crisis, the struggle between Polynices and Eteocles, unlike that of Risamante and Biondaura, is mutually fatal and Thebes falls in the same way it was erected, with fratricide. In Cadmus' old age, he reflects on his own misfortune (he does not yet know the fate of his descendants): "That serpent I transfixed when we first came / from Sidon—you remember him, the snake / whose teeth I scattered on the ground, the seed / from which we saw a strange crop sprout—was he / a sacred serpent? If the gods' intent / in all they have inflicted is revenge/for that, then may I, too, become a snake: / let me be stretched into a serpent's shape."<sup>66</sup> He is then transformed into a snake himself, his wife following suit. Cadmus recognizes that his killing of Mars' snake has triggered an extended punishment from the gods.

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<sup>65</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. Frank Justus Miller and G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 3.50–130.

<sup>66</sup> "num sacer ille mea traiectus cuspide serpens / Cadmus ait fuerat, tum cum Sidone profectus / vipereos sparsi per humum, nova semina, dentes? / quem si cura deum tam certa vindicate ira, / ipse precor serpens in longam porrigar alvum." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.571–575. Translation Allen Mandelbaum, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993).

In killing her snake, on the other hand, it turns out that Risamante has unwittingly lifted a curse. Fonte takes the tale of Thebes and revises it so that neither of her twin protagonists perishes in her pursuit of a kingdom and so that the killing of the snake actually results in a better life for a family. She thereby ensures that Risamante, while likened to Cadmus in terms of bravery, unlike him does not cause herself or others undue suffering, instead always aiding those in need.

After dispatching the snake, in a scene similar to Bradamante's tumble into a cave where Melissa and Merlin predict the success of her descendants in *Orlando furioso*, Risamante is summoned into a cave by a bodiless voice.<sup>67</sup> Upon entering, she finds a woman and her young son. She learns that they have taken refuge in this cave for twelve years, hiding from the woman's husband, who had threatened to kill his wife when he discovered the existence of the boy, who is illegitimate. The killing of the snake is supposed to have coincided with the death of the husband, and therefore Risamante's act has set the two prisoners free. Fonte takes care to again point out Risamante's unsurpassed valor, writing:

E sappi che quel drago esser consunto  
Non deve per valor d'alcun barone,  
Ma per man d'un vergine gentile  
Che non ha paragon da Battro a Thile.<sup>68</sup>

As Virginia Cox has noted, unlike the parallel scene in Ariosto in which the spirit of Merlin is present, the disembodied voice Risamante hears belongs to the enchantress who inhabits the cave, making this scene take place in an entirely feminine sphere.<sup>69</sup> Paola Malpezzi-Price points

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<sup>67</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 2–3.

<sup>68</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 3.36.

<sup>69</sup> Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 180.

out that the enchantress herself, who reveals Risamante's future through a magic mirror, calls Risamante "figlia" repeatedly, acting as another parental stand-in for the warrior.<sup>70</sup> In the ottava above, Fonte not only underscores that Risamante is a greater warrior than all others, but she specifically highlights her gender difference, using the term "vergine gentile." Fonte seems to indicate that women like the mother in this case do not always need a male savior.

Another, subtler way in which Fonte depicts Risamante as superior to her male counterparts is through the contrast between Risamante and Risardo, the Thracian knight whose name is so similar to the female protagonist's that some sort of equivalence between the two is suggested. Risardo's quests are always changing: first, he wants to go to Egypt to help a dwarf whose lady has been wrongfully accused of murdering her uncle. While journeying there, he learns of the tournament in Greece and the beauty of Celsidea, so he switches course. He then meets a lady named Odoria who is on her way to consult the oracle at Delphi. Attracted by her beauty, he decides to accompany her, much to the dwarf's chagrin:

Poi che prego non val, pianto o lamento  
Perché Risardo altro cammin non prenda,  
Partesi il nano irato e mal contento  
E fa che la sua ingiuria ognun intenda,  
Per trovar uom più fido al suo talento  
Che l'innocente giovane defenda...<sup>71</sup>

The enraged dwarf, unsuccessful in his pleading with Risardo to stick to his original plan, wants to ruin Risardo's reputation in revenge, spreading word of his inconstancy. Risamante's reputation, on the other hand, remains perfectly intact because she fulfills her obligations. She is

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<sup>70</sup> Malpezzi-Price, *Moderata Fonte*, 108.

<sup>71</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 4.48.

acclaimed throughout the world. In the first canto, the maiden who relays the story of the queen of Dacia is seeking Risamante's help with a problem. Though Fonte leaves this thread unresolved so that we neither learn what the problem is nor see Risamante's solution, the maiden describes Risamante as "un guerrier d'aspetto ardito e franco...[che] vince tutti i casi gravi, / Tanto è maggior la sua d'ogni possanza."<sup>72</sup> Again Risamante is depicted as being stronger and more capable than all other knights, but in this case it is hearsay; the maiden does not know Risamante's name, only knowing her "per fama."<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Risamante, unlike Risardo, does not stray from her mission when given the opportunity to do so. When Nicobaldo asks her to free his wife Lucimena from imprisonment in a castle, Risamante agrees to do so, declaring her willingness to accept every challenge:

Allor ch'io trovo il modo  
D'espormi a qualche impresa perigliosa,  
Non mi ritiro indietro, anzi più godo  
Quando si tien per impossibil cosa.  
Che di disciorre ogni intricato nodo  
Deve aver l'alma pronta e desiosa  
Ogni buon cavalier quando alla gente  
Giova, come fu questo del serpente.<sup>74</sup>

She explains her own attitude toward the adventures of knighthood in the first four lines and then broadens her scope to comment on every good knight's responsibilities to the people to aid them. Having said this, however, she then makes clear that she will not embark on this particular quest

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<sup>72</sup> Fonte, 1.51–52.

<sup>73</sup> Fonte, 1.51.

<sup>74</sup> Fonte, 5.71.

until after her primary aim of retaking Armenia has been accomplished.<sup>75</sup> She is not easily distracted like Risardo or the knights in Ariosto whose adventures frequently take them in new directions, further and further from their supposed goals.

We have established that Risamante, orphaned as a child, becomes a hero, and that Celidante's role was essential in cultivating these heroic qualities in his ward. We have not yet addressed, however, why being an orphan raised by an adoptive parent might make Risamante more likely to become a hero than she would be had she been raised by her own parents. As with the heroes of the *Furioso* and *Meschino*, I propose that it is the sense of vulnerability Risamante experienced as a child separated from her family that contributes to her success as a knight. Risamante's vulnerability is manifested in several ways. Like all warriors, she is physically vulnerable, but she appears better able to withstand the trauma of combat than her enemies. If we apply Tamara Neal's formulation for ancient Greek heroes to those of the Renaissance, Risamante's endurance of her injuries makes her worthy of glory.<sup>76</sup> During a pause in the poem's last duel, Risamante is the "guerrier [che] non mostra di riposo / Aver bisogno e sta con ardimento," while "L'altro stassi appoggiato in gran pensieri / Com'uom che di sua impresa poco spera."<sup>77</sup> Risamante grows impatient with the pause and re-initiates combat. When her opponent finally manages to strike her and draw blood, she reacts with wrath and reciprocates with the decisive blow of the fight.<sup>78</sup> It is no coincidence that Fonte uses the word "furiosa" to describe Risamante here, echoing Ariosto.<sup>79</sup> She is endowed with the strength and anger of Orlando, yet she applies it appropriately in the context of combat rather than losing her senses and wreaking

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<sup>75</sup> Fonte, 6.82–84.

<sup>76</sup> See Introduction of this study. Tamara Neal, *The Wounded Hero: Non-Fatal Injury in Homer's Iliad* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 15–16.

<sup>77</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 13.49.

<sup>78</sup> Fonte, 13.62.

<sup>79</sup> Fonte, 13.61.

havoc across the countryside as Orlando does in the course of his fury.<sup>80</sup> At a moment of extreme vulnerability, in heroic fashion she moves forward despite the pain of her injury.

Even more relevant is Risamante's emotional vulnerability. As Finucci points out, in seeking out her rightful inheritance of half her father's kingdom, Risamante is not just searching for political gain. She also wants to regain her place in her father's family (emphasis again being placed on the father, the mother having predeceased him).<sup>81</sup> This is the second reason, returning to Girard, for which the concept of mimetic desire is not fully applicable to Risamante and Biondaura. Their objects of desire differ: Biondaura seeks to rule, but Risamante seeks first to reclaim her familial identity, and then to ensure that her descendants will prosper in the manner she has seen in the enchantress's mirror, discussed further below.<sup>82</sup> Though cared for as a child, Risamante has nevertheless been deprived of the protection and comfort of her parents. In the second canto we learn that after the death of her mother, Risamante's father no longer even considered her a daughter.<sup>83</sup> In his will, her father has either forgotten or chosen to ignore her, leaving everything to Biondaura while "l'altra pur non noma," "not even nam[ing] the other."<sup>84</sup> Without a name, to her family Risamante becomes simply "l'altra," the other, an identity-less copy of her royal sister. Biondaura herself denies her sister's existence:

Ma la sorella simulò con arte  
Benché da molti avesse inteso il vero;  
E così fé risponderli da parte  
Di lei che non avria sì di leggiero

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<sup>80</sup> Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Finucci, "Fonte and Women's Chivalric Romances," 31.

<sup>82</sup> Here I disagree with Finucci and D'Alessandro Behr, who view the twins' desire as mimetic. Valeria Finucci, "La scrittura epico-cavalleresca al femminile: Moderata Fonte e 'Tredici canti del Floridoro,'" *Annali d'Italianistica* 12 (1994): 225; D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman*, 55.

<sup>83</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.31.

<sup>84</sup> Fonte, 2.35.

Pensato, non che mai creduto, ch'ella  
Esser potesse a lei carnal sorella.

Ch'una che n'ebbe il fato in man condusse  
D'un ladro che la uccise di sua mano;  
Ma quando ben colei che 'l ciel produsse  
Seco fosse ella, e ciò le fosse piano,  
Non pretendea che sua di ragion fusse  
La metà di quel regno ch'avea in mano,  
Poi che morendo il re la regia soma  
Lascia a lei sola e l'altra pur non noma.<sup>85</sup>

Biondaura is deceitful, pretending not to know that she has a living sister in order to maintain control of her dominions. Even if she were to acknowledge her sister, she makes clear that she would not share because their father left the inheritance only to her. While this may be a politically savvy move that allows Biondaura to perpetuate her rule, Fonte does not praise the princess for her cleverness. Instead the author depicts her unflatteringly, as someone who dissimulates for her own gain. She is described as “molle,” then, perhaps not only because she is not a warrior but also because she is morally weak.<sup>86</sup> Knowing that her mirror image Biondaura is the sole occupant of a space they were meant to share creates in Risamante a “giusto sdegno,” or a “just rage,” and prompts her to begin gathering an army.<sup>87</sup> Thus her rejection at the hands of her family motivates her to take heroic action.

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<sup>85</sup> Fonte, 2.34–35.

<sup>86</sup> Fonte, 2.30.

<sup>87</sup> Fonte, 2.36.

McCoy writes that awareness of one's own vulnerability, as well as the ability to recognize vulnerability in others, is essential to being a hero within the context of ancient Greek literature.<sup>88</sup> The *Iliad*, for example, "presents vulnerability as central to the possibility of a strong socio-political bond, especially insofar as the acknowledgement of human mortality is necessary for the thriving of both individuals and communities."<sup>89</sup> Recognizing vulnerability in others and empathizing with them helps create a sense of community through the acknowledgement that despite potential ideological differences, everyone is subject to the same basic human needs and emotions. Risamante exhibits the kind of empathy engendered by vulnerability that McCoy describes. Part of her duty as a knight errant is to aid those in distress without recompense; perceiving shared goals with others in distress, Risamante is able to use her noble acts on their behalf to further her own objectives. Her plan is to recruit those she assists for her army:

Armata ogni città cerca, ogni regno,  
E giova a questo e a quel perché le tante  
Sue cortesie dian opra al suo disegno,  
Fa beneficio a questo e a quel signore,  
Perché al bisogno suo le dia favore.<sup>90</sup>

In a departure from Ariosto's meandering characters, Fonte has Risamante's peripheral encounters function not as distractions but rather as progressions toward her ultimate goal. Risamante's technique of assisting those in need so that they might later come to her aid in her battle against her sister is sound strategy; Gracisa, a lady-in-waiting to Biondaura, reports in Canto 9 that the Armenian queen, besieged by Risamante, has sent for help, but that many have

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<sup>88</sup> McCoy, *Wounded Heroes*, ix.

<sup>89</sup> McCoy, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.36.



refused the request because they respect Risamante too much: “di Risamante aman l’ardire, / Amano il suo valor, l’audacia, e l’arte, / E son con l’arme lor dalla sua parte.”<sup>91</sup> Her acts of courage evidently win the populace over to her side. This connection between the needs of strangers and the needs of the protagonist generates the socio-political bond of which McCoy writes. As the two parties exchange services to protect each other, recognizing within their vulnerability a common humanity, a political community is born: Risamante’s army.

In the last extant canto of the poem, we see the culmination of Risamante’s recruitment efforts as she marches on Biondaura’s city with her giant army magically summoned by Celidante in one night. As so often happens in epic, the final battle is reduced to a duel between the two leaders, Risamante and her sister’s proxy, Cloridabello. Risamante quickly shows herself to be a more accomplished and ready warrior than her opponent, striking the last blow of the duel by critically wounding him in the head. Rather than finishing him off as Aeneas does Turnus in the *Aeneid* and Ruggiero does Rodomonte in Ariosto, however, Risamante chooses to spare Cloridabello.<sup>92</sup> Fonte describes this decision as one born from compassion:

La guerriera, c’ha il cor molle e umano,  
Vistosi il meglio aver di quella briga  
Gli corre sopra, e con pietosa mano  
Dell’elmo sanguinoso il capo sbriga.<sup>93</sup>

Then, again with “gran pietà,” Risamante takes Cloridabello to the medical tent, treating him not as a prisoner but as a king.<sup>94</sup> This gesture marks the very last ottava of the poem. Risamante is

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<sup>91</sup> Fonte, 9.51.

<sup>92</sup> For an analysis of the similarities between these three final duels, see D’Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman*, 45–62.

<sup>93</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 13.63.

<sup>94</sup> Fonte, 13.70.

more merciful than Ruggiero and demonstrates even more *pietas* than Aeneas, making her character utterly blameless and therefore perhaps superior in her display of honor. While D'Alessandro Behr agrees with this judgment, she and Finucci also understand Risamante's moment of pity for Cloridabello to be an indication that she is less inclined to violence than her predecessors because of her gender.<sup>95</sup> I would challenge that view since there is ample evidence in the poem of Risamante's use of force, and since, as D'Alessandro Behr points out, there is also a male precedent for sparing an enemy in the *Furioso*, when the warrior Zerbino chooses not to kill the young Medoro.<sup>96</sup>

Finucci also interprets the recurrence of the word "molle," first used in 2.30 to differentiate Biondaura from her sister but now used to describe Risamante's leniency, as evidence that the two sisters have now become mirror images in all respects, including in personality.<sup>97</sup> Even if Risamante is described as "molle" in her decision to spare Cloridabello, and even if he confuses her with her sister (after, of course, a blow to the head), Risamante retains the crucial attribute that differentiates her from her sister until the very end: she is always a "guerriero armata."<sup>98</sup> It is this difference that sets this pair of twins apart from the tradition of the sacrificial crisis, and this difference that explains the absence in Fonte of the mortal violence

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<sup>95</sup> On Risamante's moral superiority, see D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman*, 56–58. On Risamante's gender as a factor in her mercy, D'Alessandro Behr writes "Fonte implicitly criticizes the endings of these earlier epics by showing that in the climactic duel her lady knight does not follow the same pattern of unnecessary violence. [...] in Canto 13 [Risamante] finds a way out of [the male epic warrior] archetype, accepting her femininity and a more humane victory that involves sparing her enemy." D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman*, 36. Finucci asserts that "Women warriors, [Fonte] seems to suggest, have different issues at stake when they engage in combat: respect for what they stand for is of primary importance, she argues, while useless violence is better left to men." Valeria Finucci, "When the Mirror Lies: Sisterhood Reconsidered in Moderata Fonte's *Thirteen Cantos of Floridoro*," in Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, eds., *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2017), 125.

<sup>96</sup> As we have seen, Risamante is violent when she kills Macandro in Canto 2 and the snake in Canto 3, as well as when she severely injures Cloridabello in Canto 13. The Zerbino/Medoro scene occurs in Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, 19.10, and is discussed in D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman*, 56.

<sup>97</sup> Finucci, "When the Mirror Lies," 118–119, 124–125.

<sup>98</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 2.30.

that Girard would expect when two opponents are reflections of each other. Biondaura, in the position of the rival, is not even present at the fight; her “molle” and “delicata” nature manifests itself in fear for her own well-being, whereas Risamante’s heart, which we have always known to be courageous, is “molle” only when she is merciful to another.<sup>99</sup>

Risamante’s mercy can instead be understood within McCoy’s framework. Seeing Cloridabello on the brink of death inspires empathy in the female knight, reminding her of their shared mortality and humanity, regardless of their recent hostilities. Indeed, this is the initial step toward reconciliation between the two sides, since Risamante’s victory means that she will now become queen and reign over her sister’s supporters and her own. Her imminent leadership role may be another reason she decides to save her opponent, a political move to avoid alienating her subjects. A political community again emerges through one character’s identification with another’s vulnerability.

The political community that starts with Risamante will, over generations, become the political community led by the Medici family, who are, according to Fonte, descendants of the female warrior. As mentioned earlier, like Virgil’s Aeneas and Ariosto’s Bradamante, in Canto 3 Risamante in the cave is given a glimpse of her descendants, with the aid of the enchantress’s mirror. In Ariosto’s version of this scene, Bradamante’s future family members take shape as spirits called forth by the *maga* Melissa. Fonte’s rendering of the foretelling instead through a mirror recalls the portrait of Biondaura from the previous canto. Rather than seeing her own reflection or Biondaura, however, Risamante observes those who will come after her, in effect seeing the difference between herself and her twin sister, whose lineage will not include such illustrious people. She sees not a son like Bradamante sees, but her daughter, Salarisa (whose

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<sup>99</sup> Fonte, 2.30.

name echoes hers, as opposed to the father's, which is not even mentioned). Salarisa will marry the son of the knight Floridoro and the princess Celsidea, Floricelso (again in a Fontean refusal to give the male precedence, the name of the child reflects both parents, not just the father) and their children's children will eventually become the Medici.

In Girardian terms, Risamante's ultimate object of desire, which her sister in her ignorance of the future cannot share, is for her progeny to thrive as demonstrated in the magic mirror. She knows that she is destined to create a prestigious line and that restoring herself to the Armenian throne is a vital part of this destiny. By referencing the Medici, Fonte shows us that despite the prevailing tradition, it is possible to establish a new social order without the killing of Cloridabello or either sister. She adopts a non-Girardian perspective on violence and the state. In addition, by employing twin female rivals to demonstrate this perspective, she forges her own mode of conceptualizing women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. What on the surface may appear to be equivalent, she suggests, may mask a world of difference.

While Fonte makes an effort to differentiate her protagonists from those who come earlier in the epic tradition, her poem like her predecessors' creates a mythology that connects her contemporary patrons to the heroes who appear in the poem. Fonte's poem is dedicated to Venetian Bianca Capello (1548–1587) and Francesco de' Medici (1541–1587) in celebration of their recent marriage bringing together the two cities of Florence and Venice. She writes prefatory sonnets in their honor and includes the couple in the scenes that predict the future both in Canto 3 and Canto 13. Heroic ancestors such as Risamante and Floridoro bring glory and praise to prominent political families such as the Medici, whose bloodlines were under scrutiny during the Renaissance. In Fonte's post-Tridentine world, filial legitimacy was crucial, as suggested in Canto 3 when the mother and son in the cave are threatened with death for the son's

illegitimacy. When Fonte demonstrates that Risamante is worthy of her success because she has noble blood, she also provides at least a semblance of nobility where there may not have been actual evidence of it for Bianca Capello, whose background was ambiguous.<sup>100</sup> Not only does Risamante's moment of self-discovery prove her legitimacy and validate her as a hero, it also brings glory to her descendants.

*I TREDICI CANTI DEL FLORIDORO: FLORIDORO*

Floridoro, on the other hand, knows he is a fully legitimate child and a noble from the outset, but he must nevertheless prove his heroism in the course of the poem because of his status as an immature knight. Although the title of the work is reserved for the male protagonist, Floridoro has a much smaller role in the thirteen existing cantos than his female counterpart. He is the adolescent son of the king of Mycenae who comes to Athens with his father for King Cleardo's tournament. He by no means compares to Risamante in terms of knightly ability because of his youth. Since he is not yet a fully-fledged knight, his escapades are much more limited than Risamante's. Additionally, because the poem is unfinished, there is no way of knowing how extensively Fonte intended to develop his heroism, aside from the fact that she gave the work his name, but there are nonetheless many indications that he has the makings of a true hero.

Floridoro's first appearance is not until Canto 5, when he is listed among the arrivals at the court of Athens. While Floridoro is not technically an orphan by the Renaissance definition because his father accompanies him to the joust, he is nevertheless deprived of his mother and lives as a child with a foster family. As others have noted, he is described as young with

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<sup>100</sup> Finucci, "Fonte and Women's Chivalric Romances," 9n26.

feminine features; his beauty recalls that of a typical Petrarchan lady with blonde hair and white skin.<sup>101</sup> In fact, Fonte writes that “Ogni sua parte fuor che la favella / Par d’una giovenetta illustra e bella.”<sup>102</sup> If not for his voice, he would appear to be a young girl. Virginia Cox reads this fashioning of the character as aligning with Fonte’s “tendency to an alternative scale of masculine values,” by which men are judged by their ability to exhibit fortitude in love rather than their ability to demonstrate physical prowess.<sup>103</sup> Floridoro, who “parea d’Amor la propria imago,” or is the image of Love, represents purity with his assumed name, Biancador, and his white armor, which usually signifies the chastity of a female knight like Tasso’s Clorinda.<sup>104</sup> He also defends Celsidea from an attempted rape, showing his undying love for her and proving his virtue according to this new set of values, although there is no question that he is also a capable fighter.

Floridoro’s beauty immediately endears him to others, especially his elders who are given to parenting him. When he meets Cleardo, the king forms an instant bond with the youth: “rivolgendo al dolce viso il guardo / Così gli piacque e in tanta grazia il tolse, / ...Sempre l’amò da figlio e ‘l tenne seco.”<sup>105</sup> While Silvarte, Floridoro’s father, is present at the joust with him, Fonte never involves him in the storyline. Instead, she depicts Floridoro’s relationship with King Cleardo as paternal, despite its possibly homoerotic tone. In Canto 7, she repeats this sentiment when Floridoro tries and fails to obtain permission from the king to join the joust. The cause of the king’s refusal is “per troppo amore”; he thinks Floridoro is too young to participate because of the danger involved in the sport. Fonte writes:

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<sup>101</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 187–188; Finucci, “Fonte and Women’s Chivalric Romances,” 14–16.

<sup>102</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 5.46.

<sup>103</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 189.

<sup>104</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 5.46. Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 188.

<sup>105</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 5.48.

L'ama da figlio, e ha per conseguente  
Timor di lui che non patisca oltraggio,  
E quanto più lo prega ei men consente,  
Che vol goder più tempo il suo bel raggio.  
Fanciul lo chiama incauto e imprudente  
Che cerchi far sì periglioso saggio,  
Che tenti esporsi ad un periglio certo  
Essendo all'armi inerto e poco esperto.<sup>106</sup>

Cleardo, like Atlante in Boiardo and Tasso, fears that his protégé will come to harm if he should enter the tournament because of his youth and lack of experience. He does not believe that Floridoro would acquit himself well in the lists. Cleardo also has a personal motivation for preventing Floridoro from jousting, which is “che vol goder più tempo il suo bel raggio”—he wants to spend more time in the company of the boy’s beautiful radiance.

As Cox notes, Fonte’s representation of Floridoro’s femininity and propensity for loving actions is particularly apparent in his reaction when he believes his foster mother to be on the brink of death.<sup>107</sup> Filardo, his dear friend and foster brother, intuits from afar Floridoro’s yearning to joust and sets up a ruse so that his friend might be allowed to withdraw from the king’s side. Filardo forges a letter from his father reporting the illness and impending death of his mother and has a messenger deliver it to Floridoro. The letter requests that both Filardo and Floridoro, whom she also views as a son (“in loco ha figliuolo”), return to Crete to say their goodbyes.<sup>108</sup> Upon reading the letter, Floridoro bursts into tears:

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<sup>106</sup> Fonte, 7.10.

<sup>107</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 188. She contrasts Floridoro’s intense reaction with Rinaldo’s disregard for his foster mother’s feelings when he leaves home to go to battle in Tasso.

<sup>108</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 7.20.

Floridor legge e si conturba tanto,  
Tanto s'intenerisce di pietade,  
Che non può raffrenar dagli occhi il pianto  
Che 'l bel viso rigando in sen gli cade.  
Si venne allora a rimembrar di quanto  
Passato avea nelle dittee contrade,  
Quando in Creta passò tenero infante  
Ove fatte gli fur carezze tante.<sup>109</sup>

Floridoro's tears and his immediate nostalgia for Filardo's mother not only demonstrate his divergence from typical gender roles, but also his "pietade" or *pietas*, the compassion and duty toward family for which Aeneas is famed. The next ottava and a half are dedicated to his feeling of obligation toward Filardo's mother, as he realizes that he can never repay her for what she has done for him; he has "una obligazion stabile e ferma / Nel cor le avea da non pagarla mai."<sup>110</sup> He sees her maternal love for him confirmed in the request to see him on her deathbed, and he begs the king to grant him leave "per veder quella a cui tant'obligo have."<sup>111</sup> The attachment to this substitute mother is so strong that even "l desio del giostrar più nol molesta."<sup>112</sup> Floridoro gives up the goal he has sought thus far in the poem in an instant for the sake of his foster parent. Floridoro feels an overwhelming affection for Filardo's mother in part due to her role as a surrogate for his own mother. The details of her presumed death are not provided, but she must have died when Floridoro was very young, since Floridoro traveled to Crete as an infant to be

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<sup>109</sup> Fonte, 7.21.

<sup>110</sup> Fonte, 7.22–23.

<sup>111</sup> Fonte, 7.22–23.

<sup>112</sup> Fonte, 7.24.



cared for by the foster mother. The absence of Floridoro's mother is a factor in creating the vulnerability necessary to his development as a hero.

His childhood on the island of Crete also reminds us of McCoy's observations in Chapter 3 of *Wounded Heroes*, where she considers the case of Philoctetes in Sophocles's eponymous play. She writes that Philoctetes occupies a liminal space, both physically and socially, that makes him emotionally vulnerable. He lives on an island, at the threshold of land and sea. The island, Lemnos, is devoid of any other human occupant. Though he maintains a human life for himself, refusing to become a "wild man," he is at the same time removed from civilization, without any companionship.<sup>113</sup> While Floridoro was not isolated on Crete, he was nevertheless removed from his family, as was Risamante as a child. He was positioned at the liminal space between his blood relatives and his adoptive family, on an island, which is a liminal space in and of itself. Furthermore, Floridoro's heroic status is also at a threshold: he is no longer a child, but not yet fully a knight. The fact that he must disguise himself and assume a pseudonym to join the ranks of the other knights shows that, even if he is physically prepared, his youth prevents him from being considered one of their number. He is thus marginalized and vulnerable, which stokes his desire to prove himself.

Floridoro's physical strength is demonstrated by the ease with which he defeats the other competitors in the joust, but his only opportunity to show true heroism of the sort Risamante regularly displays arrives when he discovers the Persian king Acreonte's plot to rape Celsidea, with whom Floridoro has fallen in love. Floridoro furtively enters the palace unnoticed and spies on the king's banquet, losing his way as he is leaving and ending up in Celsidea's room. After confessing his love for her in a note, he escapes by tying a rope to the balcony and lowering

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<sup>113</sup> McCoy, *Wounded Heroes*, 63–65.

himself to the ground outside. He soon hears Acreonte and his brother Marcane nearby, discussing their plans to break into Celsidea's room. Although Acreonte is a king, making him older and more authoritative than Floridoro, the youth is not intimidated and immediately steps in:

Quando il buon Floridor l'oltraggio intende  
Che di far pensa il cavalliero audace,  
E che conosce il danno e che comprende  
Che seguir ne potria se soffre e tace,  
Subitamente in man la spade prende  
E grida: — Ahi, rio ladron, ladron rapace  
Ben sei, se credi in tutto e stolto e cieco  
Far questo scorno al regio sangue greco.<sup>114</sup>

He fearlessly challenges the offenders, first wounding Acreonte and then breaking Marcane's sword in two. Even unarmed, he easily defeats them, but Acreonte is accidentally killed by his brother, who mistakes him for Floridoro. Marcane does not realize this at first and speaks to Floridoro as if he is Acreonte, at which Floridoro again exhibits his worthy *pietas*:

Floridor, che comprende il grande errore  
Del cavalier, che cerca a far sicura  
Al fratel quella vita che gli ha tolta,  
Senza parlar con gran pietà l'ascolta.<sup>115</sup>

Floridoro understands Marcane's mistake and, despite the fact that he is an enemy, nevertheless treats him with respect, sparing him, just as Risamante spares Cloridabello. This capacity to

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<sup>114</sup> Fonte, *Floridoro*, 11.59.

<sup>115</sup> Fonte, 11.66.

identify with the vulnerability in others is characteristic of a hero, as opposed to someone who believes himself superior to others, as Macandro and Acreonte do. In addition, as with the duel between Risamante and Cloridabello, this fight has political repercussions: Marcane vows in public to avenge his brother's death, and the other foreign kings visiting Athens ally themselves with him, planning to return to wage war against the Greeks.<sup>116</sup> Though there is an act of fratricide that precedes the creation of this political community, Fonte nevertheless departs from Girard's scheme here because Acreonte's death is accidental, not the result of a sibling rivalry over a shared goal. A contrast is also drawn between Risamante and Floridoro in the aftermath of their respective fights: Floridoro's opponent seeks vengeance, while Risamante's does not. In both cases there is a misunderstanding of the identity of the perpetrator. Marcane blames the loss of his brother on Floridoro, while Cloridabello believes his beloved Biondaura has injured him, which works to Risamante's advantage. Risamante's experience allows her to calculate when she can spare enemies without fear of retribution, whereas Floridoro has yet to learn how to appropriately administer his heroic empathy.

Believing Floridoro not yet worthy of knighthood, King Cleardo does everything in his power to prevent the youth from jousting, similar in this respect to the magician Atlante. But like Risamante, Floridoro does have a father figure who wants to encourage his participation in the tournament. This is, in fact, Celidante, who makes a brief appearance here in Canto 7. Celidante steals a horse from a nobleman to give to Floridoro, again providing a hero with the means to fight. Fonte introduces the wizard again thus:

Il mago era nomato Celidante

Il qual di tutti i principi avea cura;

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<sup>116</sup> Fonte, 11.82–88.

Dico di quei che d'animo prestante  
Erano e di benigna, alma natura;  
Ed è quel ch'allevato ha Risamante  
E ch'aiutarla e favorir procura;  
Dopo lei Floridoro ei prezza e ama  
E di giovarli e d'esaltarlo ha brama.<sup>117</sup>

Celidante cares for all princes who have benign natures and a dashing spirit; in other words, heroes like Risamante and Floridoro. Fonte is careful to make clear that Celidante prefers Risamante, but he still esteems and loves Floridoro and wants to help him. He sees the youth as a son: “pensiero / Avea di Floridor come figlio.”<sup>118</sup> Celidante’s reappearance as mentor here creates a connection between the two protagonists not otherwise evident. Floridoro is a young boy whose action takes place completely within the sphere of the Greek court. Risamante is a grown female knight who is allowed freedom of movement and travels the world seeking justice after her inheritance is purloined. Fonte reverses the gender roles of the protagonists, creating an idealized world in which a woman, unlike the author’s Venetian contemporaries, can claim the spotlight and move about freely in public, whereas the male youth’s feats are minor in comparison and confined to one physical area. Both protagonists, however, experience a loss of family as children and in the course of overcoming this obstacle, gain the strength to eventually become epic heroes.

Risamante and Floridoro are model characters in a chivalric poem that, even as it appears to follow Ariosto’s blueprint closely, strays substantially from tradition. Fonte creates dual non-traditional protagonists, the female knight whose primary goal is completely unrelated to

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<sup>117</sup> Fonte, 7.32.

<sup>118</sup> Fonte, 11.76.

marriage and the young, somewhat feminine boy whose strength lies in the purity of his love.

While a few virile adult male heroes are present in the poem, none captures the reader's attention as does Risamante nor holds the titular role as does Floridoro. Both of these protagonists bring to light the importance of emotional vulnerability in a hero and show how those abandoned by their own natal families might comprise the foundation of noble lineages with deep family ties.

Moderata Fonte's portrayal of these heroes is unique among the four female-authored poems studied here because she is the only one to have created her own organic plot. Even more singular is the fact that Fonte incorporated events from her own life in her poem, a technique heretofore unseen in epic, making not only her characters but also herself an orphan-hero.

## CHAPTER 4: HOMELAND AND HOMECOMING IN SARROCCHI'S *SCANDERBEIDE*

### INTRODUCTION

Margherita Sarrocchi's 1623 poem, *Scanderbeide*, marks the first historical heroic epic to be written by a woman. While Tullia d'Aragona transformed Andrea da Barberino's prose romance into a poem, and Moderata Fonte mirrored the romantic style of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* in her *Floridoro*, Sarrocchi made the pioneering choice to structure her poem after the model of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. As in the *Liberata*, the orphan-hero has a significant role in Sarrocchi's poem. The author makes this figure even more prominent by creating two major orphan-hero characters. This chapter studies these two warriors in the *Scanderbeide*, arguing that Sarrocchi's portrayal of the orphan-hero has implications for the broader themes of homeland and homecoming in epic poetry.

I begin with an exploration of the poem's protagonist, Scanderbeg (also referred to as Alessandro, or Alexander in English), the Albanian prince who returns to his birth religion of Christianity. First, I examine his relationship with the sultan Amuratte and the suffering Scanderbeg withstands as a child, which contribute to the development of his character. Then I show how his natural ferocity also lends itself to his becoming a hero, followed by an explanation and analysis of how his conversion to Christianity compares with that of his epic predecessor, Tasso's Clorinda. I conclude that Scanderbeg's homecoming is defined through his conversion rather than through his return to Croia, and that he bears a closer resemblance to Odysseus and other heroes of ancient epic than to those of contemporary epic. I then turn to Silveria, the huntress who lives in the wild but is drawn into society by the sultan's daughter Rosmonda, who insists that she join the war effort. Silveria's return to society despite seemingly feral tendencies that would traditionally remove her from the realm of the human is another

example of a homecoming narrative for an orphan-hero. In addition, Silveria's homecoming is characterized by a proto-feminist agenda that is not generally present elsewhere in the poem. I propose that through both Scanderbeg and Silveria, Sarrocchi redefines epic homecoming, thereby expanding the nature of the genre, in and of itself a proto-feminist act.

#### BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Among the lesser known authors considered here, Margherita Sarrocchi (c.1560–1617) holds several distinctions. The first is that more information about her life has survived, though of course it is still paltry when compared with that of celebrated male authors of the period. This increase in available records on Sarrocchi is due to her prestige in the realms of both literature and science; as Rinaldina Russell puts it, the poet was a “celebrity” in her time, though her fame did not endure beyond the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> Sarrocchi, Neapolitan by birth, moved to a monastery in Rome when her father died. Her father left her education in the care of his friend the Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto (1514–1585).<sup>2</sup> In another example of a relationship between mentor and mentee that proved formative, the Cardinal, who was also the Vatican librarian, provided the young Sarrocchi with an extremely robust education.<sup>3</sup> She studied under esteemed teachers from the Roman Curia, such as author and literary critic Rinaldo Corso, who taught her Latin and Italian poetry, and mathematician and professor Luca Valerio, who taught her

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<sup>1</sup> Rinaldina Russell, “Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the *Scanderbeide*,” in *Scanderbeide: The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), 2. Russell attributes Sarrocchi's loss of fame to the later indifference toward Italian literary output in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, compounded by the fact that Sarrocchi was a female writer.

<sup>2</sup> Russell, “The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*,” 4. No mention is made of her mother.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 11.

mathematics and science.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned in earlier chapters, such access to learning was rare for girls and women, and the female authors examined here represent the exception to the rule. Their ability to publish was contingent upon male advocates like Sirleto who ensured their educations early on and those who facilitated connections with printers later. Sarrocchi in particular reaped the benefits of her studies, becoming well-versed in both the humanities and the sciences. Her aptitude for learning was commented on by many contemporary authors, including, as Russell lists, Neapolitan scholar Bartolomeo Chioccarelli, writer Cristofano Bronzini, and historian, poet, and theologian Giulio Cesare Capaccio.<sup>5</sup> Virginia Cox notes that French biographer Hilarion de Coste also proclaims Sarrocchi to be the equal of Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso in his *Les eloges et les vies des reynes, des princesses, et des dames illustres en pieté, en courage, et en doctrine* (1647).<sup>6</sup> From the age of fifteen as she began to publish her works, Sarrocchi's circle of admirers expanded.<sup>7</sup> Russell postulates that it was Sarrocchi's invitation to the Colonna palazzo, a gathering place for intellectuals, that launched her career in Roman academic society.<sup>8</sup> She hosted a salon in her own home that was frequented by scholars from all backgrounds, including Galileo Galilei, with whom she had an extended professional correspondence concerning both literary and scientific matters.<sup>9</sup> She also counted among her professional contacts Torquato Tasso himself, to whom she sent sonnets (now lost), and who sent her some of his own in return.<sup>10</sup> Luca Valerio also remained one of her most fervent supporters; Meredith Ray observes that he

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<sup>4</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 5.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 132.

<sup>8</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 8–9.

<sup>9</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 10–11; Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 134. For more on the correspondence between Sarrocchi and Galileo, see Meredith Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, ed. Sharon Ruston, Alice Jenkins, and Catherine Belling (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 9.



looms larger in the historical record of Sarrocchi's life than her husband, a man with the last name of Biraga whom she married in 1588.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary biographies reveal little of her personal life. In contrast, information about her professional life abounds. Sarrocchi was an active participant in scholarly debate of the day, becoming the first female member of the Accademia degli Umoristi and later a founding member of the Accademia degli Ordinati, both remarkable feats for a woman at the time. Of her participation in these academies, Bronzini writes:

Si senti questa singular donna trattare con tanta eccellenza, della natura, e moto de' Cieli, e di cose veramente profittevoli, e celesti, che come col moto della sua lingua rese quasi immobili le menti di quelli, che l'udivano, così fu cagione, che ciascheduno con ammirazione grandissima la incominciasse intentamente a riguardare, et altamente poi ad interrogare; fra i quali, il Galileo di Toscana, alle cui quistioni, non solo pronta, e prudentemente rispose la saggia Donna, con altissime, e ben fondate rissoluzioni, ma ella appresso mosse a' lui dubbi sí profondi, & alti, che 'l diede molto che fare per buona pezza.<sup>12</sup>

Her intelligence and the readiness with which she responded to questions, even those of Galileo, deeply impressed those around her. These sentiments are echoed in the words of other contemporary chroniclers of Sarrocchi, including Gian Vittorio Rossi, who wrote "I saw her often as she recited very elegant poems with witty epigrammatic endings to the general admiration of the entire audience,"<sup>13</sup> and Chioccarelli, who described her as "a brilliant poetess,

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<sup>11</sup> Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 133. This is all the information we have about Sarrocchi's husband.

<sup>12</sup> Cristofano Bronzini, *Della dignità, & nobiltà delle donne. Dialogo di Cristofano Bronzini d'Ancona. Diuiso in quattro settimane; e ciascheduna di esse in sei giornate* (Florence: Zanobi Pignoni, 1625), 135–136.

<sup>13</sup> "Nam saepe ego eam vidi, elegantissima argutissimeque conclusa epigrammata, summa eorum qui aderant approbatione, recitare." Gian Vittorio Rossi, *Pinacotheca imaginum illustrium doctrinae vel ingenii laude virorum, qui auctore superstite diem suum obierunt* (Cologne: Jodocus Kalcovius, 1645), 260, Google Play Books. Translation from Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 11.

famous in our day throughout Italy. This woman, admired and celebrated in our age, was not only learned in the study of poetry but also renowned for her distinction in philosophy and in nearly all the sciences and disciplines.”<sup>14</sup> When she died a widow in 1617, her death certificate read: “The renowned Margarita Sarochia, of Naples: through her intellect, wisdom, and through every literary genre raised above the rest of her sex; learned in the natural sciences, in theology, in mathematics.”<sup>15</sup>

While she garnered much well-documented praise from her associates, she also had several detractors, due to her reputation for unabashed criticism of others and, inevitably, due to her gender.<sup>16</sup> The most high-profile of these was the great Neapolitan poet Giambattista Marino (1569–1625), at first a colleague with whom Sarrocchi exchanged sonnets. Their friendship soured, however, when Marino became embittered by her criticism of his work and famously referred to her with disdain as a “loquacissima pica” in his best-known poem, *L’Adone* (1623).<sup>17</sup> Rossi, too, made disparaging remarks about her pride in his *Pinacotheca*, writing “She maintained that whatever she had said was to be taken as a response of the oracle of Delphi,” and “She considered herself better than anyone [...] For that reason she made enemies of many men of letters.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “Margarita Sarrochia perspicassimi ingenii poetria nostra tempestate in universa Italia celeberrima, imo non in poeticis tanummodo studiis erudite, sed philosophiae etiam, atque omnium fere scientiarum ac disciplinarum ornamentis illustris, quam aetas nostra admirata est, ac celebrat.” Bartolomeo Chioccarelli, *De illustribus scriptoribus qui in civitate et regno Neapolis ab orbe condito* (Naples: Vincenzo Ursini, 1780) [translated and transcribed in Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 133–134 and 235].

<sup>15</sup> “Margarita Sarochia Neap[olita]na clariss[im]a foemina: ingenio, sap[ienti]a, literarum omnium genere supra sexus conditionem evecta: Philosophicis, theologicis, Mathematicis disciplinis instructiss[im]a” Atto di morte, Archivio del Vicariato di Roma, *Mortuorum liber Ecclesiae Sanctissimi Salvatoris in suburra* [translated and transcribed in Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 134 and 235].

<sup>16</sup> Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 133–134.

<sup>17</sup> Giambattista Marino, *L’Adone*, ed. Giovanni Pozzi (Adelphi: Milano, 1988). E-book from series “La letteratura italiana Einaudi,” 2000, Internet Archive, 9.187.5; Russell, “The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*,” 12–13; Meredith Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi’s Letters to Galileo*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> “...non ab ea profectum quae posset errare, sed Delphis responsum existimari poscebat,” and “...omnibus se antepone[re] [...] ac multos & literatos viros ea causa adversos habebat.” Rossi, *Pinacotheca*, 260–261. Translation

Despite what others saw as a prideful belief in her own infallibility, Sarrocchi's correspondence with Galileo tells another story, since she sought his guidance as she edited her epic poem. Among her other works are sonnets, literary criticism, scientific essays, theological treatises, and letters, only some of which have survived, but it is the *Scanderbeide* that remains her most notable accomplishment.<sup>19</sup> It is distinct among the female-authored poems here also for the fact that there are two extant drafts, which allows for a deeper understanding of Sarrocchi's writing process. The first draft was published in 1606, with the completed version published posthumously in 1623. Sarrocchi sent material to Galileo with the request that he read it over "with an enemy eye":

Il favore che io prencipalmente desidero da lei è che rivegga il mio poema, con quella diligenza, che sia maggiore, e con occhio inimico, acciò ch'Ella vi noti ogni picciolo errore, e creda ch'io lo dica davvero e che tutto quell male ch'Ella mi dirà io la pigliarò a segno di gran bontà, e di grande affetione...<sup>20</sup>

Ray shows that Sarrocchi made repeated requests of this nature for Galileo's severest revisions to her poem, demonstrating that the poet did not believe herself incapable of error.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Ray writes that "Although Sarrocchi does not highlight her own position as a woman writer, her profound concerns about errors in the *Scanderbeide*, as well as language and style, suggest that she wished to preempt any criticism she might face in publishing a work of epic poetry."<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, epic was already generally considered the realm of male authors, but for Sarrocchi to specifically imitate Tasso's historical, Virgilian method was breaching a new frontier. As Cox

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from Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 10, 11–12. Other critics include Tommaso Stigliani, who "dismisses *La Scanderbeide* in a work of 1625 as fit only for wrapping fish." Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 167.

<sup>19</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 8.

<sup>20</sup> Margherita Sarrocchi to Galileo Galilei, July 29, 1611, in Meredith Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 55n82.

<sup>21</sup> Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ray, 29.

comments, Ariosto's style could be viewed as more feminine because it prioritizes love and errancy over war, but "this accusation could not be made against the reborn epic of Tasso, which sets out precisely to remasculinize epic and return it to the gravitas and structural stringency of the Homeric and Virgilian model."<sup>23</sup> Sarrocchi's choice of style was thus particularly daring, and her correspondence with Galileo shows the intention with which she approached the style and the language of the poem. In the contemporary academic debate over whether Ariosto or Tasso had formulated the better blueprint for epic, Galileo preferred Ariosto, which makes him a somewhat surprising choice as a consultant for Sarrocchi.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Ray convincingly argues that the scientist made a suitable editor for Sarrocchi because the two intellectuals shared the belief that Tuscan was the most appropriate language for literary endeavors. Since Galileo himself was Tuscan, and an established author, Sarrocchi could rely on him for linguistic advice.<sup>25</sup> He, in turn, benefitted from Sarrocchi's support and promotion of his own work, especially when it was questioned, both because of her standing in Roman society and her connection to Cardinal Sirleto.<sup>26</sup> In her letters she also turns to Galileo for assistance in the division of cantos, and mentions that she is leaving room to later fill in the names of the soldiers in the catalogue of the Italian army, wishing to nod to her friends and patrons—including Galileo and his family—by using their names. She dedicates the 1606 poem to Costanza Colonna, marchioness of Caravaggio (1556–1626), while the later version is dedicated to Giulia d'Este (1588–1645), daughter of the duke of Modena and Reggio and Virginia de' Medici, whose father was Cosimo I. Ultimately, however, Sarrocchi did not list Galileo in the 1623 edition of the poem. Critics

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<sup>23</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 166.

<sup>24</sup> Ray, *Margherita Sarrocchi's Letters to Galileo*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ray, 30.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this, see Ray, *Letters*, 32–40.

have surmised that her decision was due to his rupture with the Church, which may have affected the extent to which Sarrocchi desired to publicize their relationship.<sup>27</sup>

After having worked on revisions of the *Scanderbeide* until at least 1613, Sarrocchi died in 1617 and was buried in Rome.<sup>28</sup> Andrea Fei published the completed poem six years later. Though its earlier edition was widely lauded and criticized by diverse parties, the reception of the 1623 publication remains unclear.<sup>29</sup>

## THE POEM

The *Scanderbeide* recounts the Albanian war for independence from the Ottoman Turks from 1443 to 1468. The war was led by the prince George Scanderbeg (1405–1468), originally named George (Gjergj) Castrioti but dubbed “Scanderbeg” (Lord Alexander), supposedly for his similarity in military prowess to Alexander the Great.<sup>30</sup> Scanderbeg was the son of Gjon Castrioti (d.1437), an Albanian nobleman who governed territory in the northern region of Matia until it was conquered by the Turks.<sup>31</sup> As a result of this defeat, Gjon became a vassal of the sultan, Murad II (Amuratte in the Italian of Sarrocchi’s poem), and his son was sent as a hostage to the Turks, by whom he was converted to Islam. After participating in several military campaigns in the service of the sultan, Scanderbeg eventually left the Turkish side, re-converted to Christianity, and built up an Albanian resistance to the Ottomans which came to be recognized as

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<sup>27</sup> Ray, 31–32; Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 169.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, “The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*,” 17.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Harry Hodgkinson, *Scanderbeg* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 53. Hodgkinson casts doubt on the accuracy of the entire legend surrounding Scanderbeg’s upbringing, including the origin of this nickname, from 52–64.

<sup>31</sup> Russell, “The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*,” 22.

the first bid for an independent Albania.<sup>32</sup> The poem follows these events in broad strokes, but has major embellishments: Sarrocchi's main source, Marinus Barletius' *Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi* (c. 1506–1508), was the most popular account of Scanderbeg's life at the time and included details that are probably apocryphal, such as the poisoning of Scanderbeg's brothers.<sup>33</sup> Sarrocchi's revisions between the 1606 and the 1623 version of the poem show that her primary aim was to maintain the unity of action in the poem in an effort to adhere to Aristotle's *Poetics* and the work of other literary scholars whom she lists in a letter to Galileo: "Le dirò ancora che mi sono forzata di far questo poema secondo le regole di Aris[totele], di Falareo, di Herm[ogene], di Lugn.[o] et di Eustat[io], i quali convengano tutti in uno."<sup>34</sup> In the poem, Scanderbeg's resistance takes place mainly in the city of Croia, as Sarrocchi calls it, or Krüje, in Albania. Sarrocchi removed anything that took attention away from the principal battle scenes at Croia from the first edition of the poem, most significantly the episode in Canto 3 which depicted an enchantress, Calidora. The author clearly had reservations about this figure even in 1606, as evidenced in the preface, where she addresses readers, saying "Troverete ancora un'osservatione d'auguri all'antica, cosa favolosa; & similmente una fattura d'una maga turca pur favolosa, poste solo per dilettere ad imitatione d'altri Poeti, & non per significato, & forza che possino havere nel modo finto & favoleggiato dal Poeta."<sup>35</sup> She attributes any usage of fabulous characters and events, particularly the "maga turca," to her desire to imitate other authors in keeping with epic tradition, hoping it will not be viewed as an addition of her own invention. Without Calidora in the 1623 edition, the poem contains little in the way of the supernatural. Even so, Sarrocchi preserves the first part of the preface in which she explains her

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<sup>32</sup> Russell, 22–23.

<sup>33</sup> Russell, 24–25; Hodgkinson, *Scanderbeg*, 52–64.

<sup>34</sup> Margherita Sarrocchi to Galileo Galilei, January 13, 1612, in Ray, *Letters*, 57n96.

<sup>35</sup> Margherita Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide poema heroico* (Rome: Lepido Facij, 1606), preface. Google Play Books.

use of the terms Fortune and Fate: “In questo poema della Scanderbeide troverete alcuna volta Fato, e Fortuna, dalle quali voci non si argomenta, che realmente sia la necessità fatale, nè meno, che la Fortuna habbia alcuna sussistenza personale; ma per la Fortuna s’intendono gli accidenti, che possono occorrere, e non occorrere alla vita humana, e per lo Fato la Divina provvidenza preso in significato l’uno, e l’altro, che lo piglia S. Tomasso glorioso.”<sup>36</sup> She tries to stave off any suspicion of heretical leanings by defining fortune as life’s normal vicissitudes and by couching fate in religious terms, calling it divine providence. This self-protective impulse makes sense given the environment of the Counter-Reformation, when the Index of Forbidden Books was a threat to any author. As Cox observes, Sarrocchi also improves the style of the poem and minimizes the hero’s rather devious means of seizing the city in the 1623 version.<sup>37</sup> This change enhances the portrayal of the hero as a symbol of Christian leadership.

Although the 1606 version may be of more interest, much in the way that the *Liberata* is preferred to the *Conquistata* for its richer content, this chapter will focus on the 1623 version of the poem because it is complete. Here I argue that two of Sarrocchi’s characters, Scanderbeg and Silveria, become heroes in part as a result of the suffering they endure as orphaned children, and that she frames them in this way as part of her effort to model her poem on that of Tasso. While the protagonists’ vulnerability as orphans helps foster their development into heroes, the poet gives equal weight to their innate personality traits as factors in the formation of their heroic identities. Rather than favoring the influence of either nature or nurture, she describes a balance between the two that serves to create a hero.

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<sup>36</sup> Margherita Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide poema heroico* (Rome: Andrea Fei, 1623), preface. Google Play Books.

<sup>37</sup> Virginia Cox, “Fiction 1560–1650,” in *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy*, eds. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61; Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 171–2.

Despite Sarrocchi's apparent imitation of Tasso, critics have delineated some notable variations between the two poems.<sup>38</sup> The principal change studied here concerns the concept of homeland, which in epic is generally tied to a physical place, a *patria* whose inhabitants consider this geographical location to be the defining feature of their identities. Sarrocchi instead places more emphasis on a metaphorical homeland for her orphan-heroes manifested by the sense of belonging to a group. It is the return to this group that constitutes their homecoming in the course of the poem.

## SCANDERBEG

### *ROOTS*

Editor Giovanni Latini's plot summary which prefaces the 1623 version of the poem reads:

Scanderbec in lingua Turchesca vuol dire Alessandro il Signore; Questi da Giovani Castriotto suo padre Signore de l'Epiro fu dato bambino per ostaggio al gran Turco Amurat primo, il quale lo fece allevare a la Mahomettana. Divenuto guerriere di gran valore, fu spedito a l'espugnatione di Belgrado con carico di Generale. I Christiani, che lo difendevano se gli arredererono, salvi le persone, e l'havere. Questi patti furno giurati da Amurat, il quale ordinò ad Alessandro per huomo espresso, che gli mandasse Dori giovanetta di suprema bellezza figliuola di Arnite Capitano, e difensore di Belgrado, e la soldatesca l'uccidesse, e la facesse schiava; e perche Alessandro volle osservare il

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<sup>38</sup> See Serena Pezzini, "Ideologia della conquista, ideologia dell'accoglienza: *La Scanderbeide* di Margherita Sarrocchi (1623)," *MLN* 120, no. 1 (2005): 190–222; Virginia Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 164–197; Gerry Milligan, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 43–78; Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 111–155; Ray, *Letters*, 24–32; Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 17–40.



giuramento, & i patti, sdegnato Amurat per mezzo di Baizette l'avvelena; disperato de la vita fa voto a Dio di tornare a la fede di Christo, e miracolosamente si risana; & irato col Turco occupa l'Epiro, e da gli Epiroti è riconosciuto, & acclamato per Re si fortifica in Croia, dove Amurat l'assedia con cento sessanta mila combattenti. Dopo varij avvenimenti Amurat è finalmente vinto da Alessandro in una battaglia generale, dove per dolore muore.<sup>39</sup>

This description establishes the setting of the story, listing the background events that Sarrocchi only relays as a flashback in the second edition of the poem. Latini explains that Scanderbeg (Alessandro) was born Christian, but raised Muslim because as a child he was taken hostage by the Turkish king Amuratte. Once grown, the young Albanian becomes a warrior of great valor. Sent to conquer Belgrade as the general for Amuratte's forces, Scanderbeg negotiates a peace with its citizens, to which Amuratte agrees. However, Amuratte's plan to capture and enslave the beautiful daughter of the opposing army's captain violates this agreement. Scanderbeg, disapproving, refuses to comply and Amuratte is convinced by an advisor to poison him for it. On the point of death, Scanderbeg turns to the Christian faith of his origins and is miraculously restored to health. As revenge for Amuratte's betrayal, Scanderbeg occupies Epirus and takes up residence in Croia, where he is accepted as leader of the people. Amuratte besieges the city, which is where the action of the poem begins. Latini skips straight from the poem's opening to its close, writing that "after various events" Scanderbeg defeats Amuratte in battle, where Amuratte dies.

There are several points of interest in Latini's summary. The first is that it clearly frames Scanderbeg as an orphan-hero whose removal from his parents and education as Amuratte's

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<sup>39</sup> Giovanni Latini, "Soggetto della Scanderbeide," in Margherita Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide poema heroico* (Rome: Andrea Fei, 1623). Google Play Books.

ward result in his becoming an accomplished warrior. Secondly, taking his cue from Sarrocchi, Latini omits the details of Scanderbeg's seizure of Croia. Cox explains that in the 1606 poem, Sarrocchi follows Scanderbeg biographer Marinus Barletius's version of events, in which Scanderbeg coerces an Ottoman official into falsifying documents in order to gain control of the city. While in Barletius the official is silenced with immediate death, Sarrocchi reduces the impact by having Scanderbeg's followers imprison and then kill him as he tries to break free. Cox writes, "Still, the Machiavellian means Scanderbeg employs in this case accord rather ill with his character as exemplary Christian hero."<sup>40</sup> Thus in the 1623 edition, the capture of Croia occurs before the action of the poem and is described in flashback in 2.38 as mostly peaceful, with the inhabitants welcoming Scanderbeg as their new ruler, just as Latini here writes simply that Scanderbeg "acclamato per Re si fortifica in Croia." As mentioned above, Cox posits that Sarrocchi's motivation for this change is to depict the hero more favorably.<sup>41</sup> In addition, it helps maintain the poem's unity of action because it allows the story to focus solely on the conflict at Croia. There is also a narrative motivation for minimizing Scanderbeg's problematic behavior, since the envoy relaying the story in flashback hopes to win his audience, the Neapolitan king Alfonso, over to Scanderbeg's side so that he will provide troops and resources to the besieged Albanians.

The story that the envoy, Svarte, tells in Cantos 1 and 2 is indeed laudatory of Scanderbeg. Like other epic heroes, he is described as unparalleled in military skill: "nè guerrier nè Capitano / Fu pari in nulla etate antica o nova," polite and wise: "non men cortese, / Che saggio, invito, coraggioso, e forte," and pure of faith and noble-hearted: "havea candida fede, / E

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<sup>40</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 172.

<sup>41</sup> Cox, 172.

nobil core, e singolar bontate.”<sup>42</sup> Like other epic authors, Sarrocchi shows that these heroic qualities were formed as a result of his childhood suffering. Serena Pezzini notes that Sarrocchi includes the concept of suffering in the proem of the *Scanderbeide*:<sup>43</sup>

Canta Musa il valore, onde sofferse,  
Et oprò tanto il forte Re d’Epiro  
Contra a cui genti Arabe, e Scithe, e Perse  
A Croia il Turco Imperator seguio,  
Di morti il monte, e ‘l pian si ricoperse,  
Gonfi di sangue i fiumi al mar se’n giro,  
Co’l Barbaro Ottoman sue squadre uccise  
Furo dal Rè, cui il Ciel benigno arrise.<sup>44</sup>

“Sofferse” is the first verb that applies to the hero in the poem. Sarrocchi indicates a relationship between Scanderbeg’s suffering and his bravery by tying them together with the catch-all relative pronoun “onde”; his valor can be understood as something both *from* which and *for* which he has suffered. He has suffered *from* his valor as a consequence of the war he is waging. As I will argue, he has also suffered *for* it—that is, to become valorous—through his experience as an orphan child. Because the proem serves as both an introduction to and summary of the

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<sup>42</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.22–23, 50. This and all following references to the *Scanderbeide* belong to the 1623 edition. I am using the stanzas as numbered in the 1623 text for ease of reference to that text, despite various errors in the numbering, which I will note if relevant (Russell has corrected these in her translation).

<sup>43</sup> Pezzini, “Ideologia,” 196.

<sup>44</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.1. I am using the version found on Google Play Books, which is published by the same editor in the same year as the version Rinaldina Russell used to translate, but is nevertheless very slightly different from that version. Line 6 of the proem in that version reads instead “Molte alme al Ciel, molte all’ inferno giro.” Of all of the quotations in this chapter, this line in the proem is the only difference between the two versions I have found. I did not have access to Cantos 19, 20, or 21 of Russell’s version, so it is possible that there are disparities in those cantos that I have not noted.

poem, and the relationship between suffering and valor is presented immediately in the proem's first line, the significance of this coupling should not be underestimated.

Scanderbeg's childhood is not explicitly detailed, but several references are made to the relationship between the hero and Amuratte in the beginning cantos. In 1.7, Svarte is sent to Alfonso with instructions on how to recruit his help:

Al Re Partenopeo d'amore antico  
Avinto al genitor, pria Messo invia,  
Che rappresenti a lui, ch'essergli amico,  
Egli non men del Padre ama, e desia:  
Come è di man del Barbaro inimico  
Fuora hor tornato a Dio verace sia,  
E diagli di qualunque evento occorso  
Contezza, e pronto il reda al suo soccorso.<sup>45</sup>

The first father figure mentioned in the poem is not Amuratte but Scanderbeg's own father, who was on friendly terms with Alfonso. Scanderbeg intends to replicate this bond for his political advantage. He relies on his blood tie with his father to outweigh his previous alliance with Amuratte in Alfonso's eyes, despite his closeness with Amuratte and near-total lack of relationship with his biological father. This expectation demonstrates societal regard for family connections above all else, and underlines the idea that Scanderbeg truly "belongs" with the Christians. His conversion is thus a form of homecoming. Part of Svarte's duty is to assure Alfonso that this homecoming is complete, that Scanderbeg has fully renounced Islam and returned to the "Dio verace." His assurance also serves to remind readers of Scanderbeg's past

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<sup>45</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.7.

for expository purposes without dwelling too much on it, thereby keeping the hero's reputation intact.

Further insight into Amuratte and Scanderbeg's relationship is gained in 1.37, when Svarte describes Scanderbeg's reaction to Amuratte's decision to break the agreed-upon peace with Belgrade:

Ode Alessandro il temerario messo,  
E di giust'ira accende il forte core,  
Sa ch'a macar di quel ch'egli ha promesso  
E infamia eterna a chi ben stima honore:  
Quinci rammenta, e volve entro a sestesso  
L'onte sofferte dal crudel Signore,  
Ch'ad empia morte i suoi fratelli diede,  
Et ei sempre il servì con tanta fede.<sup>46</sup>

This contemptible act reminds Scanderbeg of Amuratte's earlier betrayal, when his mentor murdered all of his brothers. This is the suffering inflicted on him as a child: in addition to being deprived of his parents, he also had to endure the massacre of his brothers and live with its perpetrator. Having physically and mentally survived this ordeal makes him the perfect candidate for heroism, according to the epic formula we have been following. The ottava makes clear that young Scanderbeg did indeed come to terms with his situation, since he remained loyal to Amuratte despite the atrocity the Turkish king had committed. Scanderbeg is only reflecting on it at this point because he sees a parallel between the loss of his family at the hands of the leader to whom he has been devoted and the same leader's attempt now to go back on his word. Both

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<sup>46</sup> Sarrocchi, 1.37.

deeds are dishonorable in the chivalric sense, as indicated by the hero's "giust'ira" and the observation in the fourth line that those who respect honor will view Amuratte as disgraced. Svarte characterizes the slaughtering of Scanderbeg's brothers as *empia*—impious—a word that also describes Amuratte's religious beliefs according to the author, who may be hinting that this moment marks the beginning of Scanderbeg's decision to convert.

Determined not to obey Amuratte, Scanderbeg's thought turns to military strategy in 1.36–47, reviewing his possible moves with echoes of Giovanni Botero's *Della ragion di stato* (1589) and Scipione Ammirato's *Discorsi* (1589). Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1513) is also referenced, though Russell observes that Sarrocchi may have known the contents of Machiavelli's works only through reading the later two authors.<sup>47</sup> The critic notes that discussions of statecraft which rely heavily on these three political theorists are frequently present throughout the poem.<sup>48</sup> In this instance of strategizing, despite his anger with Amuratte, Scanderbeg nevertheless considers the king's feelings:

Pur se pote al suo Rè fido, e costante  
Mostrarsi pensa, e non mancar di fede,  
E con vive ragion negargli innante,  
Che ribellarsi a lui quel ch'egli chiede.<sup>49</sup>

The hero wants to avoid rebelling against his lord if at all possible. He still has a strong sense of loyalty to Amuratte, showing his moral fiber through the repetition of words like "fido" and "fede," which have as their root the Latin *fides*, trust or faith. Though Scanderbeg has not yet

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<sup>47</sup> Margherita Sarrocchi, *Scanderbeide: The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), 87n36; Russell, "The Writing of the Scanderbeide," 37–38.

<sup>48</sup> Russell, 37–38.

<sup>49</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.41.

converted, his faith, as one of Catholicism's theological virtues, shows that he is Christian by nature if not yet in name. His faithfulness to his lord Amuratte will eventually be replicated in his faith in the Christian deity. Sarrocchi is drawing a contrast here between Scanderbeg's faithfulness and Amuratte's impiety in ottava 37, but at the same time there is an implied association between the hero's relationship with the Turkish king and his later relationship with the Christian God. To be clear, Sarrocchi is by no means suggesting that Amuratte is similar to God, but she is suggesting that Scanderbeg looks to Amuratte as a father figure. The framing of this relationship is even more apparent in the preceding ottava:

Tal leon che temea già pargoletto  
Del fier custode suo l'ira, e la verga,  
Se quegli il batte poi d'età perfetto  
Sveglia il nativo ardir, ch'al cor gl'alberga  
La gran coma ingombrar si mira il petto,  
I gran velli cader giu dalle terga,  
L'hirsute branche, e l'ugna acuta, e dura  
E da l'offesa altrui ben s'assicura.<sup>50</sup>

Scanderbeg is compared to a lion cub who once submitted to his master's punishments but now, fully grown, will fight back. Russell makes note of several lion similes in the poem, writing that compared with lion similes in other epic poems, those in the *Scanderbeide* are "always different and cleverly adjusted to the specific psychological situation."<sup>51</sup> I would argue that this in particular is the most original of Sarrocchi's lion similes because it is the only one that does not

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<sup>50</sup> Sarrocchi, 1.40.

<sup>51</sup> Sarrocchi, *Scanderbeide: The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell, 86n35.

occur in the context of battle. This sets it apart both from her other lion similes and from lion similes in other epic poems, both ancient and early modern. Most, if not all, of these concern heroes who, facing their enemies, are compared to lions roaring in preparation for battle, lions killing their prey, or hungry lions anticipating their next meal.<sup>52</sup> While the association between the lion and a warrior's strength is present in the simile in 1.40, the scenario is different: Scanderbeg is not in battle, but instead in the midst of preparing his strategy against his mentor. This placement confers upon the lion an unusual association with cleverness. In Chapter 18 of *Il Principe*, Machiavelli famously puts forth the necessity of exhibiting both the qualities of a lion (force), and a fox (cunning), in order to be an effective leader. He writes that “Coloro che stanno semplicemente in sul liono, non se ne intendano.”<sup>53</sup> Sarrocchi's poem often considers Machiavellian issues, usually in the context of advisors favoring strategies found in *Il Principe* during war councils. She discusses whether a leader should be feared, respected, or loved (1.82, 21.11 and 21.21), how people might seek revenge against their oppressors (1.89), the repercussions of an army comprised of diverse nations (5.103, 14.67), the necessity of conflict in order for a leader to showcase his bravery (20.33), and what a ruler must secure in order to maintain his empire (21.5–6), among others.<sup>54</sup> In this case, however, Sarrocchi departs from Machiavelli's interpretation of lion imagery, endowing the lion with brains in addition to brawn. Her protagonist also disagrees with the political theorist as to whether a leader should break his

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<sup>52</sup> Sarrocchi's lion similes can be found at 5.43, 7.44, 9.66, 10.62, 13.53, and 13.76. Russell lists some ancient and early modern examples from other epics in *Scanderbeide: The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, 86n35. These include *Iliad* 16.485–90 and 16.823–26; *Aeneid* 9.339–41, 10.454–55, 10.723–29; Petrarch's *Africa* 4.204–17, 7.1260–61; Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* 18.178. For more on lion similes in ancient epic, see Justin Glenn, “Odysseus Confronts Nausicaa: The Lion Simile of *Odyssey* 6.130–36,” *The Classical World* 92, no. 2 (1998): 107–16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4352235>.

<sup>53</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, eds. Luigi Firpo and Laura Barberi (Torino: Einaudi, 1972), 18, liberliber.it.

<sup>54</sup> These issues are found in *Il Principe* 17, 7–8, 3, 26, and 5 and 14, respectively. For a full list of references to Machiavelli in the poem, see the index of Sarrocchi, *Scanderbeide: The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell, 458.



promises. Whereas Machiavelli believes that “quelli principi avere fatto gran cose che della fede hanno tenuto poco conto, e che hanno saputo con l’astuzia aggirare e’ cervelli delli uomini; et alla fine hanno superato quelli che si sono fondati in sulla lealtà,” Scanderbeg instead says that

Chi non osserva altrui quel che promette,  
L’haver, la vita a rischio, e l’honor mette.  
[...]  
Molti d’Egitto al Re faran ritorno,  
Di cui fermo il dominio ancor non have  
Il Signor nostro, e gli altri havran paura  
Darsi a la fè di lui si mal sicura.”<sup>55</sup>

By framing Scanderbeg as a lion, both smart and powerful, who adheres to a political theory in which it is to a prince’s advantage to keep his word, Sarrocchi bestows upon the lion a chivalric sensibility. She also ensures that he embodies Christian mercy: the hero unequivocally states in the next ottava that compassion is preferable to cruelty, while Machiavelli proposes a more nuanced approach between the two.<sup>56</sup> The lion is then not just a killer, but also a thinker and an upstanding leader. This last characterization is fitting if we also consider that in medieval bestiaries, the lion was depicted as the king of all other non-human animals, assigning it a political role.<sup>57</sup> Renaissance thinkers followed Aristotle in the belief that the possession of a rational soul differentiated humans from animals.<sup>58</sup> Humans thus rank higher than animals on the

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<sup>55</sup> Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 18; Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.46–47.

<sup>56</sup> Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> See Sarah El Massry, “The Laudable Lion of the Medieval Mind,” *The Iris: Behind the Scenes of the Getty*, May 10, 2018. Part of an online collaboration between UCLA and The Getty that accompanied the 2019 exhibition “Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World” at The Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA. <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/the-laudable-lion-of-the-medieval-mind/>.

<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), Books 2–3.

schema of life known as the Great Chain of Being, where God is represented as the top tier.<sup>59</sup>

The lion's position as the uppermost species of animal on the Chain makes it the most proximate to humans, and it is therefore the animal which has the closest semblance of the ability to reason. Sarrocchi's decision to give the lion a political and rational bent in addition to its rage and muscle is thus founded on established connotations of lion symbolism, even if she strays in this case from Machiavelli and epic poets of the period.

The simile in 1.40 is further unique in that it is the only time a lone male lion is depicted as weak and placed in a defensive position instead of an offensive one.<sup>60</sup> Before it displays its might as an adult, it is "pargoletto," a little cub, fearful of its master's wrath and cane. The issue of childhood suffering resurfaces here. Sarrocchi presents the image of a youth withstanding pain who becomes stronger as an adult because he overcame it. As with Scanderbeg, the lion's true strength emerges as it reaches adolescence and adulthood. Its transition is signified by the changes in its appearance: now it has a great mane, ample fur down its back, and sharp claws with which to fight. Scanderbeg similarly is now prepared to defy Amuratte. His heroism is thus shaped by his childhood vulnerability. On the other hand, 1.40 also indicates that there is an innate aspect to Scanderbeg's ardor or ferocity. When the lion is beaten as an adult, it is ready to rebel against its guardian because its "nativo ardir" is awakened. "Nativo" of course comes from the Latin *nasci*, to be born. By describing Scanderbeg's ardor with this adjective, Sarrocchi suggests that a person can be born with heroic qualities. By inserting this noun-adjective pairing within an ottava that focuses on Scanderbeg's development, she simultaneously signals that it may take a period of time for such an innate trait to emerge. There is a relevant legend appearing

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<sup>59</sup> See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

<sup>60</sup> There is another simile in the poem in which a male lion cub needs defending, but he is assisted by his mother (6.84).

in the *Physiologus*, a collection in Greek of Christian parables about beasts written anonymously in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, upon which medieval bestiaries are based.<sup>61</sup> The myth holds that lion cubs are born dead and only come to life after three days when their parents breathe on them.<sup>62</sup> Scanderbeg's ardor is similarly awakened ("sveglia") after lying dormant for a time. It is also triggered by an action on the part of his guardian, though Amuratte's move is violent rather than nurturing as in the case of the lion cubs' parents. Nonetheless, the fact that in both scenarios the children are moved only as a reaction to their parents is significant. Moreover, the lion story is an obvious allegory for Christ's crucifixion and resurrection by God, his father, after three days, and was commonly understood as such in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Scanderbeg's comparison to the lion, then, is also a comparison between the hero and Christ, which we will explore further below. While Scanderbeg does not die, he does experience a period of darkness and suffering, followed by a rebirth through his conversion to Christianity.

#### CONVERSION

The hero's decision to convert is described starting in 1.70, when he summons the young Christian woman Dori to clarify whether she had indeed expressed a desire to become part of the sultan's harem, as the sultan's envoy had reported. She denies the allegation, citing her faith, and suddenly Scanderbeg experiences a flashback sent by God:

Sente Alessandro illuminar sua mente  
Dal gran Rettor de le celesti squadre,  
E si rammenta, che da'padri nacque

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<sup>61</sup> *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> "We begin first of all by speaking of the Lion, the king of all the beasts," *Physiologus*, 1.

Christiani, e si mondò ne le sante acque.<sup>63</sup>

Dori's speech triggers Scanderbeg's memory of his baptism. She represents both the hero's past, given this reminder of his childhood, and his future, because she will become his wife and is part of the inspiration for his return to Christianity. Just as easily as Dori evokes Scanderbeg's Christian feelings, however, his devotion to the sultan tamps them down:

Ma non lunga stagion fermar si puote,  
Che d'altra fe la scaccia antica usanza,  
Onde le legge sol crede al fin vera,  
In cui dal gran Signor nutrir fatt'era.<sup>64</sup>

Scanderbeg's religious status is dependent on who his guardians are at a given time, as clearly outlined in these two ottavas. The struggle between his Christian birth or nature ("nacque") and his nurture ("nutrir") by the Muslim Amuratte is highlighted for a second time here. Sarrocchi devotes equal space to both, but Amuratte's influence is framed as an obstacle that the protagonist must conquer in order to attain heroic stature. It is not until his parents are invoked as described in Canto 2 that Scanderbeg has a more sustained shift away from his loyalties to the sultan. At this point in the narrative, Amuratte has poisoned the hero as a result of his refusal to obey orders, and Scanderbeg's captain Palinuro has sent the medic Macaone to his aid. Instead of medical advice, however, Macaone offers a religious solution:

E poscia a lui: O Cavalier possente  
Il Monarca del Ciel, ch'al tutto impera,  
Per qualche occulta sua pietà consente,  
Ch'anzi tempo al tuo dì giunga la fera;

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<sup>63</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.70.

<sup>64</sup> Sarrocchi, 1.71.

E l'uno, e l'altro tuo regal parente,  
Che tenne in lui santa credenza, e vera,  
Hor godendo nel Ciel mercata palma,  
Impetra vita a la tua nobil alma.<sup>65</sup>

He tells Scanderbeg that his parents in heaven are appealing to God to save their son, pointing out that Scanderbeg suffers not only from the physical malady of poison but also from a religious affliction. The cure for both will be Scanderbeg's rediscovered faith in the Christian God. The physician becomes more of a spiritual advisor than medical doctor, urging the ailing hero to remember the desires of his parents. It is this reminder that motivates Scanderbeg's conversion over the next few ottavas.

After prompting the hero to think of his parents, Macaone uses two similes in his speech relevant to the theme of Scanderbeg's development. The first, "Deh mira dunque la celeste mano, / Che con pietosa sferza hor ti flagella, / Qual saggio padre il pargoletto insano / Talhor di voglia al proprio ben rubella" positions Scanderbeg as a child of God whose rebellion is met with mercy.<sup>66</sup> Macaone's exhortation is an invitation to return to the fold without severe punishment from God, who is depicted as both spiritual father and personal father to the hero within the simile. This parent-child relationship is in sharp contrast to Scanderbeg's relationship to Amuratte, who responds to rebellion by poisoning his ward. The protagonist's birth religion, and the parental upbringing of which he has been deprived, are framed as clearly preferable to how he has been raised. The poisoning by Amuratte, however, is a necessary evil that Scanderbeg must endure in order to find his way back to Christianity.

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<sup>65</sup> Sarrocchi, 2.23.

<sup>66</sup> Sarrocchi, 2.24.

The doctor continues, telling the hero that God is searching for him: “Che ti cerca, e desia, come smarrita / Agnella da la gregge il buon pastore.”<sup>67</sup> Whereas as we saw above, Scanderbeg stands out as a lion among men, in relation to God he is a mere lamb in need of guidance. Like the lion, the lamb is also a symbol of Jesus, who is introduced as the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29 and 1:36.<sup>68</sup> The lamb in these lines of the poem therefore indicates Scanderbeg’s need of God’s intervention, but the identification with Jesus also points to Scanderbeg’s future as a leader of Christians who will gain followers as Jesus did. The epithet “Lamb of God” has various layers of meaning, including a reference to the Passover lamb in Exodus 12 whose blood is used to mark the houses of the Jews, so that God will spare them from his last plague on Egypt, the death of the first-born sons.<sup>69</sup> As the lamb through its sacrifice at the direction of Moses protects the first-born of the Jews, Scanderbeg as leader of the Albanians serves as protector and indeed savior of his people. Furthermore, the Passover story recalls the situation of Scanderbeg’s own family. The Ottomans’ conflict with the Castrioti is territorial and the two groups are also at odds in terms of religious and ethnic identity, as were the Jews and the Egyptians. Because Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time Sarrocchi was writing, she might have considered the ancient Egyptians in the biblical story of Exodus to have a similar role to that of the Turks in her poem. This seems especially relevant when we take into account that Amuratte kills all of the male Castrioti children, just as the Pharaoh in Exodus kills the male children of the Israelites. The exception is, of course, Scanderbeg, who, like Moses in the story of Exodus, is spared and raised in the court of the oppressor. Scanderbeg’s association with the

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<sup>67</sup> Sarrocchi, 2.25.

<sup>68</sup> John 1:29 and 1:36 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 12.

lamb, then, links him to both Moses and Jesus, the two leading figures of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The comparison of Scanderbeg to Jesus in particular is underscored even further by the appearance of the lion and the lamb in Revelations, where they are presented almost interchangeably as symbols of the son of God. In Revelations 5.5, the only entity able to open the sealed scroll containing the wisdom of God is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, [who] has conquered.”<sup>70</sup> In the next verse, the same being is described as a “Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.”<sup>71</sup> The lion’s victory and the slaughtering of the lamb, though seemingly discordant events, both refer to Jesus’s death on the cross.<sup>72</sup> It is this death that enables the creature in Revelations to discover God’s plan, as the group of elders sings: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered.”<sup>73</sup> As in the case of the orphan-hero, Jesus’s suffering is a necessary part of his triumph.

In ancient epic, lambs and lions do not perform shared functions. Instead they occupy their natural roles of prey and predator respectively. They appear often in similes together, as we have seen above, usually in the context of a warrior’s advance on his enemy being compared with the lion’s approach to a herd of sheep. This epic tradition would consider Scanderbeg’s role paradoxical, since he exhibits both the strength of the lion and the weakness of the lamb at different points. In the Christian framework, however, these attributes can work in tandem. St. Augustine’s sermon 375A addresses this issue. He writes that Jesus is “...perhaps both in his passion lamb and lion, and also in his resurrection lamb and lion. [...] Why a lamb in his

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<sup>70</sup> Revelations 5.5.

<sup>71</sup> Revelations 5.6.

<sup>72</sup> See Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 375A: On the Sacraments,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Part III–Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill and ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1995). This text is quoted and discussed further below.

<sup>73</sup> Revelations 5.9.

passion? Because he underwent death without being guilty of any iniquity. Why a lion in his passion? Because in being slain he slew death. Why a lamb in his resurrection? Because his innocence is everlasting. Why a lion in his resurrection? Because everlasting also is his might.”<sup>74</sup> Because Jesus’s suffering and triumph are inextricably linked, he embodies both the vulnerability of the lamb and the power of the lion to overcome that vulnerability. Scanderbeg, too, displays these two characteristics in succession, and Sarrocchi, by using the similes of the lion and the lamb, emphasizes that his journey mimics that of Jesus.

#### *EPIC PREDECESSORS AND HOMELAND*

Sarrocchi’s likening her hero to Christ is not surprising in the context of his leadership of the Christians in the poem, and it also serves to highlight Scanderbeg’s similarity to another epic hero, Tasso’s Clorinda, whose affinities with Christ are outlined in Chapter 1. The trajectory of Scanderbeg’s life also repeats the pattern of Clorinda’s, as is evident in Latini’s narrative, which succinctly describes Scanderbeg’s birth to a Christian family, childhood with a Muslim guardian, and conversion back to his original faith. Virginia Cox writes, “As a Christian by ancestry and a Muslim by adoption, Scanderbeg is closer in some ways to Tasso’s Clorinda than to his Goffredo: less fixed in his identity, more doubting and complex.”<sup>75</sup> There are a few key differences, however, between Tasso and Sarrocchi’s characters. The first is of course their differing genders, which in turn assigns them differing roles within their respective poems. Clorinda cannot be the main protagonist of the *Gerusalemme liberata* because she is female; in addition to the sociocultural and religious norms which prevented women from leading armies during the First Crusade, epic poetry in general does not feature women in this particular role.

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<sup>74</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “Sermon 375A: On the Sacraments.”

<sup>75</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 189–190.



None of the epic poems discussed here have a sole female protagonist. Even the *Floridoro*, which glorifies Risamante as the best warrior and leader of her army insofar as the available cantos show, is named after a male protagonist. Tasso can give Clorinda a wavering identity because she is a woman and therefore does not need to represent the whole crusade as Goffredo does. As we have seen, Clorinda is also expendable for this reason, and in fact must die midway through the poem because there is nowhere for her to go as a single female warrior.<sup>76</sup>

Scanderbeg, on the other hand, survives the poisoning attempt and is allowed to flourish throughout his poem, acting as a leader despite—and I would argue because—of his conflicted identity. His return to Christianity after straying underscores his commitment to the religion, especially because we see the process underlying his decision to convert in the first few cantos of the poem. Moreover, Scanderbeg differs from Clorinda because his conversion is in effect a re-conversion. He was baptized as a child before he converted to Islam. While she was born to a Christian family, Clorinda does not receive baptism until she is an adult on her deathbed. Her conversion is less of a return than Scanderbeg's; although she is joining the faith of her family, it is one into which she has not previously been accepted and which she has never known. Scanderbeg actually remembers his baptism in the moment with Dori in 1.70 described above, making his religious journey a true circle that ends where it begins.

The Albanian might therefore be better compared to Homer's Odysseus than to Clorinda. As Gregory Nagy writes, referring to tales of the ancient heroic age, "the *Odyssey* is the final and definitive statement about the theme of a heroic homecoming."<sup>77</sup> Epic poems produced after the *Odyssey* that include scenes of a hero's homecoming must necessarily look to the Greek epic as

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>77</sup> Gregory Nagy, "The Return of Odysseus in the Homeric *Odyssey*," in *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 278.

the preeminent example of *nostos*, the Greek word Nagy defines as “return” or “homecoming.”<sup>78</sup> As discussed at the end of Chapter 1, Clorinda and Odysseus also share points in common, but Scanderbeg better fits the mold of the ancient Greek hero. Not only is Scanderbeg’s metaphorical (that is, religious) homecoming more complete than Clorinda’s, but he also has the distinction of returning to his geographical home. Both his physical and his metaphorical journeys are therefore circular. In 1.44, while deliberating over Amuratte’s desire to take Dori and his command to kill the men and imprison the women of Belgrade, Scanderbeg muses:

E se fruir mai sempre, e l’aura, e ‘l sole  
Questo mortal caduco al fin ne toglie,  
Di fruirgli ciascun nella sua prole  
Un innato desir sembra, ch’invoglie,  
Quinci è che perder poi tanto ne duole  
La patria, i figli, e la diletta moglie,  
E morti anzi giacer, ch’esserne privi  
Vogliam, dove sorgemmo in prima vivi.<sup>79</sup>

He considers how the citizens of Belgrade will react to these losses, imagining that they would prefer to die fighting rather than tolerate this kind of rule. His thoughts stress the connection between *patria* and birth. It is clear from the root of the word, *pater*, that the land has a generative role. Because the land is positioned as father to its people, Scanderbeg suggests that people’s desire to propagate derives from the land; reproduction is “un innato desir.” If family and homeland are irretrievably lost, humans would prefer to die and return to the land. A homeland is both a symbol and a physical place where one can be buried. This latter meaning

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<sup>78</sup> Nagy, 278.

<sup>79</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 1.44 (marked as 1.36 in the version Russell used).

recalls Genesis 3:19: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”<sup>80</sup> The land is fertile and generative, but it also provides a final resting place for those who are willing to die in defense of what it has given them. Although Scanderbeg’s contemplation directly addresses the conflict between Amuratte and the citizens, it is also a reflection on his own familial situation, since Amuratte is responsible for this as well. Scanderbeg has been deprived of his homeland, but not his life. This ottava perhaps contains his veiled wish to return to the place where he was born. The subject of the ottava is a universal “noi,” showing that Scanderbeg includes himself as one of the many people who share this vision of homeland.

Despite the importance of geographical homeland, however, Scanderbeg’s return to his native religion is portrayed as a much loftier goal than his return to Croia. Serena Pezzini argues that the emphasis on conversion is a function of the time in which Sarrocchi lives:

*Il soggetto si attaglia particolarmente alle esigenze dell’epica controriformata: la figura di frontiera incarnata dell’eroe, campione dell’Islam provvidenzialmente ravvedutosi e tornato in seno all’occidente cristiano, diviene paradigma di un sovradisdegno celeste che ordina e ricomponi i destini individuali e la sfera temporale dell’esistente.*<sup>81</sup>

A hero who decides to fully devote himself to Christianity is an especially appropriate choice during the Counter-Reformation. While his homecoming, both metaphorical and physical, is described only briefly within the first few cantos of the poem, the conversion is nevertheless understood as the moment in which Scanderbeg truly reunites with his ancestors and begins to fulfill his destiny. Macaone’s comparison of Scanderbeg to a lost lamb in 2.25, for example, depicts him as one who is missing from the herd, and one whom Christ, his shepherd, is actively

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<sup>80</sup> Genesis 3:19.

<sup>81</sup> Pezzini, “Ideologia,” 190–191.

seeking. This simile is derived from the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12–14 and Luke 15:3–7, in which Jesus proclaims that one should abandon ninety-nine sheep if it means finding the one sheep that has been lost.<sup>82</sup> In other words, one repentant sinner counts for more than ninety-nine people who do not need to repent. Macaone’s implication in this case is not that the majority of the sheep will have to be given up, but instead that Scanderbeg as a repentant sinner will rejoin the herd, making it complete again.

Scanderbeg’s decision to reclaim Croia is secondary, motivated less by a sense of duty to the land itself and more by the desire for revenge against Amuratte, who acted impiously by poisoning the hero and breaking promises to the citizens of Belgrade.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, as Virginia Cox observes, the *Scanderbeide* takes a different approach to the military situation than most other epic poems.<sup>84</sup> Because the repossession of Croia is described only in flashback in the beginning, when Svarte recounts Scanderbeg’s adventures to the King of Naples, the Christian army is actually on the defensive for most of the rest of the poem. Scanderbeg and his followers are already stationed in Croia and act as the city’s protectors, rather than its invaders. Amuratte’s army, the villains, are instead on the offensive, advancing on Croia. This is a reversal of the epic standard whereby the heroes conquer the citadel held by the enemy. Cox reads Sarrocchi’s reversal through a gendered lens, noting that Scanderbeg and his troops are feminized because they are in the receiving role rather than the penetrative one.<sup>85</sup> Traditionally in chivalric epic, the Muslims are placed on the defensive so as to imply that they are less virile. I would add to this reading that the fact that Sarrocchi’s Christians are not actively trying to annex land deemphasizes its importance in the conflict. As a result, the war is more ideological than

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<sup>82</sup> Matthew 18:12–14, Luke 15:3–7.

<sup>83</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 2.32.

<sup>84</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 190.

<sup>85</sup> Cox, 190.

territorial; for the Christians, and especially Scanderbeg, it is motivated more by religious zeal than by a devotion to the land. Consider the contrast between the military situation in Sarrocchi's historical epic and the epic models on which the *Scanderbeide* is most closely based: in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas and his followers seek land on which to establish a new Troy, ousting Turnus and the Rutulians in the process.<sup>86</sup> In *Gerusalemme liberata*, the crusaders' goal is to conquer the city of Jerusalem, freeing it from Muslim control. Both of these examples make the possession of the land itself the defining factor in the protagonists' victory. Without this objective, Scanderbeg and his warriors need not focus so much on the city as a reason for war. Instead, their focus is on religion. Of course, the Crusade in Tasso's poem is also entirely motivated by religion, but the religious undertaking is defined by the repossession of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Croia, in contrast, is not specifically linked to the religious mission of the protagonist. While historically Scanderbeg's resistance against the expansion of Ottoman territory was seen as Albania's first endeavor for independence, in the poem Sarrocchi paints Scanderbeg as so pure of heart and faithful that his actions are solely driven by the will of God.<sup>87</sup> Only his rival, Amuratte, is materialistic in his pursuit of territory and spoils of war. Russell asserts that "As the focus is maintained on the reasons for men's successes and failures, divine interventions become redundant and the religious motivation for the war is diffused," but I would argue that the religious motivation, while perhaps formulaic as Russell terms it, is nevertheless clearly present throughout the poem.<sup>88</sup>

The following provides a few of the more prominent examples of this representation. First, before the war itself can begin, Scanderbeg requires that his Muslim captains convert to

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<sup>86</sup> See Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 39–40 for the poem's similarities with the *Aeneid*.

<sup>87</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 23.

<sup>88</sup> Russell, 38.

Christianity so that they can be united in their purpose (4.41 and following). Next, after a particularly vicious argument concerning faith, Amuratte is moved to prove the worth of Islam by calling for single combat between two representatives of the respective religions. Scanderbeg chooses his champion, Vaconte, based on a vision he receives from God (8). In preparation for the fight, Vaconte is given a sword that belonged to a Muslim warrior who converted to Christianity as he was dying. The conversion conferred upon the dying soldier a “vita immortale” in heaven, and serves as an echo of Scanderbeg’s own noble conversion.<sup>89</sup> Vaconte wins the duel with the aid of this sword whose history gives it a special value: each time it slays a Muslim, it avenges the death of one of the many Christians it had killed under previous ownership (9.20–22).<sup>90</sup> The sword is a perfect embodiment of the poem’s religious dispute. Then, before a sea battle toward the end of the poem, the captain Borso rallies the navy by reiterating the reason that they have gone to war:

Non alcun di noi di lasciar piacque  
I dolci figli, e la diletta moglie,  
Esporsi al fiero Marte, a l’infid’acque  
Spinto d’avare, ò d’ambitiose voglie:  
Per ritornar al nido, ov’ei già nacque,  
Carco d’opime, e gloriose spoglie:  
Ma per cangiar ripien d’un fanto zelo  
La terra ogn’hor, che tempo sia, col Cielo.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 9.21.

<sup>90</sup> The passing down of armor from hero to hero in order to confer the glory of the older hero upon the younger one is another epic commonplace. This scene will be discussed further below.

<sup>91</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 20.3 (this text is based solely on the Google Play Books version).

He distinguishes between possible motives for war, assigning a moral judgment to each: the Christians' aim is not to greedily bring spoils and wealth back to their homeland but instead it is the holy task of ensuring their place in heaven. This is the only justifiable reason for leaving their families behind. The emphasis on the sacrifice of abandoning family repeats the similar emphasis we saw in 1.44, reflecting Scanderbeg's own sacrifice and vulnerability and positioning the importance of family as secondary only to the importance of God. Prior to the final battle, Scanderbeg first performs some Christian rites (21.44–45) and then encourages his troops by reiterating their holy mission:

Guerrieri arditi, il cui valore ho visto,  
In ogni impresa invito, e vincitore,  
Giunto il tempo ecco è pur di fare acquisto  
Di soma gloria in Ciel, qui d'alto honore.  
De l'affano, e del rischio, e sia per Christo,  
E la fama, e la preda assai maggiore,  
Certi venir con gente hora a battaglia,  
Che tanto men di voi di forza vaglia.<sup>92</sup>

The time has come to achieve their goal of heavenly glory. Even if their actions in war will also afford them some fame on earth, their celestial reward will be far greater. In the equivalent conversation on the Ottoman side, the contrast is obvious. The warrior Attravante says, addressing the sultan:

De le provincie soggiogate, e dome,  
Onde il lontan ti cole, e 'l vicin pave;

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<sup>92</sup> Sarrocchi, 22.7.

La gloria conservar anch'io ben lodo,  
Ma qual d'invitto vincitore in modo.<sup>93</sup>

The source of glory is not God, but instead earthly success on the battlefield and the land that accompanies it. Amuratte's advisor Artabano tries to convince him to cut his losses and retreat, citing the Christians' advantages:

Così uniti in amor, fermi, e costanti  
Son fatti in guerra forti, e coraggiosi,  
Se gli eserciti sol d'amati, e amanti  
Fusser sempre, sarian vittoriosi;  
Ma se quei pochi già vincer noi tanti,  
Hor giunti a lor tanti guerrier famosi,  
E di piu il campo tuo di tanti scemo,  
Debole speme a la vittoria havemo.<sup>94</sup>

He emphasizes that the Christians' love, their constancy, and their pursuit of the same goal will allow them to prevail, even if the sultan's army has the upper hand in terms of numbers.

Sarrocchi follows Tasso in portraying divisiveness among the so-called infidels as a sign of weakness, contrasted with the unity displayed by the Christians.<sup>95</sup> This contrast is further underscored by the fact that Artabano commends Christian unity within the context of a disagreement among the Turkish advisors. The sultan ultimately chooses to accept Attravante's recommendation, exposing his greed and endless thirst for material gain. As the head of the

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<sup>93</sup> Sarrocchi, 21.28 (this text is based solely on the Google Play Books version).

<sup>94</sup> Sarrocchi, 21.12 (this text is based solely on the Google Play Books version).

<sup>95</sup> See Sergio Zatti, "L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano," in *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano: Saggio sulla "Gerusalemme Liberata"* (Milano: il Saggiatore, 1983), 9–44.



Ottomans, his decision reflects poorly on his whole army, even if certain individuals like Artabano demonstrate superior judgment.

Cox points out that on the whole, however, Sarrocchi's treatment of the religious clash between the two armies is much less discriminatory against the Muslims than that of her contemporaries. Even the Venetian poet Lucrezia Marinella, resident of a republic with a reputation for tolerance, has her characters disparage Islam more fervently than Sarrocchi does.<sup>96</sup> One example of Sarrocchi's relative impartiality is the positioning of the armies which causes the Muslims to appear more masculine than the Christians. Cox also shows that the 1623 version of the poem has a more "rigorous and consistent ideological control," citing along with Russell the fact that Sarrocchi occasionally adds pejorative adjectives for the Muslims in the 1623 version where they were absent in the 1606 version.<sup>97</sup> While I agree that there is a clear ideological stance in the 1623 edition, the insults directed at Muslim characters in this edition are not necessary for Sarrocchi to express her viewpoint. Even without protracted verbal abuse against the Muslims, the distinction between heroes and villains is obvious, judging from the eponymous title of the poem, the actions of the respective army leaders as detailed throughout this chapter, and Scanderbeg's ultimate victory. It is possible to promote Christian values and goals without denigrating those of Muslims. Pezzini's reading of the *Scanderbeide*'s "ideologia dell'accoglienza" argues that Sarrocchi rejects the epic theme of conquest and instead focuses on themes of resistance and inclusion. The critic asserts that Scanderbeg's conversion allows him to stand for Christian acceptance of diversity:

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<sup>96</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 172–173. Marinella's epic poem, *L'Enrico, ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* (1635) is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>97</sup> Cox, "Fiction 1560–1650," 61; Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 172–173; Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 38–39.

...È paradigmatica la figura dell'eroe da cui il poema prende il nome: Scanderbeg, perfetto giannizzero di Amuratte, è in origine cristiano, la sua è un'alterità fittizia, una parvenza, un simulacro sotto cui si intravede la vera essenza del suo ruolo e del suo destino. Tutto il poema si risolve quindi in una continua ricerca, nell'alterità, di un'identità conciliabile, in un'accoglienza non conflittuale di ciò che solo apparentemente è diverso, 'altro da sè,' ma può diventare uguale.<sup>98</sup>

The hero is not punished for straying from the faith when he returns; he is welcomed back with open arms. As Pezzini writes above, he shows that a person whose identity is "other" can adopt a new identity which will make him "one of us." Because the Christians' acceptance of Scanderbeg is contingent upon his conversion, however, one must be cautious not to overemphasize the ideology of tolerance present in the poem. The broader war is still a clash of two religious identities, but Pezzini points out that the Christian side of the conflict reflects a form of acceptance in its heterogeneous composition. The factions involved in Scanderbeg's war are mirrored in the participants of a war contemporary to Sarrocchi, the 1593–1606 war between Turks and Christians, which included the Pope and Grand Duke of Tuscany, as well as citizens of cities along the border of Hungary: "Un conflitto quindi dove l'unione europea, l'intervento italiano e le alleanze con gli autoctoni determinano la salvezza della cristianità. Esattamente quello che Sarrocchi narra ne *La Scanderbeide*, individuando in coloro che nel Seicento rappresentano il versante balcanico dello scisma cattolico (gli Albanesi ortodossi), un uguale-diverso da re-integrare."<sup>99</sup> This union of diverse entities, like Scanderbeg's conversion, represents a resolution which advances the Christian cause. The hero's return to Christianity, his homecoming, is thus an important symbol of the poem's central conflict.

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<sup>98</sup> Pezzini, "Ideologia," 219.

<sup>99</sup> Pezzini, 220.

Scanderbeg's Christian homecoming has additional associations with the homecoming of Odysseus. While Odysseus's *nostos* is most evident at the literal level in his return to Ithaca, his homecoming does not merely consist of his physical arrival in his homeland.<sup>100</sup> Nagy proposes a metaphorical definition of *nostos* that matches closely with my view of Scanderbeg's metaphorical return: *nostos* can mean a "return to light and life."<sup>101</sup> In the *Odyssey*, the moment that Odysseus arrives on the island of Ithaca (13.78–95) coincides with the one instance in the poem in which the meanings of *nostos* and *noos* (regaining consciousness after a period of darkness, whether that is sleep or death) come together to form the meaning of "returning from darkness and death to light and life."<sup>102</sup> Odysseus is in a deep sleep that Homer compares to death while on the ship to Ithaca, but once he is deposited on land, he awakens with the sunrise. Nagy observes that the elements of a death-like sleep, a return to consciousness and a return to light all occur simultaneously in the context of Odysseus's homecoming.<sup>103</sup> Scanderbeg's conversion metaphorically contains all of these elements as well: as he returns to his religious home, he awakens from the darkness that was his devotion to Islam and sees the light of Christianity. Indeed, the lion parable in the *Physiologus* as discussed above repeats this same pattern, in an allegorical representation of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. Furthermore, Nagy writes that *nostos* can also indicate immortalization after death.<sup>104</sup> The immortalization of a hero's soul is not explicitly addressed in Homer, but Odysseus's return from Hades in Books 11–12 nevertheless stands in for the soul's journey after death: "This way, the *nostos* of Odysseus, as

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<sup>100</sup> Nagy, "The Return of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," 275–295; Emily Wilson, Introduction to *The Odyssey*, by Homer, trans. Emily Wilson (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2018), 71–74; Barbara Cassin, "Odysseus and the Day of Return," in *Nostalgia: When Are We Ever at Home?*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 13–18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt19rm9jg.6>.

<sup>101</sup> Nagy, "The Return of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," 275.

<sup>102</sup> Nagy, "The Mind of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," in *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 299.

<sup>103</sup> Nagy, "The Mind of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," 300.

<sup>104</sup> Nagy, "The Return of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," 275.

an epic narrative, becomes interwoven with a mystical subnarrative. While the epic narrative tells about the hero's return to Ithaca after all the fighting at Troy and all the travels at sea, the mystical subnarrative tells about the soul's return from darkness and death to light and life."<sup>105</sup> This mystical subnarrative situated in the context of the ancient Greek hero prefigures the Christian concept of the immortal soul, which Scanderbeg will achieve as a result of his conversion. Sarrocchi takes the classical example of Odysseus's homecoming and adjusts it to fit a Christian belief system.

Another similarity between the two heroes is the existence of a mark on their bodies that identifies them when they each return to their homes. Odysseus lands on Ithaca in Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, but in his disguise as an old beggar he is not recognized by another human until 19.383–466, when his elderly former nursemaid washes his feet and notices the scar on his leg. He anticipates her recognition, which occasions a recollection of how the scar was inflicted: as a youth, he sustained an injury from a boar he was hunting. Eurycleia's simultaneous joy and grief at seeing her master returned is tempered when Odysseus insists that she keep his identity a secret so that he may take revenge on his wife's suitors, who are threatening to replace him as King of Ithaca. Likewise, in the *Scanderbeide*, when Scanderbeg returns to Croia in 2.47, he is able to reclaim his ancestral territory because of a birthmark on his arm, shaped like a sword according to legend:

L'hereditaria sua dritta ragione  
Scopre in prodigioso, e noto segno;  
Segno nel braccio destro, o memorando,

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<sup>105</sup> Nagy, "The Mind of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," 300.

Ch'al nascer suo portò scolpito brando.<sup>106</sup>

Unlike Odysseus, Scanderbeg is accepted and reinstated as the legitimate king by the populace as soon as he displays his birthmark. His open acknowledgement of his identity morally elevates him above Odysseus, since the latter resorts to devious methods to prolong his disguise. While Sarrocchi glorifies her hero by association with Odysseus, she still distances Scanderbeg from Odysseus's reputation as a trickster, since as we have seen Scanderbeg must embody Christian moral rectitude.<sup>107</sup>

The scar and the birthmark both represent authentic claims to the heroes' thrones. Both obtained these marks during their formative years at home, and thus the marks have become literal signs of belonging to the community to which the characters return as adults. Indeed, Sarrocchi compares the people welcoming Scanderbeg back to Croia to a mother receiving a newly freed son:

Nè madre unqua così del caro figlio  
Da' lacci sciolto, si rallegra, e gode,  
Come del Re lor natural quei fanno  
Vistolo fuor di man del rio Tiranno."<sup>108</sup>

This simile conveys the sense of restitution of a missing family member as well as communal parental responsibility for the hero's safety. Both are triggered by the sight of the birthmark. By identifying the communal group with the mother rather than the father figure, Sarrocchi shifts away from the concept of *patria* as the definitive symbol of heroic homecoming. Homecoming is still represented as a return to family, but the emphasis on the geographical fatherland is

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<sup>106</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 2.47.

<sup>107</sup> See introduction to this chapter above for Cox's interpretation of how Sarrocchi manipulated Scanderbeg's story to ensure his faultless reputation.

<sup>108</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 2.49.

diminished. Furthermore, this simile in the *Scanderbeide* recalls Eurycleia's reaction to being reunited with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. She is not his biological mother, but as his former wet-nurse, she is certainly a mother figure for the hero, addressing him multiple times as "my child."<sup>109</sup> The heroes are momentarily infantilized upon their returns in this way because it is their younger selves that exist in the memories of those who receive them. While they themselves have grown, the marks on their bodies have not changed, allowing them to be recognized as former members of the community. Tamara Neal remarks that "For Odysseus, the boar hunt and the ensuing wound mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood and it seems significant that the story of the boar wound is recounted at a time that Odysseus needs to prove his identity."<sup>110</sup> The scar represents two moments of transition for Odysseus, first his entrance into adulthood and then his entrance into the final portion of his adult journey. His return to the very place where he obtained the scar is another demonstration of the circularity of his journey, echoed in Scanderbeg's return to the origin of his birthmark.

Notably, instead of a scar acquired during the Trojan War, it is the scar acquired during his adolescence that identifies Odysseus, because it marks his connection to his home. This accords with Nagy's argument that Odysseus's *kleos*, his epic glory, is not derived from his actions in the Trojan War but instead from his achieving *nostos*.<sup>111</sup> He is defined by his homecoming and not by his martial feats. While Scanderbeg's *nostos* is also a prerequisite to his *kleos*, he still achieves epic glory through battle in the rest of the poem because his homecoming occurs so early. The two traits are less dependent on each other in the *Scanderbeide*, showing Scanderbeg's well-roundedness as a hero: he has the *nostos* of Odysseus and also the *kleos* of

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<sup>109</sup> Homer, *Odyssey: Books 13–24*, ed. George E. Dimock, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 19.474, 492.

<sup>110</sup> Tamara Neal, *The Wounded Hero: Non-Fatal Injury in Homer's Iliad* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 15.

<sup>111</sup> Nagy, "The Return of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey," 283.

Achilles.<sup>112</sup> Another contrast between the Greek and the Albanian hero can be observed in the origin of the scar. There is an important distinction between Odysseus's scar and Scanderbeg's birthmark: a scar is the result of a wound, while a birthmark is congenital. Neal writes:

Injury is, essentially, a means of validating heroic identity. It is a literal mark of heroic achievement and an essential component in the ontogeny of the epic hero. Like the boar wound that the adolescent Odysseus sustains, a battle wound grounds a man's identity. [...] War, like the hunt, is a ritual that affirms male society. Injury signals participation in the ritual and admits the hunter/warrior into the adult/heroic community.<sup>113</sup>

Odysseus has to be injured and undergo a physical transformation in order to earn his identifying mark. Scanderbeg, instead, has been destined for greatness since birth, as shown by the mark bestowed on him by the Christian God. While physical injury is necessary for heroism in the ancient Greek context, Scanderbeg and other heroes considered here demonstrate that overcoming emotional injury can suffice for early modern protagonists to become heroes. In contrast to the Greek's scar, which according to Neal symbolizes his moment of transition into heroism, the Albanian's birthmark signifies that he was meant to lead his kingdom from birth. It is both his childhood experience with Amuratte *and* an innate propensity for leadership that enable him to become a hero. Odysseus thus serves as a point of comparison for Sarrocchi to demonstrate Scanderbeg's heroic stature: the significance of his homecoming surpasses even that of the most famous epic homecomer because he is driven by devotion to Christ.

As I have detailed, Scanderbeg's return to the group of Albanian citizens and his re-conversion to Christianity signify a metaphorical homecoming that suppresses the significance of

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<sup>112</sup> For more on this, see Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>113</sup> Neal, *The Wounded Hero*, 15–16.

the geographical location of Croia in the poem. The last, and perhaps most important, way in which Sarrocchi redefines homecoming lies in the absence of ancestral encomium and prophecy in the poem. The *Aeneid*, which, as the standard of historical heroic epic, sets the stage for Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* and therefore also for Sarrocchi's poem, contains the pivotal Book 6 in which Aeneas descends to the Underworld, meets the shade of his father and learns about his future descendants and the rise of Rome. This scene has many echoes in Renaissance epic, in which heroes are informed both about the past and the future of their lineages, which inevitably bear some relation to the poem's patrons. Every poem prior to the *Scanderbeide* considered here includes some variation on this scene. Sarrocchi, however, omits it. In fact, as Pezzini points out, she eliminates the epic *topoi* of genealogy and prophecy altogether, and avoids all mention of the poem's major patrons after the dedication.<sup>114</sup> Pezzini reads this absence as one in a chain of absences in Sarrocchi's poem, adding up to a "super-presenza dell'identità," meaning that the theme of identity takes precedence over preserving certain epic traditions in the poem.<sup>115</sup> I would add that this omission is another method of shifting the focus away from the land as the indicator of "home." Though Scanderbeg's ancestors lived in Croia, there is no particular reverence for them in the poem, and since there is also no mention of any descendants, there is no sense of what the city will become. The poem remains firmly rooted in the present, celebrating Scanderbeg for his conversion, his return to the group to which he belongs, and his determination to defeat the Ottoman army in the name of the Christian God. Sarrocchi's removal of the prophetic aspect of epic can also be attributed to her Counter-Reformation tendency to eliminate fanciful or magical elements, as her disclaimer in the preface shows. She prefers to

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<sup>114</sup> Pezzini, "Ideologia," 213.

<sup>115</sup> Pezzini, 218.



compare Scanderbeg to biblical figures like Jesus and Moses, as we have seen, in order to maintain Christian propriety.

While the *Scanderbeide* bears a great structural resemblance to the *Aeneid*, the omission of genealogy is another example of how it also owes much to the epics of Homer. Even if the past and the future of Croia are elided, there is epic continuity in the poem's foundation on its ancient predecessors. Pezzini shows that the proem of the *Scanderbeide* also uses the *Iliad* as a template, and that the absence of geographical exploration in the poem furthers its similarity to the ancient epic tradition.<sup>116</sup> Instead of following the Renaissance trend of having her characters push geographical boundaries to investigate the New World beyond the Pillars of Hercules, Sarrocchi restricts her sphere of action to the known world, again de-emphasizing geography and reflecting the cartographical limitations of ancient epic.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, as the example *par excellence* of Sarrocchi's reliance on Virgil, Russell highlights the scene in 9.18 when the warrior Vaconte receives the arms of Aeneas. This is an imitation of the scene in Book 3 of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas is given the arms of Achilles's son. The episode in Sarrocchi is certainly her most obvious reference to Virgil, since it directly mentions the Trojan hero and bestows the honor of Aeneas on Vaconte. The arms given to Aeneas in the Virgilian scene, however, in turn draw their glory from the Homeric hero who first possessed them. It is thus the conjoining of Virgilian and Homeric elements that makes the *Scanderbeide* such an effective historical epic.

I will close the section on Scanderbeg with a brief summary of my points thus far. The subsection "Roots" established Scanderbeg's orphan-heroism through his relationship with

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<sup>116</sup> Pezzini, 193, 217–218.

<sup>117</sup> See Carlo and Ubaldo's voyage in *Gerusalemme liberata* 15 and Astolfo's voyage with Andronica in *Orlando furioso* 15.

Amuratte, arguing that he becomes a hero both by overcoming the tragedies of his youth and because of his inborn characteristics. “Conversion” then explained the circumstances of Scanderbeg’s conversion and how it relates the hero to the figure of Jesus. In “Epic Predecessors and Homeland,” I began by comparing the hero with Tasso’s Clorinda, although the similarities to Clorinda are less potent than they may first appear. I then maintained that Scanderbeg is instead closer to Odysseus, and that the formulation of Scanderbeg’s homecoming, informed by that of Odysseus, is a key aspect of his character. Through Scanderbeg, Sarrocchi redefines epic homecoming to transcend the idea of simply returning to a geographical place, instead emphasizing the importance of returning to a group of people and to a religion. I then concluded that the absence of genealogy in the poem contributes to this new definition of homecoming, and that the new definition is an elaboration on the definition of homecoming originally found in ancient epic.

## SILVERIA

Another epic *topos* notably missing from the *Scanderbeide* is that of the enchantress who ferrets the hero away in order to seduce him. As we have seen, examples of this character include Circe in the *Odyssey*, Alcina in the *Orlando furioso*, and Armida in the *Gerusalemme liberata*. As noted above, while the enchantress Calidora appears in the 1606 version of the *Scanderbeide*, she was removed in the 1623 version in order to purge the poem of possibly heretical fantasy. In this section of the chapter I will argue, as others have, that in 1623 Sarrocchi replaces the enchantress archetype with a proto-feminist alternative.<sup>118</sup> Rather than focusing on the sultan’s warrior

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<sup>118</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 182–183; Pezzini, “Ideologia,” 205.

daughter Rosmonda as this replacement, however, I view Silveria, the mountain-dweller-turned-warrior, as Sarrocchi's version of the enchantress figure. In a departure from the usual enchantress narrative, Silveria emerges from her secluded hideaway to become a warrior, another form of homecoming for this orphan-hero.

Silveria's story begins in Canto 13, when an old woman approaches Rosmonda, leader of the Ottoman army, to seek vengeance for the death of her two sons. The person who murdered them, the mother says, is a "savage woman" who lives on the nearby Mt. Olympus.<sup>119</sup> When Rosmonda goes to investigate, she discovers that the supposedly aggressive Silveria is in reality a reserved, beautiful young follower of Diana. Cox notes the distinction between Silveria's description and that of the typical Renaissance beauty, of which Rosmonda is an example: rather than pale, starry eyed, with luxurious blonde hair, Silveria is tanned, athletic, with large eyes and untidy hair.<sup>120</sup> A huntress, she carries a bow and arrow and wears animal skins. Silveria's appearance is the first indicator of proto-feminism in the episode, since she embodies beauty in a non-traditional manner; she expands what has otherwise been a very rigid definition of female attractiveness, allowing for the existence of more than one ideal type of young woman. The next sign of proto-feminism here is Silveria's reaction to crossing paths with Rosmonda. When she first sees Rosmonda's armor, she assumes conflict will ensue and prepares to draw her weapon. When she recognizes that her potential adversary has long hair—the universal symbol of womanhood in Renaissance epic—Silveria puts aside her bow, and does not flee as she would from a man. Her response shows us that she views an encounter with another woman as safer than an encounter with a man. In fact, we learn shortly thereafter that Silveria has experienced male violence: she killed the sons of the old woman in order to protect herself from their rape

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<sup>119</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.4.

<sup>120</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 195.

attempt. Rosmonda's reply to Silveria reveals why this episode has garnered attention from feminist critics: she tells the huntress that the men deserved to be put to death for this deed. Instead of fulfilling her royal duty to punish the perpetrator of a crime, she sides with the criminal because she believes it is the just decision. Russell notes that the theme of justice runs through the episode, since the mother demands justice for her sons, Rosmonda considers herself a just ruler, and Silveria explains that she would not end someone's life without a justifiable reason.<sup>121</sup> As the representative of the law, Rosmonda actually promotes women's rights, which implies that Sarrocchi may be advocating for change rather than merely debating the position of women in an abstract manner as was usually the case in the *querelle des femmes*. She writes multiple scenes in which women have the right to consent to or refuse sexual advances, as Russell shows.<sup>122</sup>

Silveria's childhood is very similar to that of Camilla in the *Aeneid* and also provides the model for Emilia in Marinella's *Enrico*, as we will see in Chapter 5. As an infant Silveria was abandoned by her father in the wilderness and suckled by a mother bear whose cubs had been stolen by a hunter. Like Tasso's Clorinda, who as we have seen is also based on Camilla, Silveria has no fear of the wild animal that nurses her, creating an affinity between them: "Sì nutrita una fera altra fera have."<sup>123</sup> The hunter eventually returns and, discovering the child, takes her away to raise her. Once grown, she shuns human interaction and lives alone on the mountain. After she praises Silveria for defending herself against the would-be rapists, Rosmonda is curious about Silveria's isolated lifestyle and asks about her home. The huntress duly shows the queen the cave where she lives and the garden she has cultivated, and Rosmonda, impressed by Silveria, urges

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<sup>121</sup> Russell, "The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*," 34.

<sup>122</sup> Russell, 35. Silveria later rejects the sultan's sexual overtures in 17.6–72.

<sup>123</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.7.

her to join the Ottoman army. As detailed below, Silveria is convinced and becomes a highly effective warrior.

The huntress very clearly fits the pattern of the orphan-hero as an abandoned child who develops great martial skill. Her vulnerability can be understood in light of her father's actions:

E fama, che costei subito nata  
Dal proprio genitor mesto, e confuso  
Fu qual horrendo, e rio portento odiata,  
Fuor del paterno, e fuor de l'human uso,  
Quivi a le fere alpestri esca lasciata  
A piè d'un fonte, che là sorge suso,  
Ma quelle, che 'l simil'animo fero  
Conobber, morte no, vita le diero.<sup>124</sup>

Though it is the old woman who supplies this possible rumor about Silveria's upbringing, Silveria herself confirms it later, describing her father as having been "mosso da ingiusto sdegno."<sup>125</sup> Again she raises the topic of injustice, this time referencing her father's problematic behavior. Because at her birth he views her as a portent of something terrible, he leaves her at a spring expressly so that she will be eaten by wild animals. Sarrocchi notes that this act is exactly the opposite of what a parent should do, and that it is in violation of any human custom, ironically signaling that by abandoning his child, it is her father who is actually bestial. Silveria's parental circumstances present a contrast to Scanderbeg's in that in her case, it is the biological father who commits the egregious act, rather than the non-parent mentor. In both situations, the emotional wounds endured in childhood are essential to their development into adult heroes. As

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<sup>124</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.5.

<sup>125</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.27.

with Scanderbeg, Sarrocchi also includes a reflection on Silveria's nature in addition to how she was nurtured. The father's judgment of his daughter's character proves unfounded, since she will grow up to achieve greatness on her mountain and on the battlefield. However, the old woman's observation that the animals who come upon Silveria recognize in her "simil'animo fero" shows that she was born with a certain ferocity, just like Scanderbeg. Even prior to drinking the bear's milk, her spirit was similar to that of an animal. Both Scanderbeg and Silveria demonstrate Sarrocchi's view that there is a balance between the influence of nature and that of nurture in the upbringing of a hero.

In another similarity to Scanderbeg, Silveria will convert to Christianity during the course of the poem. Just as Scanderbeg's conversion is symbolized by his comparison to the lion who represents Jesus, Silveria's kinship with the bear also has a religious connotation. In the book of parables, *Physiologus*, the tale of the bear recounts how the bear must purge itself of all excrement before going into hibernation. Washing itself at a stream, it then falls into a death-like sleep for three months, only reawakening if it has successfully purified its innards. If it has failed to cleanse itself completely, it dies. This legend is a metaphor for the importance of a full confession of sins by Christians, relevant to Silveria because she must purge herself of her sinful paganism through conversion. Other familiar Christological elements in the story include the number of months for which the bear hibernates, which represents the Holy Trinity, and the act of washing oneself, which mimics baptism. The fact that the site of Silveria's abandonment and subsequent discovery by the bear is a "fonte" is not a coincidence, for she will later find herself at another kind of font. After Rosmonda converts to Christianity in order to marry Vaconte, she wishes Silveria to convert as well:

La donzella real poiche tant'ama

Silveria, ch'è da lei amata ella anco,  
Com'ha candida fuor la spoglia, brama  
Che dentro renda ancor l'animo bianco,  
Che'l rozo pastorello il Ciel pur chiama  
A se del grande Imperator non manco,  
Piace a Silveria, e bella al sacro fonte  
L'aita a far Rosmonda, e 'l suo Vaconte.<sup>126</sup>

Silveria's journey of abandonment ends at a superior version of the place where it began: left at birth by a spring in the mountains, she is then reborn into a new faith with the aid of the baptismal font. Sarrocchi highlights the contrast between Silveria and Rosmonda's stations by comparing them to a common shepherd and a grand emperor, respectively, but insists that God calls on everyone regardless of social status. In fact, by the time she converts, Silveria's position has shifted greatly from where it once was. She originally lived a life closer to the pastoral image given in this ottava, but has since adopted the life of a warrior. This transition from an isolated, natural setting to a populated setting driven by societal rules and constructs and represented by the image of the emperor is signaled also by the two water sources associated with Silveria, the first naturally occurring and the second man-made.

Silveria's move toward civilization amounts to her homecoming. Again Sarrocchi stresses a figurative homecoming over a literal one; rather than return to the physical place where she was born, Silveria instead rejoins humanity after having rejected the companionship of fellow humans for most of her life. Rosmonda is able to convince the huntress to make this change by enticing her with the thought of martial glory:

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<sup>126</sup> Sarrocchi, 18.104.

D'humili imprese homai (vil premio oscuro)  
Sdegni l'altera tua mente superba,  
Tante eccellenze a te date non furo  
Per fere saettar, coltivar herba:  
In Città populose, in regio muro,  
E fra l'arme honestate ancor si serba,  
Piu si deve a colei nome di casta,  
Che tentata via piu pugna, e contrasta.

Vincer Tigre, Leone, Orso, e Cinghiale  
Avventando lontan dardi, e quadrella,  
Di paventoso rischio, è gloria frale  
Sol dovuta di boschi a pastorella;  
Guerriera invitta tu, donna reale  
Meco amata sarai più che sorella:  
Solo in guerra acquistar puote l'huom forte  
Gloriosa vittoria, o illustre morte.<sup>127</sup>

Rosmonda, whose values are entirely shaped by the laws and rules that structure society, and who, as a political figure, represents that system of rules, makes it very clear that exploits in war are the only acceptable outlet for Silveria's talents. She points out that neither Silveria's skill in archery nor her chastity will count for anything unless other people know about them, a common notion in epic. There must be some level of competition in order for glory—and therefore heroic

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<sup>127</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.40–41.



immortality—to be achieved.<sup>128</sup> This issue will resurface when Silveria outperforms all the men in the Turkish army in an athletic contest in Canto 15.

Silveria remains unmoved by Rosmonda's words, confused and wary of Rosmonda's scorn for her bucolic activities. Rosmonda continues to berate her, referring for a second time to their common gender:

Dunque non sosterrai de l'arme il peso  
Tu sopra quel, che'l sesso debil'usa;  
Replica quella e sia di tua bell'alma  
Di fere, e caccie sol bassa, e vil palma?

Ti fè natura la persona, e 'l petto  
Ben del mio forte, e coraggioso al paro,  
Puoi la chioma coprir co'l grave elmetto,  
Premer le membra puoi co'l duro acciario.<sup>129</sup>

The queen's argument is based on the similarities between the two women, as she understands them: both are strong of body and courageous of heart. She draws a contrast between the customs of typical Renaissance women, "l sesso debil'usa," and the innate qualities she shares with Silveria. This is the same distinction Moderata Fonte draws in her declarations at the beginning of Canto 4 of the *Floridoro*, when she argues that women are born with the capacity to engage in the same pursuits as men, but are denied the opportunity to do so, instead being taught

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<sup>128</sup> Silveria's achievement can be compared to the achievement of the female author who has outstripped her male counterparts in the writing of poetry, as we have seen elsewhere (see Chapter 3). Heroic immortality is likened to the immortality that the author gains through the fame of her poetic masterpiece.

<sup>129</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.42–43.

to develop traditionally feminine habits.<sup>130</sup> Fonte emphasizes the influence of nurture in encouraging the heroism of women to emerge, while Sarrocchi here allows for women's nature to transcend what they have been taught: the two *guerriere* will rise above limitations placed on women because their martial skills are innate. Silveria, however, does not respond to this part of Rosmonda's appeal. Never having lived among other humans, she does not know what society expects from someone of her sex. Rosmonda's attempt to commiserate on this abstract point falls short. Instead, the part of the speech that evokes Silveria's assent relates only to what she can see in front of her: Rosmonda's armor. Sarrocchi describes Silveria's reaction to Rosmonda's last few lines thus:

Silveria allhor cui generoso affetto  
L'arme vedute al cor prima destaro,  
Quest'ultimo parlar quasi rampogna  
Accese di magnanima vergogna.<sup>131</sup>

The reference to the ability to wear armor sparks Silveria's interest and her shame: through this point of connection to Rosmonda she suddenly understands exactly what she has been missing, and what she is giving up by refusing to join the army. Sarrocchi compares her in the next ottava to a falcon whose master has kept it hooded and is now finally allowed the gift of sight: "Cotal Silveria a quel parlare accese / L'animo a grandi, e bellicose imprese."<sup>132</sup> Her thoughts are turned toward battle by her excitement at the prospect of wearing armor, another indicator of her natural affinity for warriorhood. Silveria's decision to fight based on the temptation of wearing armor recalls Statius's *Achilleid*, in which Achilles, the greatest warrior of antiquity, is also

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<sup>130</sup> Moderata Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Modena: Mucchi Editore, 1995), 4.1–5.

<sup>131</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.43.

<sup>132</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.44.

drawn out of seclusion and into war by the sight of armor and weapons. As we saw in the Introduction, in an effort to prevent Achilles from participating in the Trojan War, where he is destined to die, his mother Thetis sequesters him on the island of Scyros and disguises him as one of the daughters of the king (1.273–411). Odysseus and Diomedes track him to the island (1.757–780). Under the pretense of presenting the king’s daughters with an array of gifts, the two Greek warriors slip a shield and spear in with the rest and Achilles immediately picks them out. When a trumpet blasts, Achilles cannot help but to remove his female clothing and ready himself for battle. His almost involuntary reaction to the sound of war identifies him and his warrior nature, and he duly sets off with Odysseus and Diomedes to join the fray (1.940–982).<sup>133</sup> Both Silveria and Achilles betray their innermost desires at the sight of military gear. Whereas Virgil portrays Camilla’s attraction to sparkling armor as a feminine flaw, Sarrocchi follows Homer in associating armor with its martial function, understood as inherently masculine. Achilles is forced to switch from his female persona to his masculine self in order to become a hero. The feminine version of Achilles on Scyros cannot participate in the Trojan War. Silveria, on the other hand, need not cast off her gender identity when she moves from her secluded home, considered a feminine space by Rosmonda, to the masculine space of war. The huntress embodies both femininity and masculinity from her first entrance in the poem, when Rosmonda notes her “venustà viril, donnesco volto.”<sup>134</sup> Though she is of course by no means the first to create a female warrior, Sarrocchi argues for a less prescriptive definition of gender through her portrayal of Silveria since the huntress easily moves through different settings in this way.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> P. Papinius Statius, *Achilleid*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015). EBSCOhost.

<sup>134</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.20.

<sup>135</sup> See Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 75: “Without war, women, even exceptional country shepherdesses who kill lions and tigers, are left in obscurity. The episode taken as a whole seems to call women to assume a new feminine strength, leave their domestic spaces, and enter into the world of military glory.”

Another proto-feminist element to Silveria's transition from mountain and glen to battlefield lies in her role as replacement for the enchantress figure in the poem. Pezzini asserts that Rosmonda fulfills the function of enchantress because she imprisons the Christian warrior Vaconte and he falls in love with her, distracting him from his purpose, which replicates the *topos* of Alcina and Armida. The critic reads Rosmonda as a proto-feminist formulation of the enchantress figure because the queen is a warrior, not a seductive witch. She cannot lure Vaconte with any magical artifice, which means their connection is genuine and indeed will result in an acceptable match once Rosmonda converts. She also keeps Vaconte imprisoned in the pagan camp, which means neither of the two is removed from the military action; the episode is not a digression from the main thread of the poem. Pezzini also mentions the absence of the *locus amoenus* which usually characterizes the enchantress episode.<sup>136</sup> For these same reasons I would argue that Silveria is a more satisfactory substitute for the enchantress. To begin with, there is a *locus amoenus* in the poem, which can be found in Silveria's abode. Cox notes that the whole episode in Canto 13 is a "romance-like digression," rare in the 1623 version of the poem which eliminates plotlines that depart from the main action, as we have seen.<sup>137</sup> From 13.26–38, Sarrocchi describes Silveria's surroundings, which contain all of the classic elements of beauty expected in a Renaissance garden. She sleeps in a cave in a shady copse and tends a beautiful grove of various trees, complemented by clear streams. Here she grows fruits and flowers, among which red and white roses feature prominently, as they do in Armida's garden.<sup>138</sup> There was a strong association between roses and romantic love after the *Roman de la rose* was published in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which framed the rose as a symbol of sexuality. Indeed, Rosmonda

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<sup>136</sup> Pezzini, "Ideologia," 205–206.

<sup>137</sup> Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 194.

<sup>138</sup> Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2009), 15.46, 16.14–15.

is moved to pick one of the roses in the huntress's garden and kiss it with "la bocca bella," making it blush and therefore turn more red.<sup>139</sup> The theme of romance and love permeates the scene, from the nightingale singing "io ardo, io amo" to the fish who silently communicates his love to his beloved, "che gl'ode, ancorche senza voce / Ne le fredde acque il foco ardente coce."<sup>140</sup> The setting that Silveria has built sends the same message of love that Alcina and Armida's gardens do before her, but she herself has spurned romantic ties, exhibiting her moral superiority to the other enchantresses who exist to seduce and take advantage of unsuspecting warriors.<sup>141</sup>

Sarrocchi also enumerates many other species of flowers that Silveria cultivates and compares them to jewels:

Di color mille in un vaghi, e dipinti  
 Co'l bel verde de l'herbe a rai del Sole  
 Sembran da l'aura sparsi, e ventillanti,  
 Smeraldi, Oro, Rubin, Perle, e Diamanti.<sup>142</sup>

These jewel-like flowers recall Logistilla's bejeweled palace in Canto 10 of the *Orlando furioso*, whose glittering gems are bewitched to reflect inner workings of the onlooker's soul. From this comparison we also understand that Silveria's creation is more honest than that of her predecessors, because she has used no magical artifice to create the beauty found in her garden. When the grove is introduced, Sarrocchi comments that

Questa ha natura, e piu l'industria, e l'arte

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<sup>139</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.38.

<sup>140</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.36–37.

<sup>141</sup> Though Silveria has no relationships with men in the poem, Cox postulates that there is a homoerotic tension between Silveria and Rosmonda. See Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 195–196.

<sup>142</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 13.34.

D'arbori, e d'acque vagamente piena,

Onde il loco primier tanto lodato

Da lei nulla rassembra a questo a lato.<sup>143</sup>

Silveria has employed nature, but more so her own industry and talent to produce such a charming effect in her living space. Unlike Logistilla's palace or Alcina's impressive island, revealed to be the result of magical trickery, Silveria's valley boasts authentic beauty cultivated without deceit. Even here, though the subject is horticulture, we see the combination of nature and nurture at work in Sarrocchi's poem. Each setting is reflective of its owner, as demonstrated by Alcina, an old hag who uses magic to appear beautiful. The integrity of Silveria's garden shows her character to be in sharp contrast to the prototypical epic enchantress.

Furthermore, Silveria's *locus amoenus* serves a very different function than those of her predecessors. She constructed it for her own survival, with no ulterior motive of kidnapping others; in fact, she prefers that people steer clear of it if possible. Sarrocchi describes it as "Dove raro, o non mai poggiar huom suole," emphasizing that this is Silveria's refuge from encounters with others.<sup>144</sup> Unlike Alcina and Armida, she is perfectly content to live on her own and does not need a mate to provide her with a *raison d'être*. Whereas Alcina and Armida actively seduce Ruggiero and Rinaldo, Silveria is the object of sexual attention in this version of the enchantress episode, placing her in the position of these male counterparts. She shows more fortitude than either Ruggiero or Rinaldo, who both succumb to temptation, by her refusal to capitulate to the demands of the brothers, killing them when they persist. Gerry Milligan points out that Rosmonda plays the role of the aide sent to coax the hero out of the enchantress's lair: "Rosmonda's speech echoes a literary trope, those scolding lectures made to male warriors who

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<sup>143</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.30.

<sup>144</sup> Sarrocchi, 13.19.

had been ‘snared’ in the lures of women (e.g., Aeneas, Hercules, Ruggiero, Rinaldo).”<sup>145</sup> The circumstances in Sarrocchi depart from those of the epic standard: instead of rescuing the male hero from the seduction of a woman, Rosmonda draws the woman into the war and makes her the warrior. As a more honest gardener and a more capable warrior, Silveria embodies a “better” version of the enchantress and the hero archetypes. Because Sarrocchi unites the attributes of both in the form of a sylvan huntress, she creates a powerful female character heretofore unknown in epic poetry.

Thus Sarrocchi establishes a model for others to follow. Lucrezia Marinella will take her cue from Sarrocchi in developing her character Emilia, who leaves her home in a wooded environment to participate in war in the poem *L’Enrico*. Emilia’s transition from the wild surroundings of her forest home to the Byzantine army is addressed at length in the next chapter. Though their stories are similar, there are important distinctions between Silveria and her literary descendant concerning home and homecoming. Silveria’s home is comprised of a mountain cave and a garden grove in a valley, while Emilia comes from the forest. Both are indeed natural settings removed from human society, but each has a different role in epic: the garden is an ordered place where the plants are tended by a human or divine hand, whereas the forest is a dark, wild place where plants grow unencumbered and ghosts may prowl, as in the episode of the forest of Saron in *Gerusalemme liberata* 12.

Silveria receives Rosmonda in a civilized manner and the order of Silveria’s home belies the savageness the old woman ascribes to her. Her home is located on Mt. Olympus, which not only adds to the Homeric underpinnings of the poem but also, as Pezzini writes, makes it one of the spaces in Sarrocchi’s poem that “[rappresenta] una sorta di soglia tra mondo terreno e

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<sup>145</sup> Milligan, *Moral Combat*, 74.

meraviglioso (celeste, infernale, mitologico) in cui la natura regna sovrana.”<sup>146</sup> Silveria’s garden, stuck between two worlds, has a hybrid character, just as she does. It is celestial and mythological, associated with the Greek gods, but at the same time, the garden is located on earth. Like other epic gardens, Silveria’s grove ultimately represents an earthly paradise.<sup>147</sup> The order that the huntress imposes on the garden—the fact that she is moved to tame the wilderness—foretells her return to the structure of society. Silveria belongs in the company of people and her engagement in war means that she has returned to her true home, after being sequestered among the animals for so long. Emilia, on the other hand, returns to the forest where she originated in Marinella’s poem. Though it violates epic tradition for Emilia to survive the war, her homecoming is nevertheless conceived more traditionally than Silveria’s, because Marinella emphasizes the geographical space from which Emilia came. Silveria instead stays in the society she has rejoined, making permanent her homecoming to the human realm.

Silveria is unfortunately destined to die for this choice near the end of the poem, in Canto 22. Though she falls into the category of converted *guerriere* whose lack of marriageability typically requires death in battle, critics have noted that there is a proto-feminist undertone to her death because it does not come about at the hands of a man.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, it does not come about at the hands of any human at all when she is rather shockingly trampled by a war elephant. It is actually a mutual killing; when Silveria stabs the elephant in its underbelly, she trips on a rock in her attempt to escape from underneath her victim, with the result that it falls on top of her. It is

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<sup>146</sup> Pezzini, “Ideologia,” 211.

<sup>147</sup> Its mountain location and the language of love used in its description in particular recall the Christian paradises of medieval poetry. See A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 48–54.

<sup>148</sup> On women warriors’ traditional inability to survive, see Chapter 5 of this study, Francesca D’Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 79; Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 179 and Laura Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento: L’Enrico di Lucrezia Marinelli* (Leonforte: Insula, 2010), 63. On Silveria’s unusual death, see Russell, “The Writing of the *Scanderbeide*,” 36 and Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, 179.



ironic that the former huntress should be killed by an animal. Sarrocchi writes that Silveria is familiar with killing elephants, “In uccider esperta ella tai belve, / Che piu ne vide, e vinse in monte, e in selve,” and that Rosmonda, at first reluctant to allow Silveria to charge the elephant, changes her mind “ch’assicura il cor in parte / Nel cacciar di colei l’usanza, e l’arte.”<sup>149</sup> Silveria herself is surprised at her failure because in the past she has escaped from underneath elephants with ease:

Nel volersi ritrar, quando a la fera  
Si smisurata il mortal colpo diede,  
Che di sottrarsi a lei snella, e leggiera,  
Come soleva hebbe sicura fede.<sup>150</sup>

Sarrocchi sets the expectation that Silveria will succeed in the mission because of her specific expertise. Her accidental demise then becomes a confirmation that she is now more like her fellow humans, better able to defend herself against her own kind than against her former animal prey. This adoption of human ways is also evident in her appearance; outfitted now with the finest armor of silver, gold and jewels, she has achieved the trappings of heroism that initially persuaded her to come down from her mountain.<sup>151</sup> She also demonstrates her newfound adherence to Rosmonda’s system of chivalric values when she volunteers to approach the elephant:

A riguardar la bellicose fera,  
Cui d’apressar nessù par, ch’habbia ardire,  
Se’n stava intenta allhor la bella arciera

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<sup>149</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 22.87–88.

<sup>150</sup> Sarrocchi, 22.38. This ottava comes at the end of the canto and is misnumbered in the original; the correct numbering would be 22.96.

<sup>151</sup> Sarrocchi, 22.89.

Svegliando dentro al cor le nobil ire.<sup>152</sup>

Like any strong knight, she is enraged with a noble anger when she notices that no one else has the courage to battle the animal. She assumes the burden for herself, knowing that she will be honored if she succeeds and showing that she now believes Rosmonda's earlier claim that such honor can only be obtained by surpassing others in military prowess. While her bravery enables her to accomplish her primary mission, her inability to navigate the aftermath suggests that she has moved away from the natural world. She certainly knew that the elephant would collapse in a heap, an image consistent with the common medieval and Renaissance belief that elephants are unable to bend their legs.<sup>153</sup> She did not, however, anticipate the presence of the rock, another natural element that hinders her escape. Both the elephant and the rock are representatives of the natural world, reminding us of Silveria's former life on the slopes of Mt. Olympus. Sarrocchi's choice of imagery may have been influenced by the erroneous contemporary understanding that the word "elephant" came from the Greek *lophos*, meaning mountain, a reference to the large size of the animal.<sup>154</sup> The large rock, or boulder, also suggests mountainous terrain. It is fitting that Silveria's final encounter on the battlefield should reflect the conflict between the two worlds to which she has belonged and which define her changing identity. Now a fully-fledged warrior, she can no longer grapple effectively with the life she left behind. Mutual destruction ensues, but Silveria's assimilation into human society—her homecoming—is complete. Her earlier conversion means that she is afforded a further homecoming at the close Canto 22, when

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<sup>152</sup> Sarrocchi, 22.87.

<sup>153</sup> See "On the Elephant," *Physiologus*, 20.

<sup>154</sup> This interpretation originated with early Christian encyclopedist Isidore of Seville, whose *Etymologiae* supplemented the animal interpretations found in the *Physiologus*. See Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.2.14.

as she dies in Rosmonda's arms the queen affirms that she will soon be received by God in heaven.<sup>155</sup>

Sarrocchi's two orphan-heroes show that figurative homecomings can be just as effective as those that are literal in upholding epic values. Although neither character has the true equivalent of an Ithaca to which to return, both communicate a message of the importance of home and family through their respective forms of homecoming. Scanderbeg's conversion to Christianity and acceptance into the group of Albanian citizens at Croia exemplifies a *nostos* worthy of, and indeed surpassing, that of Odysseus, but which at the same time is adapted for the historical context of the Counter-Reformation. Silveria's illustrious return to human society through war glorifies martial pursuits as traditional epic would dictate, but also adjusts them to fit a proto-feminist agenda. Ultimately, Sarrocchi's tactics shed light on how the orphan-hero *topos* can shape the principles of the entire poem, and by extension, the epic genre.

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<sup>155</sup> Sarrocchi, *La Scanderbeide*, 22.41. This ottava comes at the end of the canto and is misnumbered in the original; the correct numbering would be 22.98.

## CHAPTER 5: FROM WILDERNESS TO CIVILIZATION: FEMALE FIGURES IN MARINELLA'S *L'ENRICO*

### INTRODUCTION

Maria Galli Stampino defines Lucrezia Marinella's 1635 *L'Enrico, ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* as "singular" in the introduction to her English translation, an apt adjective for many reasons.<sup>1</sup> She explains that, as we have seen, epic was a rare choice for female authors in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth- centuries. Furthermore, because epic is a genre constructed to laud the creation of political dynasties, an epic devoted to Venice would seemingly be impossible given its republican government. As Stampino notes, while Moderata Fonte herself was from Venice and one of the dedicatees of her poem, Bianca Capello, is also Venetian, the *Floridoro* praises Bianca's union with Francesco de' Medici and their subsequent Florentine lineage.<sup>2</sup> Marinella's poem instead focuses entirely on Venice and omits the dynastic aspect of epic completely, while nevertheless maintaining other markers of the poem's genre. The context of the poem is war, a crusade that pits East against West like Tasso's *Liberata* and Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide*. An enchantress reveals the past, present, and future to a hero whom she is keeping sequestered from battle, just as we have seen with Alcina in Ariosto's *Furioso*, Armida in Tasso and Circetta in Fonte's *Floridoro*. Female warriors showcase their valor against a variety of adversaries. To each of these epic conventions, Marinella adds a new intricacy, making the poem unique as Stampino has categorized it: the crusade in question is the Fourth Crusade, one that never makes it to Jerusalem and involves two sets of Christians fighting each other, the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic; the enchantress, Erina, has no seductive intentions towards her hero,

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<sup>1</sup> Maria G. Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," in *Enrico, Or, Byzantium Conquered: A Heroic Poem*, trans. Maria G. Stampino (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–4. The original text, used in this chapter, is Lucrezia Marinella, *L'Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* (Venice: Ghirardo Imberti, 1635), Google Play Books.

<sup>2</sup> Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," 3n7.

Venier, and is in fact related to him; and the courage of the female warriors is portrayed as the rule, rather than the exception to the rule.<sup>3</sup>

It is on these female characters that this chapter will focus. While not all of them fit squarely into the orphan-hero paradigm, those who do not nevertheless provide important information for understanding how Marinella has revised traditional representations of female characters in epic. The sheer number of them is what first sets *L'Enrico* apart. Although the poem is named after a male protagonist, the most striking parts of the poem occur when female characters take on leading roles. To give a sense of the frequency with which Marinella highlights female characters, in her abridged translation of the text, Stampino only needed to omit eight of twenty-seven cantos in order to focus on the exploits of women.<sup>4</sup> Nor has the variety of female characters Marinella presents gone unnoticed.<sup>5</sup> She creates warriors and enchantresses like many of her predecessors do, but, like Sarrocchi, she also adds a woman who belongs to both of these categories, as well as married young women and older mothers, including a queen who is a former fighter. In this chapter I will examine Marinella's warrior women, arguing that in addition to their primary roles, Marinella positions them as daughters to increase the reader's sympathy for their individual predicaments and for the general predicament of Renaissance women, whose freedoms were restricted by prescriptive societal expectations.<sup>6</sup> I

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<sup>3</sup> Laura Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento: L'Enrico di Lucrezia Marinelli* (Leonforte: Insula, 2010), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," 65: "In selecting the passages to translate, I have followed criteria largely linked to the female characters." In addition to the eight omitted cantos, Stampino also leaves out certain sections of 10 other cantos. However, substantial sections of each of these partial cantos are devoted to the female characters, so the point that the women are featured in at least nineteen of the cantos stands.

<sup>5</sup> Stampino, 33; Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento*, 24; Paola Malpezzi-Price and Christine Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the "Querelle des Femmes" in Seventeenth-Century Italy* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 80.

<sup>6</sup> Stampino observes in "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem" that Marinella places heavy emphasis on the effect that war has on the wives and mothers of fighters (34) and that direct address to the female characters also serves to increase the reader's sympathy for women (39).

also maintain that the heroine Meandra's background as an orphan directly contributes to her success as a warrior, due to both her overcoming vulnerability and the mentor who raises her. Starting with a short biography of the author, I then move through analysis of Meandra and the Queen of Corinth and Argos who is unnamed, Emilia, and Claudia. These lead the chapter to a consideration of Marinella's understanding of the "nature versus nurture" debate, which she discusses both through the character of Claudia and in her treatise on *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne*, quoting Fonte's ideas on the same subject. This debate, in conjunction with the depictions of women in *L'Enrico*, relates closely to another discussion prevalent in Renaissance literature, that of wilderness versus civilization. Because Marinella equates being a warrior with being civilized, the orphan-hero represents this dichotomy; the orphan, born in the wild either figuratively or literally, becomes a hero, the paragon of ordered civilization. I conclude that Marinella's vision of Venice itself coincides with this construction.

## BIOGRAPHY

The extant biographical data of Lucrezia Marinella's life are few. She was born in 1571, raised in Venice by her father, Giovanni Marinelli, a medical doctor who published two books on subjects concerning women: *Gli ornamenti delle donne* (1562) and *Le medicine appartenenti alle infirmità delle donne* (1563). Like the family of Moderata Fonte, the Marinelli belonged to the class of citizens known as the *cittadinanza*. Nothing is currently known about Marinella's mother, other than that she gave birth to at least four children. Lucrezia was the youngest, with a sister and two brothers preceding her, one of whom was also a published doctor. It is supposed that because her father and her older brother themselves were intellectuals, they approved of Lucrezia's literary

pursuits and allowed her more freedom to educate herself than women were generally permitted at the time. In addition, because she did not marry until she was thirty-six and therefore lived in her father's house longer than most women, she was afforded more time to study. Her husband, Girolamo Vacca, was also a physician, with whom she had a daughter and a son. Marinella became ill with fever and died on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1653.<sup>7</sup>

Marinella wrote in several different genres, including biography, plays, romances, poems, and political tracts. Her most famous work, *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti et mancanenti de gli uomini* (1600) belongs to this latter category and is a direct response to a vicious tract written by Giuseppe Passi the year before on the subject of women's faults, called *I donneschi difetti*.<sup>8</sup> Though she defends women in *La nobiltà*, she also mysteriously seems to contradict herself in another treatise written late in life, *Essortationi alle donne e agli altri* (1645). This change of heart, as Stampino writes, might be explained by Marinella's old age or by the idea that her words are meant to be understood rhetorically, rather than literally.<sup>9</sup> Many of Marinella's works were religious in nature, making her treatises and her epic poem *L'Enrico* particularly stand out for their subject matter. *L'Enrico* is set during the Fourth Crusade in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, though Marinella strays from historical fact to enliven her story and to ensure that the Venetians are glorified as much as possible. It depicts the conquest of Byzantium by Venetian crusaders, after several battles with the Eastern Orthodox army led by the ruler Alessio (who has taken the throne illegitimately) and his general Mirtillo. The Venetian side is led by

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<sup>7</sup> Stampino, 4–6; Malpezzi-Price and Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the "Querelle des Femmes" in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, 13–14; "Lucrezia Marinella," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, updated February 2, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lucrezia-marinella/#Lif>.

<sup>8</sup> For a more thorough exploration of these two antithetical treatises, see Stephen Kolsky, "Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi: An Early Seventeenth-Century Feminist Controversy," *The Modern Language Review* 96, no. 4 (2001): 973–89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3735864>.

<sup>9</sup> Stampino, 10. Stampino cites Kolsky, 984 and Malpezzi-Price and Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the "Querelle des Femmes" in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, 127 in this explanation.

Enrico Dandolo, portrayed by Marinella as a military hero full of strength and courage, though historically at the time of this Crusade, he was a doge in his nineties whose role in the action was political, rather than physical. The poem mostly follows the escapades of the armies at the front and the effect that these have on the soldiers' families, with the exception of the adventure of the Venetian hero Venier. Waylaid by a shipwreck on his journey to the war, he washes up on an island where he meets the aforementioned enchantress Erina and learns from her about the history and the future of Venice. The poem ends with the Venetians winning the war and Enrico appointing Baldwin of Flanders as emperor of Byzantium. The female characters under consideration here are all involved in battles at the front in various capacities: Meandra and Emilia fight for the Byzantine side, while Claudia fights for the Venetians. What follows is an analysis of each of these characters. I include the Queen of Corinth and Argos with Meandra because of her role in Meandra's orphan upbringing.

#### MEANDRA AND THE QUEEN

Within the poem, Meandra is the only true orphan-hero in its most straightforward sense: she was brought up by her aunt, the Queen of Corinth and Argos, rather than by a biological parent. Indeed, it is her close relationship with this (unnamed) aunt that frames the Byzantine warrior's first appearance in the poem. Marinella begins Meandra's story from the perspective of the queen, who is a former fighter herself and regrets that her age prevents her from joining the war effort. She watches Meandra prepare for battle with mixed feelings: "Mira Meandra sua, ch'ama qual figlia, / Ramo gentil di sua real famiglia."<sup>10</sup> Meandra is introduced not as a *guerriera*, which

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<sup>10</sup> Lucrezia Marinella, *L'Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* (Venice: Ghirardo Imberti, 1635), 9.12, Google Play Books.



later becomes her primary role, but as a daughter figure and part of the royal family tree. The queen's maternal feelings toward Meandra are underscored by the use of the possessive *sua* as she observes her niece. Meandra's own attitude of filial piety toward the queen is revealed when she says,

...Qual madre  
Teco me pargoletta difendesti,  
Allor che la mia man tra crude squadre  
Palme, e 'l ferro a pigliar pronta facesti.<sup>11</sup>

Here we learn that she reciprocates the queen's feelings, and we are given the reason for their mutual affection: the queen raised Meandra and taught her the art of war. Meandra couches her childhood in terms of battle: not only did the queen pass down her skills as a warrior to her niece, presumably when she was old enough to fight, but she also "defended" Meandra as a child. This choice of verb to describe the act of stepping in as a foster parent indicates the vulnerability to which Meandra was exposed as an orphan. She learns to overcome this weakness, and ultimately defend herself, through her aunt's mentoring, becoming one of the strongest warriors in the Byzantine army. While we have seen other examples of foster parents who mentor their wards in this way, this is the only example of a woman teaching another woman to fight in any of the poems studied here. As Lazzari points out, Marinella creates a *genealogia al femminile* through her portrayal of the queen and Meandra.<sup>12</sup>

Stampino reminds us, however, that Meandra (like most of the female characters in the poem) is a virgin and will die a virgin in the war, never furthering her line.<sup>13</sup> Although she does

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<sup>11</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 9.20.

<sup>12</sup> Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento*, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," 44–45.

not physically pass on her genes to a biological child, she does in fact replicate the queen's act of mentorship when she agrees to look after the queen's son, Ardelio, on the battlefield.<sup>14</sup> The queen is concerned for his welfare because, at her bidding, her son has never before been to war. She wavers between wanting to shield him from danger and desiring military glory for him. This conflict makes her character dynamic, in contrast to Ariosto's Atlante, who wants only to protect Ruggiero, or Fonte's Celidante, who aims solely for his ward's martial success. Since this portion of the poem is told from the queen's point of view, readers have a firsthand understanding of her inner struggle, a struggle duplicated in several other episodes in the poem as various women grapple with the idea of their husbands or sons leaving for war.<sup>15</sup> Marinella thus emphasizes the perspective of the women, also using direct address from the narrator to the female characters in order to convey sympathy for their situations, as Stampino notes.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, the queen decides that the importance of exhibiting valor on the battlefield outweighs her own fears regarding her son's safety, and agrees that he should go; this is the only instance in the poem in which a woman is the arbiter of her loved one's fate, as well as the only instance of a woman who is willing to part with her relative based on her own reasoning, rather than as a reluctant capitulation to the man's wishes. The queen chooses this option for her son because she herself was a warrior and understands the necessity of proving one's merit in battle, unlike the two young wives who protest their husbands' departures in Cantos 4 and 17.

Compared to Clelia and Areta, the queen also has the advantage of age and its accompanying wisdom. However, because Ernesto's mother, of a similar age to the queen, is as distraught as the

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<sup>14</sup> Lazzari notes that the precise familial relationships between Meandra, the queen, and Ardelio are slightly ambiguous (*Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento*, 70n21). It is true that Ardelio is referred to as Meandra's "nipote" when they should be cousins, which contributes to the idea that she is a caretaker for him, but it seems clear that the queen is Ardelio's mother, given that they are defined as "madre" and "figliuolo" in 9.22.

<sup>15</sup> Clelia is upset at her husband Lucillo's leaving in 4.66–86 and 5.3–6. Areta has the same issue when her husband Corradino departs in 17.70–94, as does the young warrior Ernesto's mother when her son leaves in 15.74–85.

<sup>16</sup> Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," 39.

young wives at the thought of her loved one's departure, we come to understand that it is the queen's experience as a fighter that is the most significant factor in her decision. In making the queen's control over her son's military career an anomaly, Marinella employs verisimilitude, since most early modern women would not have had a say in the matter. The queen's decision in favor of her son's departure also suggests that if women were allowed to be in control of these decisions, according to Marinella, they might in fact come to the "right" conclusion. The royal mother, unlike her three counterparts, is driven by reason, rather than emotion. Her reason is displayed both by how she thinks through the repercussions of Ardelio's request and how she herself refrains from entering battle, despite her desires, because of the physical limitations of her age, as she explains to her son (9.26–27). She does shed tears when Ardelio leaves, but quickly stifles them, again demonstrating that she does not let her emotions prevail. I do not want to imply that by allowing the queen this distinction, Marinella is disparaging characters like Areta, Clelia, and Ernesto's mother, who all cry with abandon at the departure of their loved ones. Rather, the poet sympathizes with their plight; because they are forced to abide by their male relatives' wishes, they are deprived of a role in decision-making and left only with their emotions.

Another feature of the queen that sets Marinella's construction of female figures apart from that of her predecessors is the queen's status as a former warrior, as someone who has not converted to a new religion, and as a mother. It is rare in epic for women who are primarily identified as warriors to occupy any of these roles. The precedent is set by Camilla in the *Aeneid*, who fights bravely for Turnus' army (that is, on the enemy side, which increases the sense of her otherness) and ultimately must be killed by a man; her survival outside of the context of war would raise questions of her position in society. As we have seen, female warriors in other epics

generally share this fate.<sup>17</sup> Marfisa and Clorinda are the Renaissance epic prototypes of these *guerriere*. Tasso ensures Clorinda's demise by Canto 12 of the *Liberata* and Marfisa, though she physically survives the events of the *Furioso*, nonetheless undergoes a spiritual death and rebirth through her conversion to Christianity. Neither produces a child. Marinella's queen not only survives her combat days, becoming an ex-warrior, but she also maintains her religious status, not forced to conform to any ideal. In addition, she has a son, which means she fills more than one prescribed role.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, as the ruler of Argos and Corinth, the queen is also endowed with a political role rarely given to women warriors by male authors. Her leadership of these cities is most likely the reason that she can decide her son's career. She is in charge, not he. This is made clear especially in a clever re-appropriation of an epic convention, when Marinella has the queen place Meandra's helmet on Ardelio's head as a joke, to try it out:

S'accosta a la donzella, e l'elmo prende  
Dorato e vago, e l'arte e 'l pregio mira.  
Poscia, quasi scherzando, adorna rende  
La fronte al figlio, che tal pompa ammira:  
Ei tosto al brando la man pronta stende,  
E con saper per l'aria il volge e gira,  
Bramò la pugna, ma negò la madre,

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<sup>17</sup> "Marinella realizes that in the *Aeneid* Camilla is a complex character who has Virgil's sympathy and yet must surrender to the logic and the rules of the epic agenda that want women destroyed, especially those who keep the hero from reaching his goals and who are not faithful wives and committed mothers." Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 79. Other critics who mention this include Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 179 and Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Bradamante in the *Furioso* also procreates, but I would argue that reproduction with Ruggiero is her primary objective in the poem, while her ability as a warrior is a secondary trait, whereas the queen in Marinella is more balanced, equally warrior and mother.

Che scoprì il suo valor tra forti squadre.<sup>19</sup>

This act reverses the traditional moment in which the female knight removes her helmet, exposing her long hair and therefore signifying her gender to the surprise of onlookers or defeated opponents who had assumed she was male.<sup>20</sup> While this conventional revelation is not exactly a joke, the element of surprise involved mirrors the unexpectedness of seeing Ardelio wearing the helmet. Marinella constructs a scene in which it is the norm that the helmet belongs to the woman, whereas the man in a helmet is the outlier. Ardelio is akin to a child playing make-believe as he brandishes the sword, especially since his mother puts the helmet on him “quasi scherzando.” Marinella creates a contrast between this image of Ardelio and the queen’s own outward appearance earlier on, establishing that using the sword was her default stance: “Già in campo trattò il ferro, ed or ch’ha sciuto / Il brando, e presa la negletta gonna...”<sup>21</sup> Her skirt, a symbol of women’s clothing, lay forgotten until she became too old to fight. Because she switches between archetypes in this way, the queen exemplifies Marinella’s ability to create variety in her female characters.

As Meandra consents to the queen’s request for her to protect Ardelio, she cites the fact that the queen raised her, implying that she owes a debt to her mother figure and that she will effectively repay her with the same service by caring for her son. This is another reversal of standard epic themes, since it is generally the men who are tasked with safeguarding the women, or an older male who might look out for a younger male in battle. The one scenario in male-authored epic in which a female figure has a similar goal to Meandra’s occurs in classical epic, when a goddess seeks to give her favorite warrior an advantage or prevent his death. Though

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<sup>19</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 9.15.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Fonte’s *Floridoro* 2.28 and 13.65, or Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* 32.79 and following.

<sup>21</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 9.12.

Meandra is not a goddess, her plan nevertheless recalls that of Venus in the *Iliad*, who wants to shield the warrior Aeneas from harm during the Trojan War. Marinella draws on this source and its successor the *Aeneid* by comparing Meandra to Venus:

Tal fuor del'onde immense il capo estolle  
La bella Dea d'amor nitido e puro,  
La qual ridendo e rosseggiando tolle  
Vapor che chiudea 'l cielo umido e oscuro.  
La guerriera, con fren placido e molle  
Non men, che con saper saggio e maturo,  
In un squadron gli accoglie e uniti accende  
Con detti l'alme, e più feroci scude.<sup>22</sup>

Significantly, Venus is Aeneas's mother, which reinforces my claim that Meandra takes up the queen's mantle by acting as a mother figure to Ardelio. Marinella here references Venus as the morning star, rather than as the mother of Aeneas. However, the comparison is still relevant: she compares Meandra's rallying of the troops (including Ardelio) with sage words to the goddess clearing away the night fog to reveal the morning light. Meandra prepares the soldiers for battle by providing them with clarity, in her first act of protectiveness that mimics Venus's instinct toward her son Aeneas.

Meandra continues to act as a leader during the war, earning the status of hero by her display of strength and courage. In 12.39–44, she is compared to “il lupo atroce,” killing lamb-like soldiers everywhere she goes. She sets an example for the other warriors and encourages them: “Imparate da me come s'uccida, / Come si vinca e come il fato arrida.”<sup>23</sup> That she tells the

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<sup>22</sup> Marinella, 9.29.

<sup>23</sup> Marinella, 12.41.

men to learn from her is again unusual, and even more so is their reaction, which is to be heartened and regain courage. She also chastises them for dishonorably fleeing from their enemies at the end of Canto 14 (116–118). Her tendency to speak without first being spoken to defies the Renaissance societal norm for women.<sup>24</sup>

When Ardelio is captured (14.111), Meandra is given another opportunity to prove her worthiness and fulfill her vow to the queen. She declares her intention to rescue him during a night raid on the enemy camp. Her decision is another adaptation of an epic pattern, the scene of the *doloneia*, in which two male friends breach the enemy line together.<sup>25</sup> Her declaration gives rise to a conversation between two such companions, Dione and Ernesto, who praise her courage at length:

E se la regal vergine non teme  
Ne l'ombra tetra gir tra genti averse  
Molto può, molto ardisce, le supreme  
Sue forze fer le vie di sangue asperse;  
Oggi, quando il gran re privo di speme,  
Ferito il volto franco non sofferse;  
Quasi fuggente, solo ella sostenne  
L'italo campo e gran soccorso dienne.<sup>26</sup>

Through this conversation held between male warriors, who might in other poems be bemused by the female warrior's expertise, Marinella reiterates that Meandra has performed exceptionally in battle. She has killed many enemy soldiers and she was the only one who stood up to the

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<sup>24</sup> Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," 45.

<sup>25</sup> See Odysseus and Diomedes in *Iliad* 10.256–670, Euryalus and Nisus in *Aeneid* 9.176–472, Cloridano and Medoro in *Orlando furioso* 18.165–19.16.

<sup>26</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 15.17.

Italians when her compatriots were fleeing. Her heroism is underscored even further when Dione and Ernesto express their desire to conduct the night mission instead of Meandra, not because she is a woman and should not embark on such a dangerous journey, but because she is too essential to the army to sacrifice (15.31). Meandra's response to the suggestion that they replace her is negative:

Nega ch'a risco tal pongan la vita:  
Sola gir vuol, né vuol compagno o guida;  
Nè chi la segua, o chi le porga aita;  
Perch'essa nel valor proprio si fida.<sup>27</sup>

She only trusts herself to accomplish the task, without any help whatsoever. With this refusal, Marinella obviously snubs the tradition of the night raid; the idea that the mission might be better left to the men is raised and quickly rejected. Because this outing is undertaken in pairs, the episode of the night raid in epic poetry is often considered a representation of the significance of male relationships in the genre.<sup>28</sup> A woman on her own, Marinella suggests, can be more capable than two men in accomplishing any task, including and especially those tasks that are usually assigned to male actors.

Meandra does ultimately relent and allow Ernesto and Dione to accompany her, but only after they reassure her that they will follow her as servants:

Noi seguirem tuoi gloriosi passi,

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<sup>27</sup> Marinella, 15.43.

<sup>28</sup> See Lee Fratantuono, "'Pius Amor': Nisus, Euryalus, and the Footrace of *Aeneid* V," *Latomus* 69, no. 1 (2010): 43–55; Michael C.J. Putnam, *Virgil's Aeneid: Interpretation and Influence* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 296–298; Philip Hardie, *Virgil: Aeneid Book IX* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 31–34; Lauren Silberman, "Growing Up in Epic: Transformations of the Doloneia," *Spenser Studies* 34 (January 2020): 167–75, <https://doi.org/10.1086/706538>; Wiley Feinstein, "Ariosto's Parodic Rewriting of Virgil in the Episode of Cloridano and Medoro," *South Atlantic Review* 55, no. 1 (1990): 17–34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3199870>.



Pompa d'ogni grandezza, alta guerriera;  
Fidi servi e compagni e noi mai lassi  
Vedrai d'uccider quella iniqua schiera;  
Ti seguirem dove il nemico stassi  
Tra gli orrori di morte a l'ombra nera.  
Vinta al fin da lor preghi seco accolse  
Ambo gli amici, ed al partir si volse.<sup>29</sup>

The only acceptable manner in which the men may join her is the one in which they act as her underlings; they are not there for her protection, but for her use. It is Meandra who leads the others and she who kills Gilberto, Ardelio's captor, fulfilling her promise to the queen to avenge any wrongdoing to her son. Similarly, when the young Ernesto is killed upon their return across neutral territory, Meandra vows revenge. She is moved by "pietà," which can be understood as pity or compassion but is also another important signifier of heroism in the epic cycle since its Latin root, *pious*, is the epithet of Aeneas, known for his loyalty to family.<sup>30</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, in her book *Arms and the Woman*, Francesca D'Alessandro Behr interprets *pietas* as exhibiting restraint in battle. She compares Risamante's sparing of Cloridabello in Fonte's *Floridoro* with Meandra and Claudia's reciprocal slaughter, arguing that Risamante demonstrates more *pietas* than Marinella's warriors because she chooses not to kill her enemy.<sup>31</sup> Risamante avoids the pitfall of Aeneas's final battle with Turnus in *Aeneid* 12, in which he succumbs to rage and kills his opponent, despite his initial hesitation and usual *pious* demeanor.<sup>32</sup> Aeneas's ire is triggered by the sight of Turnus wearing the belt of the young Pallas, whom the Rutulian had killed and

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<sup>29</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 15.44.

<sup>30</sup> Marinella, 15.87.

<sup>31</sup> D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman*, 88–89.

<sup>32</sup> D'Alessandro Behr, 39–62.

whom Aeneas considered a son.<sup>33</sup> Though not compassionate, Aeneas's action might nevertheless be read as *pious* because it is a reaction to the wounding of a person to whom he feels a certain duty, both as leader of the Trojan army and as a father figure.<sup>34</sup> Meandra's decision to seek vengeance for Ernesto's death has the same motivation, which may be why Marinella uses "pietà" to describe the woman warrior's instinct. Meandra emulates both Venus and Aeneas in her desire to protect her fellow soldiers, simultaneously acting as a mother figure and a warrior.

## EMILIA

Emilia is also a hybrid character. Like Silveria in Sarrocchi, she shares traits with the huntress goddess Diana, a virgin who makes her home in a natural setting and displays her archery skills on the battlefield. Just as Meandra is first introduced as a daughter, so is Emilia:

Stan sopra il lito, ove Bisanzio siede,  
Fanciulli, madri, figlie e vecchi inermi,  
Per saper, per veder qual fin succede  
Di loro insidie, e de' fallaci schermi:  
Benché tai genti tengan fermo il piede,  
E molti sien di cor deboli e infermi;

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<sup>33</sup> Virgil, *Virgil, Volume I: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid Book 1–6*, ed. G.P. Goold and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12.938–52.

<sup>34</sup> For Aeneas as a father figure, see Timothy M. O'Sullivan, "Death *Ante Ora Parentum* in Virgil's *Aeneid*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 139, no. 2 (2009): 447–86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/apa.0.0027>. For analyses of Aeneas and Turnus's duel, see Cesáreo Bandera, "Sacrificial levels in Virgil's *Aeneid*," *Arethusa* 14, no. 2 (1981): 217–239; Don Fowler, *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119, 284–308; Philip Hardie, "Tales of unity and division in imperial Latin epic," in *Literary Responses to Civil Discord*, ed. J.H. Molyneux (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1993), 57–71; David Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 68–83, 95.

Nulladimen con sassi e con saette  
Fan, di chi estingue il foco, aspre vendetta.

Tra costoro era Emilia, una donzella  
Vaga, leggiadra e di bellezze rare.  
Figlia de' boschi, d'arco e di quadrella  
Armata cacciatrice, non ha pare:  
Vince l'aura col corso, lieve e snella  
La pianta di coturno avvinta appare;  
Succinta in bianchi panni tien raccolta  
In breve nastro d'or la chioma incolta.<sup>35</sup>

It is striking that although she becomes part of the army, she is first seen standing on the shore in a group of Byzantines who are too young, too old, or too female, as it were, to fight (“Fanciulli, madri, figlie e vecchi inermi”). They are the family members of the Byzantine soldiers, who have just set fire to the Venetian ships during a truce. Those on the shore assist their husbands and fathers by throwing rocks and shooting arrows at the fleet. In this group, Emilia belongs to the category of “figlie,” although she has no actual familial tie to any of the soldiers. She is described as a “figlia de’ boschi,” which attributes to her a certain wildness, despite her beauty. Her wildness is mitigated by the fact that she first appears near the city with Byzantine citizens, having come from the forest of her own volition without an intermediary like Rosmonda in *Scanderbeide*. Emilia occupies a middle position between a forest dweller and a city dweller, a position I will explore further below.

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<sup>35</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 8.88–89.

Emilia's familial origins are unclear. As Stampino notes, Marinella possibly contradicts herself while outlining them: the label "figlia de' boschi" implies an orphan-hero status similar to that of Camilla, Clorinda, and Silveria, but in a few octaves Marinella clarifies that Emilia did have parents, a king and a sylvan goddess.<sup>36</sup> Whether she raised herself and could justifiably be categorized as an orphan-hero is not made explicit. She is separated from the other women on the shore also by her partially divine parentage, which endows her with a vaguely magical identity. In terms of epic archetypes, she becomes a combination of a goddess or enchantress figure and a warrior. Like Meandra, Emilia is compared to Venus in ottava 90:

Tal forse vide tra gli atroci Peni,  
Ne l'ampia selva il generoso Enea  
L'alta sembianza e i begli occhi sereni  
De la sua cara genitrice, e Dea;  
Qual vergine spartana i campi ameni  
Ornar, tal la faretra e l'arco avea;  
O qual per l'Ebro Arpalice feroce  
Spiose con fero ardir corsier veloce.<sup>37</sup>

Since both Meandra and Emilia are repeatedly referred to as virgins, these comparisons to the goddess of love might seem surprising, but Lazzari explains that though they came to embody very different roles, the images of Venus and Diana were often conflated in ancient Rome.<sup>38</sup> In fact, Marinella's reference to Emilia as Venus specifically points to an episode in which Aeneas mistakes his mother, in disguise as a virgin huntress, for Diana:

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<sup>36</sup> Stampino, "A Singular Venetian Epic Poem," 53.

<sup>37</sup> Marinella, *L' Enrico*, 8.90.

<sup>38</sup> Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento*, 61.

Across [Aeneas's] path, in the midst of the forest, came his mother, with a maiden's face and mien, and a maiden's arms, whether one of Sparta or such a one as Thracian Harpalyce, when she out-tires horses and outstrips the winged East Wind in flight. For from her shoulders in huntress fashion she had slung the ready bow and had given her hair to the winds to scatter; her knee bare, and her flowing robes gathered in a knot. Before he speaks, "Ho!" she cries, "tell me, youths, if perchance you have seen a sister of mine here straying, girt with quiver and a dappled lynx's hide, or pressing with shouts on the track of a foaming boar."

Thus Venus, and thus in answer Venus' son began: "None of your sisters have I heard or seen—but by what name should I call you, maiden? for your face is not mortal nor has your voice a human ring; O goddess surely! sister of Phoebus, or one of the race of Nymphs?"<sup>39</sup>

Why might Marinella have chosen to reference Venus-as-huntress, rather than make a straightforward comparison between Emilia and Diana? By alluding to both goddesses, Marinella avoids pigeonholing Emilia as a carbon copy of Diana. Assigning to the reader the point of view of Aeneas, Marinella connects Emilia with Venus as a mother, "la sua cara genitrice." Just as with Meandra, the poet constructs an image of Emilia as both a daughter and as a potential mother figure, creating the idea of family around her even when her relations do not appear in the poem. These allusions to Emilia as a family member increase sympathy for her

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<sup>39</sup> "cui mater media sese tulit obvia silva, / virginis os habitumque gerens et virginis arma, / Spartanae, vel qualis equos Threissa fatigat / Harpalyce volucremque fuga praevertitur Eurum. / namque umeris de more habilem suspenderit arcum / venatrix dederatque comam diffundere ventis, / nuda genu nodoque sinus collecta fluentis. / ac prior "heus," inquit, "iuvenes, monstrate, mearum vidistis si quam hic errantem forte sororum, / succinctam pharetra et maculosae tegmina lyncis, / aut spumantis apri cursum clamore prementem." / Sic Venus, et Veneris contra sic filius orsus: / "nulla tuarum audita mihi neque visa sororum, / o—quam te memorem, virgo? namque haud tibi vultus / mortalis, nec vox hominem sonat; o dea certe! an Phoebi soror? an Nympharum sanguinis una?" Virgil, *Virgil, Volume I: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid Book 1–6*, 1.314–329.

as a character, attenuating the possibly negative connotations of her forest origins. The incorporation of Venus also ties in with the comparison between Emilia's arrows and those of Love, or Cupid, Venus's other son, in ottava 93; Emilia wounds her enemies both physically and metaphorically when they fall in love with her. It is possible, Marinella argues, for one woman to possess conflicting traits: the Venus-like aspect of Emilia attracts men, while her virginal Diana-like aspect has no need of them, which gives her the power to destroy them. This latter trait is why, as Lazzari explains, Diana, or women who follow her example, are seen as a threat to the social order and must be defeated.<sup>40</sup>

The association of Diana and Emilia with animals and the forest contributes to this threat because the forest is considered a place of uncivilized wilderness. Robert Pogue Harrison traces the evolution of the forest and its female deities in his book *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*. He shows how, according to *Aeneid* 8.415–29, Rome itself was originally a forest, and that “the mythic forests of antiquity stand opposed to the city in some fundamental way. We will find that Rome itself can become Rome only by overcoming, or effacing, the forests of its origins.”<sup>41</sup> He explains that in prehistoric times, the precursor to Diana was an earth goddess, portrayed as mother of the human race who provided nature and its abundances for human use.<sup>42</sup> Her virginity, which Harrison asserts is a feature of her later iteration as Diana/Artemis, and which I will address further below, is partly due to an analogy with forests: as they are not besmirched by the touch of civilization, so does she refuse to be besmirched by the touch of men. Harrison treats this goddess within the Greek context. He refers to her solely as Artemis, writing that though she is similar to the Roman Diana, they are not actually the same goddess.<sup>43</sup> However, as

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<sup>40</sup> Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel Seicento*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1–2.

<sup>42</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Harrison, 23.

part of his analysis of Artemis, he gives a reading of the myth of Actaeon as told in Book 3 of the *Metamorphoses*, wherein the Roman Ovid uses instead the name Diana. Even if in terms of precise origins the Greek and Roman versions of this goddess are different, since like many Renaissance authors Marinella uses Ovid as a source, it is safe to consider the two goddesses to be essentially the same for our purposes.<sup>44</sup>

Marinella was also familiar with the *Iliad*, given references she makes in *L'Enrico*.<sup>45</sup> It is most likely that she read Homer's epic in Latin translation, where again, Artemis is referred to as Diana.<sup>46</sup> While giving Emilia the general shape of Diana, the poet also differentiates her from her predecessor not only by the comparison with Venus, but also by the character's involvement in war. Harrison notes that Homer's treatment of Diana/Artemis is harsh.<sup>47</sup> In Book 21, the gods erupt in anger at one another over their conflicting loyalties to the two armies in the Trojan War. Apollo, on the side of the Trojans, is goaded by Poseidon but refuses to join the fray, resulting in the huntress goddess calling her brother a coward. Hera, who with Poseidon favors the Greeks, responds angrily:

Zeus's regal consort flew into rage at once  
and her outburst raked the Huntress armed with arrows:  
"How do you have the gall, you shameless bitch,  
to stand and fight me here? You and your archery!  
Zeus made you a lion against all women, true,

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<sup>44</sup> Stampino shows that Marinella specifically cites the story of Niobe in 18.26, which is told both in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6.165 and following and in Homer's *Iliad*, 24.600–622.

<sup>45</sup> See 1.24, 15.32, 18.3, 18.26.

<sup>46</sup> The earliest known translation of the *Iliad* into Latin was by Leonzio Pilato in 1362, though his translation is lost. A subsequent translation that may have been available to Marinella was begun by Lorenzo Valla in the 1440s and completed by his student, Francesco Griffolini. At least one critic believes this version to be the one used by Ariosto: Veronica Copello, "Quale *Iliade* leggeva Ariosto?," *Aevum* 88, no. 3 (2014): 587–613.

<sup>47</sup> Harrison, *Forests*, 21.

he lets you kill off mothers in their labor—  
but you'll find it painful, matching force with me.  
Better to slaughter beasts on rocky mountain slopes  
and young deer in the wild than fight a higher goddess!  
But since you'd like a lesson in warfare, Artemis,  
just to learn, to savor how much stronger I am  
when you engage my power—”

[...]

Hera boxed the Huntress' ears with her own weapons,  
smiling broadly now as her victim writhed away  
and showering arrows scattered. Bursting into tears  
the goddess slipped from under her clutch like a wild dove  
that flies from a hawk's attack to a hollow rocky cleft  
for it's not the quarry's destiny to be caught—  
so she fled in tears, her archery left on the spot.

[...]

By now the Huntress had reached Olympus heights  
and made her way to the bronze-floored house of Zeus.  
And she sat down on her Father's lap, a young girl,  
sobbing, her deathless robe quivering around her body.  
But her Father, son of Cronus, hugged her tight  
and giving a low warm laugh inquired gently,  
“Who has abused you now, dear child, tell me,



who of the sons of heaven so unfeeling, cruel?”<sup>48</sup>

Diana is represented as a mere child who tattles to her father the moment she feels mistreated by the older sister figure of Hera. She is unfit to interfere in the arguments of the older gods, particularly in matters of war. Hera treats Diana’s abilities as inferior, saying she is better suited to her role as huntress and as goddess of fertility than she is to war, and alluding to her youth by telling her she has much to learn. The ear boxing also indicates her young age, since it is a gesture that recalls a parent’s punishment of a child. The scene of the goddess sitting in her father’s lap confirms this portrayal. Zeus laughs indulgently at Diana while he comforts her, calling her “carissima filia” in the Latin translation Marinella may have read.<sup>49</sup> Homer also compares the young goddess in her quarrel with Hera to a dove in the claws of a hawk. While the dove was not yet a symbol of peace in ancient Greece, it was associated with the goddess of love, who was positioned as the significant other and opposite of the god of war. Venus (Aphrodite) and Mars (Ares) were mythological lovers often depicted in a power struggle, in which love is the only force that can overcome war. Their conflict is portrayed by Marsilio Ficino in his *De Amore* as the opposition of the two planets by the same names, which compete for astrological dominance.<sup>50</sup> Homer’s simile likening Diana to the dove implies that she also represents the opposite of Mars in terms of martial expertise. Though the huntress rejects the carnal love Venus symbolizes, her dove-like naivete means that, like Venus, she has no business in warfare.

Emilia, on the other hand, thrives in war. She kills a large number of Venetian soldiers with arrows and slingshots, and Marinella illustrates many of her individual victories, including

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<sup>48</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 21.545–584.

<sup>49</sup> Homer, *Homeri poetae clarissimi Ilias*, trans. Lorenzo Valla (Venice: Ioannis Tacuini de Tridino, c. 1502), Book 21, Google Play Books.

<sup>50</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Reynolds Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), Speech 5.8, 96–97.

the deaths of Artemidoro, Caloro, and Alfeo (8.92–94), Enea, Filerto, and Artemio (8.112–113), and Plautio (27.50–54), as well as the severe wounding of Resin and Cesio (8.95). Though he is a minor character, it is difficult not to read at least some significance in Emilia's slaughter of a warrior named Enea, given the epic context; it speaks to her strength while reminding the reader that she is fighting on the wrong side of the war. A clearer example of the faith placed in her abilities occurs when Mirtillo requests that she kill Enrico, the leader of the opposing army, in the last canto of the poem. He says:

Figlia, pompa de'boschi, onor de l'armi,  
Splendor del campo a cui già Febo cede,  
Cede e la vergin Trivia e vero e parmi,  
Che 'l ciel lume più bel di te non vede.  
Prego che la tua man famosa s'armi  
Contra il gran struggitor di nostra sede:  
Poichè non vibri indarno, o Vergin snella,  
Da l'arco tuo le orribili quadrella.

Se 'l farai premio e gloria avrai da questi  
Popoli invitti e coraggiose schiere,  
Se vedrem pe' tuoi strali acuti e presti  
Morto il superbo Enrico al pian cadere;  
Estinto lui, li suoi fuggir vedresti,  
Li nostri ripiglior forza e potere:  
L'ode, lo stral prepara, il duce attende,

Qual con cauto consiglio i Greci offende.<sup>51</sup>

Mirtillo addresses Emilia first as daughter, which as we have seen is consistent with how Marinella has described her since her initial entrance into the poem. He then refers to her as “pompa de’boschi,” which Stampino translates as “glory of the woods” and which recalls the phrase “figlia de’boschi” from Canto 8. Although she spends most of the poem in the city amongst soldiers, her sylvan origins remain important. The proximity in Mirtillo’s words of Emilia’s identity as daughter to her identity as a forest nymph contains the suggestion that the woods somehow gave birth to her, fostering her in place of her biological parents, again raising the question of her orphan-heroism. He goes on to ask—he uses the word “prego,” rather than commanding her as is certainly within his rights as general of the Byzantine army—that she use her arrows against Enrico, the great destroyer of Byzantium. He has already praised her military prowess at length, calling her “onor de l’armi” and “splendor del campo,” but he adds that she will receive even more honor and glory if she accomplishes this task. More importantly, by killing Enrico she will ensure that the rest of his army flees and that the Byzantines will prevail. In other words, Mirtillo feels comfortable giving the responsibility for the outcome of the entire war to Emilia, a huge statement of his trust in her skill. She fails the attempt to bring down Enrico only because God protects the Venetian leader, in the sole instance of divine intervention in the poem. Lastly, in Mirtillo’s speech he directly compares Emilia to Diana, saying that the warrior outshines both the goddess and her twin brother Apollo. Marinella shows us that Emilia is not a simple duplicate of Diana, and that in fact she is more “civilized” than Diana precisely because of her participation in the war.

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<sup>51</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 27.58–59.

For Marinella, being a knight is equated with being civilized; any element of wildness or animal-like behavior diminishes a character's knightly, and therefore human, qualities. This is a common medieval and Renaissance idea, the most well-known example of which in epic occurs in *Orlando furioso* 23, when the knight Orlando sees his beloved's name carved into trees alongside the name of another man and, envious, loses his sanity. In this episode that gives the poem its name, Orlando becomes *furioso*, crazed, a wild man who does not speak, tears off his clothes, and eats all manner of things, including raw food. He is reduced to an animalistic state, his knightly duties forgotten.<sup>52</sup> Marinella upholds this binary opposition between wildness and warriorhood in many cases throughout *L'Enrico*. For example, in Canto 4, when the Venetian knight Giacinto prepares to venture into the enemy camp to understand the mood of the Greeks and report back to his army, he is described as supremely beautiful:

Toglie dal biondo crin, leva dal petto  
La ferrea soma e le pompose spoglie;  
Le generose membra sue raccoglie,  
Ma nel suo dolce e venerando aspetto  
Di sì rara beltà splendor s'accoglie,  
Che mostra ben, ch'abitator di selve  
Non è, nè fero cacciator di belve.

Anzi più fra tal manto il vago volto  
Mostra di gioventù vivaci ardori;

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<sup>52</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 23. For more on the figure of the wild person, see Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

Da gli occhi spiega e dal crin crespo e colto

Di natura e del ciel divini onori.<sup>53</sup>

Even when he removes his armor and puts aside his spoils of war, the superficial signs of knighthood, his beauty underneath proves that he does not fall into the opposite category, that is, of someone wild who inhabits forests or hunts beasts. He is “colto di natura,” civilized. The Greeks, on the other hand, are wild and crude. In Canto 10, the Greeks capture Artabano’s daughter to act as a virgin sacrifice that will help them win the war, echoing the sacrifice of Agamemnon’s daughter Iphigenia that allows his men to sail to Troy.<sup>54</sup> In Marinella, the daughter describes the Greeks as “Non uomini, ma fere de le ignote / Selve uscite d’Etolia o d’Erimanto.”<sup>55</sup> They are not men, but their opposite: feral beasts from forests. Similarly, the maiden Idilia calls the Thessalians who are attacking her beloved Giacinto in Canto 11 “orride belve.”<sup>56</sup> The warrior Oronte is often described with the epithet “Hyrcanian,” which, as Stampino writes, “serves to underscore his provenance and, implicitly, his fierceness. Hyrcania [...] was remote and wild, and especially notable for its tigers.”<sup>57</sup> In addition, Criso, the hermit, lives in isolation away from society, which Marinella indicates by mentioning his lack of need for military accoutrements:

Che da lorica o ben ferrato scudo

Fia che costi più sicurezza accoglia

La bontà del suo cor tra strane belve,

Tra boschi opachi e abbandonate selve.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 20–21.

<sup>54</sup> This story is most famously relayed in Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, ed. and trans. Christopher Collard and James Morwood (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 10.26.

<sup>56</sup> Marinella, 11.37.

<sup>57</sup> Stampino, “A Singular Venetian Epic Poem,” 29.

<sup>58</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 16.27.

Since he is a holy man, his preference to live among beasts is not necessarily considered uncivilized, but his situation is still presented as out of the ordinary and at a contrast with war. Lastly, when the Venetian Venier arrives in the realm of Erina the enchantress, he initially laments:

Crudel fortuna, in si solinghe selve  
Da la gloria de l'armi, oimé, lontano  
Tratto m'hai rea, tra sassi, tronchi e belve,  
Di senso prive e d'intelletto umano.  
Dunque il Ciel vuol che 'l mio valor s'inselve,  
Pur creduto dal mondo alto e sovrano?<sup>59</sup>

He complains that rocks, trees, and beasts are deprived of human senses and intellect. By contrasting life in the forest to the glory of arms, he equates human intellect or humanity with military involvement. He then asks if it is God's will that his valor "s'inselve," become wild, or to take the literal meaning of the word, become "forested." Again Marinella places courage in war in opposition to wildness in the forest.

Where, then, does Emilia fit in, if she is a warrior but also a forest nymph? This dual nature is exceptional in the context of the poem, where, as we have seen, the majority of fighters are labeled as either upstanding warriors or wild beasts. Emilia's difference, which corresponds with her difference in gender from most of the other warriors, is another example of how Marinella makes room for women to take on multiple roles. By doing so, the poet also restricts men, keeping them within their assigned categories. In addition, Emilia's ending differs from that of her Greek cohort. Like the Queen of Corinth and Argos, in a deviation from epic

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<sup>59</sup> Marinella, 21.14.

predecessors, Emilia survives the war. When she attempts to shoot Enrico, though the arrows change direction and speed back toward her, they fall at her feet without harming her (27.64–66). Since it is God who has intervened by controlling the trajectory of the arrows, saving Enrico, the western Christian hero of the poem, it is also God who chooses not to kill Emilia, despite the fact that she is fighting for the Byzantines and has just tried to kill the leader of the Venetians. Marinella is making a statement about Emilia’s worthiness, which is also, as Stampino writes, a pro-woman statement: “Of all enemy warriors, only Emilia, a woman, avoids the shame of escape; indeed, by virtue of her chastity, she gains divine status. It is an indication of Marinella’s pro-woman position, on the one hand, and of her adhering to early modern (patriarchal) standards of conduct on the other.”<sup>60</sup> When she realizes the Greek defeat, Emilia returns to her forest home and indeed is deified:

Tarda, dolente e disdegnosa torna  
De’ boschi amici, a la bramata pace,  
Vinta guerriera, ma di spoglie adorna  
Famose e chiare, in cui pur si compiace;  
E l’armi sue volanti ancor ritorna  
Nel pitto a tinger d’animal fugace,  
Per castidade illustre al fin divenne  
Diva silvestre e ‘l nome suo ritenne.<sup>61</sup>

The preservation of Emilia’s chastity is certainly an indication of Marinella’s adherence to patriarchal standards, but it does not nullify the effect of Emilia’s transgression of other

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<sup>60</sup> Stampino, *Enrico, Or, Byzantium Conquered: A Heroic Poem*, trans. Maria G. Stampino (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 373n33.

<sup>61</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 27.88.

boundaries; it enables Marinella to transgress while maintaining readers' approval of the character. The nymph's return to the forest and transformation into a sylvan goddess signals her ability to switch between roles, defying any attempt to fit her into a single mold. She is introduced to the poem as one in a throng of citizens, who chooses to emerge from the woods and join civilization. By introducing Emilia as part of society, even while she comes from the forest, Marinella reduces her wild aspect, without erasing it completely. The wild warrior spends the whole poem on the walls of the city of Byzantium, fully involved in the war through the very last canto, until she returns to her forest origins and is elevated above beast and human by becoming divine.

Emilia's deification might appear to be further confirmation of her association with Diana. However, as explained earlier, Emilia is distinct from the huntress goddess in several ways: her capacity to entice men is aligned with that of Venus as she wounds men with arrows that double as those of Cupid, and she is a highly skilled warrior, not confined to sylvan surroundings but also fighting in Byzantium. Thus I would argue that Emilia, in all her apparent contradictions, recalls the mother earth goddess, Terra, more than her Roman descendant Diana. As the *magna mater* and generator of all, Terra represents primeval unity. Though in Boccaccio's *Geneologia deorum gentilium*, a possible source for Marinella, he posits that the separation of the elements occurred at the earth goddess's birth, he also quotes Statius's *Thebaid* in his description of Terra. Statius portrays Terra as the creator of all things together:

O eternal creatrix of men and gods,  
who to the world's rivers and forests and all the seeds of  
animals  
and the hands of Prometheus and Pyrrha's stones,



gave birth and gave the first elements to the hungry  
 and transformed men, you who carry the sea on both sides:  
 in your power are the gentle herds and the anger of wild  
 animals  
 and the repose of birds; firm and never-setting  
 strength of the unfailing world, the swift machine of the sky  
 suspended in the empty air, as do the two chariots,  
 encircles you, O middle of things unapportioned to the great  
 brothers!  
 Therefore you supply so many nations, so many great  
 cities and peoples, sufficient by yourself below and above.  
 Without toil you bear star-bearing Atlas toiling  
 to support the heavenly homes...<sup>62</sup>

Groupings that later came to be seen as opposites were instead complementary pairs under Terra's rule.<sup>63</sup> She is in charge of animals and men, cities and forests; she remains undivided, *indivisa*, by the great brothers, meaning sky, earth, and ocean; and she is enough in herself to provide for everyone, whether *subter*, below, or *desuper*, above. She is also paradoxically a virgin mother, as Hesiod explains in his *Theogony*:

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<sup>62</sup> "O hominem divumque eterna creatrix, / que fluvios silvasque animarum semina mundi / cuncta Prometheasque manus Pyrreaque saxa / gignis, et impastis que prima elementa dedisti / mutastique viros, que pontum ambisque vehisque: / te penes et pecudum gens mitis et ira ferarum / et volucrum requies; firmum atque immobile mundi / robur inoccidui, te velox machina celi / aere pendente(m) vacuo, te currus uterque / circumit, o rerum media indivisaque magnis / fratribus! Ergo simul tot gentibus alma, tot altis / urbibus ac populis subterque et desuper una / sufficis, astriferumque domos Athlanta supernos / ferre laborantem nullo vehis ipsa labore..." Statius, *Thebaid*, 8.303–16 as quoted in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, Volume 1: Books I–V*, trans. Jon Solomon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1.8.1.

<sup>63</sup> See Harrison, *Forests*, 19.

And Earth bore first like to herself in size starry Sky, that he might shelter her around on all sides, that so she might be ever a secure seat for the blessed gods; and she brought forth vast mountains, lovely haunts of deities, the Nymphs who dwell along the woodland hills. She too bore also the barren Sea, rushing with swollen stream, the Pontos, I mean, without delightsome love.<sup>64</sup>

Boccaccio, though he does not go so far as to say Terra is virginal, does admit that her children's father is *incerto*: "...and this brings us to the explanation of her children, whom they say came from an uncertain father."<sup>65</sup> Just as Terra encompasses opposing traits, so does Emilia represent the union of love and chastity, wilderness and city, female and male, human and divine.

#### CLAUDIA

Claudia is another virgin warrior whom Marinella compares to Diana for her archery skills, though Claudia did not grow up in the forest, and also uses a sword in hand-to-hand combat.<sup>66</sup> Her most significant episodes are her killing spree in Canto 19.49–56, her battle with the warrior Oronte in 24.26–33, and her duel with Meandra in 24.35–49. Though she makes fewer appearances than Meandra, she is distinct as the only female warrior on the Venetian side of the war and because Marinella makes some of her most obvious proto-feminist statements through scenes involving Claudia. These statements notwithstanding, Stampino comments that Claudia is more reticent than the other women warriors, especially Meandra, who often speaks without

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<sup>64</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Gregory Nagy and J. Banks, Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, 2019, 125–131, <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5289>.

<sup>65</sup> Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 1.8.9: "...et ad explicandum de filiis, quos ex incerto patre genuisse dixerunt veteres veniemus."

<sup>66</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 19.56.

being prompted by a man and is the leader of her troops. “Claudia’s modesty and reserve,” writes Stampino, “might be the price Marinella pays to create a female knight who fully belongs to ‘our’ camp—unlike Tasso’s Clorinda and Sarrocchi’s Rosmonda and Silveria, Claudia is not a converted enemy.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Claudia’s comparatively meek attitude serves to counterbalance Marinella’s overt observations about female ability that accompany the character’s actions.

Claudia’s encounter with Oronte provides an opportunity for the poet to discuss these issues more openly. In the beginning of Canto 24, Oronte, Venier, and their respective troops struggle, with the two captains facing off. Emilia, not Oronte, succeeds in killing the Venetian with her arrows in 24.20, an auspicious start to the canto for the women warriors. Claudia then sees Oronte continuing to cut down Venier’s company and takes the chance to attack him, striking hard enough that Oronte bends over. He is enraged, especially when he realizes his attacker is a woman:

Con quel furor che l’ampia chioma estolle  
Da turbine agitate eccelsa pianta,  
Si ratto il capo innalza, d’ira bolle,  
E nel cor sua virtù sublime e vanta;  
S’attrista sì che donna inferma e molle,  
Abbia cor, abbia ardir, forza abbia tanta,  
Ch’osi d’opporsi ai moti suoi sdegnosi,  
Da cui fuggon del campo i più famosi.<sup>68</sup>

Through Oronte’s internal laments, Marinella spells out the problem that she has been alluding to with the accomplishments of the other female characters: men wrongly assume that women are

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<sup>67</sup> Stampino, “A Singular Venetian Epic Poem,” 48.

<sup>68</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 24.27.

weak and soft. She uses the same word, “molle,” that Fonte uses to describe Biondaura, the non-warrior twin in *Floridoro*, and as we will see below Marinella also subscribes to the same nature versus nurture theory that Fonte shows through her portrayal of the contrasting twins. Oronte’s list of what women are incapable of proves exactly the opposite, since Claudia has just clearly demonstrated her courage, ardor, and strength. Even the most famous warriors flee from him, so Claudia’s decision to approach him further emphasizes her courage. Oronte’s thoughts then turn to words:

Godi, se cadi, ei dice, il morir degno  
Fia ben di lode e d’immortal memoria:  
Nè tu, che cerchi onor, prenderai sdegno,  
S’io ti dò con la morta eterna gloria,  
Me’ t’ era star tra femminile ingegno,  
Che cercar tra i guerrier pregio o vittoria:  
Nè ‘l mio, come il tuo ferro, è ottuso o langue  
Ma ferendo sa far ferite e sangue.<sup>69</sup>

He tells her she would be better off devoting herself to womanly pursuits, because glory in warfare belongs to men. By placing Claudia at the center of this argument, Marinella shows that a woman who ticks the boxes of Renaissance propriety—she is both a virgin and a Western Christian—can also engage in combat. Oronte specifically accuses her of seeking immortality through the fame she would gain by dying on the battlefield, since again he assumes that her challenging him will only result in her death. There is a parallel here to Marinella’s venturing into the field of literature generally occupied by men and seeking her own fame. Since Claudia,

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<sup>69</sup> Marinella, 24.28.

as Stampino puts it, is in “our camp,” one might more readily connect this woman warrior with the author than the others. Furthermore, Marinella makes the tie between combat and writing explicit at the end of the duel between Claudia and Meandra, after each woman dies at the other’s hand, showing their equal valor. Of their mutual demise, Marinella writes:

Se invida non è sorte al valor vostro,  
E a vostri chiari preghi il ciel nemico,  
Vi trarrà rozza penna e basso inchiostro  
D’alta immortalità nel campo aprico;  
Ma il vostro bel seren del lume nostro  
Uopo non ha, già indarno m’affatico,  
Altissime donzelle, per voi sole  
Splendete sì, ch’appo voi tetro è ‘l sole.<sup>70</sup>

As the narrator and author, she addresses both women warriors, proclaiming that they will earn immortality through her humble pen and ink. Referring to immortality, she reminds us of Oronte’s earlier accusation of Claudia so we can appreciate that the woman warrior’s fame was achieved in a different way, as is Meandra’s. As Lazzari mentions, none of the three female warriors, Claudia, Meandra, or Emilia, is killed by a man, in contrast to Clorinda in the *Gerusalemme liberata* and in contrast to Oronte’s prediction.<sup>71</sup> Although, as Stampino notes, Marinella downplays her literary talent in this stanza, “she is also drawing attention to her role as writer and immortalizer of these women warriors’ deeds.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, it is a nod toward her own fame and immortality as an author, again in parallel with her warrior characters.

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<sup>70</sup> Marinella, 24.49.

<sup>71</sup> Lazzari, *Poesia epica e scrittura femminile nel seicento*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Stampino, *Enrico, Or, Byzantium Conquered*, 343n7.

Just before the duel between the women warriors, Claudia is given the chance to respond to Oronte's mocking. After he returns her initial blow, she answers at first not with words, but with action, causing his shield to break and wounding his thigh with her sword. He is furious at this, not only because he is not accustomed to being the underdog, but also because she is a woman: "E fu per impazzar, che sa che leso / Non da Guerrier, ma da guerriera è offeso."<sup>73</sup> Again Marinella openly highlights the gender issue when discussing Claudia. While their duel does not end in anyone's death, because Claudia eventually leaves to involve herself with Meandra, Marinella still assigns the woman warrior the upper hand: "Sia, qual si vuol, potea la gran guerriera / Portar di un tal campion la palma intiera."<sup>74</sup>

Despite Claudia's waiting for Oronte to speak first, her response is significant:

Guata, ella dice, o gran Guerrier, s'ottuso  
È 'l debil fil di mia tagliente spada,  
Come è quel de la tua? che sai per uso,  
Quanto per sua natura tagli e rada.<sup>75</sup>

She tells him he now has firsthand experience of the sharpness of her sword, which he had doubted. She specifies that swords cut and raze by nature, "per sua natura," which he must know because he is accustomed to them, "per uso." She attributes a nature, again coming from the Latin root *nasci*, to be born, to an inanimate object, rather than to the warrior himself who is wielding the weapon. The warrior, on the other hand, learns to cut through "uso," custom or practice. In other words, a sword might be created for a fixed purpose, but humans only become familiar with an action through its repetition. This sentiment dovetails with Marinella's

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<sup>73</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 24.32.

<sup>74</sup> Marinella, 24.33.

<sup>75</sup> Marinella, 24.31.

introduction of Claudia in one of the more cited ottavas in the poem, at the end of the roll call of the troops:

L'ultima è Claudia altera, che discese  
Dal gran sangue latin, progenie augusta;  
Costei ne' suoi primi anni avid' apprese  
De' prischi eroi l'alta virtù vetusta;  
E 'n cheta pace, e 'n militari offese  
Si mostrò ognor magnanima e venusta:  
Mostra che l'uso e non natura ha messo  
Timor ne l'un, valor ne l'altro sesso.<sup>76</sup>

Here we learn Claudia's background: she was not, as far as we know, an orphan, but she does come from noble Latin ancestors and she learned about famous heroes at a young age, whom she emulates. Claudia is not directly defined as a "figlia" in her introduction, as Meandra and Emilia are, but Marinella nevertheless places Claudia within the framework of her lineage and draws attention to her upbringing. The weightiest of these lines are the last two, which include the same key words as those in the discussion on swords in Canto 24 and confront the question of nature versus nurture. Claudia is proof that it is "uso," and not "natura," that caused one sex to be fearful while the other one is courageous. Because she was raised to model herself after heroes, she subsequently becomes one, defying the assumption that women are born without the ability to participate in the same types of activities as men. This argument is also consistent with one Marinella makes in her treatise, *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne*:

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<sup>76</sup> Marinella, 2.29.

O Dio volesse, che à questi nostri tempi fosse lecito alle donne l'essercitarsi nelle armi, et nelle lettere, che vedrebbero cose meravigliose, et non piu udite nel conservare i regni, et nell'ampliarli. Et chi sarebbe piu pronto di fare feudo con l'intrepido petto in difesa della Patria delle donne? Et con quanta prontezza, et ardore si vedrebbero versare il sangue, et la vita insieme in difesa de maschi. Sono adunque, come ho provato le donne piu nobili nelle operationi, che gli huomini non sono.

Et se non si adoprano in questo, avviene; perche non si essercitano, essendo ciò a loro da gli huomini vietato, spinti da una loro ostinata ignoranza, persuadendosi che le donne non sieno buone da imparare quelle cose, che imparano essi. Io vorrei che questi tali facessero una esperienza tale che essercitassero un putto e una fanciulla d'una medesima età e ambidui di buona natura e ingegno nelle lettere e nelle armi che vedrebbero in quanto minor tempo più peritamente sarebbe instrutta la fanciulla del fanciullo e anzi lo vincerebbe di gran lunga. La qual cosa lasciò scritto Moderata Fonte nel suo *Floridoro*, ma ben è vero che ella si contentò che devenissero eguali.<sup>77</sup>

She complains that in her time, men have denied women the opportunity to learn skills like writing and fighting, based solely on men's stubborn ignorance; according to Marinella, women would be the first to enter the fray in defense of their country and perform marvelous feats in war if they could, as they do in *L'Enrico*. It is precisely due to the lack of women's instruction in these matters that they cannot exhibit their strength in both areas. She proposes an experiment whereby a young girl and boy "di buona natura e ingegno" would undertake to learn letters and

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<sup>77</sup> Lucrezia Marinella, *La nobiltà, et l'eccellenza delle donne, coi'diffetti, et mancamenti de gli huomini* (Venice: Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1600), 33, Google Play Books.



arms and predicts that the girl would outstrip the boy in both endeavors, learning much faster than he. She refers to Moderata Fonte's similar sentiment at the beginning of Canto 4 of *Floridoro*, but takes Fonte's argument a step further by proclaiming that the girl would fare, not equally, but better than the boy. This view explains why Marinella's female fighters finish the poem the way they do: though her side has lost, Emilia herself remains unvanquished by men, and the only opponent worthy of killing Meandra is fellow female warrior Claudia, and vice versa.

## CONCLUSION

These three characters are linked by gender, vocation, their roles as daughters, their status as virgins, and their exceptional talent in war. There is a more subtle thread that also connects them. The portrayals of all three of these female warriors support the theory that nurture prevails over nature to determine a person's strengths and weaknesses, promoting Marinella's idea that society imposes boundaries on women that they could otherwise surpass. Through Claudia, we understand that it is how people are raised that determines their abilities in life. Emilia's journey shows that heroism can in fact be enhanced by an "uncivilized" background, in spite of the apparent opposition between warriorhood and wildness. Meandra's formation under the tutelage of the queen parallels the lesson of Emilia's upbringing, despite the orphanhood of one and the sylvan origins of the other.

Meandra and Emilia's childhoods are not as different as they might seem. Because she is an orphan, Meandra is born into a metaphorical wild. If the *pater familias* is the leader of the family unit, and the family unit is a microcosm of societal structure, Meandra's lack of a father

means the breakdown of the governance of the household. The loss of her father implies a figurative separation from the rest of society. As with Emilia, Meandra's transformation into a hero is influenced by the vulnerability she experienced as a child on the margins. The heroism of both characters then facilitates their acceptance into society. Marinella thus compares the path of the orphan-hero with the path from wilderness to civilization. In a broader sense, this is also the path of all epic, since it tells the story of the foundation of civilizations.

Indeed, according to Marinella, the origins of Venice itself follow this trajectory. As Erina recounts the republic's past to Venier, she portrays Venice as rising from the ashes of an Italy, and in fact a world, to which Attila the Hun has laid waste:

Come conduca il crudo Atila mira  
De gli Unni e d'altri essercito possente  
Rotto da Ezio irato si ritira;  
Turna ne l'Ungheria con poca gente;  
Colà schiera sleal dietro si tira;  
Li passa l'Alpi, e 'l mondo fa dolente;  
E scende nell'Italia, ahi quanti affanni  
Porta il crudel, quanti omicidi e danni.

Ecco assedia Aquilea, saccheggia e accende  
Verona, Brescia, Bergamo e Milano;  
E de la bella Ausonia strugge e stende  
Gli edifici superbi e 'l fertile piano.  
Ecco de' fiori la città, ch'ei prende

Con dolci modi, e par cortese e umano;  
Ma tosto guata, ah! miserabil sorte,  
Per lui tutte sue genti a terra morte.

[...]

Scerni tra quella orribile tempesta,  
Che non pur batte i fior, ma boschi e piante,  
Qual nova meraviglia sorger questa  
Patria famosa di real sembante?  
E mentre che 'l crudel Barbaro infesta  
L'Esperia tutta in tanto mal costante;  
S'abbellisca, s'adorni, al ciel sormonte  
Per virtù illustre, e per ricchezze conte.<sup>78</sup>

Venice emerges as a royal presence from the Huns' decimation of the world. Marinella paints a picture of utter destruction and death everywhere; this is the loss of humanity and civilization, perpetrated by those she considers less than human and uncivilized. From this wasteland, a wilderness by virtue of its lack of humanity, Venice appears, an illustrious homeland full of *virtù* and beauty. *Virtù* is an essential trait for any hero. Although the word *virtù* itself derives from manliness, Marinella describes not just the city, but also other female characters who demonstrate bravery as having "il cor virile," showing that this characteristic is not limited to

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<sup>78</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 7.9–12.

men.<sup>79</sup> Thus Venice, the homeland of heroes, itself has a mythology of rising to power out of the wilderness.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, the word “*patria*,” translated above as “homeland,” can be literally translated as “fatherland.” Stampino, however, uses the word “motherland” because, as she notes, Marinella follows the convention of gendering Venice as female, the queen of the sea.<sup>80</sup> In this symbolic representation, the city is considered a virgin, an epithet Marinella applies to her.<sup>81</sup> Again as Stampino mentions, the queen of the sea occupies two paradoxical roles: though a virgin, she is also the wife of Neptune.<sup>82</sup> This paradox is similar to that of the pagan goddess Terra whom Emilia is based upon, another virgin who is also a mother. The most important religious figure for Marinella who shares this paradoxical trait is, of course, the Christian Virgin Mary, who serves as the model of chastity for all of the female figures in the poem, connecting Meandra, Emilia, Claudia, and Venice.

Mary actually appears in Canto 16 together with the female embodiment of Venice when the crusader Rainiero has a vision on the point of death. He observes an interaction between Venice, her patron saint Mark the evangelist, and Mary, in which Venice asks Mary for mercy and peace from her enemies. Mary agrees, listing a number of desires for the future of Venice:

Vo' che per grazia mia t'ammiri il mondo  
D'ogni valor, d'ogni virtude amica;  
E che di te, mia cara, il sen fecondo  
Figliando resti ognor vergin pudica;

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<sup>79</sup> Venice is described this way in 16.62, Idilia, who wants to sacrifice herself, in 10.48, and Meandra in 15.49–50.

<sup>80</sup> Stampino, *Enrico, Or, Byzantium Conquered*, 166n5.

<sup>81</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 7.8, 16.62.

<sup>82</sup> Stampino, *Enrico, Or, Byzantium Conquered*, 166n6.

Né che di servitù l'odiato pondo  
Ti aggravì, o mano, o forza empia e nemica  
Né possa còr del tuo virgineo fiore  
L'eccelsa gloria e 'l desiato onore.<sup>83</sup>

Among these, she includes the hope that Venice will, like herself, become a mother while still a virgin. This wish implies that Venice will produce many respected descendants, but remain untainted by foreign enemy forces. The analogy Marinella makes between a man's violation of a woman's chastity and potential enemy invasions of the republic places the blame for any loss of virginity on the man, though in Venetian society it would have been the woman whose reputation was ruined in this scenario. Although she adheres to the standards of patriarchy by applauding virginity, Marinella also approaches the question with a slightly more proto-feminist (if xenophobic) stance.

Rainiero's vision includes another important symbol of Venice, St. Mark. He appears first to Rainiero, sitting on his lion:

Tra 'l candor di quell'aere venir miro  
Gran cavalier sopra un leone assiso,  
Qual luminosa stella si rai nel seno,  
Lieto, di volto affabile e sereno.

Al leon splendon d'oro i velli e mostra  
D'un ardir generoso acceso il volto,  
Lucenti ha gli occhi, e del bel pié dimostra

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<sup>83</sup> Marinella, *L'Enrico*, 16.83.

L'ugna, dove é il candor di perla accolto;  
Ha l'ali al tergo, e per l'eterna chiostra  
Il passo move in sé tutto raccolto;  
Scopron l'altere sue sembianze oneste,  
Ch'è di selva immortal fera celeste.<sup>84</sup>

Though the lion resides in heaven, Marinella specifies that he comes from a celestial forest, “selva,” and that he is a wild beast, “fera,” using words we have seen throughout this chapter to describe people and animals who emerge from the wilderness. The lion’s “proud and noble features,” as Stampino translates, mirror those of his dignified rider. St. Mark’s association with the lion originates not only with the Venetian legend that says Mark was visited by an angelic winged lion who foretold that the saint’s body would be lain to rest in Venice, but also with biblical references.<sup>85</sup> In Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelations 4:7, the throne of God is represented surrounded by four winged creatures, lion-, ox-, eagle-, and human-like, who came to be associated with the four evangelists. Mark is connected to the lion by lines at the beginning of his gospel (1.1–3): “.... I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” The voice in the wilderness, *vox clamantis in deserto*, has been likened to the roar of a lion, linking Mark with this animal. In addition, the wilderness, or desert to take the literal translation of the Latin, evokes Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt in Exodus, as does the phrase “Prepare the way of the Lord.” The editors of the fourth edition of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* explain that both of these evocations announce a new Exodus, particularly because “the wilderness...was a place where other popular prophets and movements often

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<sup>84</sup> Marinella, 16.58–59.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 78–92.

originated (e.g., Acts 5.36; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 20.5.1).”<sup>86</sup> Marinella’s references to the wilderness as the birthplace of leaders like Emilia, though most obviously based on classical characters like Camilla, therefore also have Christian connotations. Emilia, and even figuratively speaking, Meandra, mimic not just Mary in their virginity but also Moses and Jesus in their journeys through the wilderness. So does Venice herself, through the image of her ascent in the midst of desolation in Canto 7 and through her relationship to St. Mark, the lion-like. Marinella calls him “De la sposa del mar padre amoroso” in Canto 22 and describes his fatherly feelings toward Venice during the scene in heaven in Canto 16: “L’evangelista Marco lei rimira, / Per cui le fiamme d’un paterno affetto / Sente.”<sup>87</sup> Like Meandra, Emilia, and Claudia, Venice is defined as a daughter. She is born from the wilderness and she rises to greatness, saving Byzantium in the Fourth Crusade. Thus Marinella has created, through the character of Venice, the ultimate Christian orphan-hero.

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<sup>86</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol Newsom, and Pheme Perkins, Fourth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1792n2–3.

<sup>87</sup> Marinella, *L’Enrico*, 22.18, 16.77.

## CONCLUSION

A return to the three critical questions I posed in the introduction is now warranted. Let us recall them here: 1) What links orphanhood and heroism? 2) Why might poets deem this tradition worthy of continuation? 3) Do modifications to the orphan-hero by different Renaissance authors reveal or emphasize shifts in thinking during the period? In particular, to what extent do the female authors fashion their orphan-heroes to fit an early modern feminist purpose?

### 1. *CONNECTING ORPHANHOOD WITH HEROISM*

The foregoing analysis of eleven early modern epic protagonists finds a close relationship between orphanhood and heroism. While many heroes of the epic tradition are not orphans, all epic heroes have in common the courage to face their vulnerabilities, whether physical or psychological. Vulnerability, or susceptibility to wounds, is manifested in epic heroes most prominently through the physical risk of battle.<sup>1</sup> While the orphan-hero is physically vulnerable in combat, the hero's psychological vulnerability is also integral to his or her character. This vulnerability is rooted in childhood abandonment by biological parents, an abandonment that can also involve physical vulnerability when children are left exposed to the elements. The process of coping with the loss of parents shapes the protagonist's development. The hero becomes resilient, learning how to persevere in life either independently or with the aid of a surrogate parent. Tamara Neal's observation that the capacity to withstand physical pain is the barometer of heroism in classical warriors can also apply to emotional pain in early modern warriors; the

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<sup>1</sup> Though McCoy distinguishes between vulnerability, which is the possibility of being wounded, and suffering, which is definitive pain, her focus is primarily on physical wounds. I refer also to emotional wounds, the possibility and actual occurrence of which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Marina McCoy, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), x.



increased emotional resilience of the orphan advances heroism.<sup>2</sup> In certain cases, like that of d'Aragona's Meschino in Chapter 2 and Fonte's Risamante in Chapter 3, the absence of parents is not only a contributing factor in the development of their emotional strength, but also the primary motivation for their heroic quests: Meschino sets out to find his parents, and Risamante seeks to be acknowledged by her surviving family and restored to her throne. In Chapter 1 we saw that of Ariosto's twin knights, Marfisa, the one who is forced to survive completely on her own, better fulfills the expectations for a hero than does Ruggiero, who grows up with a foster parent. Similarly, the courage and resilience of Fonte's knight Risamante far outstrips that of her twin sister, the princess Biondaura, because Risamante is torn away from her family as a child while Biondaura remains in their palace. As described in Chapter 4 on Sarrocchi's *Scanderbeide*, Scanderbeg's childhood at the court of his family's enemy Amuratte gives him the strength and the motivation to convert to Christianity and take up arms against his persecutor. His opponent Silveria, like her descendant Emilia in Chapter 5, spends most of her life isolated in the wilderness, surviving without human company, which allows her to surpass many in battle prowess once she has joined the war. Meandra, Emilia's compatriot in Marinella, also benefits from her upbringing without biological parents, since it is her aunt who instructs her in the art of war.

## 2. CONTINUING TRADITION

Many of these orphan-heroes can credit mentors like Meandra's aunt for their heroic educations, which brings us to our second critical question. Because reproducing *topoi* is a hallmark of epic poetry, there is clear motivation for the early modern poets to continue this tradition. By creating

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<sup>2</sup> Tamara Neal, *The Wounded Hero: Non-Fatal Injury in Homer's Iliad* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 15–16.

heroes who are trained by great tutors, like Achilles, or who suckle from animals like Camilla, our poets recall their eminent literary antecedents Homer, Virgil, and Statius. More specifically, however, the figure of the orphan-hero offers the poet an opportunity both to enhance the hero's image and to portray how epic heroism is developed. Since ancient epics begin *in medias res*, heroes are typically already full-grown warriors at the opening of their poems. Their childhoods are not often detailed, except as occasionally narrated by characters who were present as they grew. These rare recollections, such as Diana's reflection on baby Camilla in *Aeneid* 11 or Achilles's own remembrance of his childhood with Chiron in *Achilleid* 2, are more narratively engaging when the hero in question grows up without the comfort and safety of a conventional home. In essence, as in Hollywood films today (so often in fact touted as "epic"), a hero is more impressive when he starts out as an underdog. The orphan-hero as a mechanism for maintaining the audience's interest may have appealed to Renaissance poets as well, since we know that they exercised different strategies like Ariosto's *entrelacement* to accomplish this aim.

Contemporary social circumstances may have also attracted the authors to the subject of the orphan. The growing population of fatherless children led to the institution of the first larger orphanages in northern Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>3</sup> Prior to their establishment, orphans were given to hospitals or convents, or into the care of relatives or friends who were more financially stable and better positioned to raise them.<sup>4</sup> Even non-orphans often experienced life separated from their parents. Though mythological, the Achilles-Chiron model is similar in some respects to the Renaissance practice of sending children to godparents, friends, or colleagues to be better fed and educated, or to serve apprenticeships. In these ways, to use Nicholas Terpstra's term,

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 9–10.

<sup>4</sup> Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance*, 2, 9.

families formed “webs of kin” that extended beyond blood relatives to ensure the wellbeing of their children.<sup>5</sup> The humanist Leon Battista Alberti in the fifteenth century and Bolognese author Giovanni Maria Memmo a century later both weighed in on the debate over nature and nurture. They were in agreement that young boys should pursue interests for which they had an innate ability, toward which, as Alberti writes in his *Della famiglia*, they were “proclivi e disposti.”<sup>6</sup> Memmo believed that innate talents did not necessarily pass from generation to generation and in fact that a young man would excel in his trade only if he was not forced to follow in his father’s footsteps: “[...] che i fanciulli si appiglino a quella arte, alla quale più la natura gli inclina: non facendo, come alcuni imprudenti, che vogliono che i figliuoli seguitino l’arte loro; overo quella che ad essi padri piu aggrada.”<sup>7</sup> Alberti similarly thought a father should raise his child according to the skills he already possessed.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the two authors were proponents of sending children to be trained by mentors or surrogate parents, indicating their support for the influence of nurture in child development. Memmo declares that boys would become better masters of their crafts living in the care of someone other than their father, so as to be free of their father’s shadow: “Nè si vergognino i padri, ancora che non habbiano bisogno, di metter lor figliuoli in casa altrui ad imparare tali arti: perche essendo nelle altrui mani, & mancando di quella ombra paterna, nè havendo quello ardire in casa altrui, che nella propria, piglieranno miglior creanza; & si faranno parimente migliori maestri.”<sup>9</sup> Alberti for his part specifically addresses the needs of orphans. In his dialogue, two friends discuss the imperative of the

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<sup>5</sup> Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Torino: Einaudi, 1969), “Libro primo,” 53.

<sup>7</sup> Giovanni Maria Memmo, *Dialogo del. magn. cavaliere M. Gio. Maria Memmo, nel quale dopo alcune filosofiche dispute, si forma un perfetto prencipe, & una perfetta repubblica, e parimente un senatore, un cittadino, un soldato, & un mercatante, diviso in tre libri* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, 1564), 121–122, Google Play Books.

<sup>8</sup> Alberti, *Della famiglia*, “Libro primo,” 52–54.

<sup>9</sup> Memmo, *Dialogo*, 122.

community's elders to take responsibility for fatherless children, affirming that adults should educate all children regardless of blood ties.<sup>10</sup> Alberti uses classical examples to extol the benefits of mentorship, including Achilles's instruction by Phoenix in the art of speech.<sup>11</sup>

The other facet of classical orphan nurture so frequently reproduced by early modern poets, the suckling of an infant by a wild animal, also has a historical relevance, in the sense that Renaissance children were rarely breastfed by their biological mothers.<sup>12</sup> Instead they had wet-nurses, or *balie*, with whom they lived, more often than not requiring separation from their parents.<sup>13</sup> Despite this custom, Francesco Barbaro's 1416 treatise, *De re uxoria*, strongly advocates for the advantages of women breastfeeding their own children. He writes:

The power of the mother's food most effectively lends itself to shaping the properties of body and mind to the character of the seed. That may be discerned quite clearly in many instances; for example, when young goats are suckled with sheep's milk their hair becomes much softer, and when lambs are fed on goats' milk, it is evident that their fleeces become much coarser. [...] Therefore, noble women should always try to feed their own offspring so that they will not degenerate from being fed on poorer, foreign milk. But if, as often happens, mothers cannot for compelling reasons suckle their own children, they ought to place them with good nurses, not with slaves, strangers, or drunken and unchaste women. They ought to give their infants to the care of those who are freeborn, well mannered, and especially those endowed with dignified speech. [...] mothers ought to be especially careful in their choice of nurses for infants; at this tender

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<sup>10</sup> Alberti, *Della famiglia*, "Libro primo," 23.

<sup>11</sup> Alberti, "Libro primo," 66. There is also a version of the myth, told in *Iliad* 9.526–600, in which Peleus gives Achilles to Phoenix as a foster father instead of Chiron.

<sup>12</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 134–135.

<sup>13</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, 135.

age a child's unformed character is very susceptible to being molded, and, as we impress a seal in soft wax, so the disposition and faults of a nurse can be sealed upon an infant. That very wise poet Vergil showed how important a nurse's inclinations and nature are when he described how Dido called Aeneas harsh and unyielding. Thus he has her say: "The Hircanian tigers fed you at their breasts." Likewise, that most pleasant poet Theocritus said that he detested cruel Cupid, not because he was born of his mother Venus "but because he suckled the breast of a lioness."<sup>14</sup>

Barbaro argues that the disposition of the breastmilk's source defines the disposition of its recipient; human and animal young alike will mimic the traits of whoever or whatever nurses them. He then cites literary evidence to this effect, including two examples of wild animals that impart their ferocity to the recipient of their milk, be that recipient animal, human, or otherwise. Camilla is not the only hero in the *Aeneid* to be associated with animal breastmilk, then, and as we have seen, poets sustain interest in the figure of the wild-born orphan-hero from antiquity through the Renaissance. While there is clear agreement among literati like Barbaro about the effect of breastmilk on the formation of an infant's personality, Christiane Klapische-Zuber points out that this does not reflect contemporary understanding: wet-nurses were not chosen

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<sup>14</sup> Francesco Barbaro, "On Wifely Duties," in Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 223–224. "Cujus ea' potentia est, ut in effingendis corporis & animi proprietatibus ad feminis virtutem quam proxime accedat. Id multis in rebus liquido cernitur. Hoedis ovium lacte enutritis tenerior sensim capillus efficitur: agnis vero, si capris lactentur, vellera duriora fieri certum est. [...] Enitantur igitur nobile foeminae, ut suos alant liberos ne deterioris, & insitivi lactis alimonia degenerent. Si vero, ut saepe contingit, justis ex causis genitrices filios educare nequiverint, nutrices nec fervas, nec adventitias, nec temulentas, aut impudicas, sed ingenuas, moratas, & exquisito sermone praeditas suscipiendas, & ipsarum officio substituendas existiment [...] In deligendis igitur alumnis accuratiores sint. Haec aetas, hic animus mollis adhuc, ad effingendum facillimus est. Nam ut sigillum teneris ceris imprimumus, sic in pueris nutricis affectiones & morbi caelari folent. Cujus ingenium & natura, quam efficax sit prudentissimus vates Maro demonstrat, apud quem Dido cum Aeneam non modo ferum, sed etiam ferreum vocans, *Hircane* (inquit) *admorunt ubera tigres*. Idem quoque jucundissimus Poëta Theocritus cum saevum detestatur Cupidinem, non quod Venere matre natus sit, sed quod Leenae mammas desuxisset incusat." Francesco Barbaro, *De Re uxoria libri duo, ut venustate sermonis praeclari, ita & praeceptis optimis & exemplis uberrimis ex omni Graecâ Latinaque historiâ collectis redundantes* (Amsterdam: Ioannis Ianssonii, 1639), 166–168, Google Play Books.

based on their social status or their high moral standards as Barbaro would prefer, but instead purely based on the quality and abundance of their milk.<sup>15</sup> The widespread use of *balie*, however, may have made it slightly easier for Renaissance audiences to conceptualize the separation of biological mother and child during breastfeeding. Moreover, in cities like Florence, children were more commonly sent out to the countryside for this purpose. Thus the image of a child nursing from a stranger in a remote location would have been familiar, even if an animal as a wet-nurse remains a fantastical idea.<sup>16</sup>

Milk and mentors allow all six poets studied here to investigate the nurturing of a hero, but for the female author who wants to comment on contemporary expectations for women, the orphan-hero provides a particularly robust opportunity. Fonte, Sarrocchi, and Marinella create female characters whose upbringings exemplify how women might develop if only they were given the same educations as men. All three draw comparisons between the heroic feats of their female knights, who were taught by mentors or shaped by the characteristics of the breastmilk they drank, and their own literary accomplishments. The meaning is clear: when armed with the appropriate tools, women can surpass men in any field of achievement. Furthermore, the orphan is a doubly meaningful figure for d'Aragona, Fonte, and Sarrocchi, since they themselves dealt with the effects of orphanhood; there is a direct parallel between the literary orphan who, seemingly against all odds, becomes a hero, and the historical female orphan who, against all odds, flourishes as a poet. While epic poems are not generally autobiographical, they do permit the author/narrator's commentary on certain issues related to the text, especially in the proems of cantos as we have seen with Fonte. The orphan-hero is thus a vehicle for female authors to convey their opinions on some of their own experiences as women writers and as orphans.

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<sup>15</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, 141–143.

<sup>16</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, 136.

### 3. HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

In answer to the third question above, we now move to some more general historical observations that may have contributed to the prevalence of the orphan-hero character in the early modern period. John Boswell illustrates the shift in attitudes toward orphans from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages and Renaissance through the contrast in how they were disposed of: while Romans left their unwanted children out in public, knowing that someone would take them in, early modern parents made use of the *ruota*, the small revolving doors in the walls of orphanages, to discard their children without being seen.<sup>17</sup> He notes that the abandoned children of the Roman period usually survived and often thrived, a phenomenon appropriately represented by the statue of Romulus and Remus erected in the middle of the city: “Kindness to abandoned children, [ancient Roman] culture subtly insisted, redounds to everyone’s glory; the child you expose—or take in—may rise to the very top of human society.”<sup>18</sup> By contrast, those relegated to orphanages in the Renaissance were forgotten by the city at large and often died.<sup>19</sup> The secrecy associated with abandoning children was due to the increased anxiety around preserving lineages in the period. The existence of unacknowledged blood-related children, in other words, bastards, indicated betrayal in a marriage, and even worse, represented the risk of interference with inheritance rights and political succession in aristocratic families. Conversely, the fortunate few orphans who were adopted lived under the pretense that they were biologically related to their families, so as to avoid suspicion about their backgrounds; adoption was “an inherently troubling and risky concept.”<sup>20</sup> Alberti, himself illegitimate, does not directly

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<sup>17</sup> John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 433.

<sup>18</sup> Boswell, 433.

<sup>19</sup> Boswell, 433–434.

<sup>20</sup> Boswell, 431.

reference legitimacy in *Della famiglia*, but he does mention that adopted children should be “nati di buon sangue e di buon sentimento, di gentile aspetto, e tali nell’altre cose che la casa mai abbia con ragione da dolersene.”<sup>21</sup> The appearance of “good” bloodlines was a universally sought-after trait in noble families. Barbaro addresses the pitfalls of illegitimacy in his treatise:

It is certain that legitimate marriage is appropriate in order to have children born in an honorable estate, important for educating them and best for eventually making them useful citizens, for whom a great city will be more valued in justice to its friends and more terrifying in military valor to its enemies. For that great teacher experience has established well the fact that those who are conceived illegitimately in uncontrolled love-making often turn out to be inferior and infamous and are much more prone to immorality. The light of paternal glory does not permit the well-born to be mediocre; they understand that the image of their parents is more of a burden than an honor unless they prove themselves by their own virtue worthy of the dignity and greatness of their ancestors.<sup>22</sup>

Barbaro connects the status of children to the political success of their city; only legitimate children have the power to enhance the city’s reputation. He casts illegitimate children as deficient, insisting that there is something inherently problematic in their personalities that stems from their parents’ lack of control in conceiving them, and subordinates them to their legitimate

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<sup>21</sup> Alberti, *Della famiglia*, “Libro secondo,” 153. See Thomas Kuehn, “Reading between the Patriline: Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della Famiglia* in Light of his Illegitimacy,” in *Law, Family, & Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 157–75.

<sup>22</sup> Translation in Benjamin G. Kohl and Alison Andrews Smith, eds., *Major Problems in the History of the Italian Renaissance* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1995), 277–278. “Usu compertum est nuptiis legitimis aptiores ad honestatem filios nasci, gravius educari, meliores denique cives effici, ex quibus constans civitas amicis justitia charior est, hostibus virtute terribilior. Exploratissimum enim magistra fecit experientia eos qui illegitimè ac intemperanter procreati sunt, ut plurimum flagitiosos ac improbos, & ad turpitudinem propensiores esse. Honesto loco natos paternae gloriae lumen obscuros esse non patitur, qui parentum imagines sibi plus oneris quam honoris afferre intelligunt, nisi sua virtute majorum dignitati ac amplitudini respondeant.” Barbaro, *De Re uxoria*, 19–20.



brothers. The theme of nature's influence on personality and ability resurfaces here. For Barbaro, a person's ancestry speaks volumes about his potential. Those who are born with legitimate patrician blood are destined to succeed, while bastards have tainted blood which makes them innately immoral. The idea that bastards would damage the sanctity of the state is consistent with legal restrictions in Europe, which by the middle of the fifteenth century had banned illegitimate children from ascending to thrones everywhere but in Italy.<sup>23</sup> Though the rules were slightly less stringent in Italy, the general consensus accorded with Barbaro's views. The exception was in Ferrara, where the house of Este had special dispensation from the Pope for their illegitimate sons, who held power for almost 150 years.<sup>24</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, this streak of rulers who were born illegitimate ended in 1471 when Ercole I came to power, but the cloud of illegitimacy still hovered into the sixteenth century. Eleonora Stoppino points to the surge of Amazonian imagery during Ercole's reign as an indicator of a culture fearful of illegitimacy.<sup>25</sup> We see these fears materialize in the *Orlando furioso* episode of the "femine omicide," the society of warrior women who challenge any knight who arrives on their land to kill ten men in battle and satisfy ten women in bed. Only the man who succeeds at both ventures will survive freely, while all others will be imprisoned or killed (ironically, Marfisa is selected from the group of warriors with whom she is traveling to attempt this task, although it will be impossible for her to fulfill its second requirement).<sup>26</sup> Because the first occupants of Alessandria were abandoned there by their menfolk, they formed the rules of their new society as an act of vengeance against all men. It was the bastard sons conceived during the Greek warriors' long

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<sup>23</sup> Jane Fair Bestor, "Bastardy and Legitimacy in the Formation of a Regional State in Italy: The Estense Succession," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 3 (1996): 549.

<sup>24</sup> Bestor, "Bastardy and Legitimacy in the Formation of a Regional State in Italy," 550.

<sup>25</sup> Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the "Orlando Furioso"* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 58–87.

<sup>26</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 19–20.

absence at the Trojan War who had originally stranded the women. Thus, as recounted by the character Guidone who is himself depicted as a bastard in several other chivalric poems, women's betrayal of their absent husbands is the very foundation of this Amazonian society.<sup>27</sup> According to Stoppino, a society comprised only of women then speaks to fears of sole female control over reproduction, which could imperil the line of legitimate successors.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the Renaissance idealization of female chastity derived from the fear of illegitimate children, since a woman's chaste behavior was the only assurance of her husband's paternity.<sup>29</sup> Bastards threatened the supposed purity of aristocratic genealogies; to hand women the reins was to expose these lineages to risk. Because the Este were newly concerned with maintaining the legitimacy of their bloodlines, their client Ariosto incorporated this issue into his text.<sup>30</sup>

Since uncertain parentage gives rise to questions of illegitimacy, the use of orphans allowed epic poetry to address contemporary matters. By having their protagonists start life as orphans, Renaissance poets create a suspense that did not exist in classical epic because the hero's ancestry was generally already known. This suspense is intensified by the larger historical context of worry about illegitimacy, not as much of an issue in an ancient Rome where orphans symbolized the foundation of the empire. When the hero's legitimacy is confirmed in Renaissance epic, there is the sense that it is justified because, as Barbaro writes, a bastard by nature would not be capable of upstanding citizenship, let alone leading his countrymen to the establishment of a new state. Similarly, those heroes who convert to Christianity confirm the righteousness of that religion. The greater emphasis on the emotional as opposed to the physical vulnerability of the young orphan-heroes also reflects the Christianity of the Italian Renaissance;

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<sup>27</sup> Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 72.

<sup>28</sup> Stoppino, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Bestor, "Bastardy and Legitimacy in the Formation of a Regional State in Italy," 558.

<sup>30</sup> Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 76–77.

the characters are more affected by the health of their souls than their bodies. Moreover, the proliferation of orphan-heroes in Renaissance epic may also reflect the political situation of early modern Italy. Because Italy was not yet unified, its lack of central leadership increased vulnerability to invasion. The orphan-hero can be understood as a metaphor for the state: the character shows how someone in a once-vulnerable position, without parents (or leaders), can and will rise to greatness.

Lastly, as we have seen, most of the female authors employ the orphan-hero in a number of strategies to promote a proto-feminist agenda, contributing to the ongoing *querelle des femmes*. Their very entrance into the genre of epic is their first statement of parity. Fonte's main protagonist is a woman warrior who outperforms male characters in combat and whose goals are political and familial, rather than matrimonial; Sarrocchi condemns rape and presents a revitalized version of the enchantress figure who does not seduce, but rather fights, and fights well; Marinella shows the passing down of heroic traits through the female line, a woman whose task it is to protect a man in battle, a huntress-warrior who defies female epic archetypes, and a *guerriera* whose battle prowess proves that women are not inherently timid. Each of these authors weighs the comparative contributions of nature versus nature in their portrayal of these heroes, but they are all in agreement that a woman can easily fill the heroic role.

My final observation about the pervasiveness of the orphan-hero in Renaissance epic concerns the authors themselves. Timothy M. O'Sullivan reads the parent-child relationship between Anchises and Aeneas in the *Aeneid* as "a metaphor for authorial influence and artistic creation. [...] the threat that Aeneas might die as Anchises looks on, for instance, evokes Virgil's own precarious position in relation to his 'father,' Homer."<sup>31</sup> The long chain of epic poems

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy M. O'Sullivan, "Death *Ante Ora Parentum* in Virgil's *Aeneid*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 139, no. 2 (2009): 447.

throughout history is itself a genealogy: authors are the genitors of their individual poems, but they are also the figurative children of their poetic forebears as O'Sullivan demonstrates. The early modern poets are the collective descendants of Homer and Virgil, but they also depend on the work of their immediate Renaissance "parents" to formulate their poems. The figure of the orphan-hero can symbolize the place of the poet in this genealogy. The poets, like orphans, are haunted by the shades of their predecessor-parents, but they overcome this vulnerability by forging their own paths to create new epic poems. At the same time, the poems must take their place in the lineage by fulfilling the traditional requirements of the genre. Poetic parents are therefore simultaneously absent and present in their "children's" texts, just as the orphan-hero's parents are lost and then re-discovered. By reimagining the parent text within the epic tradition, epic poets declare both their independence from and reliance on those who came before.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Where does the orphan-hero go from here? The figure has evolved through many genres and traditions: the longevity and versatility of the character is exemplified by its proliferation in current Anglo-American pop culture, given the superhero Batman's adoptive father, *Game of Thrones*' heroic bastard Jon Snow, and the orphaned wizarding hero Harry Potter. In the early modern era, we might briefly evaluate the role of the orphan-hero in the genre that according to Aristotle is the closest to epic: tragedy.<sup>32</sup> The orphan-hero, or anti-hero, without whom no literary discussion of orphanhood would be complete is Oedipus. Sophocles's tragedy, *Oedipus*

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature*, trans. Leon Golden (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1982), 2.15. "Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level." Though he differentiates between the genres of epic and tragedy, Aristotle often uses examples from Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* to illustrate points he is making about tragedy.

*Rex*, had several revivals and reiterations in the Renaissance. The following pages will consider its first (and most poorly received) early modern adaptation, the *Edippo* (1556) by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara (1517–1571).<sup>33</sup>

Anguillara stands by Sophocles's plot in the first three acts of the play, but adds embellishments that make it a distinctly Renaissance text.<sup>34</sup> Most obviously, the setting is different: Thebes is described as if it were an early modern Italian city, with a castle fortified with ramparts and a castellan.<sup>35</sup> This change is typical of many Renaissance revivals of classical tragedies. Salvatore Di Maria notes that in another version of *Edippo*, by Giustiniano in 1585, the costumes were so elaborate that afterwards noblemen from the audience requested to see them up close to judge their quality.<sup>36</sup> The religious setting of Anguillara's play is also altered to suit the times. In Sophocles, Oedipus bewails his fate as a punishment from the gods, while in Anguillara the protagonist continually praises God and teaches his children to be similarly pious.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to his Greek model, *Edippo* has utter faith in the benevolence of his deity.

Furthermore, with the early modern setting comes *Edippo*'s designation as a knight with its accompanying expectations of chivalry and *cortesía*. Tiresia describes *Edippo* to his daughter Manto (an added character) early in the play as a “guerriero errante,” who “acquistò ne l'arme eterno honore.”<sup>38</sup> This depiction sounds more like the heroes of chivalric epic than of tragedy. *Edippo*'s honor, however, diminishes as the play progresses, and in Act 3 he seeks to restore it

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Fabrizio, “The Two Oedipuses: Sophocles, Anguillara, and the Renaissance Treatment of Myth,” *MLN* 110, no. 1 (1995): 179.

<sup>34</sup> In Acts 4 and 5 he continues past the plot of *Oedipus Rex* into a mix of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Euripides's *Phoenician Women*, Seneca's *Oedipus* and Statius's *Thebaid*. According to Fabrizio, “The Two Oedipuses,” 180, this possibly confusing multiplicity of sources is one reason the play has not been critically well-received.

<sup>35</sup> Salvatore Di Maria, *The Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance: Cultural Realities and Theatrical Innovations* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 46–47.

<sup>36</sup> Di Maria, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Di Maria, 64–65.

<sup>38</sup> Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara, *Edippo* (Padua: Lorenzo Pasquatto, 1565), 1.1, Google Play Books. Listed as “dell'Anguillara” in bibliography.

by volunteering his service as a knight to anyone who may need him.<sup>39</sup> This knightly imperative to act honorably is part of Anguillara's attempt to morally redeem the character. Richard Fabrizio argues that Edippo's actions are not nearly as ambiguous as those of Oedipus, whose failure to realize that he might have murdered Laius, given the coincidence of time and place of the king's death with his own story, has always puzzled readers.<sup>40</sup> The Renaissance emphasis on honor and reputation can also be observed, as critics mention, at the crucial moment of discovery when Edippo blinds himself and his sons lock him in the castle "che non faccia al nostro sangue tanta ignominia, tanto scorno."<sup>41</sup> Sophocles's rendering of the story is the only one in which Oedipus's blinding occurs after Jocasta's suicide, "transforming it from an act of simple self-punishment to a stage in the discovery of truth."<sup>42</sup> His blinding is related to his newfound knowledge. In Anguillara, the blinding and imprisonment of Edippo in the fortress reflect the need to preserve familial honor and appearances; Edippo wants to avoid seeing himself, and his sons want to prevent anyone else from seeing him and exposing the family to shame. The double meaning of the root of Oedipus's name in Greek, "I know" and "I have seen," are used to two different ends by the different playwrights.<sup>43</sup>

We also see the importance of appearances with regard to Edippo's orphanhood. In Tiresia's narration of Edippo's upbringing, he specifies that Edippo's adoptive father Polibo pretends that Edippo is his biological son, first spreading the rumor that his wife is pregnant and then "...accortamente finse, Che la consorte havesse partorito, E fe per suo figliuol nurtir quel

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<sup>39</sup> Anguillara, *Edippo*, 3.4.

<sup>40</sup> Fabrizio, "The Two Oedipuses," 181–182.

<sup>41</sup> Anguillara, *Edippo*, 4.1. Di Maria, *The Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance*, 53; Francesca Schironi, "The Reception of Ancient Drama in Renaissance Italy," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama*, ed. Betine van Zyl Smit (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 142.

<sup>42</sup> Fabrizio, "The Two Oedipuses," 186.

<sup>43</sup> Harold Bloom, *Sophocles' Oedipus Rex*, Bloom's Guides (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 21, 41–42. Bernard Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes: Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time* (Yale University Press, 1985), 183–184.

parto.”<sup>44</sup> This accords with Boswell’s assertion above that Renaissance parents feigned biological relation to their adopted children. There is also more interest in the role of the mother figure here than there is in Sophocles, demonstrating again the early modern anxiety about relying on the female line for legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> Edippo’s childhood differs from that of the epic orphan-heroes because he does not know that he is adopted and spends almost twenty years in a loving home with his parents. When he is abandoned in the wilderness as an infant, he is not suckled by a wild animal but instead rescued by a human, who gives the child to Polibo to raise as his own. If Edippo is unaware of his orphanhood, can we then say that he is vulnerable as a result of it? McCoy reads Oedipus’s vulnerability in Sophocles’s version as vulnerability due to ignorance: he ignores the signs that point to his culpability and refuses to accept his weakness.<sup>46</sup> Edippo, however, takes note of the possible danger and tries his best to subvert fate at every turn. He becomes emotionally vulnerable when the truth is finally confirmed. Fabrizio comments that Anguillara highlights the closeness of the family relationships in *Edippo* so that the chaos that erupts when they discover the truth is a scene of particular psychological horror.<sup>47</sup> He shows Giocasta his bloody eyes as she screams, calling her “Madre, e consorte,” and referring to himself as “il vostro figlio, e sposo.”<sup>48</sup> Antigone cries and Edippo tries to comfort her, but ends up dripping blood from his eyes onto her face. Giocasta beseeches him to kill her as he killed his father. He then turns to his daughter and asks her to guide him into exile because “Altramente la peste iniqua e cruda ucciderà la tua misera madre, ucciderà la tua cara sorella, farà morire i tuo

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<sup>44</sup> Anguillara, *Edippo*, 1.1.

<sup>45</sup> In Sophocles, Oedipus focuses on the father’s role in procreation, asking “Polybus did not beget me?” Sophocles, “Oedipus Tyrannus,” in *The Oedipus Casebook: Reading Sophocles’ Oedipus the King*, edited by H. Lloyd-Jones, N.G. Wilson, and Mark R. Anspach, translated by William Blake Tyrrell (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020), 79 line 1017.

<sup>46</sup> McCoy, *Wounded Heroes*, 39–40.

<sup>47</sup> Fabrizio, “The Two Oedipuses,” 186–187.

<sup>48</sup> Anguillara, *Edippo*, 4.1.

fratelli, e anchora farà restar senza abitanti Thebe.”<sup>49</sup> He has threatened every family member even as he had earlier tried to keep them safe, securing his children’s futures by arranging marriages for his daughters and assigning each son his own city to rule, in an effort to prevent their later rivalry (which, like so much else in the story, will prove inevitable).<sup>50</sup>

Edippo’s vulnerability is still a result of his orphanhood, but the realization of that vulnerability occurs much later in life and in fact signals the breakdown of his heroism rather than its blossoming. The discovery of his Theban royal blood is not a positive, but a negative revelation for this tragic hero; his legitimacy is what makes him an illegitimate ruler. He begins the play as the city’s savior, having heroically conquered the Sphinx, but by the end he has brought plague on the city and deprived its citizens of stable leadership. Instead of founding a city in the manner of an epic hero, he causes the city’s destruction. When as a child he is exposed “per cibo de gli augelli, e de le fiere,” the shepherd apparently saves him from becoming prey for wild animals.<sup>51</sup> But, as Manto observes, addressing the shepherd, “Per voler esser pio, tu sei stat’empio.”<sup>52</sup> Prolonging Edippo’s life will paradoxically do him a disservice, and leads the reader to question whether the humane action taken here was in reality beastly. His trajectory has all the elements familiar to us in the stories of other orphan heroes, but it proceeds in reverse, with internal contradistinctions: he is abandoned and saved by a human, not a beast, raised as royal by supposedly biological parents, not with unknown origins by a foster parent, and his heroism is already at its apex when the story opens, not as it unfolds. Rather than the moment that confirms his heroic greatness, his discovery of his origins reveals his vulnerability and

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<sup>49</sup> *Edippo*, 4.1.

<sup>50</sup> *Edippo*, 1.2.

<sup>51</sup> *Edippo*, 1.1.

<sup>52</sup> *Edippo*, 1.1.



precipitates his downfall. Edippo, then, turns the epic orphan-hero on its head, instead becoming the epitome of the tragic hero-orphan.

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