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Author
Cantor, Sarah S.V.

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Epic Halves, Epic Doubles: Calvino, Tasso, and the Self-Reflecting Enemy

Sarah S.V. Cantor

> "Non per niente Galileo ammirò e postillò quel poeta cosmico e lunare che fu Ariosto. (Galileo commentò anche Tasso, e lì non fu un buon critico: appunto perché la sua passione addirittura faziosa per Ariosto lo portò a stroncare Tasso in modo quasi sempre ingiusto)."
>
> –Italo Calvino, "Due interviste su scienza e letteratura."[1]

Amid the sea of his writings on and rewritings of Ariosto, Calvino's parenthetical comment with respect instead to Tasso is notable, in particular for the light it sheds on his own relationship with the two Renaissance epic poets. While Calvino, like Galileo, undoubtedly privileges Ariosto over Tasso, here he avers that a preference for one need not indicate a disregard for the other. This observation, coupled with a direct reference to the *Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) in *Il visconte dimezzato* (1952, *The Cloven Viscount*), uncovers the modern author's interest in Tasso as well.[2] The general aim of this study will be to revisit the connections between Calvino and Tasso through this point of contact in *Il visconte dimezzato*, the first of the three novels in his trilogy, *I nostri antenati* (*Our Ancestors*). Rather than exploring Tasso's influence on Calvino, I will discuss what Calvino's novel may reveal about Tasso's poem, following Lucia Re's line of thought in her article "Ariosto and Calvino: the Adventures of a Reader."[3] Elements of *Il visconte dimezzato* can in fact serve as an interpretive key to the question of the early modern author's politico-religious ideology. My suggestion is that Calvino's citation of Tasso casts the woman warrior Clorinda in a new light, making her the foremost representative of the enemy army. This reframing in turn problematizes the extent to which Tasso portrays the Muslims as morally corrupt. Calvino thus anticipates more recent trends in Tasso scholarship.

While Calvino's use of Ariostan elements in the trilogy is well documented, the body of literature devoted to the presence of Tasso's poem in *Il visconte dimezzato* is much smaller.[4]

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[1] Italo Calvino, *Saggi: 1945–1985*, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 1:232. "It was no coincidence that Galileo admired and annotated Ariosto, cosmic and lunary poet that he was. (Galileo also commented on Tasso, and in that case he was not a good critic, for the very reason that his downright partisan enthusiasm for Ariosto led him to criticize Tasso for the most part with unfair severity.)" Translation: Italo Calvino, "Two Interviews on Science and Literature, 1968," in *The Uses of Literature*, trans. Patrick Creagh (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 31–32.

[2] Calvino also mentions Tasso in two other essays in his *Saggi*: "Territori limitrofi: il fantastico, il patetico, l'ironia" (see note 9, "Neighboring Territories: The Fantastic, the Pathetic, Irony"), and "Libri di cavalleria: Tirant lo Blanc" ("Books of Chivalry: Tirant lo Blanc") in which he remarks that Tasso stands apart from other fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian authors in his approach to the relationship between truth and myth in chivalric epic. Calvino, *Saggi*, 2:1699.

[3] Lucia Re, "Ariosto and Calvino: the Adventures of a Reader," in *Ariosto Today: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella, and Roberto Fedi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 211–33.

[4] Calvino mentions Ariosto twenty-four times in his *Saggi*, two of which, "La struttura dell'*Orlando furioso*" and "Piccola antologia di ottave," are entirely devoted to the Renaissance poet (*Saggi* 1:759–68 and 1:769–74, respectively). See Martin McLaughlin, "'C'è un furto con scasso in ogni vera lettura': Calvino's thefts from Ariosto," *Parole Rubate / Purloined Letters* 7 (2013): 139–63; John C. McLucas, "Calvino's Ariosto's Orlando:

Lorenzo Carpané has two articles that address the subject, both of which interpret the *Liberata*'s role in Calvino as parody; in "Medardo liberato e ricostruito," he proposes that the poem functions as a reminder of what Calvino's text is *not*, i.e., a reflection on good versus evil in human nature, while in "Capre, Anatre, Ragni," he argues that the viscount's failed attempt at reading the poem to his beloved has a humorous effect that again underlines the contrast between Tasso's moralistic stance and Calvino's lighter touch.[5] Silvia Longhi also includes a mention of the scene in question as one of several *Parodie tassiane e ariostesche in Calvino*.[6] Lastly, while she does not discuss this particular novel, Teresa Agovino does establish a relationship between Calvino and Tasso through *Il cavaliere inesistente* (*The Nonexistent Knight*), the third novel in *I nostri antenati*. By creating a protagonist out of an empty yet personified suit of armor, Agovino argues, Calvino mocks Tasso's reverence for chivalric customs. What was an external representation of the nobility within in Tasso becomes a mechanism to expose the irrelevance of medieval courtly values in Calvino's modern world.[7]

As the above critics have outlined, Calvino parodies epic conflict in the central narrative of *Il visconte dimezzato* by physically splitting his protagonist's body into a good half and an evil half. The setting is the aftermath of a battle that—Calvino imagines—took place in Bohemia during the 1686–88 war between the Christian armies and the Ottoman Turks. During the battle, the naïve young Medardo, viscount of Terralba, unwittingly stands with his sword drawn right in front of an enemy cannon and is immediately blown apart. Each half of his body becomes an autonomous entity, creating a simultaneous halving and doubling effect. Upon the return of the two halves of Medardo to Terralba, it is discovered that one Medardo is essentially good, and the other evil: Il Buono offers a helping hand to those in need, including humans, animals, and plants, while Il Gramo condemns citizens to death by hanging, engages in arson, and destroys property and vegetation wherever he goes by slicing objects in half. The one commonality between the two protagonists is their devotion to a peasant woman, Pamela, whose favor they both seek. It is in the context of this courtship rivalry that Tasso appears, in a moment both meta- and *metà*-literary (half-literary): while Il Buono is somewhat pedantically reading the *Gerusalemme liberata* to a distracted Pamela, Il Gramo, in an attempt to further dismember his adversary, accidentally slices the book in half instead.

While there is a comedic contrast between the gravitas of Tasso's work and the frivolity of Calvino's surrounding text, the points of similarity between the two works are equally compelling. In what follows, I will first address these connections to establish the intertextual relationship

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Selection, Omission, Praise, Paraphrase," *MLN* 134, Supplement (2019): S-332–S-344; Re, "Ariosto and Calvino," 211–33; Silvia Longhi, "Parodie tassiane e ariostesche in Calvino," in *Sul Tasso. Studi di filologia e letteratura italiana offerti a Luigi Poma*, ed. F. Gavazzeni (Padua: Antenore, 2003), 351–68; Franco Di Carlo, *Come leggere i nostri antenati (Il visconte dimezzato, Il barone rampante, Il cavaliere inesistente) di Italo Calvino* (Milan: Mursia, 1978).

[5] Lorenzo Carpanè, "Medardo liberato e ricostruito: per una lettura del 'Visconte dimezzato' attraverso Tasso," *Studi Novecenteschi* 36, no. 77 (2009): 119–35; Lorenzo Carpanè, "Capre, anatre, ragni: Come ti disturbo il lettore: Calvino e l'umorismo 'librario' nel *Visconte dimezzato* e nel *Barone rampante*," *Studi Novecenteschi* 38, no. 82 (July–December 2011): 375–91.

[6] Longhi, "Parodie tassiane," 351–68.

[7] Teresa Agovino, "Tasso, Grossi, Calvino: Il peso dell'armatura nei secoli," in *La letteratura riflessa. Citazioni, rifrazioni, riscritture nella letteratura italiana moderna e contemporanea*, ed. Cannavacciuolo (Avellino: Edizioni Sinestesie, 2014), 11–26. See also Teresa Agovino, "Tasso, Calvino e il peso dell'armatura," in *I cantieri dell'italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo*, ed. B. Alfonzetti, G. Baldassarri, and F. Tomasi (Rome: Adi editore, 2014), 1–7.

beyond the direct reference cited above. I will then examine the scene of the split *Liberata* more closely, showing how it relates Calvino's Medardo to the character of Clorinda in Tasso. I conclude that this portrayal of Clorinda elucidates Tasso's reluctance to cast Christians as entirely good and Muslims as entirely irredeemable.

The title of Calvino's trilogy immediately recalls epic poetry's primary political function, to laud the forefathers of a given state. Fittingly for a modern author, in Calvino there is no particular state or family indicated; it is clear that we should consider ourselves a collective product of his characters. The titles of the individual novels are styled in the mode of Renaissance epic, each with a name or role followed by an adjective in the vein of *Gerusalemme liberata* and *Orlando furioso* (they are: *Il visconte dimezzato*, *Il barone rampante* [*The Baron in the Trees*], and *Il cavaliere inesistente*). In addition, the physical settings reflect epic spaces: the battleground, the castle, the forest, and even the lepers' colony, which represents a sort of underworld to which the narrator, Medardo's young nephew, makes a pilgrimage. The castle of Terralba functions as a site of tragedy and imprisonment, whereas the forest is a place of freedom and safety, especially for the peasant woman Pamela. This is contrary to the way these spaces typically function in epic, particularly in relation to female characters.[8]

What makes the *Visconte* most closely related to the *Liberata* is its unity of action, the context of its war, and of course the appearance of the poem itself in the novel.[9] Firstly, the novel follows only a handful of protagonists with minimal digressions from the principal plot. This conformity to Aristotelian rules of unity aligns with the historical epic tradition and therefore separates the first story of the trilogy from the third, the aforementioned *Il cavaliere inesistente*, whose meandering characters are instead much more reminiscent of the *Orlando furioso* and romance epic.[10] Secondly, the imaginary battle in Calvino can be likened to the First Crusade not only because the putative source of conflict is religious difference, but also because there is at the outset a strong position taken against the Turkish enemy. The opening line of the novel is "C'era una

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[8] The appearance of women (usually women warriors) in the dangerous and public sphere of the forest is always constructed as a surprise in Renaissance epic, because women were expected to remain in the domestic sphere of the castle or the city. In "Territori limitrofi," Calvino comments on this association between women and cities (which are also grammatically gendered feminine in Italian). He notes first that castles recede in importance with respect to cities in sixteenth-century chivalric poetry, citing *Gerusalemme liberata* as the prime example: although the palace of the enchantress Armida plays a significant role in her seduction of Rinaldo, Tasso places more emphasis overall on the city of Jerusalem itself. Its penetration by the Christian forces feminizes the city (and by extension the Muslims defending it). Calvino, *Saggi*, 2:1640.

[9] In the *Discorsi del poema eroico*, Tasso upholds Aristotle's rules for writing epic poetry as described in the *Poetics*. The most important of these is unity of plot, which Tasso argues is missing in the *Orlando innamorato* and *Orlando furioso* because these romance epics simultaneously follow many different narrative threads while their characters wander far from the central action on the battlefield: "Aristotele […] determinò ch'una fosse la favola del poema. Ma a questa quasi legge della Poetica (la qual fu come buona accettata da Orazio là dove egli disse: *Ciò che si tratta, sia semplice ed uno*) vari con varie ragioni hanno ripugnato, escludendo da que' poemi eroici che romanzi si chiamano, l'unità della favola, non solo come non necessaria, ma come dannosa eziandío" ("Aristotle […] determined that the fable of the poem must be one. This position, almost a law in the *Poetics* [which was accepted as valid by Horace when he said, 'Let that which is told be simple and one'], has been refuted by various persons with various arguments, who would exclude unity from those heroic poems which are called romances, not only as being unnecessary, but also as being pernicious"). Torquato Tasso, *Opere: Discorsi del Poema eroico e Lettere poetiche* (Milan: Società tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1824), 108–09. Translation: Arlow Fielding Hill, "Tasso on Epic Poetry: 'Discourses on the Heroic Poem' and 'Discourses on the Art of Poetry' Translated with Introduction" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970), 303–04, https://www-proquest-com.lib-e2.lib.ttu.edu/dissertations-theses/tasso-on-epic-poetry-discourses-heroic-poem-onthe/docview/302399248/se-2.

[10] See again Agovino, "Tasso, Grossi, Calvino: Il peso dell'armatura nei secoli," for a different perspective, linking *Il cavaliere inesistente* to Tasso.

guerra contro i turchi" ("There was a war on against the Turks"), which sets the tone for the rest of the work.[11] The religious division is of course also keenly felt early in the *Liberata*, when the armies pray to different gods: as Tasso presents it, Satan, "il gran nemico de l'umane genti" ("man's enemy"), conspires with his demons and furies to intervene on behalf of the Muslims, whereas the true God sends representative archangels to aid the Christian cause.[12] In Sergio Zatti's seminal 1983 essay, *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano nella Gerusalemme liberata*, he observes a fundamental difference between the two camps: the Christians are united in their goals, strategies, and language use, while the Muslims are divided in all of the same areas, driven to disagreement about military tactics and unable to easily communicate with one another due to their varying nationalities.[13]

Perception of the enemy becomes a critical issue in both texts. During the initial enemy encounters, both authors place emphasis on perspective and vision. Tasso constantly switches the perspective in Canto 3 of the *Liberata*, from the Christians approaching the walls of Jerusalem, "Al gran piacer che quella prima *vista* / dolcemente spirò ne l'altrui petto" (emphasis added; "After that first glimpse and the joy it breathed / sweetly into the hearts of all who saw") to the Muslim guard atop the tower, "De la cittade intanto un ch'a / la guarda sta d'alta torre, e *scopre* i monti e i campi, / colà giuso la polve alzarsi *guarda* / sì che par che gran nube in aria stampi" (emphasis added; "A sentinel who looked out over the fields / and all the hills from the city's lofty spire, / glanced down and saw the beaten dust arise / as if a mighty cloud marched through the air") and back again.[14] Calvino similarly depicts the enemy pouring over the side of a hill in a cloud at a distance from Medardo, who observes the Turks with curiosity: "'Ecco, quella nuvola è i turchi, i veri turchi, e questi al mio fianco che sputano tabacco sono i veterani della cristianità, e questa tromba che ora suona è l'attacco, il primo attacco della mia vita [...] Vedrò i turchi! Vedrò i turchi!' Nulla piace agli uomini quanto avere dei nemici e poi vedere se sono proprio come ci s'immagina."[15] ("There, that cloud contains the Turks, the real Turks, and these men next to me, spitting tobacco, are veterans of Christendom, and this bugle now sounding is the attack, the first attack of my life [...] I'll see the Turks! I'll see the Turks!" he was thinking. There's no greater fun than having enemies and then finding out if they are like one thought").[16] For Medardo, this last sentiment will have an unexpected outcome, since his ultimate enemy will prove to be not the Turks, but himself.

The portrait of the enemy as wicked Satan worshippers in Tasso, however, is not wholly consistent throughout the poem. Nor is Il Gramo consistently evil, nor Il Buono consistently good in Calvino. Since Zatti famously noted the sympathy with which Tasso treats his Muslim characters, the poet's commitment to an absolute ethical divide between the two religions has been continuously called into question.[17] But, as we shall see, it was Calvino who implied such an

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[11] Italo Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falcetto (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), 1:369. Translation: Italo Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 145.

[12] Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2009), 4.1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Tasso are from: Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, ed. and trans. Anthony M. Esolen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[13] Sergio Zatti, *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano: Saggio sulla "Gerusalemme Liberata"* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1983). An earlier version of this essay appears in *Belfagor* 31, no. 4 (July 31 1976), 387–413.

[14] Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 3.5, 3.9.

[15] Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, 372.

[16] Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, 152–53.

[17] See David Quint, *Epic and Empire*: *Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 243–47; Andrea Moudarres, "The Geography of the Enemy: Christian and Islamic Empires

interpretation even earlier, in 1951, when he constructed the scene we could call the "Gerusalemme dimezzata":

> Ma a una certa ora, arrancando tra i pini, arrivava il Buono, con un fagotto legato alla spalla. Era roba da lavare e rammendare che lui raccoglieva dai mendicanti, dagli orfani e dai malati soli al mondo; e la faceva lavare a Pamela, dando modo anche a lei di far del bene. Pamela, che a star sempre nel bosco s'annoiava, lavava la roba nel ruscello e lui l'aiutava. Poi lei stendeva tutto a asciugare sulle corde delle altelene, e il Buono seduto su una pietra le leggeva la *Gerusalemme liberata*.
>
> A Pamela della lettura non importava niente e se ne stava sdraiata in panciolle sull'erba, spidocchiandosi (perché vivendo nel bosco s'era presa un bel po' di bestioline), grattandosi con una pianta detta pungiculo, sbadigliando, sollevando sassi per aria con i piedi scalzi, e guardandosi le gambe che erano rosa e cicciose quanto basta. Il Buono, senz'alzar l'occhio dal libro, continuava a declamare un'ottava dopo l'altra, nell'intento d'ingentilire i costumi della rustica ragazza.
>
> Ma lei, che non seguiva il filo e s'annoiava, zitta zitta incitò la capra a leccare sulla mezza faccia il Buono e l'anatra a posarglisi sul libro. Il Buono fece un balzo indietro e alzò il libro che si chiuse; ma proprio in quel momento il Gramo sbucò di tra gli alberi al galoppo, brandendo una gran falce tesa contro il Buono. La lama della falce incontrò il libro e lo tagliò di netto in due metà per il lungo. La parte della costola restò in mano al Buono, e la parte del taglio si sparse in mille mezze pagine per l'aria. Il Gramo sparì galoppando; certo aveva tentato di falciar via la mezza testa del Buono, ma le due bestie erano capitate lì al momento giusto. Le pagine del Tasso con i margini bianchi e i versi dimezzati volarono sul vento e si posarono sui rami dei pini, sulle erbe e sull'acqua dei torrenti. Dal ciglio d'un poggio Pamela guardava quel bianco svolare e diceva: - Che bello!
>
> Qualche mezzo foglio arrivò fin sul sentiero per il quale passavamo il dottor Trelawney e io. Il dottore ne prese uno al volo, lo girò e rigirò, provò a decifrare quei versi senza capo o senza coda e scosse la testa: - Ma non si capisce niente…Zzt…zzt…[18]
>
> (But at fixed times the Good 'Un would come hobbling through the pine trees, with a bundle tied to his shoulder. It held clothes to be washed and mended which he had gathered from lonely beggars, orphans and sick; and he got Pamela to wash them, thus giving her a chance to do good too. Pamela, who was getting bored with always being in the woods, washed the clothes in the brook and he helped her. Then she hung them all out to dry on the ropes of her swings, while the Good 'Un sat on a stone and read Tasso's "Jerusalem Liberated."
>
> Pamela took no notice of the reading and lay on the grass taking it easy, delousing herself (for while living in the woods she had got a few on her), scratching herself with a plant whose literal name was "bum scratch," yawning,

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from the Fall of Constantinople to Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*," in *The Enemy in Italian Renaissance Epic*: *Images of Hostility from Dante to Tasso* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2019), 105–42; Dante Della Terza, "History and the Epic Discourse: Remarks on the Narrative Structure of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*," *Quaderni d'italianistica* 1, no. 1 (1980): 30–45.

[18] Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, 425–26.

dangling stones in her bare toes, and looking at her legs, which were pink and plump as ever. The Good 'Un, without ever raising his eyes from the book, would go on declaiming octave after octave, with the aim of civilizing the rustic girl's manners.

But she, unable to follow the thread, and bored, was quietly inciting the goat to lick the Good 'Un's half face and the duck to perch on the book. The Good 'Un started back and raised the book, which closed. At that very moment the Bad 'Un appeared at a gallop among the trees, brandishing a great scythe against the Good 'Un. The scythe's blade fell on the book and cut it neatly in half lengthways. The back part remained in the Good 'Un's hand, and the rest fluttered through the air in a thousand half pages. The Bad 'Un vanished at a gallop; he had certainly tried to scythe the Good 'Un's half-head off, but the goat and duck had appeared just at the right moment. Pages of Tasso with their white margins and halved verses flew about in the wind and came to rest on pine branches, on grass, on water in the brook. From the top of a hillock Pamela looked at the white flutter and cried, "How lovely!"

A few leaves reached a path along which Dr. Trelawney and I were passing. The doctor caught one in the air, turned it over and over, tried to decipher those verses with no head or tail to them and shook his head. "But I can't understand a thing…tst…tst…")[19]

This scene achieves several objectives within the economy of Calvino's narrative. It conveys humor through the contrast between Il Buono's well-intentioned, highbrow reading and Pamela's crass scratching and antics with her animals, which underscore her peasant status. As Carpané notes, it also provides a commentary on interpretation because there is a contrast between Pamela, who is uneducated, yet able to interpret the non-verbal signs that Medardo leaves for her, and Dr. Trelawney, who is educated yet unable to interpret Tasso's verses.[20] She appreciates the aesthetic effect of the windblown pages, which for her adds meaning where she previously found none, while he is frustrated at the loss of meaning incurred by the halving. For Il Buono, the text is a pedagogical instrument that will instruct Pamela in the ways of righteousness, which in conjunction with his insistence on her participation in the clothes-washing demonstrates his overzealousness in the pursuit of being good (one of several examples in which he causes others annoyance, therefore undermining his reputation). He chooses the *Liberata* first for its similarities to his own experience battling the Turks and secondly for its purportedly clear-cut polarities between good and evil, which will serve his didactic purposes. In "Libri di cavalleria: Tirant lo Blanc," Calvino points out that beginning with the Valencian romance highlighted in the essay's title, epic poetry has often included a narrative mention of an earlier, authoritative text that guides the characters in the surrounding poem in chivalric etiquette.[21] Such moral instruction is also the function of the *Gerusalemme liberata* here. Like so many other objects in the novel, the poem is however fundamentally changed when cut in half. Its ability to moralize in the way that Il Buono desires is necessarily reduced. This scene prompts the question of what a halved *Liberata* would look like. Carpané suggests that *Il visconte* itself could be understood as a halved version of the poem, given its ten chapters to the *Liberata*'s twenty cantos.[22] Since Calvino takes such a literal

[19] Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, 221–22.
[20] Carpané, "Medardo liberato e ricostruito," 131.
[21] Calvino, *Saggi*, 2:1696.
[22] Carpané, "Medardo liberato e ricostruito," 124.

approach to the halving that occurs in the novel, I will likewise consider the ramifications of a *Liberata* that ends at its halfway point.

A cloven *Liberata* would highlight the areas of the poem that blur the line between good and evil. According to Tasso, the halfway point of his epic occurs not at Canto 10 but instead in Canto 13, when the sorcerer Ismeno enchants the forest to prevent the Christians from being able to gather wood for war machines. After much difficulty, God finally provides the Christian forces with assistance, marking a turning point in the poem.[23] Ending the poem here would have a significant impact on the poem's ideological bent above all because the focus would shift from the final duels in Cantos 19 and 20 to that of Clorinda and Tancredi in Canto 12.

Since Tasso took his poetic cue from Virgil, the question of mercy for the enemy in the final duel is salient and shapes the political reading of the poem. The ending of the *Aeneid*, in which the supposedly *pius* Aeneas slays his enemy Turnus despite the latter's appeal for clemency, has perplexed scholars for centuries, including Tasso and his contemporaries.[24] As Lauren Scancarelli Seem points out, Tasso responds to this dilemma twice in the *Liberata*, through the portrayal of two different duels. The first, between Tancredi the Christian and Argante the Muslim, shows that Tancredi, trying as hard as he can to resist dishonor, only kills Argante as a very last resort, after the Muslim leaves him no choice but to do so; despite multiple wounds Argante continues fighting, and thus Tancredi must continue the fight.[25] In the second duel, between Goffredo the Christian general and the Egyptian captain Altamoro, Altamoro begs for mercy in a parallel to the scene between Aeneas and Turnus. Goffredo, unlike Aeneas, decides to spare his suppliant, showing his Christian capacity for mercy.[26] In this way, Seem argues, "Tasso contrives to conclude his epic with Christian mercy rather than Virgilian vengeance."[27]

Although this apparent correction to Virgil's ambiguous ending could be interpreted as an example of sympathy for the enemy, Argante and Altamoro nonetheless belong squarely to

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[23] "…questa è più tosto la metà del quanto, che della favola; perch' il mezzo veramente de la favola è nel terzodecimo, perché sin a quello le cose de' cristiani vanno peggiorando: son mal trattati ne l'assalto; vi è ferito il capitano; è poi arsa la lor machina, ch'era quella che sola spaventava gli nemici; incantato il bosco, che non se ne possono far de l'altre: e sono in ultimo afflitti da l'ardore de la stagione, e da la penuria de l'acque, e impediti d'ogni operazione. Ma nel mezzo del terzodecimo le cose cominciano a rivoltarsi in meglio: viene, per grazia di Dio, a' prieghi di Goffredo la pioggia; e così di mano in mano tutte le cose succedono prospere" (Tasso to Scipione Gonzaga, Rome, April 17 1575, in *Le lettere di Torquato Tasso* [Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1852], 68; ["…this is the halfway point more in terms of quantity, than in terms of the narrative; the true halfway point of the narrative is in the thirteenth canto, because up until then things for the Christians keep getting worse: they are treated badly in the assault, their captain is wounded, and then their war machine is burnt, which was the only thing that frightened their enemies; the forest is enchanted, so they cannot make other machines, and lastly they are afflicted by the heat of the season, the scarcity of water, and they are blocked from every maneuver. But in the middle of the thirteenth canto things begin to turn for the better: by the grace of God and the prayers of Goffredo the rain arrives, and so little by little everything becomes favorable"] Translation mine). Even if the extent to which Tasso's letters align with his actual beliefs about the poem's structure is unknown, given that many of these letters were written with the idea of placating reviewers and censors, the plot points that he enumerates here nevertheless demonstrate a clear narrative shift at this point in the poem. The Christians were losing up until Canto 13, when the tide turns in their favor. For more on this structure, see Ezio Raimondi, *Poesia come retorica* (Florence: Olschki, 1980). For more on Tasso's conflicted feelings with regard to his poem and censorship, see Laura Benedetti, "Le ragioni della poesia: Torquato Tasso e Silvio Antoniano," *Annali d'Italianistica* 34 (2016): 243–59 and Walter Stephens, "Tasso, Poet of Doubt," *MLN* 134, Supplement (2019): S252–71.

[24] Lauren Scancarelli Seem, "The Limits of Chivalry: Tasso and the End of the *Aeneid*," *Comparative Literature* 42, no. 2 (1990): 116–25.

[25] Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 19.1–28.

[26] Tasso, 20.140–42.

[27] Seem, "The Limits of Chivalry," 124.

Muslim backgrounds, with Argante in particular likened to Satan.[28] If instead the last duel in the poem ended with Clorinda's death at the hands of her lover Tancredi, the overall portrayal of the enemy would have an entirely different effect. Clorinda's death is tragic because it is of course accidental; Tancredi does not recognize her in the black armor she has donned for her night raid and deals her a fatal blow.[29] Their relationship heightens the drama of the episode, which evokes the reader's sympathy, but it is Clorinda's conflicted identity and conversion on the point of death which would most alter the general perception of the enemy. Her story as recounted by the eunuch Arsete in Canto 12 is well known: born white to Black Ethiopian parents, she is sent away by her mother the queen for fear her father might suspect betrayal upon discovering the color of her skin (it was in fact her mother's meditation during pregnancy on a painting of St. George saving a virgin that caused this anomaly). The queen entrusts Arsete with the care of the young princess and requests that he baptize her as a Christian, but instead he raises her in his own Muslim faith and only confesses the truth just before Clorinda sets out for her night mission. Thus Clorinda, newly armed with the knowledge of her true background, asks Tancredi to baptize her just before she dies. Rather than being a straightforward male Muslim enemy, then, Clorinda's identity is complex and defined by dualities: as a woman warrior she is both masculine and feminine, she is both white and Black, and she is both Christian and Muslim.[30] Were her duel with Tancredi the last duel of the poem, she would become the enemy soldier *par excellence*, the new Turnus, the new Argante and Altamoro. And if this most prominent enemy figure actually redeems herself through conversion during her last moments, becoming Christian, then is she an enemy at all? Even after Clorinda's death, when Ismeno creates an apparition of her in the forest of Saron in Canto 13, Tancredi is unable to bring himself to attack it.[31] Despite its obviously sinister provenance, its resemblance to Clorinda prevents him from seeing it as an enemy.

Of course the poem does not end in Canto 13, but Calvino's suggestion of a halved *Liberata* favors a more flexible interpretation of Tasso's depiction of the Muslim army. Calvino conjures the image of a different kind of enemy, one who mirrors the self, in both Clorinda and Medardo.[32] Physically, the viscount's two halves are obviously perfectly matched, but despite their categorizations as "Il Buono" and "Il Gramo," each half also shares some of the other's traits: for example, Il Buono preaches decency to the lepers to the extent that he puts an end to their revelry and as such an end to their happiness ("passavano le sere piangendo e disperandosi" ["they spent their evenings sobbing in despair"]), and Il Gramo unwittingly saves the lives of his nephew and Dr. Trelawney when he sets a trap that hides them from a mob that has mistaken them for thieves.[33]

Indeed, the elderly nursemaid Sebastiana never distinguishes between the good and the evil sides of her former charge, alternately accusing Il Buono of deeds performed by Il Gramo and vice versa: "Forse per via del suo indistinto amor materno, forse perché la vecchiaia cominciava a offuscarle i pensieri, la balia non faceva gran conto della separazione di Medardo in due metà: sgridava una metà per le malefatte dell'altra, dava all'una consigli che solo l'altra poteva seguire e così via" ("Perhaps because of her maternal instinct, perhaps because old age was beginning to cloud her mind, the nurse took little account of Medardo's separation into two halves. She would

[28] Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 19.25.
[29] Tasso, 12.64.
[30] There are many studies on Clorinda, but for a comprehensive one pertaining specifically to religious identity, see Quint, *Epic and Empire*, 234–47.
[31] Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 13.40–46.
[32] See also Andrea Moudarres, "The Enemy as the Self: Madness and Tyranny in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*," in *The Enemy in Italian Renaissance Epic*, 75–104.
[33] Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, 435. Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, 234.

criticize one half for the misdeeds of the other, give one advice which only the other could follow and so on").[34] Much like the nursemaid Eurycleia who is the only person to recognize the disguised Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca, Sebastiana has the power to see right through Medardo.[35] When Il Buono protests that it was not he who cut Nonna Bigin's chicken in two, Sebastiana responds, "O bella! E sentiamo un po': chi è stato?" ("Oho! Then just tell me who it was?"). Il Buono has no choice but to say, "Io. Ma…" ("Me but— "). However, the nurse pays little heed to what might come after his tentative "ma."[36] Rather than two different entities, Sebastiana sees one whole, flawed person who must take responsibility for all his actions.

In keeping with epic tradition, Pamela's fate is decided by a duel between the two halves of Medardo. This duel, like those between Aeneas and Turnus, Argante and Tancredi, and Goffredo and Altamoro before it, comes nearly at the end of the story. All who hear the call of the leper's horn, signaling the commencement of the duel, turn against themselves:

> Il cielo vibrò come una membrana tesa, i ghiri nelle tane affondarono le unghie nel terriccio, le gazze senza togliere il capo di sotto l'ala si strapparono una penna dall'ascella facendosi dolore, e la bocca del lombrico mangiò la propria coda, e la vipera si punse coi suoi denti, e la vespa si ruppe l'aculeo sulla pietra, e ogni cosa si voltava contro se stessa, la brina delle pozze ghiacciava, i licheni diventavano pietra e le pietre lichene, a foglia secca diventava terra, e la gomma spessa e dura uccideva senza scampo gli alberi. Così l'uomo s'avventava contro di sé, con entrambe le mani armate d'una spada.[37]
>
> (The sky quivered like a taut tissue; dormice in their lairs dug claws into soil, magpies with heads under wings tore feathers from their sides and hurt themselves, worms' mouths ate their own tails, snakes bit themselves with their own teeth, wasps broke their stings on stones, and everything turned against itself. Frost lay in wells, lichen turned to stone and stone to lichen, dry leaves to mould, and trees were filled by thick hard sap. So man moved against himself, both hands armed with swords.)[38]

These images, one after another, of creatures attacking themselves, ending with the image of a man, a sword in each hand, ready to destroy himself, evoke a sense of the futility of war, as does the final scene in Tasso, in which a bloodied Goffredo hangs his weapons on the Holy Sepulchre.[39] In this passage, Calvino does not expressly define Medardo's two parts as being distinct from one another so that the image ceases seeming fantastical and the reader pictures one whole man only, about to do himself violence. While Calvino was adamant that his text had nothing to do with the question of good and evil, he nevertheless writes in the same essay that "Dimidiato, mutilato, incompleto, nemico a se stesso è l'uomo contemporaneo; Marx lo disse 'alienato,' Freud

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[34] Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, 434. Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, 232.
[35] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 19.465–510.
[36] Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, 434. Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, 232.
[37] Calvino, *Il visconte dimezzato*, 441–42.
[38] Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight & the Cloven Viscount*, 242–43.
[39] "Né pur deposto il sanguinoso manto, / viene al tempio con gli altri il sommo duce; / e qui l'arme sospende, e qui devoto / il gran Sepolcro adora e scioglie il voto" (Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 20.144; "To the temple with the other chiefs goes he, / nor does he set aside his blood-stained vest. / He hangs his arms here; with devoted brow / adores the great tomb, and fulfills his vow").

'represso'; uno stato d'antica armonia è perduto, a una nuova completezza s'aspira. Il nocciolo ideologico-morale che volevo coscientemente dare alla storia era questo"[40] ("Severed in half, mutilated, incomplete, an enemy against himself, that's contemporary man. Marx called him alienated, Freud repressed. We have lost an ancient harmony, and aspire to a new completeness. This was the ideological and moral kernel that I consciously intended the story to have").[41] Calvino's ethics, represented here by conflict within an individual, parallel those that Tasso applies on a collective level. All war is essentially the action of turning against oneself because our so-called enemies are, as humans, equivalent to us. As Andrea Moudarres demonstrates, the image of the enemy as the mirror of the self has been present in Western literature since the reconciliation of Priam and Achilles in *Iliad* 24, when the two opponents recognize each other's humanity through mutual grief for their lost loved ones.[42] Calvino's representation of the enemy as a part of the self that has been physically severed also recalls the shade of Mohammed in *Inferno* 28: because Dante viewed Mohammed as a schismatic who split apart the Catholic Church, the sinner is himself sliced down the middle as his *contrapasso* in the afterlife.[43] Like Mohammed, Tasso's Clorinda is divided (though figuratively) between Christianity and Islam. Following Dante's framing of Islam as a rebellious sect, Tasso famously writes of Clorinda after her baptism: "se rubella / in vita fu, [Dio] la vuole in morte ancella" ("Rebel in life, on her such grace is poured / that she may die the handmaid of the Lord").[44] As she passes from life to death, her conversion allows her also to pass from religious rebel to handmaiden of God. She becomes spiritually whole under the auspices of one faith. Similarly, the result of Il Buono and Il Gramo's final duel is that they physically combine to again become one Medardo. While for Clorinda wholeness ultimately means choosing between her identities, with Medardo Calvino suggests that for the modern reader, it is possible for multiple disparate selves to coexist. Calvino's reading of Tasso allows us in turn to reinterpret the *Gerusalemme liberata* in new ways, discovering as readers new versions of ourselves.

[40] Calvino, "Postfazione ai *Nostri antenati* (Nota 1960)," in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falcetto (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), 1:1211.
[41] Translation from Eugenio Bolongaro, "Italo Calvino: From Neo-Realism to the Fantastic," in *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 65.
[42] Andrea Moudarres, *The Enemy in Italian Renaissance Epic*, 143–46.
[43] For a detailed reading of Mohammed's role in *Inferno* 28, see again Moudarres, "Between Fathers and Sons: Sowers of Enmity in *Inferno* 28," in *The Enemy in Italian Renaissance Epic*, 15–42.
[44] Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, 12.65.