

Introduction: ‘I dote on Tasso’

An after-dinner conversation in the first part of George Eliot’s final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876, exactly 300 years after the completion of the famous epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata*, offers an invaluable insight into English, and indeed wider European, attitudes towards the celebrated sixteenth-century Italian poet Torquato Tasso in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The two female speakers are Gwendolen Harleth, the novel’s heroine and the ‘spoiled child’ after whom the first book is named, and Mrs Arrowpoint, the mother of Gwendolen’s new friend Catherine and an author of many as yet unpublished ‘home made books’. In response to Gwendolen’s enthusiasm about her authorship, Mrs Arrowpoint offers to lend the young girl copies of everything that she has written. Gwendolen, in her gratitude, demonstrates exactly how she hopes to benefit from these works, which are evidently biographies of significant literary figures:

I shall be so glad to read your writings. Being acquainted with authors must give a peculiar understanding of their books: one would be able to tell then which parts were funny and which serious. I am sure I often laugh in the wrong place. ... In Shakespeare, you know, and other great writers that we can never see. But I always want to know more than there is in the books.¹

Despite Eliot’s gentle mockery of Gwendolen, the central premise – that knowledge of an author’s biography might help to elucidate aspects of the work of ‘great writers that we can never see’ – is not necessarily being subjected to ridicule here. Indeed, Mrs Arrowpoint draws attention specifically to her account of an author whose life and work had already proved a constant source of fascination for poets, playwrights, composers, painters, and biographers throughout much of Europe for more than 250 years:

'There are things I dare say I shall publish eventually: several friends have urged me to do so, and one doesn't like to be obstinate. My Tasso, for example – I could have made it twice the size.'

'I dote on Tasso', said Gwendolen.

'Well, you shall have all my papers, if you like. So many, you know, have written about Tasso; but they are all wrong. As to the particular nature of his madness, and his feelings for Leonora, and the real cause of his imprisonment, and the character of Leonora, who, in my opinion, was a cold-hearted woman, else she would have married him in spite of her brother – they are all wrong. I differ from everybody.'

... 'I know nothing of Tasso except the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, which we read and learned by heart at school.'

'Ah, his life is more interesting than his poetry, I have constructed the early part of his life as a sort of romance. When one thinks of his father Bernardo, and so on, there is much that must be true'.

'Imagination is often truer than fact', said Gwendolen, decisively, though she could no more have explained these glib words than if they had been Coptic or Etruscan. 'I shall be so glad to learn all about Tasso – and his madness especially. I suppose poets are always a little mad'.²

However glib Eliot might have believed her character's words to be, they are actually rather apt in describing how Tasso's life was approached, in England and beyond, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where historical fact was often downplayed or ignored in favour of a more striking legendary biography. Despite the revelation that Tasso's epic poem was still being studied and learnt by heart in an English girls' school almost 300 years after Queen Elizabeth I had notably done exactly the same thing in the mid-1580s, Mrs Arrowpoint's opinion that the poet's life is more interesting than his work was not an uncommon one by the nineteenth century, even if she believes that the many other chroniclers of this life are wrong in their accounts of the key details. The character's brief summary of what she views as the central events in Tasso's life obviously demonstrates Eliot's own awareness of these biographical 'facts', and it also suggests that the novelist expected at least part of her contemporary readership to be as familiar with the Italian poet's tragic history. Gwendolen is most interested, like so many others, in learning about the 'particular nature' of Tasso's madness, which was inextricably linked to his seven-year confinement, from 1579 to 1586, in the hospital of St Anna in Ferrara at the behest of his patron, Duke Alfonso II d'Este. Despite strenuous attempts by a late eighteenth-century Italian biographer with connections to the Este family to prove otherwise,³ throughout the nine-

teenth century the most popular explanation for this imprisonment was Tasso's presumptuous and forbidden love for the duke's unmarried sister, Princess Leonora.

It is not always made clear whether this love was believed to be unrequited, or reciprocated but impossible to fulfil within the close confines of a sixteenth-century Italian ducal court, given the vast gulf in rank between princess and court poet. Mrs Arrowpoint certainly hints at a mutual love, but then, somewhat unreasonably, blames Leonora for not standing up to her elder brother's objections to the match. The other key figure in her account is Tasso's father and fellow poet, Bernardo. It was his disastrous banishment from the kingdom of Naples in the early 1550s, as a consequence of his misjudged loyalty to his patron Ferrante Sanseverino, Prince of Salerno, that caused the permanent break-up of the family and loss of its serene home in Sorrento, and the subsequent penury and endless wandering from court to court with his young son, permitting Mrs Arrowpoint to construct Torquato's early life 'as a sort of romance' in which much 'must be true'. If this description hints at the curious combination of fact and fiction that permeated so many English accounts of Tasso's life, the emphasis placed on Bernardo mirrors the important shift of attention in them away from the poet's putative attachment to Leonora, and towards Tasso's own complex 'family romance', to use Strachey's translation of Freud's term from his 1909 'Family Romances' essay, as the twentieth century loomed.

The origins of Tasso's apparent love for the Princess Leonora have habitually been traced back to the first detailed biography of the poet, printed some twenty-five years after his death in 1595 by one of his final patrons and benefactors, Giovanni Battista Manso, the Marquis of Villa.⁴ Manso suggests that Tasso had veiled his real feelings for the princess in amorous verse that could have been addressed to any one of three Leonoras at the Ferrarese court: the other two were Leonora Sanvitale, the Countess of Scandiano, who was to become a significant character in both Carlo Goldoni and Goethe's eighteenth-century dramatic representations of Tasso's life, and one of the princess's ladies-in-waiting, who also features in the intrigue in the Italian comedy *Torquato Tasso* (1755) as a more socially plausible smokescreen. Manso's *Vita di Torquato Tasso* (1621) came to be regarded throughout Europe as the definitive account of Tasso's life for more than a century and a half, owing mainly to the Neapolitan nobleman's proximity and kindness to the poet in the final years of his life, rather than to any impartial historical accuracy in the biography itself.

The suspicion that there was a link between the poet's ambitious love, his imprisonment, and his perceived madness, however, certainly predated Manso's biography. The earliest surviving record alluding to it appeared in England in 1593, a couple of years before Tasso's death, as part of an overwhelmingly positive assessment of the still active Italian poet's literary achievements. Most of the French text in the chapter 'Of the dignitie of Orators, and excellencie of tongues' in John Eliot's bilingual French language-learning manual *Ortho-epia Gallica* is taken almost verbatim from the notes added by the Huguenot scholar Simon Goulart to the 'Babilone' section in the posthumous edition of Du Bartas's *La Seconde Sepmaine* (1591), including his extensive commendation and summary of Tasso's works, which Eliot merely rendered, with one highly significant addition, in dialogue form and parallel-text English translation:

Torquato Tasso, a fine scholer truly, who is yet liuing, the last Italian Poet who is of any great fame in our age, but worthie of the first honour; besides that he is a diuine Poet, he is also a most eloquent Oratour and Rhetoricyan, as his missiue Epistles do shew very well. This Youth fell mad for the loue of an Italian lasse descended of a great house, when I was in Italie.

What other fine books hath he made?

Many: there are three Toomes of his workes printed at Ferrara, wherein there are diuers sorts of verses of all kinds of fine inuentions: a Commedie, a Tragedie, diuers Dialogues and discourses in Prose, all worthie the reading of the wisest and quickest spirits of Europe.

Is that all that he hath written?

No, for he hath the pen in hand euery day.

You haue forgotten his Gierusalemme liberata.

You say true, this childe hath written in Heroicall verses one excellent Poeme amongst all other Italian Poesies, intituled as you say, wherein all the riches of the Greeks and Latines are gathered together and enchaced so cunningly past all others skill, with such grace, breuitie, grauitie, learning, liuelinesse, and iuuacitie that is remarqued to haue bene in Virgill the Prince of Latine Poets.⁵

Although this high praise for Tasso is derived directly from a recently printed French source, it does accurately reflect contemporary knowledge and evaluation of the poet's work in England. With the exception of the apparent reference to the *Lettere poetiche* ('*missiue Epistles*'), printed in 1587, there is plentiful evidence for the impact in England of *all* of Tasso's other notable achievements in both verse and prose by the time when Eliot's translated survey was published in 1593: the pastoral (tragi-) comedy *Aminta* (1580) had already been printed, along with Guarini's *Il pastor fido*, in Italian in London by John Wolfe and Iacopo Castelvetro

in 1591, and was translated (into English alliterative verse) in the same year by Abraham Fraunce in *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch*; the recently printed tragedy *Il Re Torrismondo* (1587) had been cited, along with passages from *Aminta* and, more extensively, Tasso's already celebrated epic, in Fraunce's *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588); the prose dialogue *Il padre di famiglia* (1583) had been translated by Thomas Kyd and printed as *The Housholders Philosophie* (1588); sonnets and madrigals, collected in the first volume of Tasso's *Rime* in various largely unauthorised editions throughout the 1580s, provided Samuel Daniel with direct models for sonnets in his *Delia. Contayning certayne Sonnets: with the complaint of Rosamond* (1592), which also revealed the English poet's sustained engagement with key moments from *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) in the accompanying female complaint poem, soon after Spenser's close and extensive imitations of passages from the popular Rinaldo and Armida episode in the epic poem (cantos XIV to XVI) had been included in the first edition of *The Faerie Queene* (1590).

Like Du Bartas and Goulart in France, these English writers did not hesitate to grant Tasso, and particularly his renowned religious epic, a status comparable to that of the greatest ancient poets. Fraunce included more than eighty separate illustrations from *Gerusalemme liberata*, alongside quotations from Homer, Virgil, and modern European authors, in *The Arcadian Rhetorike*. The Italian poet could also have found himself placed, alongside his predecessor Ariosto, in similarly elevated company as an epic model in Spenser's 'A Letter of the Authors' addressed to Sir Walter Raleigh at the end of the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, and, a few years after his death, in Daniel's *A Defence of Ryme* (1603), where Tasso's recent epic achievement in *ottava rima* verse was cited as decisive proof of the failure of a mid-sixteenth-century Italian experiment with quantitative measures:

Nor could it neuer induce *Tasso* the wonder of *Italy*, to write that admirable Poem of *Ierusalem*, comparable to the best of the ancients, in any other forme then the accustomed verse.⁶

While the emphasis in Eliot's dialogue is primarily on Tasso's notable literary achievements, it is the brief, original biographical detail about the poet's love-induced madness, apparently occurring while the fictional speaker was actually in Italy, which is the most intriguing. It is curious, however, that the dialogue gives no indication of Tasso's subsequent confinement by his patron, ostensibly as a direct response to this madness. The French essayist Montaigne, who claimed to have witnessed Tasso

in person during his incarceration on a visit to Ferrara in late 1580, had reacted with an uncharacteristic lack of sympathy for the unnamed poet's desperate plight, in his meditation on madness in the expanded 'Apologie de Raymond Sebond' (1582):

Platon dit les melancholiques plus disciplinables et excellens; aussi n'en est-il point qui ayent tant de propension à la folie. Infinis esprits se trouvent ruinés par leur propre force et souplesse. Quel saut vient de prendre, de sa propre agitation et allegresse, l'un des plus judicieux, ingenieux et plus formés à l'air de cette antique et pure poisie, qu'autre poete Italien aye de long temps esté? N'a il pas dequoy sçavoir gré à cette sienne vivacité meurtrière? à cette clarté qui l'a aveuglé? à cette exacte et tendue apprehension de la raison qui l'a mis sans raison? à la curieuse et laborieuse queste des sciences qui l'a conduit à la bestise? à cette rare aptitude aux exercices de l'ame, qui l'a rendu sans exercice et sans ame? J'eus plus de despit encore que de compassion, de le voir à Ferrare en si piteux estat, survivant à soy-mesmes, mesconnoissant et soy et ses ouvrages, lesquels, sans son sçeu, et toutesfois à sa veue, on a mis en lumiere incorrigez et informes.⁷

Eliot may have recalled this passage from Montaigne's essay when he added to Goulart's account the telling detail about the madness of the poet, whose identity *was* subsequently made clear in John Florio's English translation of the *Essayes*, printed a decade later in 1603:

Plato affirmeth, that melancholy minds are more excellent and disciplinable; So are there none more inclinable unto follie. Diverse spirits are seene to be overthrown by their own force, and proper nimblenesse. What a start hath one of the most judicious, ingenious, and most fitted unto the ayre of true ancient poesie (*TORQUATO TASSO*), lately gotten by his owne agitation and selfe-gladnesse, above all other Italian Poets that have been of a long time? Hath not he wherewith to be beholding unto this his killing vivacitie? unto this clearenesse, that hath so blinded him? unto his exact and far-reaching apprehension of reasons which hath made him voide of reason? unto the curious and labourious pursute of Sciences, that have brought him unto sottishnesse? unto this rare aptitude to the exercise of the minde, which hath made him without minde or exercise? I rather spited than pittied him, when I saw him at *Ferrara*, in so pitteous a plight, that he survived himself; misacknowledging both himself and his labours, which unwitting to him, and even to his face, have been published both uncorrected and maimed.⁸

Knowledge of Tasso's imprisonment had certainly reached England by the time of Eliot's survey of the poet's achievements in 1593. A scurrilous poem in the second book of Sir John Harington's *Epigrams*, not printed

until 1618 but surviving in a presentation manuscript copy recently assigned to the mid-1590s,⁹ demonstrates the English poet and translator's keen awareness of his Italian contemporary's predicament, hinting at his ill-judged love in the 'one little fault', for which he had been so harshly punished by his ungrateful patron, and highlighting for the first time a marked disapproval of Duke Alfonso, which was to become such a prominent feature of many later English engagements with Tasso's life, such as Byron's 'Lament of Tasso' (1817):

'To Itis, aliasse Ioyner, an vncleanly token conuaid in cleanly tearms.'

Torquato Tasso, for one little fault,

that did perhaps merrit some small rebuke,
was by his sharpe and most vngratefull duke,

Shut vp close prisoner in a loathsome vault.

Where wanting pen and ynke by Princes order
his witt that walls of Adamant could pearse
found meanes to write his mind in exlent vearse

for want of pen and ynke in piss and ordure.

But thy dull witt damnd by Apollos crew
to Dungeon of disgrace, though free thy boddy
with pen nay print doth publish like a noddy.

...

thou callst thy self vnproperly a Ioyner,

Whose vearse hath quite disservd ryme from reason
Deserving for such rallying, and such bodging,
for this, Torquatos ynck, for that, his lodging.

(II, 76, I-II, 15-18)¹⁰

It is also likely that this imprisonment, as a result of his apparent love madness, became a significant element in a sadly lost contemporary English play called *Tasso's Melancholy*, which was first performed in August 1594, indicating that the afterlife of his legendary biography in England had actually commenced even before the poet's death in 1595, a point noted over a century ago by Sidney Lee in his Oxford lectures (1909) as a 'graphic illustration' and 'luminous proof' of 'the active interest which the English public showed, when the English Renaissance was flowering, in the personal experience of great contemporary leaders of continental literature':

Much may be gauged from the fact that the melancholy fortunes of Tasso's concluding years were, while he was yet alive, the subject of a play, which was several times performed at the chief theatre in Elizabethan London.¹¹

Lee goes on to detail, with reference to Philip Henslowe's theatrical records, at least ten performances of the play in 1594 and 1595 alone, including one only weeks after Tasso's untimely death at the end of April 1595. 'Tasso's Robe' and 'Tasso's Picture' were still listed as part of the inventory of the Rose Theatre in 1598, and the play seems to have been revived and revised, by Thomas Dekker, in 1601, around the time of the first wave of popularity of *Hamlet* at the rival Globe Theatre. A few years later, in an essay on 'Tasso and Shakespeare's England' (1918), Lee again turned his attention to the lost *Tasso's Melancholy*, focusing this time specifically on the early seventeenth-century revival:

The playgoer of Elizabethan London was thus offered during the same theatrical season an opportunity of contrasting in mimetic representation the pathetic melancholia of Tasso with the no less moving melancholy of Shakespeare's Prince of Denmark. ... England well deserves the credit of honouring Tasso's genius and of lamenting his misfortunes with a promptitude and a sincerity which have few parallels in the contemporary history of literary appreciation.¹²

In the same essay Lee argues that Tasso's literary influence could also be detected in contemporary plays intended for the London public stage, suggesting that 'Tasso's chronicle of the city's recovery by Christian warriors furnished the anonymous dramatist with his theme' for another lost play, *Jerusalem* (1592).¹³ While it is impossible to verify any potential indebtedness to *Gersualemmè liberata* in this specific play, there is some evidence to demonstrate the swift impact of Tasso's epic on the English stage. Lee also draws attention to Thomas Heywood's *The Foure Prentises of London. With the Conquest of Ierusalem*, not printed until 1615 but probably dating from the early 1590s,¹⁴ in relation to Tasso's poem. This curious dramatised 'crusading romance', in which the historical protagonists of the First Crusade are improbably relocated to London as apprentices in various trades at the start of the play, shares many of its principal characters, such as Godfrey of Bulloigne, Eustace, and Tancred, with Tasso, although Manion has recently suggested that there is no direct source for the play's plot, and fails even to mention the Italian poem as a possible influence.¹⁵ There is, however, one moment that certainly indicates Heywood's awareness of Tasso's poem, and particularly the initial impact the alluring enchantress Armida has on her arrival at the Christian camp. When, en route to the Holy Land, the beautiful Bella Franca, an invented sister for Godfrey and his three brothers, becomes a cause of amorous conflict between the chief Christian crusaders, including

Robert of Normandy, Tancred, and all her unwitting brothers, she is quick to challenge the soldiers about the dissent in the ranks that their competitive behaviour is provoking:

Princes, what means this frenzy in your hearts?
 Or hath some Necromanticke Coniurer
 Rais'd by his Art some fury in my shape,
 To worke sedition in the Christian campe?
 You haue confirm'd by generall Parliament
 A Statute, that must stand inuiolate:
 Namely, that mutiny in Prince or Pesant
 Is death, a Kingdome cannot saue his life:
 Then whence proceed these strange contentions?¹⁶

In canto IV of Tasso's poem, after the memorable infernal council at the beginning, the pagan magician Idraote determines to send his beautiful niece, the enchantress Armida, to the enemy camp expressly to sow dissension among the Christian soldiers by appealing for their pity, and using her feminine wiles to distract as many of them as possible from their military quest. Although Tasso's figure of Armida is a real woman rather than a spirit illusion, this is clearly the literary precedent that Bella Franca has in mind when she suggests to the crusaders that they are responding to her as if 'some fury in my shape' had been magically summoned to cause similar disruption.

In the one clear allusion to Tasso's epic on the English stage before his death in 1595, it is striking that Heywood was drawn to the first appearance in the poem of the character of Armida, one of the central figures in the later romantic episode that was to prove the most widely imitated and adapted in the entire poem across a range of art forms, verbal, visual, and musical throughout Europe. In one of the two principal strands of this study I will endeavour to trace the reception and artistic afterlives in England, from the 1590s through to the eighteenth century, of this key episode, focused on the amorous interlude of Armida and Rinaldo in her enchanted garden in cantos XV and XVI, after she has kidnapped and unwittingly fallen in love with the Christian hero. The first chapter will concentrate initially, as in Heywood's contemporaneous allusion, on the literary impact of Armida's arrival in the poem, examining how the poets Abraham Fraunce and Samuel Daniel both responded to canto IV of Tasso's poem: in *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588), the earliest example of English engagement with *Gerusalemme liberata*, only seven years after its appearance in print, Fraunce drew most heavily on this canto of the

Italian poem, and particularly the descriptions of Armida, for his abundant rhetorical illustrations from Tasso's work; 'The Complaint of Rosamond' (1592) was the first English poem to engage fully with the figure of Armida herself, as demonstrated in Daniel's frequent allusions to Tasso's enchantress in relation to his own spectral narrator, many of which have not been previously detected or acknowledged. The opening chapter will also examine the numerous English poetic responses in the first half of the 1590s to the celebrated song from the later amorous episode, the *canto della rosa* heard in Armida's garden in canto XVI, in translations and imitations by Robert Southwell, Edmund Spenser, and Daniel, as well as allusions in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593), to demonstrate how swift and pervasive the impact of Tasso's epic on late Elizabethan verse was.

Spenser's version of this *carpe florem* rose song constitutes an important element of the best-known and most extensive imitation of Tasso's poem in all of English literature, his re-imagining and re-working of Armida's enchanted garden in cantos XV and XVI as the Bowre of Blisse in the final canto of Book II of *The Faerie Queene* (1590). Spenser's almost immediate engagement with *Gerusalemme liberata* in his own romantic epic has long seen him acknowledged as 'l'arbitro della gloria del Tasso nel primo mezzo secolo della sua vita in Inghilterra', 'the arbiter of Tasso's glory in the first half century of his life in England'.¹⁷ However, despite the voluminous work on Spenser's episode and its sources, which have, according to Hester Lees-Jeffries, attracted 'something approaching a canon of criticism, from Lewis to Greenblatt and beyond, which adds to, and indeed almost parallels, the "thick" texture of the passage, the way in which it is overburdened with material deception, amplification, and intertextuality',¹⁸ the profound indebtedness to Tasso throughout has, perhaps surprisingly, still not been fully appreciated and acknowledged. The second chapter of this study will therefore offer a detailed re-evaluation of the relationship between the two episodes, to try to underline the sustained imitative virtuosity of Spenser's emulation of his principal source, while remaining mindful, in relation to Tasso and his poem specifically, of Wiggins's pertinent warning, about another significant sixteenth-century Italian epic model and its author, that 'Spenser criticism too often treats the *Orlando Furioso* (a great – albeit, in our time, unread – classic of Western literature) as a footnote to *The Faerie Queene* and leaves Ariosto looking like a minor author'.¹⁹ That Spenser regarded Tasso as a major author and *Gerusalemme liberata* as a significant new epic model is indicated not only in the considerable attention he paid to the

Rinaldo and Armida episode, but also in the prescient way in which he seems to both reflect and pre-empt its enormous popularity in other artistic media. The emphasis that Spenser places on both the musical and, particularly, the pictorial elements of Tasso's descriptive verse in his artful poetic elaborations highlights how these very features were already starting to appeal to visual artists and composers across Italy and much of Europe by the end of the sixteenth century.

The third chapter will investigate the impact in England of visual depictions of scenes from Tasso's romantic episodes, featuring both Rinaldo and Armida and the almost equally popular Tancredi and Erminia, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although in England, unlike Italy, France, and the Netherlands, no native tradition of pictorial representation of Tasso's poem was ever to develop, there is still evidence of a keen interest in such pictures at various moments: in the late 1620s the Dutch artist Anthony Van Dyck received a commission for King Charles I to produce a depiction of the Rinaldo and Armida episode, focused, as I will demonstrate, on a less familiar moment from canto XIV, which he executed so successfully that it seems to have been instrumental in bringing the painter into the service of the English king for the final decade of his career. The early eighteenth century witnessed the arrival in England of the first work by probably the greatest artist to have paid significant visual attention to Tasso's poem, the French painter Nicolas Poussin, who repeatedly depicted scenes from a number of episodes during the 1620s and 1630s: his second version of the Tancredi and Erminia episode in canto XIX was purchased and taken to England in the early Georgian period by the painter and collector Sir James Thornhill, and it was soon to inspire a detailed and thoughtful evaluation in relation to its literary source by the artist and critic Jonathan Richardson, which I will also examine closely.

The influence of Tasso's poem on Italian composers was no less sudden and momentous. Madrigal settings of stanzas from *Gerusalemme liberata* began to appear almost immediately after its first printing in 1581, and continued in popularity until at least the 1620s, by which time the poem's romantic episodes had also started to find favour as a source for operatic libretti. Perhaps inevitably, the story of Rinaldo and Armida proved to be the most popular of these, and eventually, by the end of the seventeenth century, this phenomenon had reached the musical stage in England, via Italy, France, and even Germany. The fourth chapter will explore ambitious musical adaptations of the episode for the London stage in

the native form of dramatic opera in John Dennis's *Rinaldo and Armida: A Tragedy* (1699), with music by John Eccles, and in the through-sung Italianate form in Handel's *Rinaldo*, with a libretto by Giacomo Rossi, first performed to great acclaim in 1711. It will also examine the somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation, by Paolo Rolli, of a different romantic episode in Tasso, that of Erminia and Tancredi, as the source for another Italianate London opera, Giovanni Bononcini's *L'Erminia favola Boschereccia* (1723). These visual and musical works, founded often closely but sometimes more freely on the Italian poem, which provide the central focus of the study in Chapters 3 and 4, help to demonstrate the breadth of Tasso's impact in England, both chronologically and across a range of art forms, but they perhaps also indicate, as Arnaldo di Benedetto has suggested, that 'i temi della *Liberata* ebbero una fortuna pittorica (nonché musicale) parzialmente autonoma del testo letterario', 'the themes of the *Liberata* have had a pictorial, not to say musical, fortune partially autonomous from the literary text'.²⁰

By the middle of the eighteenth century interest in Tasso across Europe was beginning to move away from his epic poem and other literary achievements, and back towards the predominantly unhappy events of his life. Although English translations of *Gerusalemme liberata* continued to appear in print regularly during the eighteenth and indeed nineteenth centuries,²¹ attention in England was also drawn once again increasingly towards the troubled man, who would come to be regarded by the early decades of the nineteenth century almost as 'a prototype of the Romantic poet, loving passionately but hopelessly and above his station, the victim of political oppression, maintaining his dignity and essential nobility of heart through intense and prolonged suffering, the hypersensitive creative artist at odds with society, wandering restlessly from court to court or chained in a lunatic's cell'.²² The second principal strand of this study will trace and analyse, in the fifth chapter and the conclusion, the development of such views about Tasso himself, from the earliest English biographical account in 1748 to the last at the turn of the twentieth century, and also in the many imaginative engagements with aspects of the poet's legendary biography, such as his prolonged imprisonment in Ferrara, which were to become such a prominent feature of both English and European responses to him in the nineteenth century:

L'immagine del Tasso sembra vivere, nella prospettiva della tradizione critica e letteraria, non soltanto per quelle linee e per quelle luci che vengono fuori dalla sua poesia, ma ancora (e con intensità tutta particolare,

che non si ritrova in molti altri scrittori) per quelle suggestioni che derivano dai gesti e dalle vicende della biografia.

(The image of Tasso seems to live on, from the perspective of both a critical and literary tradition, not only through those lines and from those lights which issue from his own poetry, but also, and with a particular intensity which is not to be found in many other writers, from those suggestions that derive from the actions and the fortunes of his biography.)²³

After the initial burst of interest in Tasso's life before and after his death in 1595, there were to be no further English allusions to his imprisonment and troubled romantic history until towards the middle of the seventeenth century. On this occasion it does appear to have been the first Italian biographer, Manso, who was directly responsible for perpetuating the story of the poet's attachment to Princess Leonora d'Este. In November and December 1638 John Milton benefitted from the Marquis of Villa's hospitality during his stay in Naples, and, to demonstrate his gratitude, composed a Latin poem for his host before his departure. The poem *Mansus* makes much of Manso's 'felix concordia', 'happy friendship' (7), with, and patronage of, both Tasso and Giambattista Marino, alluding directly to the Italian's biographies of both (although that of the latter poet has not survived), and suggesting that these memorials of the poets' lives will help to ensure Manso's own literary immortality alongside theirs:

Fortunate senex! Ergo quacunq; per orbem
Torquati decus et nomen celebrabitur ingens,
Claraque perpetui succrescet fama Marini,
Tu quoque in ora frequens venies plausumque virorum,
Et parili carpes iter immortale volatu.

(49–53)

(Therefore, fortunate old man, wherever Torquato's glory and great name shall be celebrated throughout the world, wherever the brilliant fame of enduring Marino waxes, your praises too will frequently be on men's lips, and flying by their side you shall enjoy their immortal flight.)²⁴

Milton's words proved to be prophetic, certainly in the case of the earlier Italian poet, although whether Manso's biography has had an entirely beneficial impact on the legacy of Tasso's 'nomen' is perhaps open to question. Milton evidently knew Manso's *Vita*, and probably also discussed Tasso's life directly with its author in Naples. In the second of three Latin epigrams composed while in Italy, and later printed, like *Mansus*, in the *Poemata* of 1645, addressed to the Neapolitan singer Leonora Baroni,

whose captivating voice enchanted the English poet at a performance in Rome, Milton alludes specifically to Tasso's unhappy love for the other Leonora:

Altera Torquatum cepit Leonora poetam,
 Cuius ab insano cessit amore furens.
 Ah miser ille tuo quanto felicius aevo
 Perditus, et propter te, Leonora, foret!
 Et te Pieria sensisset voce canentem
 Aurea maternae fila movere lyrae!
 Quamvis Dircaeo torsisset lumina Pentheo
 Saevior, aut totus desipuisset iners,
 Tu tamen errantes caeca vertigine sensus
 Voce eadem poteras composuisse tua;
 Et poteras, aegro spirans sub corde quietem,
 Flexanimo cantu restituisset sibi.

(1–12)

(Another Leonora captivated the poet Torquato, who for frenzied love of her went mad. Ah, poor unfortunate! How much more happily had he been lost in your times and for love of you, Leonora! He would have heard you singing with Pierian voice as the golden strings of your mother's lyre moved in harmony. Though he had rolled his eyes more fiercely than Dircean Pentheus, or all insensible had raved, yet you by your voice could have composed his senses wandering in their blind whirl; and, inspiring his distempered heart with peace, you could have restored him to himself with your soul-moving song.)²⁵

Milton, however, is much more explicit in attributing Tasso's madness to his 'amore furens' than Manso ever was in his biography. Whether Milton's description was informed by the personal views of the Italian patron expressed later in private conversation, or whether it exaggerated the motive and extent of the poet's madness, imagining him raving insensibly with rolling eyes, in order to emphasise the potentially curative impact of this other Leonora's singing voice, this epigram was the first work by an English poet to create a vivid verbal picture of the Italian poet driven to distraction by love. In a similar way to Milton's prophecy of literary immortality for both poet and biographer in *Mansus*, the poem itself foreshadows the later English and European-wide fascination for imaginative engagement with Tasso's love-induced madness. Among a host of poems, plays, operas, and paintings, spanning the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries and much of Western Europe, Tasso was to emerge as the central figure in literary and artistic works by Goethe,

Byron, Leopardi, Delacroix, Baudelaire, and Liszt to name only a few of the most prominent, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5.

By the early years of the twentieth century, however, the fame of Tasso and his work in England had already started to wane. In 1918, only a decade after the publication of the last English biography of the Italian poet, William Boulting's *Tasso and his Times* (1907), Sidney Lee appraised the contemporary fortunes of the poet, who he had suggested 'was for Shakespeare's England a living force in a sense which fails to apply to any other of the great Italian company', and was moved to lament that 'well justified would be a revival in England of that sympathetic interest in the *Gerusalemme Liberata* and its author, the beginnings of which go back to the day when the work first issued from the press, and first uplifted the spirit of Italy and Western Europe'.²⁶ This study of Tasso's literary, artistic, and biographical afterlives is expressly an attempt to stimulate such a revival of 'sympathetic interest' in a now undeservedly under-appreciated epic masterpiece and its fascinating poet, almost a century after Lee's plea, and half a century since the last book-length account of Tasso's reception and influence in England. It was a chance encounter some twenty years ago with C. P. Brand's book *Torquato Tasso*, published in 1965, which provided a key starting point for my own study: while Brand's second section still offers an excellent wide-ranging overview of the *literary* reception of Tasso's life and work in England, it did not attempt to address, as I have subsequently done, the simultaneous and long-standing impact of the poet's work, particularly his epic *Gerusalemme liberata*, on opera and the visual arts.

NOTES

- 1 George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 46.
- 2 Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, pp. 46–7.
- 3 See Pierantonio Serassi, *La Vita di Torquato Tasso* (Bergamo, 1785).
- 4 Giovanni Battista Manso, *Vita di Torquato Tasso* (Venice, 1621).
- 5 John Eliot, *Ortho-epia Gallica. Eliots Fruits for the French* (London, 1593), pp. 30–1.
- 6 Samuel Daniel, *Poems and a Defence of Ryme*, ed. Arthur C. Sprague (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), p. 141.
- 7 Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, 2, ed. P. Villey, V. L. Saulnier, and M. Conche (Paris: Quadrige / PUF, 2004), p. 492. For a consideration of whether Montaigne did actually encounter Tasso directly in Italy, see Ayesha Ramachandran, 'Montaigne's Tasso: madness, melancholy and the enigma

- of Italy', *Forum Italicum*, 47 (2013), 246–62: pp. 253–4, and Concetta Cavallini, *L'Italianisme de Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Presse de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), pp. 127–41.
- 8 John Florio, *The Essayes of Montaigne*, ed. J. I. M. Stewart (London: Nonesuch Press, 1931), p. 438.
 - 9 *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, ed. Gerard Kilroy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 68.
 - 10 *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, ed. Kilroy, p. 157.
 - 11 Sidney Lee, *The French Renaissance in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), pp. 11–12.
 - 12 Sir Sidney Lee, 'Shakespeare and Tasso's England' in *Elizabethan and Other Essays*, ed. F. S. Boas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), pp. 169–83: pp. 182–3; see also C. P. Brand, *Torquato Tasso: a Study of the Poet and of his Contribution to English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 206.
 - 13 Lee, 'Shakespeare and Tasso's England', p. 181.
 - 14 See Lee Manion, *Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 174, and Fenella Macfarlane, "'To try what London Prentices can do': merchant chivalry as representational strategy in Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London*", *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 13 (2001), 136–64.
 - 15 Manion, *Narrating the Crusades*, pp. 187–8.
 - 16 Thomas Heywood, *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*, 2 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 209.
 - 17 Alberto Castelli, *La Gerusalemme liberata nella Inghilterra di Spenser* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1936), p. 130.
 - 18 Hester Lees-Jeffries, *England's Helicon: Fountains in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 171.
 - 19 Peter DeSa Wiggins, 'Spenser's anxiety', *Modern Language Notes*, 103 (1988), 75–86: p. 75.
 - 20 Arnaldo di Benedetto, *Tra Rinascimento e Barocco: dal petrarchismo a Torquato Tasso* (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2007), p. 109.
 - 21 See Brand, *Torquato Tasso*, pp. 263–72, for details.
 - 22 Brand, *Torquato Tasso*, p. 205.
 - 23 Giovanni Getto, 'Approssimazione biografica' in *Malinconia di Torquato Tasso* (Naples: Ligouri editore, 1979), pp. 9–26: p. 9. All translations from the Italian in the book are mine, unless otherwise stated.
 - 24 *The Latin Poems of John Milton*, ed. and trans. Walter MacKellar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), pp. 156–7.
 - 25 *The Latin Poems of John Milton*, ed. and trans. MacKellar, pp. 110–13.
 - 26 Lee, 'Shakespeare and Tasso's England', p. 170. Interestingly, Boulting's biography has been reprinted frequently in the past decade.