Tasso's Petrarch: The Lyric Means to Epic Ends
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A favorite poetic gambit of the young Torquato Tasso was to rewrite Petrarchan sonnets. In a mischievous turn away from images of erotic torment, Tasso revised the famous sonnet 14 of the *Rime sparse* in ways that anticipate the lush lyricism of his later work:

Occhi miei lassi, mentre ch’io vi giro
nel bel viso di quella che v’à morti,
pregovi siate accorti,
che già vi sfida Amore, ond’io sospiro.

(*Rime sparse* 14)¹

Occhi miei lassi, mentre ch’io vi giro
Nel volto in cui pietà par che c’inviti,
pregovi siate arditi
pascendo insieme il vostro e mio desiro.

(*Rime II.14*)²

Where Petrarch sighs tragically, Tasso looks forward to the enjoyment of desire with sensual relish; while Petrarch warns his weary eyes to be cautious and resist temptation, Tasso orders them to gaze boldly
and to revel in the possibility of erotic fulfillment. This is not the only poem in which Tasso takes on Petrarch, only to refuse firmly—if teasingly—the self-enclosed poetics of yearning. His *Rime d’amore* return repeatedly to the dilemma of the Petrarchan poet-lover and consistently resolve the erotic paralysis and self-absorption of the *Rime sparse* into neat lyrics of mutual reciprocity and erotic satisfaction. But these poetic exercises, naughty parodies of an established literary tradition of tormented and lamenting lovers, raise an important question for readers of Tasso’s vast oeuvre: what was the extent of Tasso’s literary engagement with Petrarch?

This question of Petrarch’s influence on Tasso is often acknowledged. Editors and critics of Tasso’s epic, the *Gerusalemme liberata*, have long noted the many allusions to Petrarch sprinkled through the romance plot of Rinaldo and Armida, and it is a commonplace of the poem’s reception history to comment on its intense “lyricality.” Moreover, Tasso’s pastoral romance, the *Aminta*, draws extensively on the commonplace postures of Petrarchan poetry, and the *Discorsi* feature a long discussion of Petrarch as the exemplary poet of grace and beauty while examining the place of lyricism in the epic. Despite the evident frequency of Petrarchan allusion in Tasso’s writing, the issue of Petrarchan influence remains a vexed one, for as Dante Della Terza warns, “direct recourse to Petrarch is not sufficient, since it would be necessary also to analyze the influence of more immediate and direct sources: Bembo, [Della] Casa, Magno, and Bernardo Tasso.”

However, though the many, often conflicting, discourses of sixteenth-century petrarchismo provide an immediate literary context for Tasso’s many poetic variations on Petrarchan themes, the sheer number of direct echoes of the *Rime sparse* in the *Liberata* suggest that Tasso was

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specifically interested in the figure of Petrarch and the tradition of lyric poetry for which he had become the canonical exemplar.5

Tasso certainly left behind Petrarchan lyric for the challenges of Vergilian epic, but the dense allusions to Petrarch’s _canzoniere_ in the _Liberata_, and its association with the character of Armida in particular, indicates that Tasso did not completely reject lyric poetics. Instead, he sought to explore the lyric’s poetic potential and to rehabilitate its egocentric emphases within the national and historical concerns of the long poem. Idrąote’s instructions to Armida in Canto IV of the _Liberata_ present an exemplary illustration of this phenomenon:

Dico: “O diletta mia, che sotto biondi capelli e fra si tenere sembianze canuto senno e cor virile ascondi, e già ne l’arti mie me stesso avanze, gran pensier volgo; e se tu li secondi, seguiran gli effetti a le speranze. Tessi la tela ch’io ti mostrò ordita, di cauto vecchio essecutrice ardita.

Vanne al campo nemico: ivi s’impieghi ogn’arte feminil ch’amore alletti. Bagna di pianto e fa melati i preghi, tronca e confondi co’ sospiri i detti: beltà dolente e miserabil pieghi al tuo volere i più ostinati petti. Vela il soverchio ardir con la vergogna, e fa manto del vero a la menzogna.

(IV.24–25)6

Lurking behind this portrait are the twin traditions of Petrarchan lyric and Ariostan romance: Armida is the latest incarnation of a literary genealogy that begins with Laura and fosters romance heroines such

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5Sozzi, 45–47, notes that Tasso owned four editions/commentaries of Petrarch’s _Rime sparse_—an edition with commentaries by Alessandro Vellutello, an edition with annotations by Giulio Camillo Delminio and additional tables by Lodovico Dolce (Venice: Giolito, 1577), an edition with commentary by Lodovico Castelvetro (Basel, 1582) and the _Lezioni sopra il principio del Canzoniere del Petrarca_ of Giovanni Talentoni (Florence, 1587). In contrast to Baldacci and critics who assert that the influence of sixteenth century Petrarchism on Tasso was stronger than the influence of Petrarch, Sozzi calls attention to the many direct Petrarchan borrowings in Tasso’s works and briefly discusses Tasso’s theoretical and critical evaluation of Petrarch; my own work builds on these insights.

6All citations are from Torquato Tasso, _Gerusalemme Liberata_, ed. Bruno Maier (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1982). All emphases are mine unless otherwise indicated.
as Angelica, with their blond hair, demurely arranged veils, and lethal capacity to precipitate the experience of erotic desire. However, Idraote’s vision of Armida at the Crusader camp goes beyond the commonplaces of *petrarchismo* and the *romanzi*. Here, Tasso alludes specifically to sonnet 213 of the *Rime sparse*:

Grazie ch’ a pochi il Cielo largo destina,  
rara vertù non già d’umana gente,  
sotto biondi capei canuta mente  
e ’n umil donna alta beltà divina,  
leggiadria singolare et pellegrina  
e ’l cantar che ne l’anima si sente,  
l’andar celeste e ’l vago spirito ardente  
ch’ogni dur rompe et ogni altezza inchina,  
et que’belli occhi che i cor fanno smalti,  
possentì a rischiarar abisso et notti  
et torre l’alme a’ corpi et darle altrui,  
col dir pien d’intelletti dolci et alti,  
coi sospiri soavemente rotti:  
da questi magi transformato fui.

*(Rime sparse 213)*

The turn to a sonnet that identifies Laura as a magician, and Tasso’s redeployment of its imagery to describe Armida, his romance-enchantress, is a self-conscious generic marker: it emphasizes and explains the dual literary ancestry of Tasso’s romance plot. Armida and her erotic enslavement of Rinaldo are modeled not only on a long tradition of romance enchantresses ranging from Circe to Alcina, but on the Petrarchan love experience as it is exhaustively examined in the *Rime sparse*. Petrarch claims that he has been physically transformed by the magical powers of Laura’s eyes, but Tasso goes further, connecting the emotional experience of *internal* transformation recorded by Petrarch with the physical experience of *external* transformation enacted by the evil enchantresses of romance who turn their lovers into animals, plants or stones. He is thus able to produce a romance

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7 Yavneh, 148, suggests that Armida’s beauty is a composite of Petrarchan commonplaces, so that she becomes a false Laura and “the ‘author’ of the Petrarchan lover-like projections of Goffredo’s men.” However, Yavneh dwells on Armida’s appearance and seductive tactics (135–36), comparing them to the generic ideal of the *bellissima donna* in cinquecento treatises and images, rather than to specific instances of Petrarchan imitation (see especially, 136–45). For a detailed discussion of Ariosto’s use of Petrarch’s Laura for the figure of Angelica, see Klaus W. Hempfer, *Testi e contesti: saggi post-ermeneutici sul Cinquecento*, trans. Laura Bocci (Napoli: Liguori, 1998) 230–43.
heroine who symbolizes the dual potential of poetic beauty to enthrall and to ennoble; in this, Armida represents an important set of generic innovations.\(^8\)

With the *Gerusalemme liberata*, Tasso provides an innovative solution to the fierce debate over the *romanzi* by adapting the experience of Petrarch’s *canzoniere* for the romance plot of Armida and Rinaldo. The quarrel over the relative merits of epic and romance hinged on two crucial issues. First, the perceived need for epic unity contradicted the successful model of romance with its multiple, endlessly proliferating narratives. No attempt at epic in the Cinquecento had been able to match the effortless ease and popular appeal of Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, with its interwoven, frequently deferred plots; any attempt at a new epic would have to meet this challenge.\(^9\) Second, the need to introduce the element of wonder (meraviglia) into the epic while retaining its commitment to verisimilitude seemed especially difficult since it was usually associated with romance magic and marvels. If epic poets could not introduce supernatural or fantastic figures into their poems, they had few means of stimulating wonder other than relying on providential intervention or the aristeia of the hero. However, the *Rime sparse*, with its clear narrative structure and its lingering meditations on the wonder of the beloved’s beauty, offered a third way between the rigid conventions of epic and romance.

Re-conceptualizing the relation between lyric and epic poetics, Tasso moves beyond the ornamental sheen and erotic conflicts of petrarchismo and finds in the *Rime sparse* a model for variety in a single, unified plot. As the narrative of the Petrarchan lyric sequence points towards the integration of romance pleasures and epic imperatives, it also bequeaths a new source of meraviglia to the epic: the beauty of the beloved herself.\(^10\) Tasso quite deliberately introduces the wiles of his

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\(^8\) Melinda Gough, “Tasso’s Enchantress, Tasso’s Captive Woman,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.2 (2001): 523–52, argues that Armida symbolizes the reclamation of classical, pagan beauty and learning for the Christian world. She shows that in textual and spiritual terms, the beautiful pagan women in the *Liberata* and the pleasure of poetry that they embody (romance) must be converted and appropriated to the exigencies of Christian epic; my analysis, which suggests that Tasso also reclaims poetic beauty on aesthetic and philosophic grounds, complements such a view.


enchantress with a sonnet that describes the effects of Laura’s beauty as magical and transformative: the magic of Armida in the Crusader camp is not diabolical illusion (as it will be in other episodes of the poem), but is simply and unequivocally Petrarchan. If Laura has “sotto biondi capei canuta mente,” Armida too has a “canuto senno” “sotto biondi capelli.” However, Tasso distinguishes between lyric beloved and epic enchantress even as he carefully establishes their relationship. Where Laura’s beauty and wisdom are natural extensions of each other, Armida uses her “canuto senno” and “cor virile” to manipulate the crusaders with her feminine charms, so that Petrarch’s “belta divina” effectively becomes Tasso’s “belta dolente.”

This emphasis on beauty, reminiscent of Tasso’s insistence on the idea of the beautiful in his Discorsi, marks the beginning of Armida’s association not merely with Petrarchan poetics, but with the poetics of the Liberata. Indeed, the transformative meraviglia of Armida underscores Tasso’s transformation of romance and epic. By superimposing a Petrarchan narrative on a conventional romance plot, Tasso explicitly associates the romance wandering (errare) of the Liberata, well known from earlier epics, with the lyric giovenile errore of the Rime sparse.

This combination has important consequences for understanding the romance sections of Tasso’s epic. In the light of Petrarch’s Rime sparse, the Armida-Rinaldo interludes no longer seem antithetical to and distracting from the epic purpose of Goffredo’s Crusade. The self-involved idyll on Armida’s island, Tasso delineates a vision of erotic fruition that Petrarchan poets ostensibly crave; but this sterile, narcissistic fulfillment of desire dramatized by the closed, circular gaze of the lovers in the enclosed garden must be rejected firmly, as Petrarch too, ostensibly rejected its sterility for the grace of the Virgin. Instead, in that heightened self-awareness precipitated by the poet’s meditations on the Virgin, Tasso’s pious discourse is not antithetical to but is integral to the epic purpose of Liberata.


Contemporary critics question the authenticity of this conversion (see John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel,” Diacritics 5.1 [1975]: 34–40; and Thomas M. Greene, The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry [New Haven: Yale UP, 1982] 114–15), but cinquecento commentators frequently read this conversion as plausible and exemplary; on the Rime sparse as a “specchio di vera penitenza” in sixteenth-century commentaries see Baldacci, 60–74.
by Petrarchan love, Tasso recognizes the potential for true religious conversion—Armida, like Laura, is after all an erotic idol who usurps the devotion reserved for God, but the awakening of that devotion in Rinaldo suggests that it may be redirected towards its true object.\textsuperscript{13} Since Tasso locates a potential for self-discovery in the Petrarchan erotic-poetic experience, Rinaldo’s wandering becomes a necessary detour before his true submission to Goffredo’s divine command is possible.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, the psychological arc of the canzoniere, as a narrative lyric sequence, provides a unifying structure for a tale of romance wandering, imposing a coherent teleology of repentance on the aimlessness of romance error. At the same time, he draws on the Petrarchan model only to break its static circularity and, as with his lyric rewritings of the Rime sparse, moves beyond lyric stasis and romance suspension toward narrative fulfillment.

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Tasso’s Rime d’amore and his constant discussions of Petrarch in the prose tracts demonstrate his engagement with a rich literary inheritance.\textsuperscript{15} For, by the mid-sixteenth century, Petrarch had become the linguistic and poetic model for writers in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{16} His Rime

\textsuperscript{13} Such a reading implies a Neoplatonic interpretation of Petrarch’s canzoniere, of the kind that develops after the publication of Pietro Bembo’s Gli Asolani, which effectively merged Petrarchism and Neoplatonism. For a useful summary Christian-Neoplatonic interpretations of Petrarch’s Rime sparse see Baldacci, 85–110; and Braden, Petrarchan Love, 99–105.

\textsuperscript{14} The presence or absence of a clear narrative in Petrarch’s Rime sparse has been the subject of much debate since the fifteenth century. However, that Tasso did read a narrative structure out of the canzoniere seems likely given his ownership of Alessandro Vellutello’s influential edition and commentary which rearranged the order of the poems to create a clearer continuity. For a discussion of Vellutello’s ordering of the Rime sparse see Kennedy, 285–88. Whether Tasso follows Vellutello’s interpretation or not is unclear; his ownership of other editions of Petrarch’s poems suggests that he was at least familiar with the original order of the work.

\textsuperscript{15} See specifically, Lezione sopra un sonetto di M. Della Casa (1564), Considerazioni sopra tre canzoni di M. Gio. Battista Pigna (1568), both reprinted in Le prose diverse di Torquato Tasso, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1875). Of course, the issue also arises at various points in the Discorsi.

\textsuperscript{16} On the publication history of Petrarch’s Rime sparse and Trionfi in the cinquecento, see Kennedy, 1–25; Mary Fowler, Cornell University Library Catalogue of the Petrarch Collection Bequeathed by Willard Fiske (London: Oxford UP, 1916); and Laura Jennings, Petrarch: Catalogue of the Petrarch Collection in Cornell University Library (Millwood: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1974). Moreover, Thomas Roche notes that “an endless number of lectures and addresses on individual poems [were] given at the Florentine academy and other learned societies once a week for years” (Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences...
sparse, interpreted through a variety of lenses, was vast and intricate enough to offer two contrary portraits of the love experience, each with important literary legacies: one, a cautionary tale of execrable moral error, the other, an exemplary tale of moral repentance. However, the relevance of this lyric tradition to Tasso’s epic poetics is less evident at first glance, particularly since it was (and is) customary to keep the literary histories of epic and lyric separate. Scaliger, for instance, thought of the two genres as opposite ends of the poetic spectrum, having little to do with each other directly, and this view continues in a modified form into modern critical scholarship as well. However, the arrival of Armida at the Crusader camp in canto IV of the *Gerusalemme liberata* suggests otherwise:

Argo non mai, non vide Cipro o Delo
d’abit o di beltà forme si care:
d’auro ha la chioma, ed or dal bianco velo
traluce involta, or discoperta appare.
Così, qualor si rasserena il cielo,
or da candida nube il sol traspare,
or da la nube uscendo i raggi intorno
più chiari spiega e ne raddoppia il giorno.
Fa nove crespe l’aura al crin disciolto,
che natura per sé rincrespa in onde;
stassi l’avoro sguardo in sé raccolto,
e i tesori d’amore e in suoi nasconde.
Dolce color di rose in quel bel volto
Fra l’avorio si sparge e si confonde,
ma ne la bocca, onde esce aura amorosa,
sola rosseggia e semplice la rosa.

(IV.29–30)

Not content with a single gesture towards the beloved of the *Rime sparse*, Tasso reiterates Petrarch’s puns on Laura’s name three times (d’auro/l’aura/aura), emphasizing the dual identity of his enchantress—she is


both tempting beloved and a figure for poetry itself; the erotic pleasure she promises is also the promise of poetic delight. But Tasso is precise about the kind of poetry Armida embodies. She surpasses the beauty of women and goddesses celebrated in classical epic (Helen, Venus, Diana), and instead incarnates the beauty of Laura, celebrated in the *Rime sparse*. Tasso is, of course, aware of playing a dizzying intertextual game here: while Petrarch alludes to Aeneas’s meeting with Venus to describe his own encounter with Laura in *Rime* 90 ("Erano i capei d’oro a l’aura sparsi"), thereby effecting “a lyricization of epic materials,” Tasso extends and inverts the process.\(^\text{18}\) Armida bypasses epic analogues to model herself on a lyric beloved as Tasso converts lyric materials back into epic. This deft juggling between two distinct genres hints at what the Petrarchan lyric had to offer the epic as it searched for a new poetics.

Armida’s appearance at the Crusader camp underlines the strong insertion of lyric poetics into the epic. In canto IV of the *Liberata*, the seemingly ubiquitous Petrarchan images of blond hair, tantalizing veil, ivory-and-rose complexion along with the Laura/lauro puns that characterize her appearance find specific correspondences in the imagery of *Rime* 227 and *Rime* 11:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Aura che quelle chiome bionde et crespe} \\
\text{Cercondi et movi et se’ mosso da loro} \\
\text{Soavemente, et spargi quel dolce oro} \\
\text{Et poi ’i raccogli e ’n bei nodi il rincrespe:} \\
\text{tu stai nelli occhi ond’ amorose vespe} \\
\text{mi pungon si che ’n fin qua il sento et ploro,} \\
\text{et vacillando cerco il mio tesoro} \\
\text{come animal che spesso adombre e ’ncespe;} \\
\text{ch’ or mel par ritrovar et or m’accorgo} \\
\text{ch’i’ ne son lunge, or mi sollievo or caggio,} \\
\text{ch’ or quel ch’ i’ bramo or quel ch’ è vero scorgo.} \\
\text{Aer felice, col bel vivo raggio} \\
\text{rimanti; et tu, corrente et chiaro gorgo:} \\
\text{ché non poss’ io cangiare teco viaggio?}
\end{align*}
\]

(\textit{Rime sparse} 227)

\(^{\text{18}}\)For a discussion of Petrarch’s “lyricization of epic materials” in *Rime* 90, see Greene, 114–15.
Lassare il velo per sole o per ombra,
Donna, non vi vid’io
poi che in me conosceste il gran desio
ch’ogni altra voglia d’entr’al cor mi sgombra.
Mentr’io portava i be’ pensier celati
ch’èanno la mente desiendo morta,
vidivi di pietate ornare il volto;
ma poi ch’Amor di me vi fece accorta,
fuor i biondi cappelli allor velati
et l’amoroso sguardo in sé raccolto.
Quel ch’i’ più desieava in voi m’è tolto,
sì mi governa il velo
che per mia morte et al caldo et al gielo
de’ be’ vostr’occhi il dolce lume adombra.

(Rime sparse 11)

The double allusion to the *Rime sparse* links Armida to fundamental aspects of Petrarchan eroticism and explains the interrelation of beloved and poetry (*Laura/*lauro) through the associated experiences of beauty, wonder and desire. In *Rime* 227, the breeze (*aura*) verbally recalls the beloved (*Laura*) and enacts the poet-lover’s projected desires for physical proximity at a time of separation. As the sonnet moves from octave to sestet, Petrarch moves from apostrophizing the air to expressing mental anguish; a poem which begins by describing Laura’s beauty soon becomes a cry against the torment of absence and the burden of imaginative desire as the poet-lover can no longer distinguish between truth and willful illusion (“ch’or quel ch’i’ bramo or quel ch’è vero scorgo”). Similarly, *Rime* 11 dramatizes the extent to which Laura’s apparent control of her veil may be nothing more than Petrarch’s projection of his own desires onto her actions, so that his anguish stems from an inability separate external action and internal longing.

By framing Armida’s appearance at the Christian camp (the world of epic) with these potent signifiers of Petrarchan experience, Tasso clearly indicates the nature of the plot she initiates: she will turn the Crusaders into incipient Petrarchan poet-lovers, stimulating their imaginations, and precipitating an experience of individuation through erotic desire. Like Laura in *Rime* 11, she appears veiled (IV.29.3: “d’auro ha la chioma, ed o dal bianco velo”), but her hair resembles the vision of 227 (IV.30.1–2: “Fa nove crespe l’aura al crin disciolto, / che natura per sé rincrespa in onde”). There is also a key difference, one that emerges in Tasso’s strategic substitution of Laura’s “amoroso
sguardo in sé raccolto” (Rime 11) for Armida’s “avaro sguardo in sé raccolto” (30.3). If Petrarch imagined Laura’s control over her veil, Tasso’s Armida actually does exert control; her appearance and self-presentation are carefully pre-mediated. Indeed, her miserly gaze suggests that she may be more like the solipsistic Petrarch even as she strives to imitate the Petrarchan beloved; like him, she is an expert creator of fictions, particularly fictions of the self.

Armida offers her admirers the promise, not of sexual satisfaction, but of exquisite imaginative pleasure. The two extended similes in canto IV, describing the luminous effect of her veil and mantle, explain her seductive appeal and its Petrarchan guise:

Cosi, qualor si rasserena il cielo,  
or da candida nube il sol traspare,  
or da la nube uscendo i raggi intorno  
più chiari spiega e ne raddoppia il giorno.  

(IV.29.5–8)

Come per acqua o per cristallo intero  
Trapassa il raggio, e no ’l divide o parte,  
per entro il chiuso manto osa il pensiero  
si penetrar ne la vietata parte.  

(IV.32.1–4)

Significantly, both similes derive from Tasso’s expansion of the final tercet of Rime sparse 227. The echo of “il sol traspare” in “trapassa il raggio” identifies the two similes as extensions of each other, emphasizing the related functions of veil and mantle: the action of the sun shining through a gleaming cloud describes Armida’s hair through her veil, and a similar action of a sunbeam passing through water or crystal describes the desiring gaze (“il pensiero”) of her admirers penetrating her “chiuso manto.” The breach of the velo and manto that occur in the imagination of each observer recalls Petrarch’s incoherent quest to possess Laura (“mio tesoro” and “bel vivo raggio” of Rime 227) and his inability to breach the veil and gaze of Laura except through hidden thoughts (“i be’ pensier celati” of Rime sparse 11). However, by changing the failed dynamic of Petrarch’s literal sgombra/ adombra (Rime sparse 11) into the successful, figurative action of il sol traspare / trapassa il raggio, the narrator suggests that Armida not only wears the controlling veil of desire as a Laura-figure, but that she creates the governing veil of Rime 11 as a Petrarchan poet.19

19Zatti reads the covering and uncovering action of Armida’s veil in the context of courtly sprezzatura, and links it to Tasso’s narrative techniques of dissimulation. He also
She controls the “ombra” (shadow, fiction) in sg-ombra and ad-ombra because she creates herself as an erotic imago—her veil is not the cloak of allegory, but the boundary between what is seen and what is imagined, between reality and fiction.

The careful parallelism of the similes establishes an important link between the lyric poetics of Petrarch and Tasso’s own theories regarding the power of erotic and poetic beauty to signify relations between the real and the imaginary, between truth and illusion. As a veiled woman, Armida has often been identified as the figure of allegory, particularly at the literal level of allegory, as an image of the reified, idolatrous potential of poetry itself. But unlike her romance predecessors she does not conceal an ugly body beneath her enchanting appearance, nor does she incarnate deception as Ariosto’s Alcina does. This generic modification masks a crucial distinction: it separates Armida from being an allegory (for poetry, or of concupiscence) and presents her as a figure of the poet who understands the working of fictions which she manipulates for her own use. Indeed, Tasso’s adaptation of distinctly Petrarchan gestures for Armida re-conceives the source of the enchantress’s magic, associating it with beauty and poetic power rather than making it a moral allegory of the kind that so often accompanied annotated editions of the Aeneid or the Orlando furioso. He could thus make Armida, and the Petrarchan plot she initiates, the source of meraviglia in his epic.

In Rime 227, Petrarch converts the Circean topos of a bestializing passion into a metaphor for erotic suffering as desire reduces the lover into the state of trapped animal (“come animal che spesso adombre e’ ncespe”). This conversion of magical romance topoi into the metaphors


Gough and Migiel, 130–33, note and discuss the fact that Armida is not stripped and revealed as a hag as are previous romance enchantresses such as Alcina and Acratia.

To make such an assertion is to directly contradict Tasso’s own allegorization of Armida as the figure of the concupiscent passions in his Allegory of the Liberata. However, my analysis takes the Allegory to be Tasso’s gesture of propitiation to the Counter-Reformation rather than a statement of his intentions in writing the poem; it is therefore more clearly applicable to the Gerusalemme conquistata. Interestingly, Walter Stephens argues that Tasso probably did not compose the Allegory himself, and perhaps relied on Flaminio Nobili (see Stephens, “Metaphor”).
of lyric experience lies at the heart of Tasso’s attempt to introduce elements of *meraviglia*, long associated with the improbable wonders of romance narratives, into the epic. His grafting of lyric techniques onto the figure of the romance enchantress thus signals a transformation of the troubled relationship between romance *meraviglia* and epic *verosimile*. By turning literal romance *topoi* into the metaphors that characterize Petrarchan experience, Tasso deftly re-shapes romance wonder into a new *meraviglioso verosimile* based on lyric beauty and its eroticized poetics.

To penetrate Armida’s veil then is not to attain the truth of allegory but to experience poetic *meraviglia*:

Ivi si spazia, ivi contempla il vero  
di tante meraviglie a parte a parte;  
poscia al desio le narra e le descrive,  
e ne fa le sue fiamme in lui più vive.

(IV.32.5–8)

The enjambment leaves “il vero” precariously identified with the body under the mantle, until the clause is completed with an ironic reversal—Armida’s body does not offer “il vero” of allegorical revelation, but “il vero di tante meraviglie,” which are viewed part by part as if in an erotic *blason*.23 The truth of many marvels, a key phrase in Tasso’s poetics, draws together the *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* and its later version, the *Discorsi del poema eroico*, written after the *Liberata*. In the early discourses, Tasso insists on the relationship between the verisimilar and the marvelous, while in the later work, this notion of the “true fantastic” is combined with that of the beautiful marvelous; Armida represents a synthesis of these twin concepts.

Moreover, “il vero di tante meraviglie” also invokes the elusive and tantalizing relationship between beauty and truth, and by extension, raises that vexed question about the moral worth of poetic pleasure, which stems from sensual beauty and eroticism—a question that was in fact central to the numerous critiques and defenses of Petrarch. Was the seductive wonder of poetic beauty an errant diversion, an invitation to idolatry, or a medium for achieving spiritual (Neoplatonic)

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23 Gough argues that this passage presents an already “tainted” beauty that casts doubt on Tasso’s Neoplatonic rehabilitation of Armida; see Gough, 532–33. However, the inherent *doubleness* of this image, which suggests both sensual pleasure and Neoplatonic fervor, is precisely what Tasso may have been interested in, since it articulates a dilemma crucial to any defense of poetic beauty.
transcendence? The perils of erotic wandering, poetic pleasure and literary self-involvement are of course already present in the *Rime sparse* where Petrarch struggles against the idolatry implicit in the poetics of Laura/lauro, the reification and worship of poetry itself. Armida, as a composite figure of beauty, desire and poetic expression, is implicated in this Augustinian idolatry thrice over—not only does she set herself up as an idol opposing the Christian goal of the crusade, but by making soldiers into incipient Petrarchan lovers, she encourages action based on imaginatively produced desire, effectively obscuring the boundary between real-world imperative (epic) and the pleasures of fiction (romance).

III

To claim that Armida represents the inherent doubleness of lyric beauty, which can lead upwards to heavenly contemplation or to the paralyzing torments of Petrarch’s “giovenile errore,” is to cast a different light on her idyll with Rinaldo in canto XVI. The famous episode of Armida gazing into her mirror, which hangs at Rinaldo’s side in place of a sword, has traditionally been interpreted as the nadir of the hero’s career. Emasculated and idolatrous, trapped in the midst of the enchantress’s labyrinth, Rinaldo is blinded by the concupiscent passions, and blasphemously asserts the existence of paradise in Armida’s face. The rich lyricism of the canto’s poetry indicates that Rinaldo’s plight was perhaps the ultimate fantasy of the smitten soldiers in canto IV: dense with Petrarchan allusion, the episode is also Tasso’s attempt to write an epic *canzoniere*.

Armida’s garden and the lyric experience it embodies are the poetic counterparts to Tasso’s theoretical union of lyric and epic. Here, the

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24 See also Tasso’s defense of love in Book II of the *Discorsi del poema eroico*. The relationship between erotic desire and the beautiful is frequently asserted in Neoplatonic treatises on love; see for instance Marsilio Ficino’s *De amore*, Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore*, Pietro Bembo’s *Gli Asolani*, Book IV of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Libro del Cortegiano* and Sperone Speroni’s *Dialoghi d’amore*.

25 Freccero articulates this dilemma succinctly: “In order to create an autonomous universe of autoreflexive signs without reference to an anterior Logos—the dream of almost every poet since Petrarch—it is necessary that the thematic of such poetry be equally autoreflexive and self-contained, which is to say, that it be idolatrous in the Augustinian sense.” See Freccero, 38.

26 Armida’s garden itself derives from a double tradition of poetic gardens—the romance gardens of Homer and Ariosto, but also the narrative lyric gardens of Petrarch’s *Triumphus Cupidinis* and Poliziano’s *Stanze per la giostra*. The similarity between the two
beauty of ornate surfaces and Neoplatonic ideals, of lyric style and substance, are fused into a probing analysis of the Petrarchan love experience itself. Tasso’s assertion in the *Discorsi del poema eroico*, that epic and lyric may use the same style when their subject matter and *concetti* are the same, now finds practical expression;\(^{27}\) for the space of a canto, the epic poet takes on a lyric persona—and then shows how lyric experience may be integrated into epic action.

At first glance, however, it is unclear whether the passion of the lovers in canto XVI is really any different from the sensual excess of romance or the overall sterility of the Petrarchan love experience:

> Dal fianco de l’amante (estrano arnese)  
> un cristallo pendea lucido e netto.  
> Sorse, e quel fra le mani a lui sospese  
> A i misteri d’Amor ministro eletto.  
> Con luci ella ridenti, ei con accese,  
> mirano in vari oggetti un solo oggetto:  
> ella del vetro a sé fa specchio, ed egli  
> gli occhi di lei sereni a sé fa spegli.  
> L’uno di servitù, l’altra d’impero  
> Si gloria, ella in se stessa ed egli in lei.  
> “Volgi,“ dicea “deh volgi” il cavaliero  
> “a me quegli occhi onde beata bei,  
> ché son, se tu no ’l sai, ritratto vero  
> de le bellezze tue gli incendi miei:  
> la forma lor, la meraviglia a pieno  
> più che il cristallo tuo mostra il mio seno.

(XVI.20–22)

Several critics have commented eloquently and insightfully on this passage, noting the narcissistic dangers of desire and poetry.\(^{28}\) However, the self-absorption that Rinaldo demonstrates in this scene is no more than the erotic counterpart to his self-centered devotion

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to military honor. By forcing him to wear a mirror alongside the arms of a warrior, Armida subjects him to the Petrarchan experience of internal conflict and desire that precipitates the agonies of self-scrutiny. The replacement of Rinaldo’s sword with a “cristallo” thus signals an important shift of purpose that represents a necessary, if misunderstood penitence: not only must Rinaldo give up the excesses of martial independence, he must learn the value and pleasure of self-conscious submission to a greater cause.

Tasso signals Rinaldo’s metamorphosis from warrior to lover with the introduction of the mirror as an erotic rival, marking the relationship between Rinaldo’s epic and romance destinies with a figure derived from lyric. Self-enclosed, plangent, and idolatrous, Rinaldo’s complaint against Armida’s mirror is a conventional topos of Petrarchan poetry (and of courtly love poetry before it), made startlingly literal, where the beloved’s mirror is addressed as a rival. Indeed, the dramatic situation, where Armida looks into her mirror while Rinaldo pleads with her to look at him instead, derives from perhaps the most famous lyric treatment of the mirror-as-rival theme in Rime sparse 45:

Il mio adversario in cui veder solete
gli occhi vostri ch’Amore e ’l Ciel onora
colle non sue bellezze v’innamora
più che ’n guisa mortal soavi et liete.

...Ma s’io v’era con saldi chiovi fisso,
non dovea specchio farvi per mio danno
a voi stessa piacendo aspra et superba.
Certo, se vi rimembra di Narcisso,
questo et quel corso ad un termine vanno—
ben che di si bel fior sia indegna l’erba.

(Rime sparse 45)

By suggesting that Laura’s narcissism is responsible for her unattainability, the poet-lover displaces his own narcissism onto his beloved and thereby renders any reciprocal relationship impossible. Tasso

29 Rinaldo demonstrates his predilection for self-love by killing Gernando in Canto V, thus violating Goffredo’s strict code of peace between the members of the Crusader camp.

30 The moment also picks up Tasso’s assertion (following Proclus) in the Discorsi del poema eroico, that love and wrath are the two passions most suitable to heroes; in the Liberata, Rinaldo’s heroic stature is emphasized—not undermined—by his passionate outbursts of wrath and love. See Tasso, Discorsi, 104–06.

31 Gordon Braden observes tellingly that “the craft of the Canzoniere is committed in such specific and innovative ways to obscuring the difference between love and
takes this premise of Petrarch’s narcissistic poetics and develops its logical conclusion in the image of Armida and Rinaldo, who look at each other and see only a reflection of their own desires. However, even as Tasso appropriates the language of *Rime sparse* 45 for Rinaldo’s lament, he changes its implicit narcissism into an authentic plea for reciprocity. As in the early lyric rewritings of Petrarch, he explodes the static, circular self-analysis of his Petrarchan model and entertains the possibility of fulfillment: in this case, his Armida is no ethereal Laura, but a fully realized Petrarchan lover in her own right, while the haughty and proud Rinaldo genuinely yearns for emotional, not merely sexual, engagement. The Petrarchan analogue thus explains the function of Rinaldo’s mirror: it is the emblem of his narcissism, but it also enables him to transcend the pride of self-love by displacing it onto an inert erotic rival.

This double use of the mirror to symbolize both narcissism and a desire for mutuality finds expression in Tasso’s early *Rime d’amore*, which rework the mirror-as-rival image of *Rime sparse* 45 several times. In II.44 (“Chiaro cristallo a la mia donna offersi”), the lover, much like Rinaldo, holds up a mirror for his beloved, but argues that her image in his thoughts and verse is more beautiful than her physical reflection. In II.169 (“Qual da cristallo lampeggiar si vede”), however, the lover becomes her mirror and declares his existential dependence on her beauty:

Specchio son io, di beltà no, di fede,  
Puro ed informe e sol a voi presente;  
Fatto sono da voi bello e lucente  
De la vostra beltà, che mia si crede.  
...
Ma qualunque io mi sia, turbido e vago,  
Son vostro specchio e lacrimosa fonte:  
Oh miracol d’Amor, possente mago!  

(*Rime*, II.169)

This is an astute and intriguing response to Petrarch: Tasso recognizes the rival mirror and the beloved as symbolic displacements of the poetic self, and ruthlessly unmasks the Petrarchan evasions for what they are—“specchio son io” (“I am the mirror”). But even as he recognizes and repeats the Petrarchan drama, he makes a radical change.
Instead of explaining the lover’s desire to become the rival-mirror as an impulse toward self-love (as Rime sparse 45 suggests), Tasso’s lyric, almost paradoxically, reveals it as a desire to unite with the beloved. This yearning to make oneself into the image of the beloved, so powerfully articulated by Tasso’s lyric speaker, clearly informs Rinaldo’s claim to be the true picture of Armida’s beauty:

ché son, se tu no ’l sai, ritratto vero
de le bellezze tue gli incendi miei:
la forma lor, la meraviglia a pieno
più che il cristallo tuo mostra il mio seno.

(XVI.21.5–8)

Rinaldo, like Tasso’s lyric speaker, cannot reflect her beauty as the mirror does, but he offers a “ritratto vero,” that is, a truer picture of the effects of her beauty. Erotic desire and lyric poetry are no longer superficially mimetic and subliminally narcissistic; they seek to transcend individual egocentrism and reach for true engagement, as the truth of many marvels, once hidden in Armida’s “bel petto” (IV.31–32) becomes the wonder of her beauty that may be found in Rinaldo’s “seno.” The subtle, but crucial, transfer of meraviglia from Armida to Rinaldo implicitly opposes the self-absorbed narcissism that colors this scene, and points to the potential for self-discovery and spiritual awakening contained in erotic experience. It also announces a redirection of the plot and signals a turn, through lyric revisions, away from the self-enclosed bubble of romance and back to epic action; the meraviglia of the poem will soon be found in Rinaldo’s martial exploits, rather than in Armida’s beautiful wiles.

Situated within a poetic experience dense with images of reflection, the true remaking of Rinaldo also involves a quasi-narcissistic moment of gazing at himself, this time in an adamantine shield:

Egli al lucido scudo il guardo gira,
onde si specchia in lui qual siasi e quanto
con delicato culto adorno; spira
tutti odori e lascivie il crine e ’l manto,
e ’l ferro, il ferro aver, non ch’altro, mira
dal troppo lusso effeminato a canto:
guernito è sì ch’inutile ornamento
sembra, non militar fero instrumento.

(XVI.30)
It is only fitting that the mirror, which heals Rinaldo’s emotional and spiritual fragmentation, is a shield whose literal function is to resist the destruction of the body.32 This substitution of shield for mirror, underlined by the re-emergence of the sword as the object that defines Rinaldo’s selfhood, now announces the return to epic action from the realm of lyric. Enmeshed in the romance world of Armida’s island, far away from the claims of public duty, Rinaldo learns to submit, bend his fierce pride and devote himself to the service of someone other than himself. While these gestures remain idolatrous when applied to Armida, they provide the basis for a redefinition of heroic values when applied to his relationship to Goffredo. Tempered by a new self-consciousness and humility to the service of the Christian body and the epic task, rather than to the pursuit of individual glory or erotic satisfaction alone, Rinaldo has undergone a kind of un-making as a chivalric knight in order to be reconstituted as a Crusader.

IV

The error of Armida’s island may now be understood as the “giovenile errore” of Petrarch, a narrative of errancy, fragmentation, awakening selfhood and eventual repentance. And it is in precisely these terms that Tasso presents Rinaldo’s experience. In the scene of Rinaldo’s spiritual cleansing by Peter the Hermit, the reappearance of images associated with Armida pass almost unnoticed:

Sol la grazia del Ciel quanto hai d’immondo
può render puro: al Ciel dunque converso,
riverente perdon richiedi e spiega
le tue tacite colpe, e piani e prega.”

Così gli disse; e quel prima in se stesso
pianse i superbi sdegni e i folli amori,
poi chinato a’ suoi piú mesto e dimesso
tutti scoprigli i giovenili errori.
Il ministro del Ciel, dopo il concesso
perdono, a lui dicea: “Co’ novi albori
ad orar te n’andrai là su quel monte,
ch’al raggio matutin volge la fronte.

(XVIII.8–9)

32This moment also echoes Statius’ Achilleid when Achilles reveals (and recognizes) his identity as a man and a warrior by looking into a shield brought by Odysseus. For an analysis of this episode in Statius and Tasso’s imitation see Beatrice Corrigan, “The Opposing Mirrors,” Italica 33.3 (1956): 165–79.
Amidst the solemn ritual motions of contrition, confession, penitence and absolution, a subtle and important verbal transposition occurs, as the images of erotic worship are now transferred back to their rightful referents—Heaven, God, the saintly intercessor, and the topography of spiritual renewal. The insistence on the supreme agency of Heaven (“grazia del Ciel,” “al Ciel,” “ministro del Ciel”) recalls and corrects the Petrarchan allusion in canto IV, in which the heavens are infatuated by Armida’s beauty, and canto XVI, in which Rinaldo is a “ministro eletto,” declaring the heavens and stars as a fitting mirror for Armida.

Framed between these pointed revisions of erotic idolatry is Rinaldo’s confession. While his act of contrition involves repenting of his pride and amorous folly, he specifically confesses to “i giovenili errori,” and the carefully placed Petrarchan allusion lends the phrase much greater significance. Rinaldo may well be remembering his moment of self-recognition in the shield:

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Qual uom da cupo e grave sonno oppresso
Dopo vaneggiar lungo in sé riviene,
    tal ei tornò nel rimirar se stesso,
    ma se stesso mirar già non sostiene:
    giù cade il guardo, e timido e dimesso,
    guardando a terra, la vergogna il tiene.
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(XVI.31)

As in the scene of spiritual cleansing, there are three key moments in this scene of psychic cleansing: he is disoriented like a man waking up from deep sleep, he collects himself slowly after a moment of delirious raving (“vaneggiar”), and on recognizing himself, he is filled with shame (“vergogna”). Rinaldo’s confession to such an experience, described in retrospect as “i giovenili errori,” is a gesture back towards the most famous Petrarchan sonnet of all, Rime sparse 1:

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Voi, che ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
di quei sospiri ond’ io nudriva ’l core
in sul mio primo giovenile errore,
quand’ era in parte altr’ uom da quel ch’ i’ sono:
del vario stile in ch’ io piango et ragiono
fra le vane speranze e ’l van dolore,
ove sia chi per prova intenda amore
spero trovar pietà, non che perdono.
Ma ben veggio or si come al popol tutto
favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente
di me medesmo meco mi vergogno;
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et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l fruto,
 e 'l pentersi, e 'l conocer chiaramente
 che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.

(Rime sparse 1)

This sonnet could be Rinaldo’s address to the reader, since it traces
the progression of the speaker from vaneggiar to vergogna, and identi-
fies his erotic and poetic wanderings as diversions that conclude in a
Christian-Neoplatonic view of life as a dream (Tasso’s “grave sonno”
echoes and modulates Petrarch’s “breve sogno”). The retrospective
turn away from erotic wanderings, the identification of a divided and
remade self, the desire for pity and pardon, along with awareness of
shame, repentance and a clear understanding of the fragility of worldly
pleasures, are all resonant themes for Rinaldo’s lyric adventures.33 In
Tasso’s hands, Petrarch’s “favola” has become Rinaldo’s romance, a
tale of errancy and error that establishes an unprecedented fusion
of genres.

The narrative of Rinaldo and Armida, however, does not end with
the hero’s return to the Christian fold. Tasso’s lovers meet again in
the final canto of the poem, but this episode remains one of the most
perplexing in the entire epic since the final reconciliation is ambigu-
ous and not unproblematic.34 The transformation of Rinaldo may be
convincing, but what of Armida? If repentance and a Christian turn
towards the divine are the conclusion of the Petrarchan experience
(at least from a Neoplatonic perspective), then Armida, the exemplar
of Petrarchan poetics, achieves a conversion that recalls the Rime
sparse’s final turn from Laura to the Virgin in 366. However, this final

33 In the context of Rinaldo’s turn away from the narcissism of Armida’s island, it is
worth noting that the final lines of canto XVI.31 also contain a glancing allusion to
Dante as he stands before Beatrice in Purgatorio XXX.76-78: “Li occhi mi cadde giù
nel chiaro fonte; / ma, veggendomi in esso, i trassi all’erba, / tanta vergogna mi gravò
la fronte.” On Dante’s use of the Narcissus myth in this passage see Kevin Brownlee,
“Dante and Narcissus (Purg. XXX. 76–99),” Dante Studies 96 (1978): 201–06. The
moment of self-recognition after a period of delirium also echoes two occasions in Ariosto’s
Orlando furioso: Orlando’s return to consciousness after his madness (Orlando furioso
39.58) and Ruggiero’s awakening from the thralldom of Alcina’s island (Orlando furioso
7.65); Ariosto may also have Petrarch in mind, particularly in the case of Orlando.
Interestingly, Migiel notes that the Mago di Ascalona also echoes Rime sparse 1 when
describing his conversion, “Ben son in parte altr’uom da quell ch’io fui” (XIV.46.7);
see Migiel, 135.

34 See for instance, Giamatti, 209–10; Gough, 533–34; Stephens, “Saint Paul among
the Amazons,” 175; Quint, Origin and Originality, 115–16; and Jo Ann Cavallo, The
Romance Epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso: From Public Duty to Private Pleasure (Toronto:
rehabilitation of Armida within the epic’s all-encompassing embrace is one of the poem’s famous critical cruces: at best, it has been received with a tempered skepticism; at worst, with outright rejection.\(^3\)

Armida’s conversion has been variously explained; however, the Petrarchan frame of Armida’s story suggests that her conversion is also perhaps a fitting conclusion to her own erotic-poetic experience.\(^36\)

The importance of love, specifically Petrarchan love, in Armida’s conversion is easy to overlook, but it is a teleology with a strong literary pedigree derived from both Dante as well as Petrarch.\(^37\) In this context, the Petrarchan frame of the Armida-Rinaldo plot offers Tasso a well-developed model for female poetic self-hood in lyric form since contemporary women poets such as Gaspara Stampa, Chiara Matraini, and even Vittoria Colonna or Veronica Franco, had pioneered a re-interpretation of Laura that allowed women a range of erotic expression.\(^38\) If the female petrarchisti had reappropriated Laura and given her a voice, Tasso now draws on this rich tradition and even extends

\(^35\) It is of course impossible to know whether Tasso intended a marriage between Armida and Rinaldo, though several critics have suggested convincing reasons for such a conclusion. For an extended discussion of Armida and Rinaldo’s possible marriage see Stephens, “Saint Paul among the Amazons”; Gough; and Jo Ann Cavallo, “Tasso’s Armida and the Victory of Romance,” *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke UP, 1999) 77–114. Tasso removed the reconciliation scene in the *Gerusalemme conquistata* and while his *Allegory* suggests one (strongly didactic) interpretation, his letters to Scipione Gonzaga, reveal his own vacillations regarding the end of the Armida-Rinaldo plot; on the changed ending see Gough, 549–50.

\(^36\) On Armida’s conversion as divine inspiration, see Stephens, “Saint Paul among the Amazons”; as lovelorn submission, see Cavallo, “Tasso’s Armida and the Victory of Romance,” 101–06; as a counterpoint to the tale of Sofronia and the loss of the statue of the Virgin, see Migiel,129–30; as an integration of the power and pleasure of poetry into the Christian epic, see Gough.

\(^37\) Upon her introduction at the Crusader camp in canto IV, Armida had already been associated with Dante’s Beatrice and the Virgin (through allusions to *Rime sparse* 126 and 366). At the end of the *Liberata*, when the lovers encounter each other again after the battle for Jerusalem has been fought and won, Tasso returns to *Rime sparse* 126 to describe Armida’s reaction upon seeing Rinaldo (XX.128.5–8) which echoes *Rime sparse* 126.4–9. If the early cantos marked the transformation of romance *topoi* into lyric metaphors, here the process is reversed: the metaphors of lyric desire are literalized and brought to practical, sensual fulfillment. Cavallo, “Tasso’s Armida and the Victory of Romance,” 97, asserts that Armida’s conversion is indeed a conversion for love, but argues that it is derived from chivalric romance traditions.

\(^38\) The difficulty of female poet-lovers assuming the stance of the Petrarchan poet-lover is insightfully discussed in Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women’s Love Lyric in Europe, 1540–1620* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 2–5. The difficulties faced by women poets writing in the Petrarchan tradition suggests some of the problems that Tasso may have faced in trying to find an appropriate conclusion for Armida’s lyric self-hood.
it: Armida, unlike many women lyric poets, gets her man even as she becomes a Marian figure.

Though Tasso is faced with the tricky problem of fashioning Armida’s turn away from profane to divine love, given the frame of Petrarchan repentance, his solution is an innovative one, not nearly as misogynistic as some critics have suggested. By echoing the Virgin as she submits before God’s will, Armida herself becomes a sanctioned Marian figure and partner for Rinaldo, submitting to the divine order by accepting an authorized relationship. Her loss of power as an enchantress prefigures her acquisition of a different kind of power, represented by the Virgin at the Annunciation—submission to God paradoxically results in the power of religiously sanctioned love in marriage; her love now ceases to be idolatrous because it acquires a licit and attainable object. The result is unexpected, certainly unsettling, and perhaps difficult to accept: for Tasso (as for St. Paul), the Virgin signifies the paradox of female influence through submission. Petrarch’s words in the canzone alla Vergine are instructive:

Tre dolci et cari nomi aì in te raccolti,
madre, figliuola et sposa,
Vergine gloriosa,
donna del Re ch’ nostri lacci à sciolti
et fatto ‘l mondo libero e felice,
ne le cui sante piaghe
prego ch’ appaghe il cor, vera beatrice.

(Rime sparse 366.45–52)

Mary’s submission at the Annunciation marks the moment when she takes on the exemplary triple role of mother, daughter and wife, and Armida’s verbal recollection of that episode might well mark her acceptance of an earthly version of the divine role. Petrarch’s invocation of the Virgin as God’s beloved and hence the “vera beatrice” suggests what Armida’s relationship to Rinaldo (to whom she submits) might be—beloved and bringer of joys.

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