IMITATIO ET INVENTIO: RECEPTION AND INVENTION OF A TRAGIC STYLE IN

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN TRAGEDY

by

GARY WATERS

(Under the Direction of Thomas E. Peterson)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation has as its premise a critical re-evaluation and rehabilitation of sixteenth-century Italian tragedy, which has been largely ignored in both Anglophone and Italian scholarship. The starting point of my re-evaluation is the reception and innovation of the theoretical framework of tragedy itself found in two vital sources: Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*. My argument is that the compositional process itself plays as important a role on the theorization of the tragic and the rebirth of the genre as does the ideological message contained within each tragedy. The problematics of genre definition render it difficult to satisfactorily and unitarily codify tragedy and its role in society. Trissino, Giraldi Cinzio, Speroni, and Tasso all conclude quite differently the role of the poet and the genre itself; and this project analyzes those differences to arrive at a fuller understanding of the historical icastity and poetic lyricism in the Cinquecento. Chapter one discusses Trissino's *Sofonisba*, the first neoclassical tragedy, and his theorization of a new tragic style rooted in the Aristotelian theoretical framework. Trissino's tragedy, taking a historical subject as its matter, is predicated upon representing a peaceful utopia between the political forces of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. In Chapter two, I discuss Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche* which takes one of Giraldi

Cinzio's own novella as his source material. I trace how Giraldi Cinzio diverges from Trissino's theoretical framework by embracing Horace's *Ars Poetica*. The *Orbecche* represents a major turning point from the few tragedies which follow Trissino's because it seeks to locate the ideological message in the horrific shock of its representation. Chapter three examines Speroni's *Canace* and the lyric innovations that he adds to the development of tragic composition. Speroni is less engaged theoretically with Aristotle or Horace, and he attempts to situate the tragic sentiment in its melic representation. The final chapter examines the culmination of the tragic form in the sixteenth-century, Tasso's *Re Torrismondo*. Tasso composes the *Re Torrismondo* as a psychologized reflection of the inner turmoil of the soul as he delimits the function of utility and privileges that of pleasure.

INDEX WORDS: Tragic, poetics, tragedy, imitation, sixteenth-century, Aristotle, renaissance, theater

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GARY WATERS

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GARY WATERS

Major Professor:	Thomas E. Peterson
Committee:	Paola De Santo
	Charles Platter

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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To Joshua: my life, my love, my all.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This project takes its beginning as a critical re-evaluation of Italian Renaissance tragedy

in an effort to rehabilitate it from the negative criticism that it has endured in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries. The project is motivated by three competing but intersecting interests:

reception, imitation, and invention. The first is the reception of critical material from Aristotle's

Poetics and Horace's *Ars Poetica*. The difficulty in recreating tragedy lies in very precise

definitions of the characteristics that constitute the genre. Sixteenth-century tragedians bind

themselves to the theoretical rules expounded in these two texts, but they also unable to avoid the

conventions of their own burgeoning literary canon. It becomes necessary to characterize exactly

how each tragedian engages with the theoretical material which they receive from their classical

sources and to understand how they reconfigure that material to suit their own compositional

needs. Initially, Giangiorgio Trissino will adhere very strictly to Aristotelian precepts,

composing his *Sofonisba* in close proximity to the rules as he understands them. The changing

nature of the literary experience, that is to say, the oral and representational one of classical

Greece to the written medium of the Renaissance, forces Trissino to rethink and reimagine the

sequence of the Aristotelian paradigm. This development will continue with Giambattista Giraldi

Cinzio, Sperone Speroni, and finally with Torquato Tasso at the end of the sixteenth century.

Each successive tragedian will consider Aristotle's prescriptions and will decide what to

incorporate and what to leave aside. The privileging of classical poetic theory is a result and not

a cause sparked by the increasing desire among the humanists and early Renaissance writers to

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precisely codify literary genres. The interest in classical authors, most notably the reintroduction of Greek texts in the western world, fuels this desire and sparks numerous translations and critical commentaries both by the above-mentioned authors as well as other Renaissance critics and philologists.

My second interest is to qualify the level of imitative style that sixteenth-century authors employ, pertaining both to their narrative choices as well as the poetic language used, once theoretical models of the tragic begin to reappear. For example, many Renaissance dramatists uphold the primacy of Sophocles just as Aristotle did in the *Poetics*, and Sophocles' tragedies and tragic style become the foundation of Renaissance dramatic narrative for authors such as: Trissino, Rucellai, and Tasso. A critical component of tragic composition is the necessity that the narratives deal with grandiose subjects and very often with stories that are already known. This does not mean that tragedy may not treat unfamiliar characters, but the dramatic nucleus of the narrative must deal with specific scenarios. For instance, Tasso's *Re Torrismondo* proposes new subject matter that has been redressed to imitate Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Trissino drew the material of his *Sofonisba* from the annals of history, but the narrative follows a power struggle similar to the one found in Sophocles' *Antigone*. Sixteenth-century Italian tragedy is often judged more for its relationship to its models and antecedents than on the particular merits of its innovation. The difficulty remains in the fact that there were no contemporary models, and precise definitions of tragedy and the tragic elements had to be established. The most important element was to characterize how tragedy differed from other poetic genres. After having taken this definition and the tragic elements from Aristotle, Renaissance authors were left with the task of choosing narratives that would speak to a contemporary audience as well as establish a poetic lyric language appropriate to the genre.

The third interest is an investigation into the ways in which sixteenth-century tragedians contribute stylistically and theoretically to the rebirth of the genre. In order for tragedy to reappear in any meaningful way, authors could not simply translate the classical tragedies. It required a critical engagement not only with the classical, theoretical texts but also an innovation of style which could speak to their contemporary audiences. While still dependent in several ways on classical models, each of the tragedians in this study contributed to the evolution of the tragic in the Cinquecento, which begins to transform into something wholly new. For example, the religious holdovers from classical tragedy, like the chorus, become problematic, and they are forced to update the tragic structure in order for it to be more easily assimilated by the audience. The choral songs very often become lyric *intermezzi* between acts. The amount of characters within tragedies are expanded to better approximate the Renaissance court, and this proximity, reflecting the political nature of Renaissance tragedy, became a way for sixteenth-century authors to specifically comment on the political moment.

A number of problems persist that affect our critical judgment of the genre. Many contemporary critics tend to judge sixteenth-century tragedy in comparison with other tragic traditions that came before or after. The comparisons that they draw often lend a negative critique of the tragedies of the Italian Renaissance tradition, because they are judged on the merits of other cultures rather than the one that produced them. This begins with Marvin Herrick's *Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance* in which he concludes that Italian Renaissance tragedy is wholly derivative and does not function due to its length and often lack of tragic *pathos*. Other scholars, both Anglophone and Italian, are not immune to these types of comparisons and judgments. For example, Scarpati describes how Carducci found Tasso's *Re Torrismondo* slow and possessing none of the youthful hedonism that he expressed in his early

works. My position stands upon the fact that Italian Renaissance tragedy must be judged on its own characteristics: narrative content, stylistics, and development of its own internal, theoretical framework. To judge a cultural period's tragic production based on the superiority of other cultural models misses the point of tragedy's ability and purpose. Post-Romanticism and post-Nietzschean scholarship latched onto the existentialism of tragedy and began to identify a singular functionality: the depiction of internalized suffering and the psychological struggle of its representation which led the audience to a psychagogic catharsis. This viewpoint places the importance on the individual audience member's identity and relationship with the subject matter rather than material that affects the audience's identity as a whole.[1] Therefore collective, civic themes are a fundamental and integral part of sixteenth-century tragedy. Giraldi Cinzio himself wrote that the function of tragedy was to "diligere et intellegere" the audience. His position changes the identity of the audience; we should not think of it as a collection of individual members but as a sampling representative of society as a whole. The educative function of the tragic moment is not instantiated in the individual alone, but elevates the level of discourse to a civic functionality. The representation of tragic tension and elements democratizes their reception in the audience, despite their social position, and allows the dramatist to comment on society. To better understand Italian Renaissance tragedy, we must re-contextualize the civic and political functions of tragedy or else we run the risk of losing a critical approach that is very

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[1] It must be taken into consideration that Greek tragedy had its origins in collective, civic ritual which influenced the development of its subject matter. The collective experience of tragedy during the Great Dionysia was an educative one in civic terms. Goldhill makes this assertion in regard to poetry as a whole noting that not only poets wrote in meter but also philosophers, like Parmenides and Xenophanes, and civic leaders, such as Solon. He writes, "This notion of poetry not as esoteric art or mere entertainment, but as a medium for important, general and true utterance to the city is also highly relevant to the institution of the tragic festival as a civic occasion" (141).

useful in elucidating the context of tragedy. The third and final impediment to our critical re-evaluation of Italian Renaissance tragedy has been and is German Idealism. Joshua Billings recently wrote, "Tragedy is the most philosophical of all genres," and he is hardly the first to believe this to be the case (Billings 1). In fact, in his new book the <u>Genealogy of the Tragic</u>, he outlines the obsession of the German Idealist philosophers with classical tragedy.[2] The tragic has been subsumed under the weight of the philosophical discipline that has divorced it completely from its historical and cultural moment. Largely, the result of philosophy's obsession with the tragic has led to much debate about the interiorization of suffering and the psychological effects of tragedy. Stemming from the Idealist tradition, recent criticism has failed to mediate both the formal and historical aspects of the compositional process. This will be my job in the chapters that follow to examine the content of my chosen authors in light of their critical texts in order to arrive at a formal definition of the tragic as well as tragedy the genre.

In Chapter Two, I will examine Trissino's role in the inauguration of a new tragic style. Trissino composes the first neoclassical tragedy in the Cinquecento, and he will establish several of the rules that persist in the tragic tradition going forward. I will discuss how Trissino engages critically with Aristotle's theoretical framework in the *Poetics* in the process of writing his own tragedy. I will also demonstrate that Trissino's engagement with the numerous literary debates in the Cinquecento affect his choice of source material and his conceptualization of tragedy's function. In order to accomplish this, Trissino will subtly reformulate Aristotle's tragic paradigm in order to privilege not the plot, as is expected, but thought and characterization through rhetoric. Aristotle dictates that a tragedy's action advance due to necessity built into the fabric of

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[2] See also Simon Goldhill, "The Greek Chorus: Our German Eyes," in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, pp. 35-52.

the plot; each scenic representation is urged and driven by a carefully balanced need, so that in the end, the tragic action seems fated to happen. Trissino's tragic formulation does not rely on this underlying force and is situated in sentimental feelings, that is to say, Trissino expects the action to unfold through the careful manipulation of speech and characterization. The tragic moment is felt on a personal level as the reader is convinced of the helplessness and self-sacrifice of its main characters.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche* and his divergences from Trissino's theorization of the tragic. Giraldi Cinzio differs from Trissino and many other sixteenth-century tragedians by combining the tragic theory of Aristotle with that of Horace. Giraldi Cinzio will also further privilege the Latin tragic tradition over the Greek, and consequently, he will choose Seneca as the model for his tragic narrative. His departures are significant, and his *Orbecche* will be based not on a well-known narrative or myth but on one of his own novelle. This is important to Giraldi Cinzio's conceptualization of catharsis because he believes that the suspense adds a shocking quality to the ending and forces the audience to pay more attention. He will add to the shock a sense of horror that permeates the *Orbecche*, which violates Horace's prescriptions that violence not be shown onstage. Giraldi Cinzio's combination of the unknown narrative in conjunction with the presentation of horror demonstrate his desire to overtly instruct the audience. The audience is presented with a tough ideological conundrum, and they are expected to use elements from Giraldi Cinzio's characters to arrive at the appropriate ideological message.

Chapter Four discusses Sperone Speroni's *Canace*, which sparked a controversial debate with Giraldi Cinzio over the appropriateness of tragedy's themes and the nature of its characters. Speroni does not present us with a theoretical text from which to draw his formulation of the

tragic, but he does give us some insight in his responses to the criticisms levied at him during the debates surrounding his work. Speroni draws his narrative from Greek mythology, and for the first time, he engages with the theme of incest as the impetus for the dramatic action. His narrative will treat the well-known myth of Canace's and her brother Macareo's love affair taken from Ovid's *Heroides*. The story involves the discovery of their incestuous affair by their father and the eventual deaths of the two siblings. Speroni's innovations involve his greater reliance on different metrical forms rather than the standard *endecasillabi* and *versi sciolti* established by Trissino. Speroni's dialogue will use both *quinari* and *settenari* in addition to the *endecasillabi*, a change that sparked considerable discussion from critics in the Cinquecento. He will rely on this new style of versification to add lyric quality to the spoken dialogue, and he draws on the shifting prosody to imitate lamentation. This variable prosody will create a melic effect that moves the pity and fear of the audience not by the action but by the sentimental lyric of the characters.

The final tragedy that I will examine is Torquato Tasso's *Re Torrismondo* in Chapter Five. Tasso's *Re Torrismondo* is a critical re-evaluation of his earlier work that he rewrites and completes several years later. Tasso's sustained engagement with this work and others that he rewrites evidences a diligent attempt to establish his own theoretical formulation of specific genres. In several ways, Tasso is the culmination of the tragic tradition. He alters the nature of tragic theory which had always balanced utility with pleasure, and he begins to privilege pleasure over any particular instructional quality. Tasso will combine many elements in the formulation of the tragic narrative including historical subject matter mapped onto a Sophoclean model. The psychologization of his narrative places the audience into an ethical dilemma especially difficult to throw off because the characters are all almost blameless; they do not possess culpability like

those found in Giraldi Cinzio's or Speroni's tragedies. The internal anguish that his characters feel is reflective of desire to blur the ideological and ethical boundaries as the audience grapples with their own sense of right and wrong. The narrative mirrors Tasso's intellectual development caught between the idealism of the Renaissance and the pessimism of the Counter Reformation. Initially, the audience feels the same tension of the characters as the dramatic action ends with Torrismondo and Alvida's discovery of their familial relationship and the sense of hopelessness that ensues. Tasso's own inner hopefulness for the future is represented in Germondo's promise to Torrismondo's and Alvida's mother to take care of her and be a steward for her kingdom. The audience carries this hopefulness with them as they leave knowing that time will heal Germondo's losses.

CHAPTER TWO

TRISSINO'S *SOFONISBA* AND THE INAUGURATION OF A TRAGIC STYLE

The discussion concerning the existence of tragedy from the collapse of the Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages is long and varied and is not the topic of this chapter. For our purposes it will suffice to say that tragedy in its classical form did not exist in Italy until its "rebirth" during the early Renaissance. This rebirth of tragedy will trace its origins to the re-introduction of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the West along with Greek literacy which served as not only the catalyst of the renewed interest in tragedy but also as the template for its recreation. This chapter investigates in what ways Trissino engages with Aristotle's theoretical model to recreate the tragic for Renaissance Italian audiences. I will look for those areas where Aristotle's theoretical precepts and Trissino's innovation to tragic theory overlap and/or diverge to determine what Trissino decided to incorporate into his inauguration of a new tragic style. My approach differs from scholars like Marvin Herrick and Salvatore DiMaria because it assumes that the compositional process was as important as the content in his ideation of the tragic. I will trace specifically Trissino's engagement with the important linguistic debate, the *Questione della lingua*, and the theoretical debate, concerning imitation. I have subdivided these areas both to highlight their relevance and to not confuse my audience.

Giangiorgio Trissino (1478-1550) was born to an aristocratic family in Vicenza, and is the author of the first neo-classical tragedy, *Sofonisba*. Trissino's formation included an element that set him apart from some humanist authors and scholars; he spent several years in Milan studying

Greek under the famed tutelage of Demetrius Chalkokondyles.[3] Trissino moved in impressive literary circles, and in 1513, one year before the completion of *Sofonisba*, he participated in meetings of the Orti Oricellari.[4] The following year he joined Pietro Bembo and Baldassare Castiglione at the court of Pope Leo X. Bembo and his literary theories also exerted a powerful, competitive influence over Trissino's poetic practice. Trissino's early life coincided with the return of Greek literacy to the West as well as the Aldine publications of Greek texts. Indeed, Trissino modeled the *Sofonisba* on Greek tragic examples instead of the more well-known Senecan models, despite his source material being drawn from Roman history.[5] Trissino imitates Aristotle's poetics structurally and innovates by reformulating Aristotle's paradigm of the six constituent elements of tragic composition in the *Sofonisba* in order to emphasize rhetorical importance of the tragedy.

Narrative Summary[6]

The narrative opens at the end of a heated battle of the Second Punic War between the Roman forces and their African ally, Massinissa, king of the Massylii. The battle was waged against Rome's former ally and the current ally of the Carthaginians, the Massaesyli and their

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[3] Chalkokondyles was one the foremost Greek scholars in Italy during the Quattrocento. He taught Greek language and philosophy for more than forty years during his stay. Marsilio Ficino, Angelo Poliziano, Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, and Baldassare Castiglione were among his students. Chalkokondyles prepared and published the first edition of Homer which he dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici.

[4] "Pur mancandoci prove precise di discussion sulla tragedia nelle sedute degli Orti del 1513 ed evitando quindi la sopravalutazione che se ne è fatta, non si puo sfuggire all'impressione che quegli incontri fiorentini abbiano lasciato un qualche segno nella *Sofonisba*, se non per lo svolgimento della sua poetica tragica, almeno per ciò che concerne l'uso della fonte liviana, di una « fabula » tratta da quel quel Livio intorno a cui si concentrava l'interesse politico e storiografico degli Oricellari e su cui Machiavelli tesseva i propri *Discorsi*" (Ferroni 113).

[5] He uses Sophochles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Alcestis* specifically (Carta 42).

[6] Trissino did not divide his tragedy according to the standard five-act division originally proposed by Horace; therefore, I do not use this information in the narrative summary.

king, Siface. The source of tension centers on the young Carthaginian princess, Sofonisba, daughter of the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal Gisco. In reality, there had been several shifts in alliances as Massinissa was originally allied with the Carthaginians. The shifting nature of the prosecution and success of the war changed the sides around several times. The final accounting puts Massinissa with the Roman forces and puts Siface with the Carthaginian forces. Siface's alliance was sealed through marriage to Sofonisba, who was originally betrothed to Massinissa.[7]

The play opens with Sofonisba worried about her fate and what should become of her should her husband Siface lose the battle. Soon news arrives of his capture and the approach of hostile forces. Massinissa, with the permission of Laelius, goes on ahead and enters the city before the Roman commanders. His intention is to repossess Sofonisba, who has been taken unjustly from him. In their first meeting once Massinissa has made his intentions clear, Sofonisba seeks a pledge from Massinissa that he will not allow her to be sent to Rome as a slave. At first, Massinissa is reluctant, but he does eventually relent to her request because it also serves his own interest at the same time. He convinces Sofonisba that their marriage will afford her the necessary protection against enslavement. Sofonisba requests that Massinissa kill her should his plan not work.

Laelius, who is Scipione's lieutenant, does not react well to this news. Laelius' negative reaction does not convince Massinissa of the futility of his request, and he decides to take it up with Scipione. Scipione appears to give consideration to the request but concludes that Sofonisba's fate is not up to either of them. She is now considered property of the Roman people, and the Senate will have to decide to grant her freedom. Massinissa agonizes over this

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[7] This version of the story will be discussed later on in relation to Trissino's connection with his sources.

judgment, but he eventually dispatches a servant to provide Sofonisba with poison as a way to honor his promise to her.

The final scenes of the tragedy surround Sofonisba's death and the pain experienced by the chorus. Sofonisba worries about the future of her young son, whom she entrusts to the care of her sister. Massinissa arrives at the end, but he comes too late because Sofonisba has already taken the poison. He arrives in the middle of Herminia's and the chorus's lament, and he adds his own. He orders a state funeral for Sofonisba, and he promises to consider Herminia his sister-in-law for as long as he shall live. He further promises to do anything that she should ask giving to her the love that he bore for his recently deceased spouse.

Livy is one of the primary sources for Trissino's *Sofonisba*, but there are other historical sources such as Appian and possibly Cassius Dio. Sofonisba was also a character in several works of Boccaccio and Petrarch. Boccaccio addresses the episode in two respective Latin works: *De casibus virorum illustrium* and *De mulieribus claris*, and he treats the narrative in two different ways. In *De casibus virorum illustrium*, Sofonisba's internal character is hardly addressed and she plays no role beyond being the object of desire of Syphax. This changes in his *De mulieribus claris* in which Sofonisba is given more agency and more attention is paid to her feminine charms. Boccaccio's second telling tends to be less balanced than those of Livy and Petrarch, who both mention the allure of Sofonisba but do not solely place the reasons of the war on her. Trissino may also have been inspired by Galeotto Del Carretto, who wrote his own *Sofonisba* in 1502.[8] The differences between Carretto's version and Trissino's were that it was written in *ottava rima* and it did not conform to Aristotelian precepts and unities. Due to his

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[8] Del Carretto's *Sofonisba* would not be published until 1546, but Trissino may have at least heard of the manuscript.

usage of meter, it is also likely that Carretto's version has its origins in the epic form. The confusion surrounding genre definition is one of the large problems that leads Trissino to formulate a precise theory of the tragic. He will rely heavily on all of his sources to create a language, theoretical structure, and plot fitting to Aristotle's definition of tragedy.

Aristotelian Reception

The first aspect of Trissino's formulation of the tragic will be his reception of Aristotelian theory. Aristotle, in Chapter Six of the *Poetics*, identifies the six component elements of tragedy: plot structure (μῦθος), character (ἦθος), thought (διάνοια), diction (λέξις), spectacle (ὄψις), and song (μηλός).[9] The order in which these components are presented is Aristotle's and he attributes primary importance to plot structure and the order of the other elements proceeds in order of importance. Trissino in *La quinta divisione della poetica* reorders Aristotle's paradigm using the following terms: *favola* (μῦθος), *costume* (ἦθος), *discorso* (διάνοια), *parole* (λέξις), *melodia* (μηλός), and *rappresentazione* (ὄψις). Trissino introduces a single change into the paradigm in which *rappresentazione* and *melodia* have exchanged places. While seemingly only a slight change, Trissino's organizational structure represents a significant departure from Aristotle. This significant divergence is not apparent through a particular re-ordering of Aristotle's paradigm, which Trissino maintains out of respect, but rather is demonstrated through the emphasis that he places on *costume* and *discorso*. Trissino relies specifically on these characteristics of tragedy in order to situate the tragic experience of *Sofonisba* in *le passioni*.

Before turning to Trissino's text, it is important to establish definitions of these elements and highlight where Trissino and Aristotle agree and disagree. I will address plot structure

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[9] This order of classification will follow the same process as that which appears in the *De animalia*.

(*favola*), character (*costume*), and thought (*discorso*) to approximate the commonalities between each author. Aristotle, again in Chapter Six says, "…tragedy's greatest means of emotional power are components of the plot structure: namely, reversals and recognitions, …And so, the plot structure is the first principle and, so to speak, the soul of tragedy, while characterization is the element of second importance" (Halliwell *Aristotle's Poetics* 38). The role of the poet, which Aristotle discusses in Chapter Nine, is not to speak of events which have necessarily occurred but events which may occur as "possible by the standards of probability or necessity" (Halliwell *Aristotle's Poetics* 40). To simplify, Aristotle's conception of plot structure is to indicate that tragedy cannot support a series of episodes that seem to have no connection, episodes in which the action that follows is neither "probable or necessary" (Halliwell *Aristotle's Poetics* 41). Here, Aristotle is emphasizing the importance that events should build on each other due to causal relationships. Authors who do not incorporate this causality into their work create episodic tragedies.[10]

Aristotle's view of *character* diverges from the modern usage of the word that has been affected by its post-Shakespearian and post-Romantic definition.[11] Halliwell in his commentary

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[10]I am quoting Aristotle here to emphasize "εἰκὸς οὔτ᾽ ἀνάγκηεῖναι" in which Halliwell translates above as "probable or necessary." "εἰκὸς" as probable or likely will come down in the Latin tradition as verisimilitude and becomes a foundational characteristic of Cinquecento tragedy. The verb "ἀνάγκηεῖναι," to be necessary, will be an aspect of Aristotle's figuration of the tragic which eludes many tragedians of the Cinquecento.
τῶν δὲ ἁπλῶν μύθων καὶ πράξεων αἱ ἐπεισοδιώδεις εἰσὶν χείρισται· λέγω δ᾽ ἐπεισοδιώδη μῦθον ἐν ᾧ τὰ ἐπεισόδια μετ᾽ ἄλληλα οὔτ᾽ εἰκὸς οὔτ᾽ ἀνάγκηεῖναι. τοιαῦται δὲ ποιοῦνται ὑπὸ μὲν τῶν φαύλων ποιητῶν δι᾽ αὐτούς, ὑπὸ δὲτῶν ἀγαθῶν διὰ τοὺς ὑποκριτάς (Aristotle 1451b35).
[11]Early tragedies like Trissino's *Sofonisba* have to be viewed in the ways in which they are receiving Aristotle. This is counter to what we as modern readers have received in our post-Shakespearian and post-Romantic experience. Phillips-Court states, "This ossified narrative, parts of which are demonstrably false, emerges from a teleological portrayal of the rise of Renaissance tragedy and comedy as a progression toward an ideal of "modernity," which, for drama, could be alternately expressed as psychological depth, political relevance, or aesthetic autonomy. One aspect of modernity that concerns both Renaissance readers and post-Romantic

says, "Aristotle is not, therefore, attending to anything like the intricacies of personality or

consciousness which more recent traditions of individualism and psychology have associated

with the term" (Halliwell *Translation and Commentary* 139). Consequently, characterization is

not emotional transcendence nor the explication of interiorized anguish; but rather, it is the

ethical disposition of the character evinced by his actions. More succinctly, $\tilde{\eta}\theta o\varsigma$ is the sum of a

character's ethical disposition:

> Whether as critic or as philosopher, Aristotle regards the fundamental question about
> character to be not, in what does the distinctiveness or even the uniqueness of this person
> consist, but, what ethical virtues or vices are embodied in his active life (Halliwell
> *Translation and Commentary* 140).

To that end, Aristotle provides four goals for the poet in figuring his characters: the characters

are good, the characters are appropriate, likeliness of character (verisimilitude), and consistency

of character. Three of these aspects are for the most part self-explanatory, but likeness of

character needs some contextualization. Aristotle highlights that characters must inevitably be

portrayed in noble actions, hence the goodness of the character, but they cannot be so good as to

pass beyond reasonability. Beyond just noble actions, the characters cannot be ordinary people;

rather they must possess a loftier station to make their fall greater, but they also cannot be

faultless.

   The last of Aristotle's elements that I will define is thought. Not surprisingly considering

the lack of completeness of the *Poetics*, Aristotle does not present a full explanation of what he

intends. Aristotle first addresses thought in Chapter Six of the *Poetics* when he introduces the six

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readers like ourselves is the question of originality. Beginning with the judgmental posture of the
romantic movement, early Italian tragedy has not received high marks for originality in studies
that look forward to Tasso or Shakespeare. Only works of the later sixteenth century – Tasso's
Aminta, for example – seem to have been judged for their intrinsic qualities, instead of for the
way they absorb what came before." (Phillips-Court "Performing Anachronism" 43-44).

constituent elements and he returns to it again in Chapter Nineteen. In Chapter Nineteen,

Aristotle refers his reader to his other writings on rhetoric and it is clear that *thought*, for

Aristotle, is associated with persuasion, a means by which characters interact and influence those

around them. This connection with public and formal speechmaking with which tragedy shares a

close relationship allows Halliwell to draw the conclusion that *thought*, and *characterization* are

also closely related.

> It is therefore not surprising that ch. 6 gives two hints of a potentially close relation
> between thought and character: first, in the statement that agents are to be characterized
> 'in both their character and their thought'; secondly, in the reference to the 'political
> vein' of thought in early tragedy, where the phrase denotes morality in the public or
> social sphere. Again, ch. 6 more than once implies, in a way which is wholly consistent
> with Greek tragic practice, that characterization will readily take the form of the set or
> formal speech, thus inevitably working in close connection with the rhetorical thought
> which represents the expository, argumentative and persuasive techniques used in such
> speeches. (Halliwell *Translation and Commentary* 96)

It is by means of *thought* that we get the "clearest idea of the ethical dispositions of the dramatic

agents" (Halliwell *Translation and Commentary* 156). Despite the seeming importance of

thought to a modern sensibility, its postponement until Chapter Nineteen and the reference to

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* does not deemphasize its relative importance and does not show that his

thinking was immature on the subject. What we can see is how each of Aristotle's six constituent

parts of tragedy are in service of the ones that came before. Therefore *thought*, which comes

before *diction*, represents the ethical motivation of the words.

Trissino follows closely Aristotle's definition of plot structure. In *La quinta e sesta*

divisioni della poetica, he discourses at length, much like Aristotle himself on this particular

component, following almost exactly Aristotle's prescriptions. Trissino acknowledges, from the

poet's point of view, plot structure is the most important element of tragedy.[12] Before moving

onward to his treatment of character Trissino takes account of all of his prescriptions for plot

structure:

> E così ciò che avemo detto fin qui ci basterà quanto al formare della favola, cioè a sapere che la favola è imitazione di una sola azione compiuta e grande, la quale muova misericordia e tema, e ch'ella dee avere nomi e passioni vere, e che la ricognizione e la rivoluzione e la passione sono le parti proprie di essa favola, la quale dee essere di persone illustri e di virtù mediocri, e di amore o di consanguinità congiunte, e che la mescolata di ricognizione e rivoluzione è la più bella; e delle azioni la migliore è quella che non conoscendo è per fare una crudeltà, ma per la ricognizione poi non la fa, e prossima di bontà è quella che non conoscendo fa. (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 29)

At least regarding plot structure, the two theorists are in agreement, and it would seem that they

are in agreement concerning *characterization*. Trissino adds a reference to see *La sesta divisione*

della poetica, in which he treats the epic and comedy, for a further discussion concerning

characterization. In this citation, he is following the advice of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which

he says, "la quale al parer mio è più copiosa e bella" (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 31). Trissino

declares that his treatment of characterization will be more ample than that of Aristotle in the

Poetics. In this part, he cites Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ars Rhetorica* 11.2[13]:

> …il costume è duplice, cioè uno è comune e filosofico, e l'altro è particolare e retorico. Et il comune e filosofico e quello che invita gli uomini alla virtù li rimove dai vizii, il che dee essere la intenzione di tutti i buoni poeti. Il particolare poi, o vero retorico, è quello che fa dire parole e far cose convenienti alla natura e disposizione di ciascuno di quelli che se introducono nei poemi. (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 62)

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[12]Trissino mentions that from the spectator's point of view that *spectacle* would be the first principle which contradicts Aristotle's paradigm. Trissino writes, "La quale rappresentazione, per essere quella che primamente s'appresenta agli occhi dei spettatori, pare essere la prima e principale parte della tragedia…" (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 15); This contrasts with what Aristotle says, "ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἷον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας" (Aristotle 1450a section 35).

[13] It is also titled *Τέχνη ῥητορική* and the part in question is not actually authored by Dionysius. See Malcolm Heath's article "Pseudo-Dionysius Art of Rhetoric" pp. 8-11.

Trissino connects the element of characterization with rhetoric, in much the same way that

Aristotle has done in the *Poetics*. Rhetoric and *thought* are one and they share an integral

relationship with characterization. I believe this comes about from Trissino's theorization which

takes into account the theoretician's point of view as well as the spectator's, whereas Aristotle's

stance represents the philosophical examination of tragedy.

Trissino uses Aristotle's hierarchy of the four types of tragedy to add weight and support

to his own reconfiguration of the tragic. Aristotle, in Chapter 18 of the *Poetics*, says that there

are four types of tragedy: the complex tragedy, the tragedy of suffering (pathetic), the tragedy of

character (ethical), and the simple tragedy (Aristotle qtd. in Halliwell *Translation and

Commentary* 51-52). Trissino will follow this same schema and here he identifies in which

category his *Sofonisba* falls:

> L'una, adunque, di queste quattro specie di tragedie sarà la complicate, cioè che tutta
> consiste nella rivoluzione e nella ricognizione; questa arà il suo stato principale dalla
> favola, come è la *Ifigenia in Tauris*, lo *Edipo*, e simili. L'altra sarà la passionale[14], come è
> lo *Aiace*, la *Sofonisba*, e simili, e questa sarà il suo stato dal discorso, perciò che da esso si
> preparano le passioni, cioè la misericordia e la tema e l'altre simili. Le quali però ancora
> dalle azioni si fanno, ma principalmente sono preparate dalli concetti e dal sermone e da
> l'artificio di quello. (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 28)

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[14] Trissino's use of *passionale* corresponds to Aristotle's παθητική in Chapter 18. What Trissino
means here is that the tragedy relies primarily on emotions rather than the reversal and
recognition of the complex type of tragedy. This type, the pathetic (passionale) does not unfold
on account of action and causality but through intense emotions, which require the service of
diction and thought. Gill puts it thusly, "The province of 'thought' turns out to be an extensive
one, consisting of 'all the effects which are to be produced through language (*Poetics* 19
1456a37-8).' As Aristotle develops this point, it becomes clear that he has in mind the *Rhetoric*'s
schema of three kinds of proof, logical, ethical, and emotional; and that he imagines the tragic
figure, like the public speaker, using discourse for the purpose of showing, unfolding, and
preparing the way for pity and fear, "τό τε ἀποδεικνύναι καὶ τὸ λύειν καὶ τὸ πάθη παρασκευάζειν
οἷον ἔλεον ἢ φόβον..."(Gill 154).

Trissino places his tragedy in the second category and therefore emphasizes the role that thought, or rather rhetoric, will play in moving the audience to pity (*misericordia*) and fear (*tema*) as well as other emotions. He goes so far as to say

> Il discorso, poi, o vero concetti, i quali Aristotele nomina 'dianea,' si denno pigliare dalla retorica, per essere cose proprie di quell'arte; al qual discorso si appartengono tutte quelle cose che si convengono preparare dal sermone, le parti del quale sono dimostrare, solvere, muovere le passioni, come è misericordia, ira, e simili" (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 32).

The result, according to Trissino, is that the tragic has an instructive utility, and consequently his reformulation shifts the importance onto characterization and thought. Recall Aristotle's tragic formulation worked through the unfolding of the plot and the necessity which resulted from the enchainment of the scene in order to build tension, anxiety, and fear in the audience. Necessity would apply a fatalistic and antithetical quality to Trissino's formulation of the instructive utility of tragedy; also, he had to be careful with the concept of Fate in order to avoid conflicts with the Church. Let us now examine how Trissino chose his subject material, and how he incorporated it into his own theorization of the tragic.

The original source material of the *Sofonisba* is Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* Book XXX Section 12, but the story itself has been retold several times by Boccaccio and Petrarch. Trissino was aware of several versions of the story, but he relied more heavily on Livy and Petrarch. Livy's version of the story gives us the clearest sign for the choice of this episode for the writing of a tragedy:

> quid Carthaginiensi ab Romano, quid filiae Hasdrubalis *timendum sit* vides. si nulla re alia potes, morte me ut vindices ab Romanorum arbitrio oro obtestorque." forma erat insignis et florentissima aetas. itaque cum modo genua modo dextram amplectens in id ne cui Romano traderetur fidem exposceret, propiusque blanditias iam oratio esset quam preces, non in *misericordiam* modo prolapsus est animus victoris, sed, ut est genus Numidarum in Venerem praeceps, amore captivae victor captus.

> What a Carthaginian woman, what a daughter of Hasdrubal has to *fear* from a Roman you see. If by no other means you are able to do so, I beg and implore you to save me by

death from the decision of Romans. Her beauty was conspicuous and her age at full
bloom. Consequently while she was clasping now his knees and now his right hand,
begging for his promise not to surrender her to any Roman, and her words were now
more nearly those of a charmer than of a suppliant, the heart of the victor was quickly
moved not to *pity* only, but with the amorous susceptibility of the Numidian race the
victor was captivated by love of the captive. (Livy 30.16-18 translation by Moore 408-
411)[15]

Two words in the Latin text stand out immediately, *timendum sit* the subjunctive passive
periphrastic and the noun, *misericordiam*. The two elements constitute what Aristotle and
consequently Trissino agree are the essence of tragedy. The narrative passes other tests that
present the possibility of transforming it into a tragic discourse. The principal characters are both
of a high station, but they are not so overtly noble as to violate Aristotle's dictum that characters
should be of moderate virtue. The narrative presents two figures who change from *felicità* to
infelicità. To Trissino, this narrative presents excellent source material for composition as a
tragedy and he drew on the stylized lyrics of Petrarch in *Rerum Vulgarum Fragmentum* along
with interpolations from Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Alcestis*; however, there are some
changes that Trissino needed to make to the story. Livy and Boccaccio assign a manipulative
aspect to Sofonisba's motivation. Livy uses the word *blanditias* to describe her imprecations of
Massinissa, and Livy characterizes all Numidians as prone to love and sexual delight. Boccaccio
in recounting the same scene says, "in libidine pronus…motus et humanitate et libidine
tractus."[16] Petrarch's is the narrative that does not assign these sentiments to either character.

Let us consider Trissino's *Sofonisba* and how he uses both thought and character[17] to
bring about the unfolding of the action. Halliwell has told us that ethical disposition is rooted in

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[15] Italics in both the Latin and English versions are my own.

[16] The citation is taken from Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* LXX in the *Villa I Tatti Library*
edition.

[17] By character, here I mean characterization and I will sometimes substitute the latter for the
former.

character and thought. Sofonisba addresses Massinissa in Act One Scene 5 after he enters Cirta

victoriously. Sofonisba is willing to accept her fate as the conquered queen, but she is unwilling

to become the property of the Romans. She appeals to Massinissa appropriately as a suppliant

and as a woman to be saved from the Romans. She begins:

> SOF: Signor, so ben che il cielo e la fortuna
>   e le vostre virtù v'hanno concesso
>   il poter far di me ciò che vi piace. (390-92)[18]

She goes on to call upon his "regale e gloriosa altezza" to forgive her only crime, being the wife

of the conquered king, Siface. She continues to delineate her argument and she further appeals to

their shared African kinship:

> SOF: più tosto mi vorrei por ne la fede
>   d'un nostro, nato in Africa, com'io,
>   che d'un esterno, nato in altra parte (411-13)

The rhetorical progression of her argument is not just an intellectual exercise that Trissino has

included, and the psychological trauma of what Sofonisba is about to face becomes apparent at

the end of her speech:

> SOF: Pensate poi quel ch'io mi debbia fare,
>   sendo cartaginese e sendo figlia
>   d'Asdrubale, e s'io debbio con ragione
>   temer l'orrendo arbitrio de' Romani. (414-17)

Sofonisba does not fail to move Massinissa who demonstrates his own nobility through his

wisdom:

> MAS: il mio costume è di perseguitar
>   i miei nimici fin ch'io gli ho vinti,
>   e poi scordar le offese. (427-29)

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[18] I cite the Gasparini's textual edition due to the fact that Cremante reproduces Trissino's
orthographic changes.

Massinissa even uses the same word as Trissino, *costume*, to define his own character. He does not immediately promise to be able to save Sofonisba from the fate that she so desperately wishes to avoid, but we see in Massinissa's discourse that he is open to being persuaded. In the process, Massinissa falls more and more in love not only with Sofonisba's beauty but with her thought and character, her ethical nature. The scene develops through her rhetorical skill and through a vocabulary which highlights this skill in the repetition of rhetorical phraseology: *ragionare soave*, *parole, parlare pio*, *priego*, *supplico*, *chieggio*. Sofonisba's rhetorical skill leads Massinissa to the promise that he will try to find a means to save her. The promise, which has been made through Sofonisba's persuasive argumentation, will bring him in direct conflict with his Roman allies. This scene is an example of Trissino's use of character and thought to substitute for necessity in the propagation of the action. The tension is built upon the rhetorical lexicon and the audience experiences both pity, fear, and anxiety as the scene plays out between Sofonisba and Massinissa. The remainder of the tragedy hinges upon the choice that Massinissa makes in this moment with Sofonisba. Massinissa demonstrates that he is an honorable man, and he believes that his status with his allies will protect Sofonisba from their desire to enslave her. His choice to make this promise to Sofonisba, in the face of the alliance that he already has with the Romans, highlights his character and ethical disposition. The tragic is evinced when he realizes that his allies will not respect this new promise, and there will only be one way that he can keep his word with Sofonisba.

Trissino's reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* constitutes the beginning of Trissino's own theoretical positioning, but he goes beyond Aristotle's prescriptions by subverting his paradigm. Although Aristotle allows for the various types of tragedy, he makes clear that his preference is for the complex tragedy, which requires a strong plot with highly interconnected episodes all

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dependent upon each other. Trissino's theoretical stance is updated in accordance with what he believes to be the goal of authors. In *La quinta divisione della poetica* he writes, "Oltre di questo la Tragedia non è imitazione de i corpi de gli uomini, ma de le azioni di quelli, e de la felicità, et infelicità loro; e la felicità, la quale è il fine, a cui si dirizza ogni operazione umana…" (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 17). He also states in the dedicatory letter that the role of poets is to teach men to "vivere bene." Trissino's theoretical position makes it very clear that if human action is directed toward the goal of happiness then it is to be achieved through instruction.

Trissino conspicuously neglects the role of catharsis in *Sofonisba*. According to Kristin Phillips-Court, "Renaissance readers and recent readers have attributed the *Sofonisba*'s neglect of catharsis to the author's failure to embrace the lessons of Aristotle" (*The Perfect Genre* 71). This cannot be the case as Paola Mastrocola dispels this theory by analyzing Trissino's direct quotations of the *Poetics* in the dedicatory letter of 1524.[19] Also Gwynfor Griffith points outs, "…for although he clearly knew his Aristotle before the publication of the first four divisions of the *Poetica* in 1529 (indeed before the composition of the *Sofonisba*), he left the final revision of Divisions V and VI late enough to include his own plays and epic as examples" ("Theory and Practice" 144). So why is such scant attention paid to this important tragic concept? Aristotle never truly defines catharsis in the *Poetics*. The term first appears in Chapter 6 when he defines tragedy and its six components. Aristotle says only:

> Tragedy, then, is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude – in language which is garnished in its various forms in its different parts – in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative – and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions (Halliwell *Translation and Commentary* 37).[20]

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[19] "Il risultato è una sintesi delle caratteristiche del tragico che al Trissino del 1524 paiono principali, dedotte dalla *Poetica* in senso lato, cioè da tutto l'arco del testo, ma in modo selettivo e contratto" (19).

[20] I will quote Aristotle's original text for reference here. "Ἔστιν οὖν τραγωιδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας, μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένωι λόγωι χωρὶς ἑκάστωι τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς

Aristotle does not give us much to go on, which of course may be due to the incompleteness of the *Poetics*. Trissino's paraphrase of Aristotle may give us some insight into his conceptualization of the term:

> La tragedia è una imitazione di una virtuosa, e notabile azione, che sia compiuta, e grande, la quale imitazione si fa con sermone fatto suave e dolce, separatamente in alcune parti di quella, et essa tragedia non per enunziazione ma per misericordia e per tema purga nei spettatori queste tali perturbazioni (Trissino qtd. in Weinberg 14).

Trissino makes an interesting addition, *spettatori*, which seems to demonstrate that he connects the traditional view of the emotional purgation, evinced by his vocabulary choices *purga* and *perturbazioni* with spectacle. Trissino is at odds with his own formulation of the tragic. He is attempting to copy Aristotle, and he says that not through enunciation (*enunziazione*) but through pity (*misericordia*) and fear (*tema*) that the audience is purged. Obvisouly this violated his own privileging of the tragic elements, character (*costume*) and thought (*discorso*); therefore, how does Trissino conceptualize catharsis?

We must begin by trying to understand the significance of the Greek term. Catharsis is defined in Liddel and Scott as a cleansing from guilt or defilement or it is a purification. The origin of the Greek definition clearly lies in religious and medical connections. By Aristotle's lifetime, however, those definitions had expanded to include a metaphorical sense.[21] For example, Plato's *Phaedo* references catharsis in this metaphorical sense:

> Then doesn't purification turn out to be just what's been mentioned for some while in our discussion – the parting of the soul from the body as far as possible, and the habituating it

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μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι᾽ ἀπαγγελίας, δι᾽ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν."

[21] Halliwell cautions the difficulty for a modern reader to define *catharsis*. He points out that the term itself is only used once by Aristotle in the *Poetics* when he defines tragedy. He states, "Evidence is acutely sparse, and we are in any case dealing with an area of Greek thought which is alien to prevailing modern views of art" (Halliwell *Aristotle's Poetics* 184). He will go on to confirm the religious and medical uses of the terminology to which he provides ample evidence in the subsequent pages.

to assemble and gather itself together, away from every part of the body, alone by itself, so far as it can, both in the present and in the hereafter, released from the body, as from fetters? (Plato 67c qtd. in Gallop 12)[22]

Here, Plato talks of purification (*katharsis*) really as a sundering of the immortal soul from its mortal body and the meaning has extended beyond the ritual and medical. The single reference to *catharsis* in the *Poetics* does not give us enough to go on and we must look elsewhere in Aristotle's works to get a better understanding of what he intends. Indeed, Weinberg states:

> It should be said, in defence of the Renaissance reader, that the text of the *Poetics* was not – is not – easy to understand. Incomplete in the form in which we have it, it is highly condensed, and the subtlety and rigorousness of its structure become apparent only after the most searching study and in the light of a method only discoverable only through analysis of the whole Aristotelian corpus (Weinberg *Literary Criticism* 350).[23]

Aristotle uses catharsis three times in the eighth book of the *Politics*.[24] This book deals with education in the ideal state, and in it he references the role of music. By extending the medical definition of purgation, Aristotle demonstrates that certain musical styles or modalities can elicit certain emotional responses. Aristotle builds on prior extensions of meaning concerning the term *catharsis*, which Halliwell confirms:

> In Book 8 of the *Politics* we find an exposition of the educational significance of music which presupposes its capacity to influence and shape the emotional faculty of the mind (and, through it, the character). The channel for this influence is mimesis, by which the

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[22] I cite Plato's original text for reference here. κάθαρσις δὲ εἶναι ἆρα οὐ τοῦτο συμβαίνει, ὅπερ πάλαι ἐν τῷ λόγῳ λέγεται, τὸ χωρίζειν ὅτι μάλιστα ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐθίσαι αὐτὴν καθ᾽ αὑτὴν παντα- χόθεν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος συναγείρεσθαί τε καὶ ἀθροίζεσθαι, καὶ οἰκεῖν κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα μόνην καθ᾽ αὑτήν, ἐκλυομένην ὥσπερ ἐκ δεσμῶν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος; (Plato 67c).

[23] Gill and Woerther will put this into practice by examining other works of the Aristotelian corpus in order to define key concepts.

[24] ἔτι δ᾽ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ αὐλὸς ἠθικὸν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὀργιαστικόν, ὥστε πρὸς τοὺς τοιούτους αὐτῷ καιροὺς χρηστέον ἐν οἷς ἡ θεωρία κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον δύναται ἢ μάθησιν. (Aristotle 1341a); καὶ γὰρ παιδείας ἕνεκεν καὶ καθάρσεως—τί δὲ λέγομεν τὴν κάθαρσιν, νῦν μὲν ἁπλῶς, πάλιν δ᾽ ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς ἐροῦμεν σαφέστερον—τρίτον δὲ πρὸς διαγωγὴν πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν. (Aristotle 1341b); ταὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖον πάσχειν καὶ τοὺς ἐλεήμονας καὶ τοὺς φοβητικοὺς καὶ τοὺς ὅλως παθητικούς, τοὺς ἄλλους καθ᾽ ὅσον ἐπιβάλλει τῶν τοιούτων ἑκάστῳ, καὶ πᾶσι γίγνεσθαί τινα κάθαρσιν καὶ κουφίζεσθαι μεθ᾽ ἡδονῆς. (Aristotle 1342a).

emotions and ethical character enacted in music are sympathetically experienced by the hearer too (Halliwell *Aristotle's Poetics* 190).

Aristotle's understanding of the role of music in education must be connected to his treatise the *Ethics*, "that which music influences is no longer the ψυχή as a whole,[25] but just one part of it" (Woerther 99). Woerther goes on to define ἦθος in the *Ethics* as,[26] "ἦθος designates that part of the desiring soul which being irrational by nature, nevertheless has a share in reason to the extent that it takes reason into account" (99). In Aristotle's model music educates the ἦθος of the young through habituation, "it consists of habituating young persons to experience pleasure for the things that they are not yet capable of judging rationally and whose value, for good or ill, they cannot yet understand on their own (Woerther, 100)." To connect ἦθος back to catharsis and musical education, Aristotle on three occasions demonstrates that music achieves this educative effect through purgation/purification. He does not go on to clarify an explanation of how this is accomplished but refers his reader to his treatise the *Poetics*. What is clear is that the meaning of the purgation extends beyond the physical sense to an abstract one, and Aristotle sees the role of character to be an educative one; both facts will be important to Trissino's adoption of Aristotelian unities and poetics.

   Some critics criticized Trissino's *Sofonisba* for its lack of catharsis, which they believed constituted a failure on the part of the tragedy. Phillips-Court points out that Renaissance and contemporary readers alike feel this acutely with the neglect of *catharsis* in the tragedy, "However, in Sofonisba's quiet, protracted suicide Trissino sidesteps a powerful catharsis" (*Perfect Genre* 71). The reason being is that Sofonisba's suicide scene does not represent the

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[25] Soul.

[26] I remind the reader that ἦθος corresponds to character and is one of Aristotle's six constituent components of tragedy.

moment of catharsis. Phillips-Court questions whether Trissino intended for her death scene to be the moment of catharsis, "However, does it not make more sense that, given Trissino's precocious application of unities, the absence of catharsis is intentional, even integral, to Trissino's project?" (*Perfect Genre* 71). There is not an absence of catharsis in the tragedy; it just does not take place specifically at Sofonisba's death scene. The catharsis must be read as Massinissa's because he is the tragic character, and it actually occurs earlier when Massinissa and the audience realize that he is powerless to save Sofonisba. The moment of catharsis has been built on the fact that Massinissa has convinced the Sofonisba, himself, and the reader of his intention to keep his promise. It begins with his first encounter with Sofonisba in Act One, she believes that he is faithful to his word and trustworthy:

> MAS: Fatemi questa grazia, ch'io vi chieggo,
>   per le care ginnochia, ch'or abbraccio;
>   per la vittoriosa vostra mano
>   piena di fede e di valor, ch'io bacio (489-492).

There will be several repetitions of the word *fede* and its variations. The reader's own faith in Massinissa's ability to keep his word is slowly eroded. The term repeats again when Massinissa asks Sofonisba:

> MAS: Di poca fede adunque dubitate (486)

Finally, the term will appear once more at the end of Act Three, after Scipione affirms that Sofonisba's fate will be decided by the Romans. Before Massinissa retires he states:

> MAS: Anderò dentro, e penserò d'un modo,
>   che servi il voler vostro e la mia fede (1415-1416).

The culmination of this scene sees the servant recount the arrival of one of Massinissa's men to deliver the poison to Sofonisba. The audience has recognized that Massinissa is powerless to help Sofonisba and that the queen has resolved to liberate herself from the Romans by whatever

means available. At this point, Massinissa's reversal of fortune is complete because he expects her to take the poison and to die as she wished. It is not reasonable to assume that Massinissa expected to be able to prevent Sofonisba's death. The confusion of the moment of catharsis shifts the meaning of the play subtly. Sofonisba's death scene is not one of despair but changes into one of hope. Sofonisba sends her son away to her sister; she will live on through her progeny after death. Her physical legacy and memory are encapsulated in her son and also in Herminia who will come to be viewed as Sofonisba's sister:

> HER: Mi sforzerò di far ciò che volete,
> Per rimaner nutrice al Vostro figlio,
> Et a la madre serva, non che nuora. (1827-1829)

Massinissa's arrival will also demonstrate a hopeful ending by reconciling him with Herminia. Although he has lost his spouse, Sofonisba will continue to be a part of him, because he promises to care for Herminia like a sister:

> MAS: Voi poscia, Herminia, in luogo di cognata
> Sempre vi voglio haver tanto ch'io viva. (2048-2049)

The choral exode closes the tragedy on a somber tone, "La fallace speranza d'e mortali (2182)," but it too ends on a more hopeful note. Rather than locate the reason for the tragic events that have just taken place, it relegates all mortal vicissitudes to the realm of heaven:

> CHO: La fallace speranza d'e mortali,
> A guise d'onda in un superbo fiume,
> Hora si vede, hor par che si consume.
> Spesse fiate, quando ha maggior forza
> E ch'ogni cosa par tranquilla e lieta,
> Il ciel ne manda giù qualche ruina.
> E talor, quando il mar più si rinforza
> E men si spera, il suo furor s'acqueta
> E resta in tremolar l'onda marina:
> Che l'avenir ne la virtù divina.
> È posto, il cui non cognito costume
> Fa il nostro antiveder privo di lume. (2182-2193)

Sofonisba's death scene removes the source of friction from Massinissa's relationship with the Romans. Trissino demonstrates a peaceful resolution in the tragedy as a model for the power struggle between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. This leaves one final question which is how does the cathartic moment play with the reader?

To answer the aforementioned question, it is necessary to understand the way in which the tragedy was experienced. The play was not staged in its original language until 1562 in Vicenza but was completed in 1514 and published in 1524.[27] The likelihood is that the play was recited in its first showing to Pope Leo X rather than enacted. The cathartic experience changes based on this assumption. Instead of the catharsis being experienced as a purgative effect, the reader experiences this as what David Depew calls a "clarification" (144-145).[28] His argument hinges on the fact that the media elements of the play enact the typical emotional catharsis purging fear and pity; the second type, or educative catharsis, occurs when all of the media elements are removed. According to Depew, once tragedy is divorced in this fashion its catharsis becomes purely intellectual; the reader experiences catharsis as a change of opinion.[29] What is the intellectual catharsis that the reader is supposed to experience?

Trissino intends for his audience to connect Sofonisba specifically with the history of Lucretia whose virtue and honor could not withstand being impugned by Sextus Tarquinius. Lucretia committed suicide to restore her honor, an act which precipitated the downfall of the

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[27] Although the play did achieve some success in France and was translated into French and staged by Mellin de Saint-Gelais in 1556 (Griffith, "Theory and Practice" 150).
[28] See David Depew's chapter "From Hymn to Tragedy Aristotle's Genealogy of Poetic Kinds" in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*.
[29] This view is supported by several classical scholars throughout the twentieth-century and I refer you to Leon Golden's article "Mimesis and Katharsis" (1969) which has an extensive bibliography included of like-minded scholars who also argue that *catharsis* can mean "intellectual clarification."

Roman monarchy and the establishment of the Roman Republic. Her death sparked great political change, and Trissino is attempting to recreate that historic moment. The friction that has been caused by the pursuit of Sofonisba will be resolved with her death. In a similar way, Sofonisba's death will inaugurate a peaceful utopia where the object of contention, Sofonisba herself, is no longer a problem. Massinissa will be able to maintain his alliance without having to cede Sofonisba, and the Romans will be able to maintain their honor. This utopia relied on the deep intellectualism of Trissino's audience which Ariani calls, "un pubblico bisognoso di virtuosi ma rigorosi insegnamenti" (22). Trissino's *Sofonisba* is not merely an academic exercise, that is to say, I do not intend to deny that he based the work on a deeply personal viewpoint that not only reflected the role of literature but also espoused his belief in a peaceful coexistence of the Holy Roman Empire and the Church. [30] Italy which was not yet a unified country was trapped between foreign powers outside of its borders seeking to exert influence on the peninsula and her own past cultural indebtedness both literary and linguistic. In fact, I believe that Trissino saw Italy's inability to unite behind a unified and shared literary language as a reason for its political instability and its inability to unite into a cohesive nation state. Phillips-Court begins rightly when she questions why Trissino chose to write a tragedy and what his genre choice signified:

> For example, why tragedy? Why did Trissino choose dramatic literature, and tragedy, its most rigid form? How did he seek to deploy his ancient sources within the rigid confines of the solemn genre? When Trissino co-opted Sofonisba, he created a poetic configuration, not a political symbol transmigrated clumsily from the Punic war to the pope's wars of acquisition and related allegories ("Performing Anachronism" 48).

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[30] I believe Griffith agrees here, "Careful theoretical preparation there certainly would have been, for if there is anything that strikes us repeatedly in our reading of Trissino's works, it is this: he knew exactly what he was trying to achieve. By that I do not simply mean that, as the dedications to some of his books indicate, he was eager to give Italy certain genres which the classical literatures possessed, but which Italian did not yet have, and that he was determined to make use of Greek (as well as of Latin) literature in filling some of the gaps. I mean that throughout his life practice was accompanied by a very considerable amount of theory" (Griffith, "Theory and Practice" 143).

I argue that Trissino's real innovation lies in the connection that he creates between politics and language. Language is the vehicle through which rhetorical ideas are expressed and therefore any meaningful political message whether direct, metaphorical or allegorical relies on the most expansive comprehension by the public. Ariani sees this convergence of politics and language as the convergence of idealization and reality:

> Nella storicità della lingua il Trissino ha cercato la correzione del divario sempre più pericoloso fra platonismo e realtà, fra contemplazione e impegno: con la ricerca instancabile e quasi ossessiva del punto magico in cui coscienza e lingua dicano il raggiungimento di una pienezza nuova, di una pregnanza esistenziale e artistica inaudita, per cui il sogno erotico-funebre di una tragedia come la *Sofonisba* possa significare, in uno spettacolo di alto decoro e sublime meditazione, anche il tormento di illusioni politiche continuamente eluse, per cui, infine, lo scontro fra *humanitas* sensibile (Sofonisba e Massinissa) e inflessibile sordità del potere (drammatizzato in un romano Scipione che vuol richeggiare con sottile allusività un ben più attuale e schiacciante Sacro Romano Imperatore), fra platonica contemplazione di grazia e bellezza, e storica cecità dei fenomeni trovino un giusto equilibrio nella fondamentale sostanza attiva della lingua, il suo radicarsi nell'attualità e il suo eloquente sublimare, in una italianità vasta e reale, quella stessa attualità. La lingua sarà quindi, nella tragedia, depositaria di ogni sottinteso significato ideologico e, come vedremo, proprio della lingua, della sua razionalizzazione nel *discorso*, il Trissino farà strumento principe della teatralità e spettacolarità della sua opera e del suo messaggio. (Ariani 32-33)

For Trissino, the catharsis is an intellectual realization, a mapping of the current political landscape onto the allegorical metaphor created by Trissino's historical topic. The realization does not occur through the unfolding of the narrative but through the rhetorical and philosophical debate present in the text. In order to accomplish this, Trissino has altered Aristotle's tragic paradigm focusing *Sofonisba* around rhetoric and language to advance the narrative instead of the primacy of the plot.

The *Questione della lingua:* The Tragicity of Rhetoric

Trissino's contribution to the tragic is often overshadowed by his involvement with the *Questione della lingua*, a linguistic and literary debate of particular importance in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento. The principal literary language of the Italian peninsula

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remained Latin, despite the influence of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, who composed works both in Latin and the *volgare*. The debate surrounding the *Questione della lingua* began with the humanists of the Quattrocento and dealt primarily with Latinate style; should authors imitate classical authors like Cicero or continue to develop the Latin language for their own purposes? The debate eventually grew beyond the bounds of the Latin language and encompassed the role of the *volgare*, whether it should be used as a literary language and if so, which authors should be emulated. The aspects of the debate concerning the *volgare* peaked in the early Cinquecento, and two figures, Pietro Bembo and Baldassare Castiglione, both dealt at length with questions concerning the *volgare*.

Trissino's linguistic contribution was to overhaul the orthographic and consequently fundamental phonetic structure of the language rather than elements of style and syntax like Bembo and Castiglione. Trissino tried and failed to add new letters and sounds to the language, a theory which was formulated in the *Espistola delle lettere nuovamente aggiunte nella lingua italiana* in 1524 and finalized in his dialogue *Il Castellano* in 1529. These changes were not well received, particularly by those in favor of Bembo's proposal. Trissino depicts elements of the argument between his interlocutors, Giovanni Rucellai (the Castellano) and Filippo Strozzi, in the dialogue:

> FIL. Non vi ricordate poi, che il titolo di
> essa dice: Epistola del Trissino delle lettere
> nuovamente aggiunte nella lingua italiana?
>
> CAS. Sì mi ricordo.
>
> FIL. E poi nel principio di essa dice:
> "Molti anni sono, beatissimo Padre, che
> considerando io la pronunzia italiana."
>
> CAS. Che cosa è per questo?

FIL.   Che cosa è? Egli dovea dire, lingua
             toscana, e pronunzia toscana, e non assegnare
             nuova patria alla nostra lingua, cercando di
             torle quello che egli non gli ha dato. (Trissino qtd. in Daelli 10)

Trissino sought to reform, but in reality, standardize a courtly language taking into account the phonetics of the various peninsular dialects (Trissino in Daelli x-xii). Trissino's proposed changes introduced classical Greek letters to represent various vocalic pronunciations. Many saw the changes as cumbersome and unnecessarily confusing.[31] Despite his attempts, Trissino's changes did not last beyond his own usage in *Sofonisba* and *Italia liberata dai goti*. How does this influence Trissino's reformulation of the tragic?

Trissino, was an avid classical scholar and student of Greek philology. Despite his preference for the Greek language and literature, he was also quite proficient in Latin. Yet, Trissino chose to compose his tragedy in the *volgare*. A tradition of composing neo-Latin tragedy in the Quattrocento was already present. If Trissino were thinking of working in an established tradition, he would have composed the tragedy in Latin. Trissino addresses this point in the posthumous dedicatory letter of *Sofonisba*. Pope Leo X would have had the ability to read both Latin and Greek, and Trissino knew that those languages would have brought more prestige to his enterprise. Yet, two things stand out about Trissino's choice of the *volgare*: his attribution of the adjective *italiana* and his connection of language and comprehension with *utilitate e diletto*. Trissino three times refers to the *lingua italiana*, which does not exist at this point. Trissino was in the process of conceiving a pan-peninsular language capable of being employed and understood universally.

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[31] For a more detailed summary of the Florentine reaction to Trissino's proposed changes see Caterina Mongiat Farina *Questione di lingua* (2014) and Gwynfor Griffith "Theory and Practice in the Writings of Giangiorgio Trissino" (1986).

What emerges from accounts of the Orti meetings is a microhistorical view of a common intellectual enterprise and shared intellectual property. Most of the men who attended the meetings were in the process of composing larger literary works. Their choice to use the vernacular language in many of these works reveals more than an aesthetic debate over naturalistic expression versus ideal forms; their choice reveals a great concern for the contemporary world. Writing in the vernacular, as "younger generation" Oricellarians Machiavelli, Trissino, Giovanni Rucellai, Brucioli, and Gelli did, suggests that even behind the protective walls of the orchard these authors, like comic authors, were actively trying to identify with common culture rather than retreat from it. (Phillips-Court "Performing Anachronism" 48-49)

Trissino infused his poetic practice with the rules that he was formulating around the language. Tragedy only has some utility if the language is understood. Trissino's tragic theory and linguistic theory are inextricably linked because of the emphasis he places on the three rhetorical components of the Aristotelian tragic paradigm: *il costume*, *le sentenzie*, and *il discorso*. The emphasis on thought and words supersedes the role of action, which allows the audience to appreciate the ethical and didactic functionality of the play. Meaning is therefore further removed from the action and is subsumed under the rhetorical paradigm instituted by Trissino.

> …l'ipotesi tragica trissiniana si esplica dunque in uno spettacolo in cui non l'azione sia l'elemento dinamico, bensì il messaggio ideologico che la sottende, il *discorso* appunto che prova l'impegno culturale della tragedia, la sua capacità di penetrazione nel tessuto storico, nella stratificazione delle idee, delle convinzioni politiche, dei gusti letterari di una classe sociale allargata come pubblico di teatro (‹‹tutto il Popolo››) e, anche, la capacità di fondare un gusto spettacolare che dobbiamo riconoscere come radicalmente antitetico a quello odierno, post-shakespeariano e post-romantico, in cui l'azione è l'elemento indispensabile all'icasticità delle psicologie drammatiche. (Ariani 36)

This rhetorical shift serves the specific function of adding to an already nascent ideal of a unified language, I argue also that this shift is meant to unify language and literary theory in a move toward a pan-peninsular body of literature. Bembo and others were also focused on the same eventuality, but where Trissino and Bembo differed on which authors ought to be imitated. Trissino disagreed with Bembo's prescriptions to follow Boccaccio for prose and Petrarch for verse. He felt that those authors did not reflect contemporary Tuscan, and in imitating them, it

would be much like learning Latin or Ancient Greek. To Trissino, this represented a step backwards:

> Yet, behind Trissino's arguments were some sound observations and some sound instincts. He was right to point out that no linguistic community, however small, is homogenous, and he grasped the principle that the literary language is bound to develop into something different from the dialect of one city or one region. Moreover, his fundamental ambition was purely a healthy one: that Italy should achieve a more broadly-based literary language. (Griffith "Theory and Practice" 158)

This is not the only area in which Bembo and Trissino differ, they also had conflicting ideas about cross-genre imitation.

The fundamental difference between the Latin tragedies of the Quattrocento and Trissino's *Sofonisba* is not only the engagement with Aristotle's *Poetics* but also the creation of a lyric language suitable and capable of encapsulating the tragic sentiment. The late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento saw a sharp influx in the publishing of Greek texts and their reproduction by Aldo Manuzio. Trissino's curiosity in the genre was likely piqued by Manuzio's printings of Sophocles that began in 1502. These works had been lost to the West for centuries, but they left a lasting impression in the collective memory of successive Latin authors which proliferated down to that of the Italians. Trissino was not alone in his desire to recreate classical genres and provide Italy with a new genre of literature capable of ideating an icastic representation of his contemporary, political world.

It is important to note that Trissino chooses a historical source rather than a mythological one. In fact, he is careful not to select material that depicts pagan deities, respecting Aristotle's thought that the best tragedies rely on human agency and not divine intervention. In the end, Trissino settles on a well-known story from the annals of history. I have mentioned that Trissino is also probably aware of Petrarch's works in which the character Sofonisba appears: his *Africa*, and his *Triumphus Cupidinis*. According to Wilfred P. Mustard, Trissino's *Sofonisba* bears little

resemblance to the tale recounted in the *Africa* (108). This is not necessarily the case as the narrative is mostly the same; the primary difference is evidenced by the character of the actors. In the *Africa*, we see the blame placed on Sofonisba as Syphax believes that all of his grief comes from her. Sofonisba even curses several of the male characters as she dies in this version of the story. Sofonisba is configured as manipulative; her rhetoric serves her only in the sense that it works toward securing her father's success or preserving her life. The only time that any pity is aroused is when Aeacus, judge of the Underworld, expresses that she suffered dying for love like many women before her. Trissino revises the narrative into one with tragic potential, which comes from reimagining her rhetoric less as manipulation and more as supplication. This is reinforced by verbs of asking in Sofonisba's first encounter with Massinissa, as I mentioned above.

The story that Trissino develops from his source material is important for two reasons. The first is that Trissino was not a natural poet, at least not on par with Petrarch. Stylistically he needed to borrow the harmony of Petrarchan lyric in his prosody and versification to add tragic sentiment. Trissino's sought to pair his new linguistic codification with Petrarchan lyric to create a courtly language understood throughout the peninsula, in doing so he would have changed the landscape of Italy's literary culture and achieve a significant level of fame. Trissino, who had difficulty with the Tuscan dialect himself, saw the problem its place of privilege had on the other inhabitants of the peninsula. In fact, Griffith cites Trissino's lack of native fluency in Tuscan as the primary reason for which his lyric expression in the *Sofonisba* fails at generating the necessary *pathos*:

> But Trissino's blank verse does not achieve the concentration of his rhymed verse, and
> there are places where his language has neither the strength nor the dignity the occasion
> demands. Indeed, Trissino's language never has the same assurance in other areas of
> human experience as it does when he is dealing with what the Petrarchan tradition has

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already dealt with. I think this must be partly due to his being a non-Tuscan author who did not speak the language he wrote and who did not have the talent to create an adequate language for those experiences not previously described and analysed in the literature he had read. (Griffith "Theory and Practice" 150)

Trissino was wrestling with constructing a lyric that would have transcended the dialects of the various courts. His peaceful vision at the end of the tragedy extends beyond the imagined utopia between the Roman Emperor and the Pope. The language itself becomes a vehicle of peace, the very structure of which promotes a universal linguistic identity through new tropes and figures. The primary reason was his involvement with the Orti Oricellari in which he was in contact with others who were of various origins.

Contemporary Tuscan scholars considered the Florentine dialect the closest to Latin, and they saw their literary production as the cultural patrimony of the Roman Empire. Machiavelli in his *Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua* maintains that the Florentine is the preferred language for composition. He never mentions Trissino by name in the treatise, but the dating of the work to 1524 suggests that it was written during the discussions brought about by Trissino's *Epistola*. Claudio Tolomei, although a Sienese philologist and not Florentine, debated Trissino's orthographic editions in two dialogues, *Il polito* and *Il Cesano*. Trissino's rediscovery of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, a text which he translated and published in 1529, played a fundamental role in his perception of these concepts. Dante theorized a *vulgare illustre*, a courtly language that could manifest in the writings of "doctores illustres." The fact that the *volgare* is a living language that evolves with use is fundamental to Trissino's thinking. Trissino maintained that the ossified language of the "Three Crowns" was no longer properly Florentine as modern usage of the "language" had developed into something else. Trissino sought to construct a language around the various linguae spoken in the various courts to produce a unifying language to be used in various literary endeavors. Trissino's philological training allowed him to mine three

literary and linguistic traditions in order to write *Sofonisba*. Any discussion of his theorization of

the tragic must take into account his extreme erudition. A formal approach becomes necessary as

the foundational basis of an analysis the tragedy.

> E così diremo che la bellissima tragedia secondo l'arte sarà della constituzione simplice che avemo detta, come furono molte delle tragedie di Sofocle e di Euripide tra i Greci. E tra i Latini è da credere che fossino simili il *Tieste* di Varo e la *Medea* di Ovidio, che si sono perdute; perciò che quelle di Seneca che sono rimase sono per la più parte fragmenti di cose greche posti insieme con pochissima arte. (Weinberg *Trattati* 25)

Only the dedicatory letter gives us any explicit insight into the meaning of *Sofonisba*, "Se nella

Sofonisba del Trissino e nella *Dido* non v'è traccia, oltre la dedica, di alcuna teorizzazione

interna…" (Mastrocola 24). It is only through sustained investigation of the formal and

compositional elements of Trissino's tragedy in the content of his historical moment do we begin

to get a clearer picture. Let's now turn to how Trissino engages in the debate on imitation at a

time when, "Petrarchismo had become the imitative standard" (Feng 138).

Imitatio and its Practice

Imitation and mimesis must be more clearly defined before we can begin to discuss its

role in Trissino's poetic practice. We have briefly seen Aristotle's use of the term. The question

remains what does imitation signify to a Renaissance author? Again, it is Plato and Aristotle who

provide us with the background to begin to understand its conceptualization by Renaissance

critics. Plato deals with the role of the poet as an imitator in his *Ion* and *Republic*, and he

expounds a generally negative opinion of poets in these works. Aristotle's conceptualization of

mimesis is somewhat more difficult to understand, and many scholars have attempted to identify

his position with great difficulty. W. F. Trench states, "And that is form, creative form, as in

dance movements or a melody, and the plot of drama is form, creative form. Through rhythm,

through composition, emotional and imaginative experience achieves expression abidingly"

(Trench, 15-16). Therefore, in Aristotle's mimetic theory at its core is simply the ideation of creative form. Initially, it does not encompass the rhetorical elements of imitating authors.

Aristotle's mimesis dealt with art imitating life; but Cicero, like so many other Romans receiving aspects of Greek literary criticism, formulated a theory of *imitatio*. Cicero, despite his unsuccessful attempts at poetry, was concerned with the rhetorical practice of imitating earlier stylists.[32] Cicero's theoretical formulations of rhetorical *imitatio* would go on to be one of the most meaningful developments of literary criticism that would have far-reaching effects into the Renaissance, "Not just in the rule books, but also in practice, it was a recognized part of the orator's duty to borrow from a previous writer in such a way as to signal the imitation to the audience or readers, but to alter in some way the material borrowed" (McLaughlin 6).

The aspect of the imitation debate that concerns us is the relationship to source materials and inspiration. Two positions regarding imitation presented themselves; the first, slavish imitation, is a type that uses precise language, vocabulary, and literary devices of a particular author. The second type, eclectic imitation, relies on several models and attempts to create something new by distilling substance from its source material. The arguments for both viewpoints were well organized and debated for well over a century.

Slavish imitation, as mentioned above, relied on the usage of a singular model for inspiration in both style and vocabulary. The primary argument against this type of imitation was that it did not allow for innovation and was stifling to creativity (Feng 136). This type of

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[32] Elaine Fantham's article "Imitation and Evolution: The Discussion of Rhetorical Imitation in *De Oratore* 2.87-97 and Some Related Problems of Ciceronian Theory" offers a concise description of the different uses, both Greek and Roman, of *mimesis/imitatio*. She relates that Cicero understood the difference of literary representation and "reality" in the first meaning. The second meaning, imitation of artists, is what he concerns himself with in his rhetorical treatises and dialogues.

imitation was most closely associated with the Ciceronians in the *Questione della lingua* debate. The Ciceronians upheld Cicero as the singular literary model to follow in the composition of new material. Their idea was that Cicero achieved the height of literary greatness and success and therefore his style was the apex of prose stylistics. Any thought or idea could be conveyed using Cicero's writings. The counter-argument here is that new social and political realities found no precedent in Cicero and thus a more natural language was needed to express new concepts. The difficulty arose when authors questioned whether they could create new terminology, or should they recycle words previously used by native speakers of the Latin language. Strict Ciceronians were against the development of such neologisms, but there were those who recognized their necessity.

One of the most important discussions of the imitation debate involved Paolo Cortesi and Angelo Poliziano. Poliziano clearly fell on the side of the Eclectics while Cortesi insisted on the purity of Ciceronian style. The discussion of major model imitation between these two humanists began when Cortesi sent Poliziano a collection of letters that he felt best represented Ciceronian stylistics. Poliziano's response to this collection of letters perfectly demonstrates his position, as it is a Petrarchan inspired anecdote that he uses to clarify his point.

> Sed ut bene curare non potest qui pedem
> ponere studet in alienis tantum vestigiis,
> ita nec bene scriber qui tamquam
> da praescripto non audit egredi
>
> But as you cannot run well if you strain
> to put your feet in other people's tracks,
> neither can you write well unless you dare depart
> from what has been prescribed as it were. (Poliziano to Cortesi qtd. in Feng 135)[33]

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[33] I cite here Poliziano's imitation of an earlier Petrarchan metaphor which appears in tandem in Feng's text that I cite later on pg. 34.

The anecdote captures the spirit of Petrarch's views on imitation, but Poliziano puts it into his own words. Cortesi rejects this analogy by comparing what is consumed to food necessary for the proper functioning of the body, and he affirms that in order for the body to function well it is dependent on the type of nourishment ingested. In Cortesi's view, Poliziano and the other Eclectics were like gluttons consuming everything that was not necessarily healthful for the body (Feng 137).

Poliziano was noted for his *brevitas* and his vocabulary choices (McLaughlin 188 and 193); and although he acknowledged the beauty and style of Cicero's writings, he did not seek to emulate him or any one author (McLaughlin 195). Poliziano chose to emulate authors of Silver Age Latin who were considered to be writing in the decline of Latin literature and stylistics. He enjoyed reading authors like Quintilian, Tacitus, and Statius. Since Poliziano's tastes tended toward shorter more concise works, it only makes sense that he would choose non-standard authors as models for his own compositions. Poliziano not only imitated their style and genres, but he also imitated some of the rarer vocabulary. He saw the need to re-energize the Latin language with a new vocabulary that, in the end, was unable to cope with the demands of sixteenth-century reality.

The debate did not end with Poliziano and Cortesi and it spilled over into the next century between Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Bembo. In this case, the younger Pico della Mirandola was arguing a progressive position similar to the Eclectics, while Cardinal Bembo took the Ciceronian position. The discussion, while seemingly and superficially the same as that held between Poliziano and Cortesi, treats other aspects of the debate, namely cross-genre imitation and the definition of emulation. Both Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Bembo were careful when it came to cross-genre imitation. The younger Pico della Mirandola used the

classical authors Homer and Virgil to express his theory of cross-genre imitation. Homer managed it unsuccessfully while he attempted to salvage Virgil's reputation of slavish imitation of his sources. He argues that Homer's use of Orpheus' song to Demeter in his epic, the *Iliad*, was inappropriate because the subject matter was not conducive for the form. His charge stemmed from the fact that Homer only changed two verbs. Pico della Mirandola's thoughts on cross-genre imitation held that the subject matter must be appropriate for the genre of epic and not proto-encomia. Virgil managed to succeed in his composition of the *Aeneid* due to the fact that like a bee he took what came before him and produced something wholly new. For Pico della Mirandola, this is how he developed a theory of *aemulatio* and was able to describe its characteristics. Bembo was more circumspect in his description of cross-genre imitation. He did not rely so much on the appropriateness of the subject matter, and he argued for consistency of style. Bembo believed that Cicero did not care so much about genre boundaries in his writing because he culled material from various sources and he synthesized them into a unitary formula.

In Book Two of the *Prose della volgar lingua*, Bembo upheld Petrarch as the model for lyric poetry, a fact which became a central tenet of poetic stylistics in the Cinquecento. While Petrarch officially upheld Latin as the superior language, his care and attention in the revision and reordering of the *RVF* demonstrated an interest in the "classical" elements that appeared in many of the sonnets (McLaughlin, 34. Petrarch saw himself borrowing elements of his sources like a bee extracting pollen from a flower, and through his own language, he was producing something wholly new:

> Solo e pensoso i più deserti campi
> vo mesurando a passi tardi e lenti,
> et gli occhi porto per fuggire intenti
> ove vestigio human la rena stampi.
>
> Alone and filled with care,

> I go measuring the most deserted fields with steps delaying and slow,
> and I keep my eyes alert so as to flee
> from where any human footprint marks the sand. (Petrarca *RVF* 35.1-4)[34]

McLaughlin provides another Petrarchan quote that contextualizes his meaning in the above quote, "…that we should possess a style that is unified and personal, though inspired by several models," (Petrarch *Fam.* 1. 8. 5 qtd. in McLaughlin 27).[35] Petrarch's idea of imitation was mature and distinct. The likelihood is such that he would not have approved, as it was argued a century later, of solely finding inspiration in a single author since his imitative practice ran the gamut between classical sources, the Bible, Augustine, and Dante.[36]

Trissino relies on a broad interpretation of cross-genre imitation. He culls material from various sources most evidently the original story of Sofonisba comes from historical sources. Beyond his sources, Trissino includes passages from Greek tragedy (*Alcestis* specifically), lyric poetry (Petrarch's *RVF*), and even Greek epic (Homer's *Iliad*). The sources are an impressive albeit eclectic mash-up that helps support the ethical message.[37] Trissino's intertextual recall of other literary works serves a double purpose. Firstly, it demonstrates his familiarity with numerous literary traditions, and adds intellectual authority to his enterprise. Secondly, Trissino takes advantage of the *pathos* enacted in other literary works. By subsuming their words into his work, he appropriates the *gravitas* of the other authors:

> There is, too, not merely breadth of knowledge but catholicity of taste: Trissino is not
> prepared to become one of the exclusive brethren of the Petrarchism. His *Poetica* is
> clearly a rejection of the scale of values proposed in Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*
> of 1525, and his appreciation of Dante, Guittone, Cino, and moreover, of various non-
> Tuscans as well, *alongside* his enthusiasm for Petrarch, is entirely consonant with the

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[34] , The translation is Feng's (135)

[35] "ut…unum nostrum conflatum ex pluribus habeamus." The translation is mine.

[36] I would also include Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Quintilian, Ovid and Virgil.

[37] "Trissino's *Sofonisba* is a formal pastiche, and its political relevance may be argued in both pro- and anti-imperialist directions; but its cultural artistic, and intellectual relevance emerges out of the pastiche itself" (Phillips-Court "Performing Anachronism" 45).

linguistic theories in which he will encourage writers to seek a widely-based Italian language (not a Petrarch-based poetic language and a Boccaccio-based prose as advocated by Bembo). Nonetheless, Petrarch remains a dominant figure both in his own poetic preparation and his theory. (Griffith "Theory and Practice" 144)

The opening verses of Sofonisba's first monologue are in fact a Petrarchan allusion.

> SOF: Lassa, dove poss'io voltar la lingua,
> se non là 've la spinge il mio pensiero?
> Che giorno e note sempre mi molesta.
> E come posso disfogare alquanto
> questo grave dolor, che 'l cor m'ingombra,
> se non manifestando I miei martìri?
> I quali ad un ad un voglio narrarti. (1-7)

………………………………………………………………………………………………

> PET: Lasso me, ch'io non so in qual parte pieghi
> la speme, ch'è tradita ormai più volte.
> Che se non sparger al ciel sì spessi preghi?
> Ma s'egli aven ch'ancor non mi si nieghi
> finir anci 'l mio fine
> queste voci meschine,
> non gravi al mio signor perch'io il ripreghi
> di dir libero un dì tra l'erba e i fiori:
> 'Drez et rayson es qu'ieu ciant em demori.' (Petrarch *RVF* LXX.1-10)

It is through practice rather than a theoretical text that Trissino demonstrates his theoretical

formulation of *imitatio*. Trissino's Petrarchan intertextual allusion situates the audience in the

context of Petrarch's lyric. Trissino's Petrarchan allusion in and of itself is interesting because

Petrarch's poem relies on intertextual borrowings from Arnaut, Dante, and Cavalcanti, and it

reinforces Trissino's stance on cross-genre imitation and unwillingness to borrow from a single

source.[38] I agree with Phillips-Court, "Petrarchan rhetorical phrases reveal more than dutiful

citation or a mechanical attempt to naturalize courtly love into tragedy" (Phillips-Court *The*

Perfect Genre 62). Trissino's Petrarchan citation is by no means perfunctory; it is a deliberate

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[38] "The truth is that all Trissino's successful short poems deal with those areas of human experience for which his predecessors (mainly Petrarch in love-poetry, though Trissino sometimes echoes Dante and Cino too) had already provided him with a basic vocabulary which has both weight and delicacy" (Griffith "Theory and Practice" 146).

nod to his forbear. According to Peterson, the opening verse signals Petrarch's self-

consciousness and his connection to and detachment his sources:

> The not 'knowing where to turn' of the canzone's incipit is a narrative premise that allows the poet, in the course of writing the poem, to articulate his position with respect to Arnaut Daniel, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, and Cino da Pistoia – whom he cites in the final lines of the stanzas 1 to 4, before ending the poem by citing the first line of canzone 23: 'Nel dolce tempo de la prima etade' ('In the sweet season of my early youth')(70,50). While paying homage to the earlier poets, Petrarch detaches himself from their doctrines of love and idealizations of the Lady (73).

Trissino's use of similar language is an indication of his relationship to his narrative and

linguistic sources. He respects what came before, but he intends to create something beyond his

sources. Therefore, it is only fitting that the opening verses of the *Sofonisba* begin thusly.

Tragedy holds a special place in sixteenth-century literary criticism because it is wholly

understood in the context of Aristotle's *Poetics*, therefore any writer of tragedy writes in the

particular mode of how he has digested Aristotelian precepts. If we take this to be the case, then

Trissino's opening nod to Petrarch makes all the more sense. The Petrarchan allusion

immediately signals to the reader anxiety felt on the part of the speaker. Trissino goes a step

further by altering Petrarch's language from "speme" to "lingua" immediately ensuring the

reader of the importance of rhetorical language throughout the tragedy. Phillips-Court argues that

Trissino goes beyond Petrarch in that, "he gives his tragic muse a voice…and he invests in her

the voice of a poet-subject" (Phillips-Court *The Perfect Genre* 63). I agree here with Phillips-

Court's analysis that repeated quotations of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* endow Sofonisba with the

authority of the poet. Sofonisba's "meco medesma mi vergogno," echoes Petrarch's "di me

medesmo meco mi vergogno" (*RVF* 1,11). This confluence of the poet-subject in Sofonisba

draws all of the action of the tragedy in and around her, and from her perspective, the reader

experiences both the ethical and political message of the play. What Phillips-Court does not take

into consideration is that Petrarchan language comes to serve as the basis for a new tragic lexicon. Cremante's critical edition shows that Sofonisba's opening, "Lassa, dove poss'io voltar la lingua," has a direct parallel in Luigi Alamanni's *Antigone*, "Dove potrò voltar gli occhi o la mente" (Cremante 35). Cremante also shows a parallel in Giraldi Cinzio's *Cleopatra* Act Two Scene 1, "Io non so come volterò la lingua" (Cremante 35).

Trissino enacts and inaugurates the language and style that will come to encompass tragic composition for the rest of the Cinquecento. While the opening of *Sofonisba* echoes Petrarchan language, Trissino most closely emulates the opening of Sophocles' *Antigone* in spirit, that is to say, Trissino stylistically maps Petrarchan language onto the tragic narrative of *Antigone*.

ANT: ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα,
ἆρ᾽ οἶσθ᾽ ὅ τι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ᾽ Οἰδίπου κακῶν
ὁποῖον οὐχὶ νῷν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ;
οὐδὲν γὰρ οὔτ᾽ ἀλγεινὸν οὔτ᾽ ἄτης ἄτερ
οὔτ᾽ αἰσχρὸν οὔτ᾽ ἄτιμόν ἐσθ᾽, ὁποῖον οὐ
τῶν σῶν τε κἀμῶν οὐκ ὄπωπ᾽ ἐγὼ κακῶν.
καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ᾽ αὖ φασι πανδήμῳ πόλει
κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀρτίως;
ἔχεις τι κεἰσήκουσας; ἤ σε λανθάνει
πρὸς τοὺς φίλους στείχοντα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;

My own sister, Ismene, linked to myself, are you aware that Zeus... ah, which of the evils that come from Oedipus is he not accomplishing while we still live? No, there is nothing painful or laden with destruction or shameful or dishonouring among your sorrows and mine that I have not witnessed. And now what is this proclamation that they say the general has lately made to the whole city? Have you any knowledge? Have you heard anything? Or have you failed to notice the evils from our enemies as they come against our friends? (Sophocles 1-10 translated by Lloyd-Jones)

Trissino's imitation in this regard is to choose a classical tragedy on which to model his own new material: his Roman source matter, Sophoclean tragic structure, and his lyric language. *Antigone* opens with the titular character and her sister-in-law discussing their troubles just like Sofonisba and Herminia. The scene is intimate and private and relates how Antigone externalizes her interior anguish, and the relationship between Sophocles' tragedy and *Sofonisba* implies that

Sofonisba herself will do the same. Antigone seeks guidance and support from her sister-in-law in the same way that Sofonisba will with Herminia. According to Mark Griffith, their opening discussion is more than a setting of the scene but outlines, "…the main issues of the play and the personalities of the chief characters" (Griffith 119). Much like Sophocles, Trissino highlights the character of his primary heroine. She recalls what has transpired recently from her frame of reference and the vicissitudes of fortune that have come to afflict her. She recites the contents of a dream, a tragic trope that will come to be very familiar in Renaissance tragedy.[39] The dream foreshadows the entirety of the play:

> SOF: Appresso, un duro sogno mi spaventa,
> ch'io vidi inanzi l'apparir de l'alba.
> Esser pareami in una selva oscura,[40]
> circondata da cani e da pastori,
> che avean preso e legato il mio consorte; (101-105)

Sofonisba, the central figure, finds herself surrounded by dogs and shepherds, "È la prefigurazione onirica di tutto il seguente svolgimento tragico e delle sue figure (Massinissa è il pastor protettivo, i Romani sono i cani, la spelonca è la morte) …" (Ariani 41). They essentially take her hostage by taking away her consort. This continues to foreshadow how Sofonisba will have to deal with one of these two in order to survive. She is well aware that the Romans (more so than her future husband) will not deal with her or concede her freedom. Her only hope is to deal with her kinsman in order to negotiate her survival. Ariani and Phillips-Court point to an underlying eroticism in the first encounter between Massinissa and Sofonisba. Ariani highlights the physical contact, "Al dialogo elegante e allusivo si aggiunge, in un vero e proprio crescendo, il contatto fisico, con termini francamente sensuali « abbraccio, care ginocchia, mano, bacio »"

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[39] According to Cremante this trope is very common to classical tragedy dating all the way back to Atossa in Aeschylus' *Persians* (Cremante 43).
[40] Reference Dante *Inferno* 1,2.

(Ariani 44). Only Massinissa is confused by her actions. Sofonisba appears to be a suppliant.

Massinissa misunderstands not because of Sofonisba's actions but because he wanted to

misunderstand. I do not entirely agree with Ariani, "La situazione politica si è perduta in un

gioco fittissimo di elegante sensualità" (Ariani 44). Sofonisba and Massinissa are conflations of

Trissino's source material. He sublimates the lasciviousness described by Livy who says, "ut est

genus Numid[arum] in venerem praeceps" and relies on Appian 8.10 who provides precedent for

the previous engagement of Massinissa and Sofonisba.[41] This adds context to both Sofonisba's

and Massinissa's actions. Sofonisba has been given into marriage (probably at an extremely

young age), taken as bride by a rival, and now must fight for her survival through political and

matrimonial alliance; it is all she has known during her adult life. Trissino's Sofonisba too

identifies herself as a suppliant:

> SOF: Lice parlare e supplicare al nuovo
> Signor de la sua vita e de la morte (394-395).

Add to the verb "supplicare," "chieggio" (396) and "priego" (403) along with her appeal to a

fellow countryman rather than a lover and it paints the picture of political maneuvering rather

than the enactment of a tragic love story that fails to stir our emotions. The tragedy is not a

failure because that was never its intention. Sofonisba represents an almost ideal of beauty and

grace gifted with rhetorical skill. The rest of the tragedy plays out what the audience already

knows, namely that she will not survive the two forces surrounding her. Much as Trissino saw

Italy in his own time caught between different forces: his home Vicenza caught between

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[41] Livy does at first allow her to be seen as a suppliant as when Sofonisba makes her initial
imprecation to Massinissa in which she refers to her "vocem supplicem" and she uses the verb
"precor" both of which would imply that Livy saw her as Trissino did. At the last minute, Livy
overturns this conception when he states "…propiusque blanditias iam oratio esset quam preces"
(Livy XXX.12.14-18).

Maximillian I and the Republic of Venice, Italy caught between France and Spain, and Italy caught between her intellectual past and future.

Trissino's ideation of the tragic lies in an intellectualism that is made apparent through characterization and thought. The denouement of the tragedy is brought to fruition by the ethical choices that Massinissa must make in order to maintain his honor in the face of his allies and Sofonisba. Trissino considered Sofonisba the sole tragic figure of his work, but I argue that Massinissa is the tragic tragic figure. In the course of the drama, he will recognize that he is unable to protect Sofonisba in the way that he had wanted (*anagnorisis*), and he will transform from victorious conqueror to widowed lover and suffer the loss of his beloved (*peripeteia*). He experiences all of the characteristics that both Aristotle and Trissino agree represent the tragic: recognition, reversal, and suffering. Sofonisba's fate was sealed from the beginning of the tragedy, and it is Massinissa in the end whom we feel falls the most from *felicità* to *infelicità*. He goes from a conqueror and husband to a Roman puppet and widower. We can say that Massinissa's final recognition of all that he has lost occurs when he finally comes to save the already expired Sofonisba. He says as much himself:

MAS: Ohimé del dolor mio ministro fui… (2024).

As Massinissa's recognition is complete, his tragicità, his "intellectual clarification," is fulfilled.

The broader context of Massinissa's choices are reduced down to his duty to the state and his duty to the family. This is a common theme in Italian Renaissance tragedy that unfolds throughout many dramas; in a manner of speaking, it is the enactment of the *ragion di stato* treatises that were prevalent in the early sixteenth century. Trissino speaks in a letter to the Datario of Pope Clement VII in 1524 the political function of his writing which as Ariani puts it

serve, "come discreti suggerimenti, all'alta meditazione dei potenti" (Ariani 18). Trissino in his

letter says:

> …Ora, essendo naturalmente questo desiderio di viver bene quasi in ognuno, ed esequendosi da pochi, certo per niun'altra ragione rimane, che per non sapersi la via, che ad esso conduca: la quale essendo stata investigata da molti sapientissimi omini, alcuni di loro si sono posti ad insegnarla col premio e con la pena; cioè col farci noto, che i cattivi dopo la morte saranno in varie pene tormentati, e i buoni con gloria di vita eterna premiati, altri poi di minore inspirazione divina, ma di sottile, e perspicace ingegno hanno risguardato solamente a questa vita terrena; onde alcuni di loro prendendo per scorta la voluttà, altri la virtù, e altri la gloria si sono affaticati di condurci ad esso; cioè alcuni con favole, poesie, altri con ammaestramenti distinti, e altri con figurate laudazioni hanno introdotti i precetti de la ottima vita. (Trissino qtd. in Ariani 18)

Trissino again lays out the idea of the function of literature as having a particular utility. He

continues in the same letter to address the importance of princes and their roles as leaders to

interpret that which is imitated. Trissino's poetics extends beyond the mere creation of tragic

work, but it invites critique and application.

CHAPTER THREE

GIRALDI CINZIO'S *ORBECCHE* AND THE PATH TOWARDS A NEW POETIC

PRACTICE

I would like to turn my attention to the next major tragedian of the *Cinquecento*, Giovan

Battista Giraldi Cinzio, and the first of his tragedies, *Orbecche*. Giraldi Cinzio's role in the

development of tragic theory in the *Cinquecento* is very important and due not only to his

composition of nine tragedies but also to his principal theoretical work, *Discorso intorno al

comporre delle comedie e delle tragedie*,[42] in which he lays the groundwork for developing a

poetics adapted for the early-modern stage. Giraldi Cinzio presents us with many new

innovations the least of which is his use of the invented plot, but also includes elements of the

horrific and other formal aspects of Senecan tragedy. Many scholars have spent much time

addressing the horrific, the compositional form, and the effects of the Counter-Reformation on

his plots; none of these elements wholly touch upon what is tragic about Giraldian drama.[43]

Giraldi Cinzio's tragedies represent a median point between classicism and the development of a

poetic practice which will fully mature over the course of the next two centuries. The tragic, as

we will see, in Giraldian theater is situated in the particular utility that underlay all of his literary

production. Although this utility is not unique to his poetic practice, he takes it to an extreme

level of moralizing in the *Orbecche*. Giraldi Cinzio assumes literally the dictums of his primary

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[42] Hereafter referred to only as the *Discorso*.
[43] See Ariani (1974) and Villari (2015 and 2016) for Giraldio Cinzio's dramatization of the horrific. See also Mastrocola (1998) for Giraldi Cinzio's compositional style and Javitch (1999) for the reception of both Aristotle's and Horace's poetic theory in his *Discorso*. See also DiMaria (2002 and 2013) for thematic analysis.

critical texts and their authors. For instance, he takes Horace very seriously in the *Ars Poetica*

(333-335) when Horace describes the role of the poet who seeks to both relate things that are

pleasing but also useful to the audience. Borrowing on his own novelle, Giraldi Cinzio

conceptualizes a compositional strategy, which has been handed down in the Latin literary

tradition, to create a poetics capable of emotionally and intellectually engaging his audience.[44] I

have chosen to focus on the first of Giraldi Cinzio's tragedies, *Orbecche*, due to its long-

published tradition as well as the uniqueness of its compositional elements in relation to his later

tragedies. I intend to discuss Giraldi Cinzio's reception of classical poetic theory, his theories of

imitation and the utility of poetry, and his ethical didacticism in both a theoretical and thematic

analysis of the tragic. In addressing the theoretical qualities, I will examine how he receives

Aristotelian and Horatian poetics, synthesizing elements of both authors, and I will demonstrate

how he thematically incorporates those elements into a compositional style that takes into

account his audience's contemporary tastes. This investigation will examine the social utility that

is specific to Giraldi Cinzio. Having been nurtured in a strong vein of Ciceronianism, Giraldi

Cinzio will bring the weight of the rhetorical practice of the Latin literary canon into his ideation

of the tragic genre. In his view, all literary production should be in the service of convincing and

edifying its spectators. This will be evidenced by Giraldi Cinzio's reordering of Aristotle's

hierarchy by placing more importance on spectacle. He will use plot, characterization, and

spectacle to engage the audience's attention, and in this way, his didacticism and moral message

will be revealed.

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[44] This is in apposition to Trissino's tragic formulation which relied on rhetorical force and less on narrative and visual elements, although Trissino's *Sofonisba* was not originally performed. For further information, see the previous chapter on Trissino.

The task of untangling the patchwork nature of Giraldian poetics may at first seem daunting, but it is necessary to highlight the beginnings of an Italian tragic tradition that is developing its own freedom, free from the complaints of imitation of its classical and early Italian models. The departure from the style established by Trissino presents Giraldi Cinzio with some theoretical questions to consider and resolve: the function of literature, the role of the poet, and the importance of the audience in the compositional process. These questions are not just pertinent to the production of tragedy in the *Cinquecento*, but they also inaugurate the process of conceptualizing and producing classical genres as well as those not of classical origin. Javitch attributes the "rebirth" of tragedy in the West to this genre-theorizing, and Giraldi Cinzio plays a role in the theoretical direction which will unfold subsequently. Javitch writes, "Undoubtedly, the *Poetics* had a fundamental impact on the development of early genre theory. That does not mean, however, that the Greek treatise was responsible for its genesis. There is more reason to believe that the unprecedented interest in the *Poetics* was generated by a new desire to define poetry according to the form and function of its genre" ("Emergence of Poetic Genre Theory" 140). Susanna Villari demonstrates that the difficulty of approaching an understanding of Giraldian poetics is due to a misunderstanding of the question. The investigation must be twofold: an investigation of the reception and innovation of the formal aspects of Giraldian poetics and an investigation into the ethico-didactic message. What is at odds and what has not always been clearly understood in much scholarly work are these two distinctions. Villari argues that only a truly philological synthesis of the entire Giraldian corpus, an acute understanding of his historical sources, and contemporary history can one begin to make sense of the threads of Giraldian tragic theory:

> Un approccio rigorosamente filologico ai testi è apparso il più consono per scongiurare il
> rischio sia di redazioni compilative, sia di elaborazioni in forma di 'saggio', entrambe poco

funzionali ai nostri obiettivi. Non sarà superfluo, tuttavia, precisare (per evitare le facili dicotomie, sempre in agguato, tra filologia e critica) che privilegiare l'oggettività del 'dato' non significa svalutarne l'interpretazione: la stessa operazione di classificazione e presentazione dei dati altro non è che l'esito di una valutazione critica" (Villari 75-76).

In the *Orbecche*, Giraldi Cinzio addresses some of the moral concepts that are at the forefront of his society's concerns: the role of women, personal choice, and the limits of power. Yet, the one ideological message that runs throughout the entirety of the work is Giraldi Cinzio's conceptualization of justice. He does not offer the audience a one-dimensional narrative. At first, the choices of the characters seem straightforward, and right and wrong are very obvious. But we must consider the time in which this play was represented and who was the audience. The questions concerning kingship and the rights of women would have been very important to members of the aristocracy watching this tragedy. There may very well have been aristocratic audience members who saw Sulmone's absolutist style of governance as a necessity especially considering the reign of Alfonso I d'Este. There may also have been women who were forced into marriages to men whom they did not want to marry. The seriousness of the questions that the drama raises allows Giraldi Cinzio to portray an ethical system in which his characters err for the wrong reasons and sometimes for the right reasons. In the *Orbecche*, Giraldi Cinzio's idea of justice is arrived at only after serious reflection on the part of the audience. The resulting denouement allows for agreement or disagreement with the way the action unfolded, and the audience is forced to consider it. They must address the ethical conundrum…can one feel compassion and pity for someone who does wrong for the right reason? This humanistic/philosophic message exemplifies Giraldi Cinzio's didacticism and fulfills his theoretical criterion that the poet must provide some useful as well as pleasing material.

<u>Background and Intellectual Formation</u>

Ferrara became the literary epicenter of Renaissance Italy despite the sometimes-contentious reigns of the Este family. Ercole I d'Este was a patron of the arts and sponsored secular theatrical productions, a tradition that continued under the patronage of his son, Alfonso I, and grandson, Ercole II, who both continued Ferrara's role as a leader in literary and musical production in Europe. Literary luminaries, such as Ludovico Ariosto, were members of the Este court. Philip Horne attributes some of the renewed interest in theatrical composition and the number of dramatic works performed in Ferrara to their presence (8). Giraldi Cinzio was educated in the humanistic environment of his native city during his formative years. He was born in 1504 in the final year of Ercole I's reign as Duke of Ferrara. He grew up, however, during the tumultuous reign of Alfonso I. Giraldi Cinzio took up the study of natural philosophy along with medicine at the university from which he graduated in 1531.

Giraldi Cinzio's education was not formally in belles-lettres or even the art of formal composition, but it is undeniable that he harbored talent as a stylist in both Latin and the *volgare*. In his studies, he was educated by the humanist and scientist Celio Calcagnini who had a formidable impact on young Giraldi Cinzio's literary endeavors. Although Giraldi Cinzio had recently graduated in 1532 and assumed the position of lecturer of Philosophy at the University of Ferrara, he did not feel prepared to embark on a career of literary composition and he sought the advice and counsel of his former teacher. A series of epistolary exchanges demonstrates that Giraldi Cinzio sought his mentor's advice concerning the prevailing theories of imitation in an attempt to come to a better understanding. Considering the debates on language and imitation at the end of the *Quattrocento* and beginning of the *Cinquecento*, it was necessary to contextualize the theories and put on paper his own conceptualization. I would like to examine some of this

exchange in order to arrive at a better understanding of Giraldi Cinzio's compositional theory. In

the letter dated June 1532, his initial line of questioning gives us a brief glimpse into his

understanding of imitation. He writes, "Some indeed claim that the imitator should pay attention

only to the empty sound of words; others, that he should look for charm; certain others, ease; still

others a method of treatment; and many others that he should imitate figures of speech and clever

remarks" (Giraldi Cinzio 127).[45] He discusses the debate of the *Questione della lingua*,

recounting the most recent opinions shared by scholars from the two previous generations.[46]

Giraldi Cinzio is seeking license to ignore the many aspects of the debate and his primary

concern is whether he should imitate other authors besides Cicero. He makes it very clear that he

sides with Cortesi and Bembo in this debate:

> Since by everyone's calculations Cicero has reached so high a level of rhetorical excellence
> that all eloquence can fashion nothing greater than him, I have been determined since
> earliest childhood always to concentrate on reading him. This course also seemed best to
> Cortesi and Bembo, who were men of sounder judgment, I think, than their predecessors"
> (Giraldi Cinzio 131).[47]

He is worried that by imitating inferior authors or authors whose eloquence did not reach the

heights that Cicero's did that he may contaminate his own work. He states:

> What makes me tend to dissociate myself from this view is that these techniques
> seem intended to train an orator as one resort to a mixed-up mess of human seed
> to produce a single man. For it is almost inevitable that, if a person goes begging
> for all his qualities from several authors, his diction will be meager, dry, lifeless,

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[45] Here I am citing Duvick's English translation of Giraldi Cinzio's letter to Celio Calcagnini in
1532, and I shall continue to use this translation unless otherwise noted. The Latin quotation is,
"Sunt enim qui inanem tantummodo verborum sonum imitatori observandum proponant; non
nulli vero leporem inspiciendum; quidam facilitatem; complures ductum; plerique figuras et
aculeos" (126).

[46] Concerning the Ciceronian debate, Giraldi Cinzio expresses familiarity with the opinions of
Poliziano, Cortesi, Pico della Mirandola, Pietro Bembo, and even Erasmus.

[47] "Cum igitur Marcus Cicero omnium calculis eo eloquentiae pervenerit, ut ipso omnis
eloquentia nihil maius fingere possit, in eius lectione mihi semper inistendum, quo Cortesio
etiam Bemboque, sanioris (ut credo) iudicii quam priores, videtur, ab incunabilis usque
constitui" – (Giraldi Cinzio 130).

choppy, unkempt, tiresome – in short, devoid of all decorum and all energy. Such diction is jarring even to those who compose it.

Ego vero in hanc sententiam eo minus descendo, quo ad oratorem instituendum haec mihi non secus attinere videntur, quam si ad unius hominis generationem quaedam humani seminis colluvies expeteretur. Vix enim fieri potest quin illius oratio, qui sic omnia a pluribus mendicant, exilis, arida, enervata, mutila, inculta, molesta, ab omni decoro, ab omni denique energia sit prorsus aliena, illisque ipsisobstrepens, qui eam composuerunt. (Giraldi Cinzio 128-129)

These two citations are significant because they provide us with context about how Giraldi Cinzio will go about selecting his subject material for *Orbecche* and his theoretical model. His choice of Seneca as his model to imitate will also lead him to incorporate aspects of Senecan morality in the tragedy.

The exchange induces Calcagnini to append a small Latin treatise on imitation emphasizing the strong vein of Latinity that surrounded early literary culture in Ferrara.[48] The treatise first exhorts the writer to compose in Latin and he also excoriates the use of the *volgare*; he accuses it of being a bastardization of the true and proper language of their ancestors. Calcagnini writes, "Need I say that we so protect this vice, which we should have used all our machines to knock down, that we now even find people who foster it with their theories, promote it with certain rules and, if it please the gods, prefer it to our true and genuine Latin" (Giraldi Cinzio 149)?[49] After announcing that Latin should be the principal, compositional language, Calcagnini's next dictum deals with style and how to choose words most fitting to the purpose of the written work. This includes not ignoring the authors of the past and subscribing only to an updated Latin vocabulary. He does, however, warn that the good author will eschew obscure

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[48] See Horne (15) for a survey of Ciceronianism in Ferrara's literary circles.
[49] "Quid dicam quod huic vitio, quod par fuit, omnibus machinis a nobis deturbari, ita patrociniamur, ut iam inventi sint qui illud rationibus foveant et certis regulis adiuvent, et si Dis placet, verae ac germanae latinitati praeferant?" (Giraldi Cinzio 148).

words as well as those that are inflated and bombastic. The remainder of his treatise continues in this rhetorical vein and does not address any philosophical aspect of imitation. Calcagnini addresses the familiar aspects of speech composition as well as the staples of rhetorical treatises. His letter states quite clearly his primary concern, "So in my judgment, the principle place for imitation comes in the choice of words, whether they pertain to explaining or embellishing the subject matter. In other aspects of speech, however, imitation should remain in second place or lower" (Giraldi Cinzio 177).[50] This fascination with appropriate language and fitting words is far from Aristotle's conception and description of mimesis which has less to do with language and more to do with man's desire to represent life. Calcagnini's treatise does not give the young Giraldi Cinzio any advice in the creation of compositional material but only how to embellish and adorn it with a robust classical vocabulary. This may be due to Giraldi Cinzio's initial letter asking for a definition of imitation due to the many disagreements surrounding the terminology. Calcagnini closes his response with an anecdote that provides him with advice, which may be considered contrary to the initial opinions Giraldi Cinzio expressed and the direction that Calcagnini seemingly has taken throughout the treatise. The fable deals with the birth of Venus' son Cupid whom she notices will not grow beyond childhood. She consults the Titaness Themis and learns that Cupid will not grow until he has a rival with which to contend. Venus, having heard this prophetic pronouncement, takes Mars to bed and conceives Anteros, or Anticupid. Cupid is then able to grow into his full potential. The point of the fable, according to Calcagnini, is that no author makes strides in eloquence without someone to contend with. Calcagnini simply points out that the author must deal not only with the words of the ancient writers but also with

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[50] "Me igitur iudice primus locus sit imitationi in delectu verborum, seu quae ad rem explicandam seu quae ad exornationem pertineant. In reliquis autem secondarius et postremus subsideat" (Giraldi Cinzio 176).

those of contemporaries. In the fable, Calcagnini uses one particular word that sums up his

theory concerning imitation, *aemulationem*.[51] Clearly the cognate of this word is *emulation,* but

an expanded sense of the word is rivalry or competition. Calcagnini intends, as evidenced by the

fable, rivalry in a healthy sense and not servile or slavish imitation to a single author. Although a

strong Latinist himself, Calcagnini is familiar with the classical Greek canon. His conclusion,

which he passes on to Giraldi Cinzio, is to temper his Ciceronianism and not discount the other

authors. He hinted at this earlier in his treatise when says, "This being said, no one should think

that I therefore underestimate the other writers or wish to cheat them of their proper honors. I

hope I can avoid such madness as that" (Giraldi Cinzio 167)![52] He goes on to list the particular

strengths of various authors in their field, and he implies that each author has their own attributes

fitting to the specific needs of the subject matter. Calcagnini cites specifically what an author

should do regarding imitation, "A paramount task in imitation will be for you to draw many

words from someone with whom you are well matched, a person like you and, as it were, from

the same neighborhood, and then store them if you will, 'in your personal repository, so you may

then withdraw them into your own material at an opportune moment'" (Giraldi Cinzio 175).[53] In

summary, Calcagnini's advice is threefold: compose in Latin, seek a good style that uses apt and

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[51] "Fatidicam igitur anum, Themin, adit, consulit, responsum accipit, non ante illum iustos auctus habiturum quam Venus filium peperisset, in cuius *aemulationem* ille succresceret (Giraldi Cinzio 180)." The italics are mine.

[52] "Nec a me quisquam putet haec ideo dicta esse quod ceteros scriptores in ordinem redigam aut suo honore fraudatos velim. Absit enim a me hic furor" (Giraldi Cinzio 166).

[53] "Illud erit in imitation praecipuum, ut a pari a simili et quasi ex eadem vicinia multa contrahas et quasi reponas *in promptuario*, *quae opportune deinde in rem tuam depromas*;" (Giraldi Cinzio 174).

fitting idioms for the subject matter, and do not neglect either the ancient or contemporary writers.[54]

Giraldi Cinzio does not follow all of the advice of his mentor, in fact, he outright ignores the advice to compose in Latin and instead composes his tragedies in the *volgare*, which he justifies in an epilogue to his original tragedy entitled *Tragedia a chi legge*.[55] Yet, he does take to heart the remaining advice, especially that of choosing a particular author and modeling his own compositional style to match. For many centuries Seneca remained the only example of classical tragedy and considering the high esteem in which he was held for his philosophical works, it seemed only natural that Giraldi Cinzio would take him as the model for his own tragic style. He incorporates Seneca's moralistic, rhetorical method of story-telling into his own, and he even excerpts entire phrases. Giraldi Cinzio's conception of *imitation* is genre and author-specific; this fact is true not only of Giraldi Cinzio himself but is also frequently found in the medieval and early-Renaissance, rhetorical traditions. This viewpoint is not new or particular to early-modern Italy or Western Europe, but in fact dates back to antiquity. Plato and subsequently Aristotle often refer to μίμησις, or *imitatio*, in a philosophical sense in which characters and plots represent or reflect the characteristics of reality. Yet the rhetorical sense, prominent among those in this study, dates back to the early Greek lyric poets. For instance, Clement quotes Bacchylides:[56]

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[54] Calcagnini's advice to not neglect contemporary authors is rather circular considering his view that authors must build on what the ancients have already written. Therefore, it establishes a tradition in which it is difficult to innovate.

[55] I will address this point more specifically when I discuss Giraldi Cinzio's compositional style.

[56] See Conte's and Most's article in the online *Oxford Classical Dictionary* for the view that *imitatio* and μίμησις are principally rhetorical except in Plato and Aristotle. They are also my source for the quote by Bacchylides, though I cite the entire emendation from the Loeb edition. Though the source is fragment 5 in Bacchylides' *Paeans*, the Loeb emendation has its origin in Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies*.

ἕτερος ἐξ ἑτέρου σοφός τό τε πάλαι τό τε νῦν,
φησὶ Βακχυλίδης ἐν τοῖς Παιᾶσιν. οὐδὲ γὰρ ῥᾷστον
ἀρρήτων ἐπέων πύλας ἐξευρεῖν.

One acquires skill from another both in the past as well as now,
says Bacchylides in his Paeans. For it is not easy to
discover the gates of words not uttered.[57] [Clem. Alex. Strom. 5.68.5 (ii 372 Stählin)]

The tradition of rhetorical *imitatio* continues down among the Alexandrian scholars and emerges among canonical Roman authors. Seneca the Elder, Cicero, and Quinitilian all give advice concerning the topic which has matured significantly by the time that Giraldi Cinzio is composing his tragedies. His tragic style inaugurates what Marvin T. Herrick terms the Senecan style of tragedy of the middle *Cinquecento*, a style which becomes the prominent one for the next few centuries eschewing the Grecian model followed by earlier tragedians.[58] This is somewhat of a misnomer as if Giraldi Cinzio does not engage with either Greek tragedies or Aristotle's *Poetics*. He, in fact, makes many conscious choices concerning his source material, form, and the precepts handed down by Aristotle. Since Horace's *Ars Poetica* had been the dominant critical text in the Middle Ages and Senecan drama had been the standard, Giraldi Cinzio is living in an era of great critical discovery. Centuries of critical literary tradition, dating back to Aristophanes, embedded the idea that tragedy exemplified a "high" style of speaking that elicited strong emotions, and comedy exemplified a "low" style that treated everyday life. Giraldi Cinzio marries centuries of critical tradition with the increasing interest in genre definition.

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[57] The translation is mine though I have taken the word skill from Conte's and Most's translation.

[58] In this instance Herrick is primarily concerned with the tragic form that Giraldi Cinzio adopted from Seneca, that is, the separate prologue followed by a tragedy divided into five acts along with the diminished use of the chorus and the inclusion of the horrific. These characteristics come to define, at least according to Herrick, a bipartite tragic tradition that develops in the Cinquecento. Herrick himself also privileges the Senecan form over the Grecian.

Giraldi Cinzio stands as a unique theorizer concerning tragedy and comedy. His *Discorso* does not appear in print until 1554; but, if Giraldi Cinzio is to be believed, the bulk of the work was finished in 1543.[59] This treatise is arguably the first, or at least, one of the first commentaries of Aristotle's *Poetics*.[60] Several translations by now had been made of the *Poetics*, the incomplete and rather flawed one by Giorgio Valla in 1498 and the better often cited one of Pazzi in 1521, but commentaries were not widely available.[61] Aristotle's formulaic, albeit partial, treatment of genres, already an important aspect of sixteenth-century literary criticism, only served to push the genre theorists further. Theorists and authors began outlining genres ignored or unknown to Aristotle. As I stated above, much of the theory surrounding specifics of tragedy and comedy have come down to us by way of the grammarians.[62] Giraldi Cinzio's conceptualization of tragedy will take all of these disparate parts into consideration.

It is undeniable that Giraldi Cinzio's theoretical ideation of tragedy consists of Aristotelian and Horatian elements, but to say that he simply takes Aristotle's *Poetics* and merges it with Horace's *Ars Poetica* is an oversimplification. In fact, multiple theoretical synchreses are happening at the same time; for instance, Giraldi Cinzio is distilling Aristotle through Horace and at the same time he is distilling Horace through the historical tradition of the grammarians.[63] In the next section, I would like to address compositional elements of Giraldi

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[59] The same year as the publication of his *Orbecche*.

[60] It is not a translation of Aristotle's text.

[61] Trissino's *Quinta Divisione della Poetica* was not yet published. There are numerous other treatises professing to give definitions and compositional instructions, but they relied heavily on the Latin grammarians and their genre definitions. See Javitch "Emergence of Poetic Genre Theory in the Sixteenth Century" (1998).

[62] Here I mean, and Javitch names specifically, Donatus and Diomedes from whom it appears that Badius gets some of the specifics which are passed down in the academic tradition in Ferrara and elsewhere. See Javitch "Emergence of Poetic Theory" 144-148.

[63] For a full discussion of the conflation of theoretical elements of Aristotle and Horace, see Javitch's chapter, "The Assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy" (1999).

Cinzio's tragic style. I intend to analyze Giraldi Cinzio's synthesis of theoretical sources to see what aspects he keeps and which ones he discards in order to arrive at his own functional form that differs widely from that of our previous author Trissino. These theoretical and compositional elements are important to fully elucidate Giraldi Cinzio's tragic theater. It is engagement with his theoretical sources that allows Giraldi Cinzio to update his narrative content and form for his contemporary audience. It is important to keep in mind that Trissino's *Sofonisba* has not yet been performed, although it has been published and has circulated in literary circles. Therefore, Giraldi Cinzio is stepping into unfamiliar territory as he plans performances of his tragedies on behalf of his patron Ercole II d'Este. His concerns will have to be contemplated and thought out in advance. This next section will show specifically how Giraldi Cinzio melds his theoretical sources as well as how he coopts their specific prescriptions in the service of his changes and updates.

<u>Theoretical Development</u>

Giraldi Cinzio's starting point coincides with that of Aristotle, that is to say, Giraldi Cinzio follows Aristotle's prescriptions concerning plot. According to both, the plot is the most important aspect of tragedy. Giraldi Cinzio largely holds true to what Aristotle dictates: the action must be whole and complete, consist of noble actions (where noble is understood as royal),[64] and imitate with both verse and rhythm. Here is where many of the similarities end, and

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[64] Aristotle says specifically that tragedy is a mimesis of a πράξεως σπουδαίας (*serious action or possibly noble action*) and comedy a mimesis of one φαυλοτέρων (trivial actions/inferior people). There has been much discussion as to the translations of these two phrases and hency why I have given the dual translations. Some scholars take σπουδαίας to mean noble in the sense of royalty or actions involving royal personages. This translation is significant because it forms the basis of tragic theory for the next century. These same scholars make the argument on the basis that in regard to comedy φαυλοτέρων refers to commoners instead of trivial actions. What is interesting about Giraldi Cinzio is that he falls into the same camp as the grammarians and scholars coming after Horace. For medieval and Renaissance theorists, tragedy is a genre dealing

Giraldi Cinzio branches off into new territory, conflating Horace's words with those of Aristotle

and those of the grammarians. Let us start with the origin of the plot. Aristotle says that the best

tragedies come from a few houses whose stories and characters are well known to the audience,

but this does not mean that a good tragedy cannot deal with less well-known stories. Giraldi

Cinzio justifies his own narrative choices, finding support in Aristotle for the unknown plot:

> Ma avenga che questa ragione porti con esso lei molta apparenza,
> non di meno io tengo che la favola tragica si possa cosí fingere dal
> poeta, come la comica; ch'oltre ch'Aristotile, giudicioso in questa
> parte quanto in alcun'altra, lo ci conciede in piú di un luoco della
> sua *Poetica*… (Giraldi Cinzio *Discorso* qtd. in Villari 214)

Giraldi Cinzio's justification hinges upon a semantic argument whereby he alters Aristotle's

dictum; although tragic plots are usually drawn from legend, the poet may arrange the tragic plot

like the comic; in other words, tragic plots, like comic plots, may rely on the invented plot (*la*

favola tragica si possa così fingere dal poeta). The main concern for the poet, as Giraldi Cinzio

pivots back to Aristotle, is the difference between the poet and the historian. The historian deals

with the particular and the poet the universal.[65] Invented plots work so long as the poet maintains

this distinction and adheres to the universal. Giraldi Cinzio takes advantage of this loophole to

promote his own narratives, which serve as source material for the majority of his nine

tragedies.[66] As it turns out, Giraldi Cinzio prefers the invented plot which is evidenced by the

fact that seven of his nine tragedies rely on it. Aristotle specifically warns the poet not to give in

to the tastes and desires of the audience, "And it seems this is best on account of the weakness of

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with illustrious actions of royal persons; and comedy, thus, consists of ordinary and private
actions or private citizens. For a fuller discussion see 379-386 of Leon Golden's chapter qtd. in
Rorty *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics* (1992), "Aristotle on the Pleasure of Comedy."
[65] See Aristotle's *Poetics* 1451b and Giraldi Cinzio's *Discorso* (qtd. in Villari 249).
[66] Seven out of Giraldi Cinzio's nine tragedies follow plots written in his novella collection, the
Hecatommithi.

the audience: for the poets follow doing according to the prayer of the audience" (Aristotle 1453a 34-35).[67] Despite Aristotle's warning, the invented plot allows Giraldi Cinzio to engage more easily with contemporary issues. In my opinion, his use of the invented plot is evidence of his concern for the taste of the audience and further demonstrates his modernization of tragic, poetic theory.

Continuing with the structure of the plot, Aristotle recommends a unity of action, by which he means that the action of the tragedy is singular and not double, or two separate actions. Giraldi Cinzio with *Orbecche* follows this same structure, but *Orbecche* stands unique, even among Giraldi Cinzio's tragedies, not only for its *horrific* nature but also for its singular plot. His remaining tragedies exemplify the double plot, which becomes favored by the author specifically for the reason mentioned above – audience taste. The double plot sees the reversal of fortune for two characters instead of just one. What this becomes in Giraldi Cinzio's time – though not unknown to Aristotle – is that things end well for the good or judicious characters and badly for the wicked characters. Aristotle states that while this may satisfy the audience's feelings, it does not arouse pity or fear and thus is not tragic.[68] Earlier in *Poetics* 1453a, Aristotle mentions that the reversal of fortune should not occur due to the villainy of the character nor should a thoroughly good man fall to misfortune; these cases are not tragic. The tragic is evinced through *hamartia* where a person of middling virtue suffers due to a fatal flaw. Giraldi Cinzio follows Aristotle's prescriptions in theory if not in practice. In the *Discorso*, his words seem, at first,

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[67]"δοκεῖ δὲ εἶναι πρώτη διὰ τὴν τῶν θεάτρων ἀσθένειαν· ἀκολουθοῦσι γὰρ οἱ ποιηταὶ κατ᾽εὐχὴν ποιοῦντες τοῖς θεαταῖς" (Aristotle 1453a 34-35).

[68] Again, see Aristotle 1453a.35. In the final paragraph, he states that the double plot is due to the sentimentality of the audience (see the quote above) and is not true tragic pleasure, "ἔστιν δὲ οὐχ αὕτη ἀπὸ τραγῳδίας ἡδονὴ ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τῆς κωμῳδίας οἰκεία."

almost a translation of Aristotle. Yet when we consider *Orbecche*, however, the immediate picture changes.

Orbecche*, on the other hand, follows a single plot structure as Aristotle recommends, but Giraldi Cinzio does not form his characters in accordance with Aristotle's ideals. Sulmone, King of the Persians, seems a heartless, cruel tyrant who murders his family members.[69] He is not a character of middling virtue or, in fact, he does not seem to have any redeeming characteristics. Orbecche is more in keeping with Aristotle's rules. She commits a serious error in marrying Oronte behind her father's back, but she does so for love. Orbecche garners sympathy as the idea of marriage for love and a woman's right to exercise her choice, marrying whomever she loves, engenders great *pathos*. The problem with Orbecche's characterization, in Aristotle's paradigm, is that she is a woman, and women are not allowed to show the cleverness or autonomy of male characters.

In another break from Aristotle's prescriptions about the formal elements of tragedy, Giraldi Cinzio elevates the role of spectacle. Remember Aristotle lists the order of importance of the structural elements as: plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. Unlike Aristotle, Giraldi Cinzio does not order the elements, beyond plot and character, by importance. It is clear, however, that spectacle takes on a more important role, and song has a diminished role in *Orbecche*. The diminishment of the importance of song is evidenced by the diminished chorus. Aristotle prescribes that the chorus should be a fully autonomous and fully integrated character in the overall narrative structure, and he chastises Euripides who diminished the chorus in his tragedies. Giraldi Cinzio never really favored the presence of the chorus as a character for

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[69] See DiMaria (2013) for the differences between Sulmone in Giraldi Cinzio's prose novella in the *Hecatommithi* versus the tragic version and also how the formal structure of the tragic text forces the changes in character.

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reasons of verisimilitude. His argument is that it does not seem probable that royalty would be surrounded by such a large group (meaning commoners) while discussing important matters of state nor would this group be in their private chambers. This leads Giraldi Cinzio to reduce, but not remove, the chorus and to insert them at the ends of acts as musical interludes. The ornate, stylized choral songs sum up the events in the preceding act. The chorus becomes a mental break from the dramatic tension. By drawing on early dramatic form, specifically the *sacre rappresentazioni*, Giraldi Cinzio finds a purpose for the chorus. The chorus' traditional role of omniscient narrator, adviser, or voice of the author have been meted out and relegated to several other characters such as the Nodrice and Malecche in *Orbecche*.

The increase in the importance of spectacle is evidenced by the attention to the detail of the horrific. Giraldi Cinzio's descriptions of the gruesome murders at the end of the tragedy are related in vivid detail. The horrific in *Orbecche* serves as a catalyst for the unraveling of the final dramatic tension, but Giraldi Cinzio uses it in another important way. He uses this imagery onstage to incite the emotions of pity and fear in his audience in order to increase the cathartic effect. Aristotle advises against this manipulation of the audience's emotions through spectacle.[70] For Giraldi Cinzio, the horrific is nothing more than a tool, which he borrows from Seneca. It does not represent an interiorization of anguish; but rather, the horrific acts carried out by various characters are a way for Giraldi Cinzio to spark debate on the theme of justice.[71] Although *Orbecche* is highly rhetorical and enunciated by means of long, personal discourse, we are not yet seeing the psychologization and pure mental anguish that we see in later Cinquecento drama

[70] This also allows us to see in what ways Attic tragedy was educative by not allowing the audience to sate their base natures on visual imagery. The audience is to be edified in a way that appeals to intelligence and reason through rhetorical discourse.
[71] I will discuss this later on in the chapter.

and beyond.[72] The elevation of spectacle and particularly the horrific, which plays a large role in Senecan tragedy, may be due to a misunderstanding of his Senecan models. Senecan tragedy was very likely read and not performed. If this was the case, then Seneca did not violate Aristotle's precepts of showing violence on the stage. It would also make sense why the horrific was used to heighten the dramatic tension. If the horrific aspects had been removed from Seneca's tragedies, the absence of the visual elements would have diminished the cathartic sentiment. The audience would have been left with a highly rhetorical play of Stoic ideals. Seneca drew upon the shocking aspects of the narrative source material to heighten the overall dramatic tension, and he used them as a tool to induce pity, fear, and finally catharsis. Giraldi Cinzio does the same thing; the exception is that by not working with mythological source material, he is able to engage with contemporary issues.

Another divergence on the part of Giraldi Cinzio from Aristotle's prescriptions is the role of the poet in teaching men how to live a moral life. Nowhere does Aristotle explicitly state that the poet has a duty or obligation to instill a moral lesson in the audience member or reader. In fact, this misapprehension is one that occurs due to the conflation of Aristotelian and Horatian poetic theory. Giraldi Cinzio makes recourse to good morals throughout the *Discorso*:

> Oltre le predette cose in che convengono, hanno anco commune
> il fine queste due favole, però che amendue intendono ad introdurre
> buoni costumi… (Giraldi Cinzio qtd. in Villari, 213)

……………………………………………………………………………….

> Et però è da sapere che, quanto alla presente consideratione appertiene,
> le attioni reali et grandi, possono essere di tre sorti, con ciò sia cosa
> ch'elle sono o di buone persone o di scelerate o di mezzane. Et però
> bisogna investigare quali debbano essere quelle, le attioni delle quali

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[72] What I mean by psychologization is that the explicit moralizing that Giraldi Cinzio employs will disappear in later *Cinquecento* tragedy especially in Speroni and Tasso. The use of the horrific as a means to instruct the audience through fear will change into a dramatic form that is more personal and metaphysical. The tragic will become an exploration of the self.

alla tragedia convengono, et perché questa sorte di favola tutta si compone
all'horrore et alla compassione, per gli buoni costumi, dee il poeta scegliersi le attioni ad
imitare che siano atte a produrre questo effetto del buon
costume. (Giraldi Cinzio qtd. in Villari, 226)

……………………………………………………………………………………………

Et come varie sono le attioni dell'una et dell'altra favola, cosí (quantunque ambedue
mirino ad un fine medesimo, ch'è introdurre buoni costumi) diversamente producono
questo effetto. Perché la tragedia, coll'horrore et colla compassione, mostrando quello
che dobbiam fuggire, ci purge dalle perturbationi nelle quali sono incorse le persone
tragiche. Ma la comedia, col proporci quello che si dee imitare con passioni, con affetti
temperati, mescolati con giuochi, con risa et con scherzevoli molti, ne chiama al buon
modo di vivere. (Giraldi Cinzio qtd. in Villari, 234)

These examples describe a specific function of tragedy as well as a specific role for the poet. As

I have pointed, out this moral function does not originate in Aristotle's description of Greek

tragedy. We must examine what Horace says to get a better understanding of the origin of this

concept. In the *Ars Poetica*, Horace writes:

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae
Aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae
Quicquid praecipies, esto brevis, ut cito dicta
Percipiant animi dociles teneantque fideles.
Omne supervacuum pleno de pectore manat.

Poets desire either to be useful or to delight
Or to say what is simultaneously pleasing and suitable to living
Whatever you will teach, be brief, that teachable minds may
Perceive quickly whatever is said and may faithfully retain it.
Everything superfluous flows out from a mind too full. (Horace lines 333-337) [73]

What Horace writes, "Poets desire either to be useful or to delight or to say what is

simultaneously suitable or pleasing to living," becomes the basis of Renaissance literary theory

of *docere et diligere*,[74] to the point that Giraldi Cinzio continually reiterated it in his various

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[73] The translation is mine and I translate the noun *vitae* here as a participle.
[74] See DiMaria pg. 26 (2002).

tragedies. For example, in the prologue of *Selene*, Giraldi Cinzio writes:

> PRO. Per insegnare adunque in un sol giorno
>   A migliaia di gente il vero modo
>   Di compir con onor la vita frale,
>   In uso posti for teatri e scene
>   Perché, veggendo indi gli spettatori
>   Varie sembianze d'uomini e di donne,
>   Di varii uffici e qualità diverse
>   E di varii costumi e varie leggi,
>   Sortir diversi fini e varie sorti,
>   Fatti acuti, sapesser da sé in tanta
>
>   Varietà di genti e di costumi
>   Seguir la loda et ischivare il biasmo
>   E veder che chiunque virtù segue
>   Giunge a buon fine e chi 'l mal segue a reo. (24-37)

The above citation shows how the poet links performance with the educative and moralizing

function of tragedy. In the final two verses, he describes the audience member who, after

witnessing the actions of the drama, follows virtue and arrives at a good end and the one who

follows evil will arrive at a wicked end. In order to do this, characterization is key and Giraldi

Cinzio concludes in the *Discorso* that tragic characters are more difficult than comic ones.

Before discussing the particulars of characterization in *Orbecche*, it suffices to mention evidence

of specific moral issues that arise in characterization. Giraldi Cinzio touches upon the way that

the elderly are treated by the young,[75] the role and status of women, familial responsibility and

duty, and kingship. DiMaria characterizes the poet's and tragedy's moral duty in this way, "The

didactic function of theater, then; was not merely to teach the difference between right and

wrong or show the effects of good and evil in absolute terms. Rather, it was to encourage the

audience to reflect upon, define, or redefine the evolving values and ideological notions (moral,

political, religious, social) underpinning their social institutions" (*Italian Tragedy* 27). Victoria

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[75] Reference the Nodrice's soliloquy at the end of Act II.

Wohl, a classical scholar of ancient theater, writes in her estimation of classical tragedy, "…dramatic form does not merely 'contain' ideological content but produces it…" (137). I agree with DiMaria, but he does not go far enough to suggest that the ideological content is not already formulated. Tragedy does not arrive ready-made in the Renaissance as a vehicle that demonstrates moral behavior. It requires a fundamental understanding of the origin of tragic, poetic theory and the role that the subject matter plays in organizing a dialectic that addresses pertinent societal issues. While the issues that Giraldi Cinzio dramatizes are not in any way new, the nature of tragic dialectic allows for an in-depth engagement with those issues. The tragic theater does more than present the viewpoint of the author such as a treatise or other types of poetry do; it engages the perspective of the audience in a philosophical investigation of the self. The content creates ideology in a very personal sense as each individual audience member evaluates and scrutinizes the ethical material in real time. Wohl espouses a methodology that combines examining the tragic form and its affects with a historicist approach to approximate new readings of the political in Euripides' tragedies. My variation of her approach has attempted to examine how Giraldi Cinzio receives classical poetic theory and how he innovates it into a working system for his contemporary audience. I have shown how he prefers the five-act drama to the continuous and episodic form of the Greeks, how he diminishes the role of the chorus and increases the number of actors on the stage, and how his characters do not correspond to the prescriptions of Aristotle. I intend to show how Giraldi Cinzio's poetic practice abandons the concept of fate in order to highlight the choices that characters make and the effects that those choices have on the drama itself. The primary difference consists in the implicit moral function of Greek tragedy and the explicit moralizing that Giraldi Cinzio practices in his tragedies. In addition to the *Selene*, Giraldi Cinzio espouses this theory of the moral role of tragedy in several

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more of his works including the prologues of *Altile* and *The Antivalomeni*. This educative, moralizing feature is intertwined with his poetics and compositional style. It is a confluence of Giraldi Cinzio's humanism along with his ever-present religiosity, which was tempered by extreme erudition. Centuries of religious-sponsored education transformed the rhetorical tradition from a means to persuade to one that taught man to *live well*. This idea of living well was grounded and rooted in moral responsibilities that one owed not just to oneself but also to others, a set of moral responsibilities that stemmed from Christian teachings.

Thematic Analysis

Orbecche demonstrates that this instruction unfolds in both subtle and not so subtle ways. Let us start by examining the not so subtle way in which this instruction unfolds. Renaissance tragedies most often dealt with two issues in particular: the *querelle des femmes* and kingship. Although these two issues frequently became dramatized, it does not mean that other topics did not also appear in Renaissance tragedies. First, I would like to deal with the portrayal of women in tragedy. It should not go unnoticed that the majority of Renaissance tragedies are named after their female characters.[76] There is certainly a preoccupation with women on the part of these Renaissance tragedians. In *Orbecche*, this preoccupation is exemplified in three female characters. If we pass over, for now, the divine females and the personification of Tragedy, who all occupy the prologue and Act I Scene 1, the first female character that we encounter is the shade of Selina, Sulmone's former wife and the mother of Orbecche. This vengeful spirit laments her situation after finding herself among the dead. She was sent there after having been discovered having an incestuous relationship with her own son. Both the discoverer and revealer

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[76] I do not say use the term tragic heroine, because I am not arguing that all of the titular heroines are the primary tragic characters.

of this information was the young Orbecche who informed her father what she saw. Sulmone

immediately had both wife and son put to death. The whole of Selina's thought is bent toward

revenge evidenced by the fact that she shares the entirety of Act I with the goddess of divine

justice.[77] Her first words show this connection:

> NEM. Uscita i' son da le tartaree rive
> Onde si son partite or le tre Dee
> Che dei dannati ne gli oscuri regni
> Prendono grave et immortal supplicio; (Giraldi Cinzio lines 227-230)

Selina claims to occupy the same physical space as the goddess of divine vengeance, that is,

Tartarus the region of the Underworld reserved for the damned. Selina confirms that she has

been judged and has been sent to Tartarus for crimes against the gods and nature.[78] Selina's

name gives us a clue to her role in the narrative. Her name recalls that of the Greek goddess

Selene. Selene, Artemis, and Hecate formed a triad of lunar deities in the Greek pantheon. These

goddesses were associated not only with the moon but also with crossroads, magic, and the

underworld. Selina's lunar association gives us a clue to her metaphysical influence throughout

the play as an unseen force directing the actions that will ensue. Even in death, Selina remains

fixed on the revenge that she wishes to exact on her husband. While she never describes in

specific terms the punishment she wants to dispense, she does use the adjective *crudele* a number

of times to describe her situation. The adjective appears three times: *crudel marito* (Giraldi

Cinzio 234), *mia crudel vendetta* (Giraldi Cinzio 243), and *morte crudele* (Giraldi Cinzio 258).

Selina while not obfuscating her wrongdoing, for she plainly calls her crime *del mio mal* (Giraldi

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[77] Nemesis' role was especially important in avenging kin slayings.

[78] All those who die arrive in the Underworld and are judged by Aeacus, Rhadamanthys, and
Minos. These men, of integrity in life, were granted the honor of judging their fellow man in
death. Selina would have undergone this moral judgment and thus rightfully ended up in
Tartarus. Selina mentions the judges of the Underworld in verse 272 along with the types of
crimes they judge by listing other famous inhabitants of Tartarus.

Cinzio 267), spends the majority of her monologue blaming Sulmone and Orbecche for the evil

that has befallen her. Let us keep in mind that Selina does not represent a tragic or pitiable figure.

Giraldi Cinzio has no intention that we should sympathize with this shade. She knowingly

entered into an incestuous relationship with her son; it is not as if she unwittingly had a sexual

relationship with him.[79] Selina's entire monologue is an exercise of vain self-righteousness and

indignation after having been caught in this incestuous relationship. Never once does she lament

her actions or express regret for her behavior; instead, all of her anger is directed at Orbecche

and Sulmone. Her prayer specifically targets Orbecche as she creates a false equivalency

between her past behavior and Orbecche's marriage to Oronte. Selina craftily and rhetorically

exchanges places with the goddess Nemesis by asking what cause gives her the right to bring her

fury upon Sulmone's house:[80]

> SEL. Ma dimmi, che uopo t'era da l'inferno,
> Nemesi, trar le scelerate Furie
> Per accender furor in questa casa?
> Che furia più potenti aver potevi
> Di me? (Giraldi Cinzio lines 244-248)

Nemesis is the dispenser of divine justice and judgment, by rhetorically exchanging places,

Selina attempts to claim that her vengeance is justified. She states, "…Ma poi ch'esse hanno

avuto quello / Ufficio ch'a ragion mi si devea" (Giraldi Cinzio 248-250). She has decided to

exact her vengeance on her daughter, by revealing Orbecche's so-called crime; and this is where

her false equivalency manifests. She believes that her daughter is committing a crime no

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[79] This difference is best exemplified by Oedipus and his mother Jocasta in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. I will address the theory behind this point later in the chapter.
[80] Here we must understand that Selina is asking what right Nemesis has to take revenge on Sulmone. In Selina's mind, she has a legitimate right to hate her former husband and to seek his downfall. Nemesis' role as the divine avenger of kin slayings is unimportant to her.

different than her own, and by laying open the secret nuptials between Oronte and Orbecche, she

hopes to bring ruin to Sulmone's house:

> SEL. Portat'ho anch'io questa letal facella
> Accesa di mia mano in Flegetonte
> Per dar degno splendore a queste nozze
> Che già foran secrete, or fian palesi,
> Tra Oronte e Orbecche, mi figlia proterva: (Giraldi Cinzio 251-255)

The imagery is inescapable. The light from her torch shall make visible that which was secret but

shall also set fire to the whole affair. She describes her torch as *letal* (Giraldi Cinzio 251) just as

Phlegethon's lethal flames consumed his love, Styx.[81]

Selina focuses on Orbecche as the single reason for her troubles and she begins her

complaint:

> SEL. Orbecche, dico, che cagion fu sola
> Che Sulmon mi trovasse col mio figlio
> E desse ad ambo noi morte crudele. (Giraldi Cinzio 256-258)

This obfuscation of responsibility seemingly inverts the tragicity of the situation. Selina tries to

convince the audience that she is truly the tragic character, and she lays the blame on those who

have caused her to suffer. Her irrationality leads her to prophesy the impending deaths of those

in the royal house. She does this by describing exactly how their deaths will unfold. Her mantic

pronouncement leads her to recount the misdeeds of the very worst inhabitants of Tartarus, and

she ends her monologue by expressing that her family will join her in eternal punishment before

the end of the day.

Selina's act of rhetorical legerdemain does not fool the audience and sets up a hierarchy

by firmly establishing a dichotomy between herself and Orbecche. It is clear that there is no

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[81] Cremante says that the allusion to the "lethal nuptial torches" can be traced back to Seneca's *Octavia*, although modern scholarship attributes this play to a later Flavian author. Giraldi Cinzio will use the imagery again in the *Altile*.

equivalency between Selina's and Orbecche's actions. Selina wants us to believe that the common denominator that she and her daughter share is an illicit love. Yet, this is not the case. Selina's incestuous love for her son is illicit and against nature, but Orbecche's love for Oronte only violates tradition and societal custom. Selina's lack of honesty with the audience seems to extend to herself as well. Orbecche did not tell her father of her love for Oronte and her intention to marry him; this does not indicate any particular error on her part and thus leaves Selina and Sulmone as the lone guilty parties for their behavior. The relationship between the truth, sound judgment, and justice, is brought to the audience's attention. The audience is meant to see that a person's ethical nature is based on their choices. Selina is a one-dimensional, irredeemable figure. Sulmone is also evil although his horrific behavior can at least be attributed to his role as the sovereign and *pater familias*. Orbecche stands alone as the singular figure who made a mistake, but before she has acted on that mistake, she exists in a state of innocence. The audience is meant to reflect on the types of choices that lead them to specific behaviors and the characteristics that would enable them to exhibit the sound judgment mentioned above.

The next female character that I would like to address is Orbecche. Some of Giraldi Cinzio's detractors claimed that Orbecche's characterization violated the ideals of verisimilitude. The main complaint comes in the form of her gender, and that it was not characteristic of a woman to act so savagely as she does at the end of the tragedy. These complaints prompted Tragedy herself to declare that women are equal to men in the epilogue appended to the end of the drama, *Tragedia a chi legge*. It is necessary to see that Orbecche's character is evolutive. As necessity forces Orbecche into more dire situations, her character evolves from the scared young woman who lies to avoid the wrath of her father into a woman capable of committing the acts that she does in the end.

Orbecche makes her first appearance in Act II long after we have seen Tragedy, Nemesis, the Furies, and Selina speak. It is in her delayed appearance that the principal action of the tragedy begins to take shape. Orbecche presents herself in the throes of anguish, and the Nodrice dutifully compels her to reveal the source of her troubles. Orbecche launches into a recounting of her personal history describing her secret marriage to Oronte and the birth of her two sons.[82] The relationship between this story and her current panic is revealed as she relates how the Parthian King, Selino, wants to marry her. Sulmone, in an effort to ally his kingdom with that of Selino's, promises Orbecche's hand in marriage and causes the already married mother of two some distress.[83] Orbecche relates how she concealed her marriage from her father in the hope that he would die before discovering her secret:

> Orb.   E perché il padre mio si ritrovava
> Debole alquanto e di molt'anni carco,
> I' mi pensai ch'ei si devesse, prima
> Che la cosa sapesse, uscir di vita. (Giraldi Cinzio 431-434)

Orbecche admits that she avoided telling her father of her marriage and hoped that he would die from old before she might ever have to tell him. This points to Orbecche's innocence at the beginning of the play. Her reasoning, of course, is that she fears his excessive anger. I question what reasonable expectation of secrecy did she have after having maintained residence in the royal palace and given birth to two children? At this early stage, Orbecche does not exhibit any of the autonomy that comes to her in her final moments of the tragedy. Her worry is evinced by her language. While she is narrating her woes to the Nodrice and eventually to Oronte, we see her inexperience in her hyperbolic language. She is simply looking for someone to tell her what

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[82] This is all done for the benefit of the audience as Nodrice already knows all of this information.

[83] It should not escape the audience's notice that the Parthian King's name is Selino, the masculine equivalent of Selina.

to do. Before she is ever able to recount the true cause of her preoccupation, Orbecche vacillates

between hypothetical imprecations:

> ORB. Nodrice mia, se la spietata morte
> M'avesse tolto il mio marito e i figli,
> Forse i' sarei la più felice donna
> Che mai nascesse al mondo. (Giraldi Cinzio 400-403)

She also offers vain laments of her current situation:

> NOD. Che strano augurio, oimè misera, è quanto!
> ORB. Egli è, Nodrice mia, pur troppo strano
> e infelice son io più d'ogni donna (Giraldi Cinzio 412-414)

These two instances point out Orbecche's desperation which is inhibiting her from acting on her

own behalf. It is not only that she wishes her situation were different, she is virtually paralyzed

in not knowing what to do. She comes to meet Oronte, who has been tied up on the king's

business, but the nurse arrives before him, so she seeks the Nodrice's counsel first.

The final female character that I will address is the Nodrice, who has taken care of

Orbecche her entire life, emphasizes Orbecche's immaturity by slipping back into her role as

caregiver. She offers Orbecche a lesson on two very distinct but disparate issues. The first is the

goodness of the gods who reward the faithfulness of their servants. This advice stands in direct

opposition to the second lesson on the vicissitudes of *Fate* by comparing the travails of mortal

life to a ship at sea tossed by winds and waves. The Nodrice resolves this apparent contradiction

in the final lines of her monologue:

> NOD.   ch'io tengo certo
> Ch'egli, col suo consiglio, immantinente
> Ritroverà rimedio a questo caso
> E vi farà col suo senno palese
> Ch'o la Fortuna è nulla, o ch'è mortale,
> Non Dea (come s'istima), e' il suo potere
> Forza non ha, s'altri v'oppon lo 'ngegno. (Giraldi Cinzio 538-544)

Her conclusion is that Fortuna has no power, and she points to a very mortal and non-supernatural characteristic, *ingegno*,[84] as the unseen force that is persecuting her. She means to not only point out the powerlessness of *Fate* but also to indicate to Orbecche that these events are enacted by the will of another. It is a reminder to Orbecche to shed her fearful paralysis and use her reason and intellect to empower herself.

The discussion continues upon the arrival of Oronte, who seems genuinely surprised to see her so paralyzed by fear and indecision. He repeatedly exhorts her to call upon and exhibit her *anima reale* (Giraldi Cinzio 712), the primary reason for which he fell in love with her. This dialogue between the two dominates the entirety of Act II Scene 3 and serves as the catalyst for Orbecche's monologue in Scene 4, in which she makes an ardent case for the condition of women. This speech represents a development in the way that Orbecche thinks. She begins the tragedy as a young girl who speaks in lamentations and is concerned only with her immediate family's problems. At this point, however, her perspective widens, and she begins to see herself as someone who suffers; she is a victim of her father's cruelty and she extrapolates from her situation a more concrete understanding of womanhood and the difficulties that women face in the world.

According to Cremante, the feminist sentiments expressed by Orbecche are not without precedent in classical tragedy and are re-echoed in the Mannerist tragedies that follow (Cremante 337). Her complaint really begins to take shape in verse 885:

> ORB. Non credo (se lo stato miser guardo
> Di noi donne) ch'al mondo si ritrovi
> Sorte sì trista tra l'umane cose
> Che la nostra infelice non l'avanzi. (Giraldi Cinzio 885-888)

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[84]I take *ingegno* here as the innate quality of intelligence which one has from birth and does not imply training or education. In the case here, it includes the force of another's will and plans working against Orbecche.

This insightful quatrain, as Cremante points out, is a very close echo of Medea's lament in Euripides:

> MED.   πάντων δ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει
> γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν:
>
> Of all who draw breath and have reason,
> we women are the most wretched.[85] (Euripides 230-231)

Beyond just the philological association, there is also a similarity of characterization between Medea and Orbecche.[86] Medea is a figure from classical tragedy who likewise participates in an illicit love affair which ends badly for her. The association between the two characters is to highlight the change that is beginning to take place within Orbecche. As her awareness takes shape and crystalizes, her active participation in events of the tragedy increases. This connection, which lasts thirty-six verses, serves to foreshadow the horrific act that Orbecche will commit at the end of the tragedy.

Orbecche, like Medea, identifies the unfair treatment of women in very specific imagery:

> ORB.   Com'a perpetuo carcere dannate,
> Sotto l'arbitrio altrui sempre viviamo
> Con continovo timor, né pur ne lece
> Volger un occhio in parte ore non voglia
> Chi di noi cura tiene. (Giraldi Cinzio 900-904)

The image that her description conjures is that of a prisoner or slave unable to exercise any free will. It is possible that her pronouncement provoked some interesting discussion among audience members long accustomed to the subservience traditionally associated with women. In her singular soliloquy, Orbecche is becoming more self-aware and seeing beyond her self-interest.

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[85]The translation is mine.
[86] Cremante (341) points out that Orbecche's language echoes Medea's from 885-921.

She is extrapolating beyond her personal situation and connecting it to larger concerns for women. The proto-feminist sentiments expressed in *Orbecche* are not peculiar to this tragedy. Cremante's critical edition points to other female characters in Giraldi Cinzio's tragedies who express similar statements (Cremante 341).[87] This fact continues to demonstrate that Giraldi Cinzio is writing tragedy to purposefully engage the audience in addressing these specific and urgent questions in his society.

The next time that Orbecche appears is after the counselor Malecche has spoken to Sulmone to mollify him after he learns that Orbecche is already married. Malecche brings what appears to be good tidings that King Sulmone is willing to accept the situation as it is. Both Malecche and Oronte are willing to take the king's message at face value. Orbecche, on the other hand, is skeptical and has difficulty accepting this forgiveness. Orbecche's realization of her social position in society, and the lower status of all women in relation to men, is providing her with much more clarity than is exhibited by the other two men. Malecche and Oronte enjoy positions of privilege in the king's court and they do not expect the level of control that Sulmone wishes to maintain over Orbecche. Would Sulmone react the same way were Orbecche his son rather than daughter? Oronte is dismissive of her fears which he blames on her gender. He states:

> ORO.   E che temete?
> Abbiam ciò che vogliam. *Gran cosa è questa,*
> *Che sian le donne così pronte sempre*
> *A divinare il mal*![88] Bene sperate
> e bene si averrà. (Giraldi Cinzio 1780-1784)

Oronte's blasé attitude and casual remark about women being ever ready to *divine* evil is a shortsighted remark and reaction to what is really going on. To use the word *divinare* not only

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[87] See specifically Giraldi Cinzio's *Epitia*, *Selene*, and *Didone*.
[88] The italics here are mine.

makes it sound as if Orbecche's fear is conjured out of thin air, or even manufactured, but it also

makes his wife seem somewhat crazy.[89]

Malecche and Oronte together do not give adequate reasons for the faith that they have

placed in Sulmone. Oronte asks:

> ORO. Deh ditemi, di grazia, per qual cosa
> N'avrebbe il Re mostrato tanto amore
> E mandatone segno così espresso
> De la sua pace, s'ei volesse poi
> Mancar di fé? (Giraldi Cinzio 1789-1793)

His question is basically why would the king lie? He does not seriously consider any possibility

of a deception on Sulmone's part. Malecche speaks similarly in his attempt to convince

Orbecche that she is worried for no reason:

> MAL.   …La fé, Reina, è proprio
> Ne' Re, come ne' corpi nostril l'alma. (Giraldi Cinzio 1793-1794)
>   …………………………
> MAL. Vedete con che lieto
> Aspetto egli vi mira. (Giraldi Cinzio 1809-1810)

Again, Malecche does not consider the possibility of a deception. His argument hinges on the

belief that faith is a part of the natural makeup and character of kings. Therefore, absolute faith is

placed in the sovereign from whom he cannot imagine that such cruelty will come.

The last time that Orbecche appears is at the end of Act V, after we have learned that

Sulmone's wicked plans have come to fruition. Orbecche has been deprived of both her husband

and her children. She is not aware of that fact until her arrival at the meeting with Sulmone. Yet

even before her arrival, she harbors doubts about her father's sincerity. The Nodrice tries to

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[89] It must not go unnoticed that *divinare* calls to mind an association with magic and the occult, another link with Medea.

encourage her before going into the meeting, for she too believes Sulmone's deception. Orbecche tries to go into the meeting with an open mind:

> ORB: Che 'l perdon c'ho da voi ricevuto oggi / Oltre ogni mia credenza, ogni mio merto. (Giraldi Cinzio 2729-2730)

She still seeks forgiveness from her father and sees it as a gift above and beyond what she deserves. She has obviously internalized the feeling that she has done something wrong despite her earlier monologue. Although she is willing to show contrition to her father, this feeling will be fleeting. Orbecche is about to learn of the dismemberment of her husband and children once she lifts the veil from the dish containing their severed limbs.

The horrific sight at first stuns Orbecche and in her grief Sulmone attempts to convince her that she alone is culpable. Sulmone repeatedly uses adjectives that situate the fault within Orbecche emphasizing her deficient character; he refers to her as *malvagia figlia* (Giraldi Cinzio 2745), *scelerata* (Giraldi Cinzio 2758), and *figlia proterva* (Giraldi Cinzio 2771). There is unmistakeable irony in the words that Sulmone utters:

> SUL: Ora m'è a grado ch'abbi aperti gli occhi / E mi conosca… (Giraldi Cinzio 2765-2766)

In reality, it is Orbecche's eyes that have been opened to the cruelty of her father and the condition of women who have no right to choose their own husbands.

Orbecche answers this disparity in the only way that can genuinely redress the inequality, by assuming an autonomy normally deemed appropriate only to men. She makes her case that her *colpa* (Giraldi Cinzio 2792) and *grave errore* (Giraldi Cinzio 2792) did not deserve the penalty that she has received. Her request is to die along with her family, a request that is denied by Sulmone. Sulmone believes that the best punishment for Orbecche is to keep her alive; otherwise, the pain that she currently feels will end. He proclaims that he still intends that she

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marry someone worthy of her stature in order to provide worthy offspring, and he will have no intention of further harming his family. Orbecche, with great cunning, repeats her earlier statement, but dissimulates her intention by inverting its meaning:

> ORB: Non merto questo don, padre: la morte / Deve emendar l'error che 'n voi
> commisi. (Giraldi Cinzio 2815-2816)

Orbecche's true objective is to deceive Sulmone so that she can get close enough to her father in order to exact her revenge. Orbecche exhibits qualities that she did not have at the beginning of the tragedy, but circumstances have necessitated her evolution. Her revenge is enacted with calculated cunning and decisiveness only moments after she has discovered the dismemberment of her loved ones. In a sign of forgiveness, Sulmone embraces Orbecche, and she plunges the knife she had hidden in her hand into his chest.[90] The savagery that follows is related in gruesome detail by the Semicoro. The Semicoro is stunned by Orbecche's actions, going so far as to question if the like had ever been seen before:

> SEM: Puot'esser tal furore in petto umano?
> E spezialmente in una donna? (Giraldi Cinzio 2845-2846)

The Semicoro draws the attention back to gender and the unexpectedness of a woman exhibiting such fury. The Semicoro reasons essentially that there is no force as strong as that of a woman deprived of her husband.

> SEM: Che né vento, né fuoco, né altra forza
> È tanto da temer, quanto una donna
> Che si veggia privar del suo marito
> E sia dal duolo a un tempo e d'Amor spinta. (Giraldi Cinzio 2849-2852)

The Semicoro's comment highlights that the fundamental difference between men and women is not one of intellect, temperament, or ability, but rather one of circumstance. Giraldi Cinzio

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[90] I am taking here Giraldi Cinzio's source novella in the *Hecatommithi* as stage directions cited in Cremante's edition 421.

supports this point in the addendum, *Tragedia a chi legge*. Here Tragedy herself steps in to forestall those who would have polemicized against Orbecche's character. Tragedy declares woman equal to man in reason:

> TRA: Ch'oltre il lume, qual ha de la ragione
> Come l'uomo la donna… (Giraldi Cinzio 3213-3214)

…….

> TRA: Non pur quanto di pregio in sé aver possa
> Donna gentil, ma che 'n prudenza e senno
> (Rimossa che ne sia la invidia altrui)
> Agguagliar puote ogni saggio uom del mondo. (Giraldi Cinzio 3220-3223)

This epilogue serves as a defense for all of Giraldi Cinzio's dramatic choices, but it is most important to note that this character defense goes beyond the poetic and theoretical choices that it announces.[91] Giraldi Cinzio's depiction and treatment of women seems somewhat inconsistent. DiMaria refers to this ambivalence as undercutting the central message of woman's equality to man, and he points out the early misogynistic statements of Tragedy when she asks the ladies of the audience with sweet and delicate natures if their minds will be able to witness the forthcoming horror. DiMaria writes, "This defense, though contributing to the playwright's reputation as a 'feminist sympathizer,' is clearly inconsistent with the patronizing and rather demeaning way in which he characterized his female spectators and woman in general" (123). But how could Tragedy's opening statements be so inconsistent with those in the epilogue? My answer returns to Giraldi Cinzio's theoretical approach. The initial statements in the prologue are a rhetorical preparation for both the men and women of the audience to examine their innate prejudices and blind unawareness. In order to resolve the inconsistency, Tragedy steps into the role of teacher. She initially reinforces the preconceived notions of the audience before they view

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[91] The audience was unlikely to care about these poetic defenses considering their technical nature.

the play and see direct evidence of those preconceived notions overturned. Tragedy's return in the epilogue is to affirm what the audience should have already concluded, that is, women are equal to me in intellect and prudence.

Orbecche's suicide at the end of the tragedy is not an indictment of her character but serves to add validity to her motivation. She is not punished in accordance with some innate wickedness. Her actions are equivalent to those of Sulmone. Her suicide is meant to create a dialogue around the subject of woman's role in society and to highlight that women are deserving of the right to make their own choices. The proof that Tragedy gives us is that women possess equal measure of the characteristics of wisdom and prudence. The dialogue is meant as a check on other Renaissance writers who, on the one hand, recognized the intelligence and virtue of women, but on the other hand diminished those qualities by maintaining the delicateness and softness of the fairer sex.[92] Giraldi Cinzio shows his innovation by bucking another precept of Aristotle's, that character must be appropriate. In Aristotle's estimation, it is inappropriate for a female character to be either manly or clever.[93] However, Giraldi Cinzio does portray a strong female character who is capable of equaling the autonomy of the male characters.

I would like to return to Wohl's point about the production of ideology which I referenced earlier. To give a bit more context, I will supply the entire quote:

> *Muthos*, Aristotle's analytic taxonomies notwithstanding, is not just a structured structure, but also a structuring structure: dramatic form does not merely 'contain' ideological content but produces it, generating through its *psukhagōgia* new sentiments, new frameworks for thought and for action, the barely recognized 'structures of feeling' that constitute ideology. A play like *Ion* does not just depict ideology, then; through its

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[92] Here DiMaria (2002), 110, points to authors like Alberti and Castiglione.
[93] Aristotle *Poetics* 1454a, the translation is S.H. Butcher's:
"δεύτερον δὲ τὸ ἁρμόττοντα· ἔστιν γὰρ ἀνδρείαν μὲν τὸ ἦθος, ἀλλ᾽ οὐχ ἁρμόττον γυναικὶ οὕτως ἀνδρείαν ἢ δεινὴν εἶναι."
"The second thing to aim at is propriety. There is a type of manly valour; but valour in a woman, or unscrupulousness, is inappropriate."

formal effects, it makes its audience experience it, right there in the real time of the

performance. The dramatic experience is, quite literally, ideology at work. (Wohl 137)

Although Wohl is working with classical drama, I believe that her ideas can be extrapolated and

applied to Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*. The content of the drama does not merely contain ideology

as if it were a regulated set of ideas ready-made for production. Rather, the content produces

ideological meaning, oftentimes even contradictory meanings within the same play, as the plot

unfolds. The spectacle acts upon the psyche of the audience to generate meaning as it challenges

in some ways and affirms in others the intellectual and empathetic viewpoints of the audience.

The aesthetic affects generate ethical effects in the communal theatrical space. These effects also

do not dissipate simply when one leaves the theater. The intellectual and ethical contradictions

continue to work on the individual psyche even after no longer sharing the theatrical space. This

is very important specifically for Giraldi Cinzio who was actively staging his plays. Wohl says

that regardless of Aristotle's specific precepts, tragedy still generates new sentiments and new

frameworks for contemplating ideological issues. Giraldi Cinzio's engagement with important

societal debates in his content allows him to project a new framework for consideration. The

rules of decorum deny the possibility of a woman behaving the way that Orbecche does, not just

onstage but in life as well. Giraldi Cinzio is able to fashion a narrative that produces a character

like Orbecche who when forced by exigent circumstances can behave the way that she does. She

assumes a masculine-like autonomy that does not compromise or negate her femininity.

Orbecche does not become gendered as male, as so often happens to female Renaissance

characters. The representation of Orbecche and the tragedy as a whole not only affects the

audience's emotions, but it forces reflection on the events that have just played out before their

eyes. The audience navigates possible meanings as they reflect on what they have witnessed and

make ethical choices and observations. The author's intent may be implicit or explicit, but it matters very little without the audience's engagement with the spectacle and the content.

Giraldi Cinzio's treatment of contemporary issues does not end with the *querelle des femmes* but continues with an examination of the nature of kingship. The audience is presented with King Sulmone, the epitome of a bloodthirsty tyrant, whose cruelty gives rise to questions about the role and duty of the sovereign. In this case, personal freedom comes up against the well-being and continuity of the state. The authority of Sulmone as the head of state is viewed in light of the synchresis of his role as father to Orbecche, virtually as *pater familias*. Does this change the way that we view Sulmone seen now as the protector of his family? Does this abrogate or mitigate his responsibility for the actions that he commits? I do not think so. I believe that the audience draws a parallel between the two roles that Sulmone plays by viewing them in tandem; Sulmone is the head of state and the audience are the children of the sovereign. The microcosm of the family that is metaphorically extended to this relationship only further highlights Sulmone's cruelty as the audience swaps places with Orbecche. The meditation on kingship becomes immediately relevant as the audience is forced to transpose its own perspective into the framework of the action that Giraldi Cinzio provides.

The debate on kingship unfolds between Malecche and Sulmone in scenes where they each deliver a monologue on their own and one scene in which they interact with one another. In Act III Scene 1, Malecche appears first after having learned about the secret marriage between Oronte and Orbecche. The old and wise counselor does not seem surprised upon learning this fact, and he reveals that he has taken notice of the furtive looks that have passed between the two youths. In fact, he admits to having proposed the idea of marriage between the two to Sulmone. Sulmone is not interested in any discussion about it, even though Malecche admits that the king

would not find a better husband than Oronte for his daughter. And here we come to the first piece of advice to kings, they should have the judgment and the ability to admit when they are wrong or when their judgment is not fully attuned to the situation:

> MAL: Che com'han recusato una sola volta
> Alcuna cosa, ancor che buona sia
> E d'utile e d'onore a l'esser loro,
> Se bene andar poi vi devesse il regno,
> Per non parere avere errato prima,
> Non vogliono più mai ridursi a farla. (1034-1039)

Malecche's pronouncement goes beyond the situation between Oronte and Orbecche and applies in general to all kings and all decisions. The monologue that Malecche delivers is in the vein of the *mirror of prince* genre. Malecche does not believe himself capable of changing Sulmone's mind; the reason for this is due to a character flaw on the part of Sulmone:

> MAL: Ma l'ostinazion tanto ha potuto
> Che n'è rimasa vinta la ragione
> Et ha sprezzato ogni fedel consiglio
> Così temo ch'ancor l'ira e lo sdegno
> Non faccia in ciò avenir sinistro effetto. (1043-1047)

Sulmone suffers from obstinacy and it prevents him from listening to sound advice. The result then is anger and disdain in his interactions with his subjects. These negative characteristics are completely contrary to humanistic ideals, which above all else, seek to foster *prudenza*. It is not the expectation that Sulmone, or any king, should be all knowing. Rather, he should have the judgment necessary to listen to sound counsel, weigh the options, and choose the right course of action. Malecche's monologue centers on this concept of *prudenza* which he references at the beginning of Act III Scene 1:

> MAL: Io veggio a la giornata avenir cose
> Che mi fan giudicar senza alcun dubbio
> Che poco veggie la prudenza umana. (987-990)

He points to the fact that, due to the nature of Sulmone's character, he has doubts that the king can recognize prudent counsel. Sulmone's predilection for anger and stubbornness exemplify his vanity and lack of prudence.

The next scene, Act III Scene 3, places Malecche face to face with Sulmone who reveals that he already knows everything. Sulmone lambasts the nature of women in addition to the trouble that Orbecche has caused, and he rages against the infidelity of a servant whom he once considered so faithful.[94] Sulmone has already planned to take his revenge on Oronte and the children, but he seeks Malecche's counsel in order to do it. In an inversion of what is expected of a wise ruler, Sulmone seeks Malecche, as the royal advisor, to devise a fitting and cruel punishment for the transgressors:

> SUL: E pigliar teco il modo con ch'io possa
>   Di tal oltraggio far piena vendetta (Giraldi Cinzio 1142-1143).

Malecche takes this opportunity to advise the king toward a rational and clement response to the actions of his daughter. Rationality is foregrounded once again by Malecche's use of *prudenzia* (Giraldi Cinzio 1156) and *prudentemente* (Giraldi Cinzio 1160):

> MAL: I' dico, Sir, poi ch'altro non si puote,
>   Ch'assai meglio sarà de la vendetta
>   Accommodarsi al tempo, a la fortuna,
>   Che la prudenzia altrui qui si conosce.
>   Alcun non è che la seconda sorte
>   Non sappia lietamente sostenere,
>   Ma pochi son che la fortuna aversa
>   Sappiano tolerar prudentemente. (1153-1160)

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[94] Here we can see again the attenuation between the daughter and the citizenry by speaking in a general tone. This narrowing of the semantic field relegates the question on the nature of kingship and connects it to the *querelle des femmes* in order to draw attention to both issues. I stated in the body of the chapter that the microcosm of the royal family stands in place of the general community where Sulmone and Orbecche are at once father and daughter, man and woman, and sovereign and subject. These binaries highlight the inequity as the heart of civic struggles and the attempts by Renaissance authors to balance and rectify these inequities without overstepping too quickly their cultural mores.

Sulmone is unconvinced and blurs the lines of private and public life. He says that he cannot be clement towards a daughter that does not consider him a father, in the sense that, she was willing to disregard any opinion he may have had about her choice of husband. Sulmone also admits that he cannot have a servant who deceives him (1178-1179). He argues for the importance of demonstrating his power and authority. His argument hinges on two points: his own sovereignty having been transgressed and the need for the crown to punish transgressions against their sovereign power. Sulmone's connection of private with public life, his dealing with Orbecche as both a daughter and as a subject, has important ramifications for the audience's understanding of the nature of kingship.

On several occasions, Sulmone has referenced children and the continuation of his familial line: *nepoti* (455) and *figliuoli* (1118). These references are evidence of the fact that Sulmone believes he has direct control over his daughter's reproductive choices. The fact that she has birthed two children from the non-noble Oronte is not just a stain on the dignity of his sovereignty, but it also precludes the continuation of his dynasty. Sulmone has already lost his firstborn son and his hopes are placed in Orbecche, but she has now done the unthinkable by placing her personal wishes above the well-being of the state and the importance of her family line. Sulmone makes this fact very clear to Malecche:

> SUL: La mia figliuola, in cui sola avea posto / Tutta la speme mia, tutto il mio bene"
> (1104-1105).

What is at stake is the concept of the individual's identity in relationship to communal, civic identity. The king has been the only one able to assert and indulge in personal desires, but with changing cultural and economic factors, personal identity is developing as a factor of life. Malecche even points to this in the advice that he gives:

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> MAL: Ch'assai meglio sarà de la vendetta
>   Accommodarsi al tempo, a la fortuna (1154-1155).

This advice extends beyond Sulmone's current situation and says that rulers and fathers alike must adapt to the times. Sulmone cannot accept this fact, believing that everyone would then take advantage of the clemency that he might display. Malecche tries to dispel this fear by employing a reasonable argument constituted of stoic and humanistic ethics. His argument rests on the important ability of knowing how to govern oneself in order to govern others:

> MAL: che un uom Re mostri
>   Ma un animo gentile, un core invitto,
>   Una ferma prudenzia, un pensier saldo
>   Di dominar, più di ciascun, sé stesso;
>   E questo è posseder maggiore impero
>   Che se servisse a un Re l'orto e l'occaso.
>   Com'esse può ch'altri mai regga altrui
>   E regger sé non sappia? (1194-1201)

This is the most critical statement that Malecche has yet made about Sulmone, and it looks forward to the fact that Sulmone will be incapable of embracing Malecche's stoic worldview. Malecche essentially questions his fitness to be the sovereign if he is unable to govern himself (*Com'esse può ch'altri mai regga altrui / E regger sé non sappia?*). The stoicism that is inherent to Malecche's counsel shows how far apart these two really stand on the nature of kingship. Sulmone responds:

> SUL: Dar mi vuoi a veder che 'l bianco è nero
>   E che l'espresso mal mi torna in bene,
>   Malecche? quasi ch'un fanciullo i' fossi
>   E scerner non sapessi il ver dal falso?
>   Tu sei ben fuori di te. (1209-1213)

Sulmone is no fool and he recognizes the way that Malecche is using rhetorical discourse to persuade him to act as Malecche believes appropriate. Sulmone subverts Malecche's intended meaning by asking in the negative if he did not know how to distinguish the truth from lies. He

also accuses Malecche of being out of his mind. To Sulmone, he is acting in accordance with necessary behaviors to preserve the continuity of the state and his house.

This does not deter Malecche from continuing to try to convince him about the importance of individual freedom and its importance to his subjects. If someone cannot marry whomever they love, how can they trust in the commands of the sovereign to work out to their benefit:

> MAL: Ma poscia ch'ella
> Mogliera gli è, non so veder che questo
> Altro ch'error d'amor chiama si posse.
> E se volete incrudelire or tanto
> Contra costui che non sì ferma fede
> La cara vostra figlia ha amato et ama,
> Chi prometter si può bene di voi? (1297-1303)

Sulmone accuses Malecche of giving advice that he would not follow were he king implying that only a fellow king can understand the necessary political expedience. Malecche pushes back on this point explaining that he would not give advice that he would not himself follow. He is making the point that morality is not as mutable as Sulmone is wont to believe and that the authority that is vested in him as king does not allow him to transgress what is right and wrong. Malecche reasons that there is a certain dignity in man and refutes any sense that sovereigns are endowed with divine right to unjustly harm another for asserting their individual desires and passions.

Malecche continues his argument by attempting to prove the worthiness of Oronte, who has been raised from childhood in Sulmone's court. Oronte is born of non-noble blood, although Malecche leaves some room for doubt of this in his aside. Oronte has demonstrated his loyalty and faithfulness in all that he has accomplished for Sulmone. Malecche begins to paint a picture

of an egalitarian society where nobility is not based on one's birth but rather on the virtue of their

spirit:[95]

> MAL: E lasciano or da parte che siam nati
> Da un medesmo principio tutti e uguagli
> N'abbia prodotti qui l'alma natura,
> Se la cieca, fallace, e ria fortuna,
> Ch'a ogni spirto gentil sempre è nemica,
> Riguardo avesse avuto a la virtute,
> Ch'ecceder sola fa in nobiltà altrui,
> Degno era Oronte d'ogni grande impero. (1330-1336)

Malecche goes on to say that Sulmone is well aware of Oronte's worth or he would not have

entrusted so much to him.[96] He makes the final thrust of his argument that again seeks to level

the status of all men:

> MAL: Né perch'Oronte sia povero deve
> Esser men caro a voi, perché l'avere,
> I ben de la fortuna, ch'oggi sono
> D'uno e diman d'un altro, son caduchi
> E si vengono e van qual onda al litto: (Giraldi Cinzio 1354-1357)

The implication is that Sulmone and Oronte's positions could have been reversed. How would

Sulmone want Oronte to treat him if their positions were reversed? Malecche points to the fact

that Sulmone's judgment is clouded by anger, the enemy of reason. It is the single reason why

Sulmone cannot and will not forgive his daughter and one of his most faithful servants. Anger is

causing Sulmone, who has already experienced betrayal by his wife and son, to place that

resentment onto Orbecche undeservedly. Sulmone asks Malecche:

> SUL: Che poss'io forse far d'un colomba Un'aquila?
> O d'un toppo un leon fiero (1378-1379).

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[95] Andreas Capellanus discusses this concept in the *De amore* as well as Dante in the first half of *Convivio IV*.

[96] Cremante (361) cites the *Hecattomithi* in which Sulmone himself declares that despite his low birth, he is "degno figliuolo di ogni gran Re."

Sulmone is saying that he cannot change his nature, no more than can these specific animals.

Malecche tries to convince him that he can change if he were to want to, and he points out that if

Sulmone could just master his anger, it would yield, and he would act justly:

> MAL: Ma se l'ira
> Cederà in parte a la ragione, al giusto,
> Muterete consiglio e voi voi stesso
> Riprenderete di sì stran pensiero (1388-1391)

The binary opposition is typical of the Renaissance debate on kingship. When the sovereign feels

that his authority has been transgressed, the resultant anger chases away reason, which is what

happens to Sulmone. Malecche tries to convince the king with his counsel:

> MAL: Eletto Oronte per marito, merta
> Ch'ad ambedue doniate omai perdono (1400-1401).

He warns that if he continues with his plan for revenge that he will do a great disservice to

himself and to his royal stature. The counselor believes that is far more damaging than what may

come from pardoning Orbecche and Oronte:

> MAL: Che con inesorabil impietade
> Voi ne che macchiate la prudenza vostra
> Et il nome real pel fallir loro:
> Che ciò giunger sarebbe errore a errore,
> Non emendar quel ch'emendar cercate.
> E tengo meglio ch'un riceva ingiuria,
> Che per vendetta far macchi il suo onore; (1494-1500)

Malecche's fault perhaps is that he believes that Sulmone can be counseled, that he is reasonable.

The end of Malecche's prolix argument sounds as if it were removed directly from one of

Seneca's ethical treatises.[97] Malecche is properly delivering a thesis on humanistic ethics:

> MAL: Ma se pur l'ira un uom prudente assale
> (Che non è in noi frenar gli impeti primi),
> Sì ch'egli il meglio suo da sé non vegga,
> Tosto che gli si fa vedere il giusto,

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[97] Here I am thinking specifically about the Seneca's *De clementia* and also the *De ira*.

> Apre lo 'ngegno e da sé scaccia l'ira
> E s'io per lunga prova non sapessi
> Quanto sia immensa la virtute vostra
> E quanto volentieri a la ragione
> Vi date in guida, i' non m'avrei giamai
> Preso baldanza di mostrarvi quello
> Che con lungo parlar vi ho dimostrato (1521-15-31)

Malecche is counting on the fact that once the right thing to do is pointed out, the *ingenium* is opened and *ira* is removed. The key here is a prudent man, which Sulmone is not.

Sulmone eventually relents and he feigns listening to the counsel of Malecche. He promises to pardon both Orbecche and Oronte without repercussions. Malecche believes this decree and praises both Sulmone and God for the outcome; although, in his prayer of thanks, Malecche admits that Sulmone's heart:

MAL: sempre è stato dur più d'ogni pietra. (1650)

As soon as Sulmone is alone, however, we see exactly how evil he really is. He has wholly discarded the advice of Malecche calling him *sciocco* (Giraldi Cinzio 1654) and says that,

SUL: Egli è ben d'ogni ingegno in tutto privo (1659).

From his perspective, Malecche is devoid of any *ingenium*. He returns to the inability of the sovereign to suffer any indignity; therefore, he must repay a transgression with another. Drawing on the spirit of Atreus in Seneca's *Thyestes*, he talks himself into committing such atrocities,

SUL: Che temi, animo mio? Che pur paventi?
      Accogli ogni tua forza a la vendetta" (1674-1675).

He asks himself whether the children are innocents, and he concludes that they are the children of a traitor and will therefore suffer the same fate. His justification for his cruelty is that the world needs to see proof of the sovereign's power,

SUL: Questo giorno ci dà degna materia
      Di dimostrare il poter nostro al mondo (1679-1680).

Sulmone crafts the punishment that he will inflict upon Orbecche. The punishment that he plans for her is a worse fate than simply allowing her to die. One thing that he does consider is how he will be regarded after taking these actions:

> SUL: Biasmato ne sarò? Che biasmo puote
> Avere un Re di cosa ch'egli faccia,
> La cui opere tutte sotto il manto
> Real stanno coperte? (1717-1720)

Sulmone reasons that a sovereign has a right to do whatever he pleases because a king's actions are covered by royal privilege. Sulmone has reached a turning point of irredeemability. There is no argument to dissuade him from his course of revenge. He is thoroughly a Machiavellian tyrant who is both willing to lie and use cruelty to accomplish his ends. Sulmone goes on to sadistically murder Oronte and his grandchildren in a bid for revenge to teach the defiant Orbecche a lesson. It is a cruel inversion of Malecche's attempt to offer a moral lesson of princely respectability. Sulmone's lesson is completely devoid of virtue and is carried to the extreme in order to offer a stark contrast to the picture of a humanist prince that Malecche paints.

Giraldi Cinzio caricatures Sulmone in the mode of a tyrant. Malecche represents the moral voice expatiating on an ethical system that draws as much on classical sources as it does on political philosophy. Sulmone, on the other hand, represents the cruel tyrant figure lacking in moral compunction. The stage is the birth of public debate. By dramatizing the debate, the discourse moves out of the purview of the erudite and into the public domain. The confluence of public and private in *Orbecche* allows the audience to extrapolate the debate beyond just the notions of kingship and womanhood. Kingship and womanhood enter into the discourse as egalitarian ideas as Malecche redefines nobility. His definition does not include birth or divine right but rather claims that nobility is an internal ethical quality whereas nobility based on birth is simply an accident of nature. Internal virtue, or ethical character, is egalitarian in the sense that

it is not the domain solely of men. Malecche points to the overall goodness of Orbecche who has committed a small error. Her error, when viewed in light Giraldi Cinzio's portrayal of Selina, only underscores the ridiculousness of Sulmone's treatment of his daughter. A prudent and reasonable audience member should be able to see that there is no equivalence between Selina's actions and Orbecche's.

Conclusion

Giraldi Cinzio's establishes an ethical system of fixed morality that can be deduced when one engages his intellect. What is not fixed is the individual character of man whom Giraldi Cinzio portrays as capable of choosing to be either just or cruel, good or bad. The defining particularity of character is choice; *Orbecche* demonstrates this as free will. The characters in the tragedy all make ethical choices that define their natures but their chacter, but their character is not fixed or innate. Sulmone and Orbecche are confronted both with situations in life and they react. The tragedy dramatizes their ethical conundrums and the audience watches in real time as they work through them. In the process, the spectacle mediates the establishment of the ethical framework between good and bad, political expedience and personal autonomy, and public versus private life.

I have spoken at length about how Giraldi Cinzio's theory of the tragic works to yield a moral lesson for his audience. We have already discussed the particulars of the tragedy and the specific ethical lessons that Giraldi Cinzio is making in *Orbecche*. I would like to conclude by discussing the broader theme of the play, justice. This concept is obviously central to the play; from the very beginning, the audience is introduced to two major distributors of justice from classical mythology, the goddess Nemesis and the Furies. Nemesis' arrival as the first character on the stage sets the tone for the entirety of the play. She is not just a goddess of justice, but she

is the bringer of divine retribution sanctioned and ordained by the gods. Nemesis represents the transgression of a higher authority than that of any other character in the play. She announces that she comes on behalf of Giove, or God the Father, to exact revenge upon Sulmone. She refers to herself as, "indagatrice certa de' fatti loro" (163-164). It is specifically her job to keep track of the deeds and misdeeds of man. Her monologue reassures the audience that none of these escape her judgment despite the fact that at times it seems the wicked may prosper. This is only for a short time in order to give them the opportunity to return to the goodness of God. If the wicked do not adjust their behavior in the allotted time, then they will suffer the judgment and punishment dispensed by Nemesis. One factor that she introduces here is that punishment may pass to the children and other family members of the one who is deserving of punishment.

> NEM: E avien sovente che gli altrui peccati
> Passano insino a' figli et a' nipoti
> E del paterno error portan la pena. (138-140)

This explanation is the key to Giraldi Cinzio's catharsis. I have already stated that Giraldi Cinzio's conception of the tragic is a subject who suffers a penalty too excessive for the crime that was committed. Orbecche suffers a penalty not for the crime that she committed but for the one that Sulmone committed. In murdering his wife and son, regardless of the crime of incest, he has transgressed divine order, because even a king does not have the power of life and death. Orbecche does not revel in the death of her father at the end of the tragedy; in fact, having become overwhelmed by grief, she commits suicide having no remaining family. The modern audience is attuned to equating revenge with catharsis and does not pick up on the importance of this fact. Though Orbecche's revenge may have brought her some consolation, were she to remain alive she would only be validation for continuing the cycle of violence. The audience is meant to remember Nemesis' words and realize that Orbecche's suffering was not due to her

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own sins but those of her father. The undue penalty that she receives, the unfairness of a life cut short and removed from love and family, is truly what is tragic.

The question of justice thus permeates the fabric of the tragedy. It spurs reflection on the seeming unfairness of justice and looks forward to a hope that in the divine there is an eternal justice. It accepts the Christian notion that earthly justice is imperfect and that the just sometimes suffer unduly; it leaves up to the imagination, a justice emanating from the divine that infallibly enraptures and winnows the wicked deserving of punishment from the righteous.[98] In Giraldi Cinzio's ethical framework, man stands at the intersection of the intellectual, the moral, and the divine.

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[98] The balance that exists between Giraldi Cinzio's humanistic predilection to educate in his poetry that meets his religious piety is what puts him on the precipice between his fellow humanists and Counter-Reformation literature. Horne classifies him as a humanist for instance and Ariani and Mastrocola both firmly place him and his writings in the Counter-Reformation. I prefer to see Giraldi Cinzio, especially with *Orbecche*, as a pivot point in light of his educational and classical background. The religious element cannot be denied in Giraldi Cinzio's conceptualization of the tragic, but it is a religion both arrived at and mediated by means of the intellectual values of humanism: reason and prudence.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE (UN)TRAGIC IN SPERONE SPERONI'S *CANACE*

Sperone Speroni, whose life spanned the majority of the Cinquecento, was a philosopher,

essayist, and tragedian. Speroni was born in Padua in 1500 and received a traditional, classical

education in both Greek and Latin. He considered the true goal and the height of education to be

philosophic study and often lamented his literary studies. Born into an aristocratic family, this

afforded him the opportunity to study with the renowned humanist Pietro Pomponazzi.

Pomponazzi played a significant role in Sperone's education and even appears in his dialogues

stating, "I am firmly convinced that the study of the Greek and Latin languages is the reason for

the ignorance (of us moderns)…It is dream and shadow of the true food and intellect which is

philosophy" (Brancaforte 14).[99] Speroni's interests were wide-ranging and he wrote dialogues

concerning the *questione della lingua* and the dignity of women, two principal debates of the

Cinquecento. His primary interest, however, was philosophy, which led him to give up a

promising career at the University of Padua to continue his study of philosophy with

Pomponazzi. Speroni was a great admirer of Plato as well as Aristotle whose teachings he

became acquainted with under Pomponazzi's tutelage.

Pietro Pomponazzi was a significant figure in Speroni's educational formation, and it is

worth discussing one of his more controversial, theoretical assertions while trying to elucidate

Speroni's tragic conceptualization. Pomponazzi, in later life, came under the scrutiny of the

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[99] The translation is Brancaforte's but it is taken from Pozzi's critical edition p. 621.

Church due to his controversial theory on the immortality of the soul. Taking his point of departure from the difference of opinion between Plato and Aristotle, he reasoned that the immortality of the soul is unknowable by reason alone. Initially his writings were deemed heretical and he was denounced by the Holy Inquisition, but Pomponazzi was saved through the intervention of Cardinal Pietro Bembo who argued for the relative harmlessness of his ideas. Sperone Speroni, a friend to both men, too would exert considerable effort in conjunction with Bembo to protect his mentor. Pope Leo X and the Church did not declare Pomponazzi a heretic since he publicly declared his Catholic faith at the urging of Bembo and Speroni. The true reason was, in reality, that Pomponazzi never denied the immortality of the soul only that it was knowable through reason alone. The acceptance of the authority of Scripture is beyond the purview of reason. Speroni's interests lay at the intersection of the rhetorical and the philosophical. An accomplished essayist, he was quite capable of arguing two sides of any debate even when they ran counter to his arguments in previous dialogues. In fact, Teodoro Katinis points out that it is difficult to separate Speroni the rhetorician from Speroni the philosopher; and when Speroni must himself decide, he more often than not chooses rhetoric over philosophy.

> Remarkably, this defense often addresses the ancient sophists and their ideas about language, communication and truth as models for his time, while his criticism of Plato's dialogues against sophists shows that when rhetoric and philosophy are incompatible, Speroni chooses the first, even in its most controversial form. (Katinis 38)

I cite the aforementioned quote to explain Speroni's hierarchical understanding of various technical skills. Philosophy stands above all other fields of learning and intellectual endeavors, but directly beneath are both poetry and rhetoric, which Speroni considers equivalent *technē*. The difference between poetry and rhetoric stands in that poetry is meant to delight and rhetoric to persuade. On the surface it would seem that Speroni intends that his tragedy *Canace* may have

no specific moral message. This is both true and false. *Canace* does not contain the explicit

moral messaging that we see in Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*. As an essayist, he is consciously

aware of the genre and the audience. I have already shown the intense interest in genre definition

during the early and middle Cinquecento, and Speroni composes *Canace* based on his

formulation of the utility of each genre. Although *Canace* is the sole tragedy that Speroni writes,

I believe he intends it to be a nexus in which philosophy, rhetoric, and poetry meet. It is

interesting to note what Mastrocola says:

> Speroni di sicuro non scrive la sua tragedia per il teatro. Per lui, "filosofo" e allievo
> del Pomponazzi, teorico della lingua e retorica, il genere tragico ha un interesse piuttosto
> filosofico-teorico: scrivere una tragedia è probabilmente un'esercitazione pratica
> all'interno di un'opera più vasta di teoria poetica; per questo, più che rappresentazioni o
> pubblicazioni, a lui interessano le letture pubbliche e i commenti e le discussioni teoriche
> che possono nascere intorno, in una cerchia strettamente accademica. (Mastrocola 187-
> 188)

Leaving aside for the moment Speroni's intention to stage *Canace*, Mastrocola's comment shows

the philosophical and theoretical concerns inherent in Speroni's tragic composition. In the words

of Brancaforte, "Stoicism is pervasive in *Canace*," a fact which must be taken into account in

order to unpack meaning in the tragedy. Speroni positions his philosophical leanings as a

fulcrum which seem to cloud the identification of the tragic hero. These leanings also give rise to

more metaphysical questions about the nature and judgment of human character in the face of

awareness of wrongdoing. Philosophical discourse is thus interwoven into the fabric of *Canace*

and I intend to elucidate the intersection of philosophy and poetics. Maria Soro offers this ahout

the conjunction of philosophy, rhetoric, and poetics within Speroni's work:

> La stesura della *Canace* fu preceduta da una serie di studi di Aristotele, soprattutto della
> *Retorica* e della *Poetica*; infatti, scrivere una tragedia significa per lo Speroni innanzitutto
> mettere in pratica i suoi interessi filosofico-teoretici. Il teatro di Seneca non è per lui (come,
> del resto, per il Giraldi) l'unica fonte d'ispirazione per quanto riguarda la concezione del
> tragico. (Soro 35)

Canace is written in 1542 and diverges topically from its predecessors, *Sofonisba* and *Orbecche*. Trissino's *Sofonisba* takes its subject matter from an historical source and Giraldi Cinzio draws on his own novella for the plot of *Orbecche*. Speroni turns to mythology for inspiration for *Canace* and the two main sources are Ovid's *Heroides* XI and Virgil's *Aeneid* I. The basis of the action of the play is sparked by the goddess Venus' desire for revenge against King Eolo, the god of the winds, who aroused storms that blocked her son Aeneas' arrival in Italy. Venus decides to enact her revenge in the usual way, by amorous means. Venus speaks an incomplete monologue in the prologue of the play which does not state her specific plan of revenge. Rather, she gives an incomplete discourse to those with reason on the nature of power. The action then does not immediately start in the first act, because we have a strange scene in which the newly born and recently deceased infant of Macareo and Canace speaks about the action of the play that is to unfold.[100] After the shade has departed the stage, the action begins with Eolo and Consigliero. Eolo is excited to celebrate the eighteenth birthday of his twin children, and Consigliero warns him that his jubilation may be excessive. Queen Deiopeia soon appears onstage with Cameriera but her attitude is significantly more somber as she recounts a dream in which Venus takes her revenge and she tells Cameriera she is worried that it may presage events to come. The audience soon confirms Deiopeia's prophetic suspicions as they are introduced to Macareo, Canace, and Nutrice, who are all preoccupied for various reasons. Macareo laments the grave incestuous error that he has committed with his sister and he explains his lack of control or choice in the matter. Canace too laments what she has done but is convinced to remain calm by Nutrice due to the imminent birth of her child. Canace soon gives

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[100] This appearance by the infant will be a major source of contention in the criticism of *Canace* which I will soon address.

birth and plan is devised to conceal the child and quit him safely from the palace. The plan, of course, does not proceed as it should. Nutrice is discovered with a basket of flowers which are supposed to be an offering to the goddess, Juno. Eolo, wanting to inspect the gift which represents his daughter's piety, quickly discovers the newly born child. He proceeds to coerce the information from Nutrice. Eolo's anger is terrible as has been feared by almost all of the protagonists. He immediately passes judgment on his children and Nutrice. He offers Canace the choice of how she will kill herself either by dagger or poison. Deiopeia fervently appeals to Eolo through rhetoric and reason by listing others who have committed similar crimes as those of Macareo and Canace. Eolo is unmoved and we, along with Macareo, learn of Canace's death by the reporting of Ministro. This same minister delivers a message also to Eolo who at the last-minute regrets his actions and reverses his decree against Macareo. The news arrives too late and the tragedy ends with the death of not only Canace but also Macareo and Deiopeia.

The tragedy is incomplete; the prologue ends abruptly, and it is missing a majority of the choral interludes. *Canace* was originally read before the Accademia degli Infiammati and was not scheduled for performance until 1542, but the untimely death of its principal director caused the performance to be canceled. It would not be performed until many years later in 1561 in Rome. *Canace* is written, structurally at least, in the Greek style, that is to say, it is not divided into acts which is the norm in Senecan and later Giraldian tragedy. The current division into acts comes from a reprinting in 1597 (Soro 37). Speroni's tragedy comes on the immediate heels of Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*; there is only one year between their publications. According to Paola Mastrocola, the rivalry between Speroni and Giraldi Cinzio begins as soon as *Canace* begins to circulate in literary circles (188). Not long after the composition of *Canace,* an anonymous dialogue was written as a judgment criticizing both the author and work. Many other polemics

would arise in judgment and defense of *Canace* but the *Giuditio* stands out as the most influential. Authorship of the *Giuditio* has always been somewhat murky; it was originally attributed to Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. The current accepted author of the *Giuditio* is Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio.[101] Mastrocola identifies a manuscript tradition of the *Giuditio* which date to 1543 but is not published until 1550; it takes issue with several key formal and thematic aspects of *Canace*. Although *Canace* only receives one performance and fewer reprints than Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*, it has a profound impact on the conceptualization of the tragic in the second half of the Cinquecento.

The *Giuditio* takes place in two phases. The first is in the Lyceum among a gathering of students and their master. The students lay out a series of arguments challenging their master's assertion that *Canace* does not make for good tragedy. The primary arguments are four in total. It is important to address the substance of the *Giuditio* and subsequently Speroni's defense which unfolds in his incomplete *Apologia* and later his *Lezioni in difesa di Canace*, because Speroni did not compose a theoretical treatise as did Trissino and Giraldi Cinzio. Speroni grants us access to his theoretical conceptualization of the tragic by his response to the criticisms and accusations of our previous author. It will first be important to enumerate and discuss the primary concerns of the *Giuditio* before expounding upon my own reading of *Canace*.

As I stated above the criticisms are four in total:

1. The theme of *Canace* can never be considered tragic.

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[101] It is not necessary to discuss here the attribution of the authorship of the *Giuditio* which Christine Roaf has more than adequately demonstrated, see her "A Sixteenth-Century *Anonimo*: The Author of the *Giuditio Sopra La Tragedia Di Canace Et Macareo*." For the purpose of this discussion, I will rely on her definitive essay which argues for likely authorship by the Ferraran Giraldi Cinzio.

2. The characters of *Canace* are wholly wicked and therefore cannot arouse pity and fear.

3. *Canace* violates the principle of verisimilitude.

4. The tragedy does not use the accepted and prescribed metrics of Italian Renaissance tragedy.[102]

I intend to summarize briefly each point briefly before beginning my analysis. The point, therefore, is to clarify points of contention and intersection between Giraldian and Speronian poetics.

The first point of controversy surrounds the tragicity of the plot of *Canace* and its theme of incest. The master in the *Giuditio* takes issue with this theme because he does not believe that a moral lesson can possibly come from an imitation of such a wicked action carried out by wicked characters. The evidence that he supplies is that Solon in giving laws to the Athenians did not even mention certain crimes so as not to put them into the minds of the citizenry. The master asks what the author is trying to teach the audience. What is really at stake is the educative function of poetry. We see that, in Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*, rhetoric is used for explicit moralizing on contemporary issues. Sperone Speroni, however, is differently attuned to the functions of rhetoric and poetry, especially definitions of genre, and he opts to write a more moving tragedy. *Canace* is not an exploration of the theme of incest but rather an exploration of the theme of love. Speroni makes subtle comment throughout the tragedy without utilizing the excessively wordy moral pronouncements brought forth in Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*. Speroni defends himself, perhaps shockingly to his readers, by stating that both natural and human laws

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[102] I have listed here Brancaforte's summary of the critical points of the *Giuditio*. Although there many points addressed in Giraldi Cinzio's criticism, these are the ones given the most weight.

prohibit parricide and matricide, but only human laws prohibit incest.[103] Also, he wants us to consider that the incest theme is not without precedent in the literary canon.

The second criticism deals with the absolute wickedness of the characters, particularly Macareo and Canace. The master criticizes *Canace's* author for violating what Aristotle teaches us regarding character. Briefly let us remember that Aristotle prescribes characters of moderate virtue. They cannot be wholly good because this only elicits extreme pity when their fortune changes from good to bad. They also cannot be wholly bad because this only arouses the feeling that they should receive their due penalty. It is only by way of moderate characters that the audience may be moved to pity and fear thus leading to catharsis which is the end goal of tragedy. The master's point is that Macareo and Canace fall into the second category and thus deserve their due penalty.

The third criticism is an attack on Speroni's disregard of verisimilitude. This attack is primarily aimed at the infant who narrates the *antefatto* of the play. Macareo's and Canace's newly born and deceased son appears to us as a shade from the underworld. He begins to narrate the course of events that happened immediately before and immediately after his death. The master's principal concern is how could this infant have any knowledge of events. There are two problems with the infant's knowledge: the first is that he was simply not present for the events which he narrates, and second, as a child he could not comprehend what was going on around him. To complicate matters is the *istrione* who would have recited these verses at the opening of the tragedy would, of course, be an adult. There are several accusations of violations of verisimilitude including the serious violation of Canace giving birth onstage. The master reasons

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[103] See Roaf (1982), 229, for Speroni's original comment and Brancaforte (2013), 25, for his English translation.

that no woman would expose herself in such a way before an audience and certainly not a princess.[104] The concern being that imitating birth is more befitting comedy rather than tragedy.

Lastly, Brancaforte's schema mentions the complaint about the "*ornatus*" of language which appears throughout the tragedy. *Canace* is rather unique, among other respects, for its metrical and rhetorical style. Beginning with Trissino, who established the versification standard for the majority of Italian Renaissance tragedy, the metrical standard was the hendecasyllabic *versi sciolti*. Speroni, however, chooses to compose *Canace* in a combination of meters that primarily include *settenari* and *endecasillabi* but also *quinari*. He also uses an irregular rhyme pattern which was disconcerting to a learned public, not to mention many theorists, who were accustomed to strict metrical rules regarding poetry. Speroni justifies his stylistic choices by recalling Dante's theoretical writing on language, *De vulgari eloquentia*.

I have delineated the concerns that Brancaforte identifies as the primary complaints of the *Giuditio*. My goal has been to address aspects of Speroni's poetics in light of the fact that he does not offer us with a theoretical framework in order to critique *Canace*. I have also tried to highlight and situate Speroni's theoretical divergences from those of Giraldi Cinzio, the other major tragedian and theorist of the same time period. These distinctions are important because of the debates that *Canace* sparked among other theorists and authors. I have only presented aspects of the debate that have unfolded between Giraldi Cinzio and Speroni, but I must point out that Speronian controversies affected tragic composition for the remainder of the Cinquecento. In the

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[104] This argument blurs the lines, according to Brancaforte, between the theory of composition of the tragedy and its representation. It begs consideration of whether the tragedy was intended to be read rather than seen.

remainder of this chapter, I will address these points adding my own analysis to gain a better understanding of Speroni's conceptualization of the tragic.[105]

I would like to begin by discovering the formal and structural elements of the tragedy. The first and probably most important thing that we notice is the metrical schema which differs greatly from the previous tragedies that I have examined in this study. Sperone Speroni dispenses with the *versi sciolti,* the traditional metrical system in *Canace*. Both Giovanni Rucellai and Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio make use of *versi sciolti* in their respective tragedies, but Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici in his *Dido in Cartagine* attempts to approximate the hexameter verses of the classical epic. Speroni makes use of a variety of metrical schemas including a variety of *quinari, settenari*, and *endecasillabi* with an irregular rhyming pattern.[106] Why the departure from the accepted standard? He first bases his decision on Dante's pronouncement in the *De vulgari eloquentia* in which he prefers *endecasillabi* but admits the ancillary function of the *settenari* and even the *quinari*. Mario Santagostini writes, "…nel *De vulgari eloquentia* tratta dell'endecasillabo, e 'lo preferisce agli altri versi, ammettendo come subordinati all'endecasillabo il settinario e il quinario, ma respingendo i versi pari: è il gusto aristocratico che respinge il metro parisillabo più facile e popolare'" (Santagostini 73).[107] In Dante's view the three meters work in tandem just as Speroni makes use of them in *Canace*.

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[105] Gaining a better understanding of Speroni's stylistic and theoretical choices is a somewhat difficult undertaking not only because he writes only one tragedy but also because that tragedy is incomplete. The task requires an analysis of the text along with Giraldi Cinzio's *Giuditio* and Speroni's positioning and defense after the fact.

[106] It is important to note Cremante's quantifying the number of varying metrical lines and their percentage of the total. Cremante records 1496 verses in *settenari* (72.3%), 566 verses in *endecasillabi* (27.3%), and 7 verses in *quinary* (0.3%).

[107] Santagositini is quoting Fubini, 120.

Trissino established the *endecasillabo* as the primary meter of tragedy because it most approximated human speech just as iambic trimeter did for the ancient Greeks. Trissino also used non-rhyming verse, *versi sciolti*, feeling that it obeyed the rule of verisimilitude more as he deemed it unlikely that characters would speak in rhyme. Santagostini writes, "Difatto, l'endecasillabo è l'unico verso che si presta a essere usato, senza limitazione di rima o di strutture strofiche" (Santagostini 86). Due to their variable nature hendecasyllabic *versi sciolti* freed the poet from having to worry so much about the rhyming scheme and he could pay more attention to the rhetorical presentation of the dialogue.[108] This allowed for the verbosity of Italian Renaissance tragedies, which were sometimes double or even triple, the length of their classical counterparts. We have already seen the effect to which Giraldi Cinzio uses this versification in Malecche's character who is able to pronounce explicit moral judgments. We have also seen Sofonisba's rhetorical skills demonstrated in her imprecations to Massinissa. There is a great amount of rhetorical freedom and versatility in the *versi sciolti*. Again, Santagostini writes, "Data la sua duttilità, l'endecasillabo sciolto si presta a numerosi toni: dall'ironica sottigliezza alla grave solennità" (Santagostini 86). Yet even with the versatility of the *endecasillabi*, Speroni decides on a different course.

Sperone Speroni was an accomplished rhetorician and it is due to this fact that he is capable and decides to play with his rhetorical style in *Canace*. The equation of rhetoric and poetry in Speroni's hierarchy allows us to glimpse how he intends to give voice to his characters. In the blending of these two arts, Speroni develops a tragic style that not only persuades but also pleases. Up until this point tragic style had employed rhetorical tropes in ways that attempted to teach the audience through verbose speeches and logical arguments. Speroni's vision of tragic

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[108] In this case, I am only speaking about the tragedians.

style relies not on the logical and the reasonable. What verisimilitude is there in characters experiencing anguish and grief to speak in such logical argumentation? Speroni seeks to create a tragic style that embodies and encapsulates both human suffering and one's attempt to reason through it. His interest in this concept is quite clear in his study of both Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. He wants to give a sense of the emotion that the character feels. Florence Malhomme characterizes it thusly, "Speroni développe une véritable théorie de la *mimèsis* oratoire, dans laquelle les paroles de l'orateur doivent littéralement imiter les concepts et les affects qu'elles contiennent" (Malhomme 176). He wants us to properly feel the anguish and the array of other emotions via the words themselves. The rapid sequence of *settenari* allow a more clipped style of speech used to express states of heightened emotion. Speroni then intersperses *endecasillabi* in order to provide the audience with background information, such as narrating the *antefatto* or events offstage, and explanations. The attenuation of the critical distance between sound, word, and feeling is meant to more thoroughly affect the audience than the calculated wordy reasoning of Speroni's predecessors. The word acts as a mediation between the feelings and the action represented; it is therefore equally important that each character's diction does not just relate a series of moral lessons or approximate feeling sublimated by lofty rhetoric. Diction and language too must imitate the sentiment affected in the anima of the characters onstage in order to properly be verisimilar. Malhomme concludes:

> Aussi bien peut-on conclure que la conception spéronienne, qui accorde une place aussi centrale qu'originale au principe d'imitation dans sa théorie de l'art oratoire, est de toute evidence fortement marquée par la relecture de la *Poétique*. La valorization considérable du principe de *mimèsis* y apparait comme l'instrument du rapprochement entre rhétorique et poétique, et plus largement encore, de leur insertion dans la question aristotélienne de l'art. (Malhomme 177)

Speroni uses these two meters to good effect by allowing the *settenari* to give a hurried and almost frenetic quality to the speech of several characters. These *settenari* often crescendo into a

hendecasyllabic verse that seems to signal an emotional pause between images.[109] This is the first use of *endecasillabi*; the second usage is in the narration of past events or those which have taken place offstage. Let's examine a few examples of the first type. The first example that I would like to address is our first meeting of Deiopeia. Cameriera is helping Deiopeia get ready for the day and notices the grief written across her face and her chest. She asks her mistress to entrust her cares to her.

> DEI: Ben pòi sicuramente
> Spaziare a tua voglia
> Per entro i miei secreti
> Tu, la cui fede ha seco ambe le chiavi
> Onde si serra et apre
> L'arbitrio del mio core.
> Veramente io non sento
> Pena che mi tormenti,
> Ma gir mi fa sospesa
> Novella vision che tira e piega
> A sé mia fantasia:
> Onde io dipingo il volto
> Di quel pensier che tu per doglia hai colto. (374-386)

These twelve verses include nine *settenari* and three *endecasillabi*. Deiopeia has not yet announced what troubles her, but the pace of her speech in couplets and tercets of *settenari* linked by enjambment gives the audience the sense of urgency that she surely feels from her dream. The crescendo of the *endecasillabi* give her a moment to punctuate her discourse with important facts as well as to allow her to breathe. The "weight" of the *endecasillabi* act as

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[109] Cremante, 454, offers, "Attraverso l'eccezionale dilatazione dello strumento dell'*enjambement* (oltreché della rima), la misura più breve e cantabile del settenario, quasi medio armonico tra l'endecasillabo ed il quinario, tende ad assumere, tende ad assumere, come è stato osservato,

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« le caratteristiche ritmiche delle altre due misure metriche, ora prolun–gandosi oltre sé stesso sull'inarcatura, ora spezzandosi (ma piir raramente) al proprio interno in sottounità prosodiche virtuali ma ben rinterzate tra cesure, pause e clausole fonico-ritmiche. »

punctuational emphasis separating her delineating "sets" of figurative language. Deiopeia tends

to speak in this figurative, metaphorical style, and the large amount of *settenari*, which quicken

her speech, allows us to glimpse her worry that has not yet manifested. She is only speaking of a

vision that has unsettled her and she has no way of knowing if it is real or simply a dream. The

use of *endecasillabi* here would give the impression of lamentation, which she does not yet have

cause to feel. In fact, she manages to recount her dream in *settenari* only slightly interspersed

with *endecasillabi*.

> DEI: Già l'aurora rendea
> Alle cose mortali
> Quella istessa figura
> Che sotto le sue ali
> Copre la notte oscura,
> Quando, dopo una mia lunga vigilia,
> Mi vinse il sonno, il quale
> Voglia Iddio che non sia vera novella
> D'alcun futuro male. (387-395)

We see how even when beginning to narrate her vision, Deiopeia's *settenari* have a melodic and

musical quality. These *settenari* almost all contain figures and not much narration.[110] The

settenari are not necessarily actions advancing the narrative but rather oneiric, metaphorical

images of an otherworldly nature punctuated by reality in *endecasillabi*. Deiopeia's words

conjure the image of the goddess of the dawn spreading her wings and banishing the darkness.

Yet Speroni brings us back to reality *vigilia* (392) and *sonno* (393) to highlight the passage of

time and bridge the world of dreamlike vision with reality. Ariani has this to say:

> Il rifiuto dell'endecasillabo (usato dal Giraldi come strumento di severa esplicazione dei concetti) dissolve ogni chiarezza di dibattito etico-ideologico in un cantabile continuato, volteggiante e incapace di arrestarsi nella sosta meditativa dello scavo, della complicazione, del pensiero incarnato in gesti e situazioni uniche in quanto dense di significati. (Ariani 182)

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[110] What I mean by figures here is that the beauty of Speroni's language allows us to visualize the specific imagery.

Ariani makes it clear that it is particularly due to the form that Speroni does not present a moralistic tragedy weighted down by rhetorical discourse. He dissolves this structure and moves closer to a tragic language that gives voice to internal sentiment. *Canace* represents a move in tragic production away from being a mouthpiece of a particular author from which the pleasure of the poetry is intellectualized. Speroni creates a tragic discourse that persuades through the pleasure of emotional affectation. The audience is taught not on an overtly intellectual level but rather on a subtle manipulation of emotions.[111]

Speroni is no less capable in handling Macareo's dialogue when he appears onstage with Famiglio. Macareo's diction in recounting the error that he has committed, however, does not give us the same frenetic sense that we saw in Deiopeia's. Macareo's speech is peppered with more *endecasillabi* slowing down his monologue and emphasizing his critical error. Again the "weightiness" here of the *endecasillabi* gives the sense of lamentation in verses 605-658. Macareo launches into an encomium of his sister Canace describing her beauty and virtue, but in opposition to this vision, are the *endecasillabi* that describe his fault in loving his sister.

> MAC: Questo dogno materno,
> Se come è buon pittore
> Del mio fallo amoroso, onde io divenni
> Di mia sorella sposo,
> Così della vendetta minacciata
> Fosse vero profeta, io crederei
> Che i dì della mia vita
> Pochi fossero e rei.
> Ma quel vero intelletto che dal cielo
> Alla mente materna
> Mostra in sogno il mio error sotto alcun velo,
> Sa ben che 'l mio peccato,
> Non malizia mortale,

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[111] Cremante says of this subtle interplay, "Se è vero, si legge nelle Lezioni sopra i personaggi, che <la condizion principale che dee aver la tragedia consiste precisamente nel <mover gli affetti>, la catarsi speroniana acquista pertanto una motivazione che potremmo definire sentimentale o passionale" (Cremante 452).

Ma fu celeste forza
Che ogni nostra virtù vince et ammoÍza.
Amo infinitamente e volentieri
Le bellezze, i costumi e le virtuti
Di mia sorella e parmi
Che indegnamente degno
Saria di sentimento e di ragione
Chi sì rare ecellenze non amasse
Ovunque ei le trovasse.
Ma degnamente indegno
Sarei d'esser mai nato,
Se con vile intenzione
E disonesto fine
Mosso fossi ad amare
Le sue doti divine.
Vili seco, io nol nego,
E disoneste fur le opere mie;
Ma n'ebbi quel che non pur non sperai,
Ma mai non disiai.
Spinse allor le mie membra
Non propria elezione,
Ma uno impeto fatal che intorno al core
Mi s'avolse in quel punto e in vece d'alma
Mosse il mio corpo frale
E sforzollo a'ffar cosa
Orribile a chi l'ode,
A chi la fe' odiosa.
Da quel tempo io son visso
Vile e grave a me.stesso e se non fosse
Che io son caro a colei che mi è sì cara,
Già con la propria mano
Arei di vita scosse
Queste mie membra ardite e scelerate.
Or vivo e con l'empiezza
Del mio grave peccato,
Che spense il nome e la ragion fraterna,
Do cagione a mio padre
Di divenir spietato,
Crudelmente extinguendo
Col sangue de' suoi figli
La sua pietà paterna. (605-658)

Verses 607, 615, 639, 646, and 650 taken in isolation alone can give you a sense of Macareo's

psychological state. The intervening verses in this case constitute a plaintive yet melic

psychologization of the anguish and love that Macareo feels which at once both say nothing and say everything. The consistent allusion to the body and its parts represents the eroticization of illicit love that is mediated by an acute awareness that it is illicit. In effect, Macareo reasons away his actions in a self-sustained monologue presented on the basis of antithetical arguments. It is as if he goes back and forth with himself why what he is doing is wrong, but he cannot avoid the allure that he feels for Canace.

Finally, I would like to examine Canace's manner of speaking. Canace's lamentations and complaints mirror those of her brother, but unlike the mixture of *settenari* and *endecasillabi* that are voiced by Macareo, she speaks almost entirely in *settenari* in her first exchange. Her opening monologue is an imprecation to Juno to end the sorrow that she feels on account of her guilt. Really this prayer has no stated outcome or real semantic meaning as it devolves from an official prayer into an almost mad-like state of grief. Canace switches from addressing Juno mid-prayer to addressing her unborn son. The entirety of this monologue, verses 761-800, speak to Canace's state of mind. In thirty-nine verses, only three are *endecasillabi*: l.767, l.772, and l.786. The remaining thirty-six verses are *settenari*. The overall effect of Canace's frenetic and clipped speech, highlighted by enjambment, adds to her characterization by evincing her state of mind. This effect is also not just limited to Canace. When Nutrice and Canace appear onstage together, the Nurse's frequency of *settenari* matches that of Canace also increasing the overall rapidity of the dialogue.

CAN: O Giunone Lucina,
      Dea de' parti, dea
      De' nascenti mortali,
      Finalmente una volta
      Ponga fine a' miei mali
      La tua bontà infinita.
      Certo, e tu il sai, questa infelice salma
      Non è men grave all'alma

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Che al corpo afflitto e stanco.
Con lei ho poco andare
A morirmi d'affanno
O a palesar mia colpa e mia vergogna
E non senza mio danno.
Nasci, figlio infelice
Di più infelice madre;
Tempo è che tu mi lievi
O di vita o d'affanno.
Ma a cui nasci, infelice
Figliuolo mio? a cui nasci?
A cui ti partorisco?
D'augei preda e di cani
Nascer ti veggio, a' pesci
Partorirò, infelice,
Le tue membra innocenti.
Me il veleno o il ferro
Aspetta, se la vista Paurosa
Del fiero padre armato
Di minaccie e di sdegno
Non mi basta a morire.
O materna pietade,
Che lo strazio futuro
Del mio parto innocente
Mi fai parer presente,
O conscienzia degna,
Che ognor mordi e traffiggi
L'anime scelerate: (761-796)

The general negative conclusion both in the *Giuditio* and on the part of later critics stems from a strongly held belief that the appropriate metrical system for tragedy should be *endecasillabi* in *versi sciolti*. What the author of the *Giuditio*, Giraldi Cinzio, fails to take into account is the role that *settenari* had always played in the history of Italian literature. Also, Giraldi Cinzio, who was known for having called for the need to update Aristotelian precepts to render them *approntate* for a modern audience, is unwilling to accept Speroni's innovations. Speroni never denies the importance of *endecasillabi*, but he manages to intersperse *settenari* along with *endecasillabi* to enhance the characterization of the speakers in his tragedy.

He does not change the importance of diction and rhetoric as it appeared in his predecessors, instead, he changes the means by which the audience experiences the message of the play. The message is meant to be felt rather than explicated by intellectualized rhetoric and it marks a clear and distinct new direction of tragic discourse.

As I stated, structurally *Canace* follows the Greek tradition and is not separated into the five-act division prescribed by Horace and followed assiduously by Giraldi Cinzio. Rather it has a total of twenty-nine individual scenes. The five-act division seen in modern re-printings of the tragedy was actually added in the 1590's after the fact.[112] Speroni originally intended the tragedy to flow in this manner in which the stage was never empty or devoid of characters. The five-act division seen in all of Giraldi Cinzio's tragedies depicts scenes of action tied to specific moral messaging and rhetorical displays. *Canace*'s very structure detaches it from the temporal experience of one scene followed by another, and renders the experience, whether seen or read, as one long interconnected scene of events. The effect is almost dreamlike as characters appear on and offstage, and the tension of their emotions blends into a unified voice of anxiety that is inseparable one from the other. This effect is enhanced by two elements of the tragedy: the first is the lack of choruses due to its unfinished nature, and the second is dream states that appear in the play.[113]

Sperone Speroni left *Canace* unfinished in that the prologue spoken by Venus is incomplete and the majority of the choruses is lacking. What we cannot tell about the chorus is if they would have been fully integrated into the action of the tragedy or if there would have been choral interludes between major scenes. If we will remember, Giraldi Cinzio diminished the role

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[112] Elio Brancaforte's translation follows this five-act version which was printed in 1597.
[113] My classification of dream state here includes the atemporal appearance of the shade in the opening scene in addition to Deiopeia's recounting of her prophetic dreams.

of the chorus and relegated it to musical interludes between acts for the most part. It seems that

Speroni either did not intend to integrate the chorus into the action or had not yet figured out

how.[114] Typically in their choruses, at least in Giraldi Cinzio and later, tragedians were able to

demonstrate mastery of lyric poetry. Perhaps Speroni's difficulty with his chorus' role is due to

the fact that he had already infused beautiful lyric throughout the tragedy.

The atemporality inherent in the tragedy is another structural element that inhibits precise

moralizing by inhibiting the audience's comprehension of time. This first occurs at the opening

of tragedy and the audience/reader encounters the shade of the recently murdered child of

Macareo and Canace. The shade recounts the *antefatto* of the events leading up to his death. The

audience is treated to an early preview of what to expect and confuses the overall temporal

structure of the tragedy.[115] Despite the events only having just occurred, the recently deceased

infant is embodied and personified by a fully matured *istrione*. Ignoring for the moment the

Giuditio's charge against verisimilitude, the *antefatto* narrated thusly creates a sense of memory,

of recalling a long-ago tale. This dreamlike state, almost a fade-in if you will, confuses the

audience's sense of the here and now; it breaks down the narratological structure by decoupling

the temporal aspect and leaving behind only sentiment encapsulated by Speroni's lyrical

language. In fact, much of the action of *Canace* does not take place onstage and is primarily

related second-hand. DiMaria characterizes it in this way, "The spectators can hardly be

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[114] Once the Chorus of Winds does appear, it is too late to be considered an integrated character despite the fact the servant performs the traditional role of messenger reciting offstage events with the chorus asking pertinent questions.

[115] A shade recounting the *antefatto* is not uncommon after Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche*, but what is unique is the child recounting the events to which he would not have been present. The embodiment of the shade by an adult *istrione* literally recalling the memory of these past events creates a disjointed sense of time. The audience is treated to past events narrated by an adult incarnation of the murdered child. The temporal sense created is one of distance as if the action of the play took place long ago and in a faraway place.

apprehensive about a story whose outcome they anticipate and whose drama has already been played out in the past and far away from the auditorium" (*The Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance* 159). DiMaria faults Speroni for following Aristotle's precept that the poet should rely on cheap thrills and scare tactics to arouse pity and fear in the audience. Speroni respects more the close relationship between rhetoric and tragedy that was intrinsic to the ancient Greeks' conceptualization of the tragic. Unlike Giraldi Cinzio who relied on the unknown plot to maintain the audience's attention Speroni relies on the lyric of lamentation to arouse pity and fear so that the audience feels rather than learns the plot development.

Speroni makes use of this technique again when Deiopeia accurately yet surprisingly prophesies the sin of her children and the harm that is to befall her household. Effectively this scene negates the time sense confusing what is to come with what has already happened essentially allowing the audience to see beyond the plot and to focus on characterization, thought, and diction. Again DiMaria states, "Spatial and temporal distance between the occurrence of a tragic act and the reporting of it on stage has the effect of shielding the audience from the immediacy of the horrifying experience and inherently, from a meaningful emotional impact" (*The Italian Tragedy in the Renaissance* 158). The rendering of Aristotle's paradigm on Speroni's part shows active thought in development of the tragic form as the plot is decentralized and the other tragic elements take on greater importance.

To conclude, the atemporality of the oneiric visions in *Canace* results in a less coherent linear narrative, which precludes the perception of an ethical-ideological message. The recounting of events and prophesying the provenance of the royal house's current detrimental situation remove the necessity of the audience members' need to guess at the resulting events or anxiously await them to transpire. The audience rather is free to focus its attention purely on the

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aesthetic sentiment that is uttered in Speroni's ornate language. According to Ariani, it is the use

of the *settenari* in conjunction with the traditionally *endecasillabi* that allows Speroni to dissolve

the ethical-ideological messaging. Speroni resorts to the language of ecstasy and anguish with

the only real action reported via messenger. The tragedy is an envisioning of the human

condition; the suffering of those who know what they should not be doing but who persist in

their erroneous behavior. The oneiric vision of the tragedy coupled with its rhetorical enunciation

render a critical distance between the audience and the action. It is a meditation of sentiment,

furore-amore, in which fear and pity help the audience navigate the psychological inexplicability

of the aforementioned emotional states.

Let's turn our attention now to the characters and characterization, which was another

point of contention in the *Giuditio*. At issue are the personal characters of both Canace and

Macareo whom the Florentine considers to be wholly wicked. The argument turns on the fact

that these two characters are wholly wicked which violates a very clear Aristotelian precept:

characters must be at least of moderate virtue.[116] Aristotle is very clear about the type of

character that is fitting to tragedy. They must be illustrious, they cannot be wholly good but nor

can they be wholly wicked, and their characterization must remain consistent. Renaissance critics

term this the *persona mezzana* or *personaggio mezzano*. Giraldi Cinzio's *Giuditio* lays out the

principal argument of why Canace and Macareo do not meet these parameters by drawing a

comparison with Oedipus and Jocasta in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus likewise commits

incest with his sister and fathers four children with her. The key difference between Oedipus and

Jocasta, and Canace and Macareo, is that Oedipus unknowingly commits his incestuous error

whereas the twins knowingly commit and persist in theirs. The most important element is the

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[116] For reference see Aristotle 1454a.

knowing commission of an error which seems to signal the dissolution of the didactic and moral function of poetry. This is of great concern to Renaissance critics attempting to ascertain whether Canace and Macareo fit the definition of tragic characters. From the ancient Greek perspective of the tragic, what separates Oedipus' unknowing error from Macareo's willful one is the concept of *Fate*.[117] Aristotle does not specifically mention *Fate* in the *Poetics*, but the concept is there when he describes the *peripeteia* of which the most tragic type is to fall from good fortune into bad. It is not a concept that gets taken up by commentators in the Cinquecento; the idea of *Fate* is virtually ignored. Mastrocola writes:

> Ecco dunque che, sotto la lettera della definizione « personaggio mezzano, » troviamo quel discorso sul Fato che abbiamo visto assente nei trattati cinquecenteschi sul tragico. È vero, nessuno o quasi parla espressamente di Fato o Destino o Ananke o Tyche, o, se ne parla, è per fugaci accenni che non arrivano comunque mai a costituire un discorso: sono termini «greci», fanno parte del mondo e della mentalità greca che, come tale, non è passata a noi. (Mastrocola 153-154)

In describing the condition of these lovers who know and lament their situation, Speroni uses language that imbues their love with the inexorable force of *Fate* itself. The two siblings know that what they are doing is wrong, but they are driven by an unseen force which makes them behave the way that they do. The goddess Venus herself is the power behind this force and she proves herself every bit as capable as *Fate* to bring about the downfall of mortal men. Macareo is equally conquered by this divine force. His description of being unable to act otherwise than how he does vividly reinforces the idea that he has no control.

> MAC: Vili seco, io nol nego,
> E disoneste fur le opere mie;
> Ma n'ebbi quel che non pur non sperai,

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[117] The ancient Greeks saw inexorable necessity as the most tragic concept when a minor fault of the character, *Tyche* or *Ananke*, brings about his or her downfall. Oedipus kills his father Laius in an act of *hubris* which leads to the rest of his troubles. Oedipus may have his faults, but he is by no means presented as a wicked or evil character.

> Ma mai non disiai.
> Spinse allor le mie membra
> Non propria elezione,
> Ma uno impeto fatal che intorno al core
> Mi s'avolse in quel punto e in vece d'alma
> Mosse il mio corpo frale
> E sforzollo a'ffar cosa
> Orribile a chi l'ode,
> A chi la fe' odiosa. (633-644)

Speroni's attribution of Macareo's lustful desire of his sister to the power of a divine force has the effect of removing responsibility from Macareo for his actions. A problem in the *Giuditio* is the fact that critics were unable to move beyond this fact as they could not expiate all of Macareo's guilt in his role as seducer no matter how much guilt he expressed.

In terms of the protocols laid forth by Aristotle, it becomes very difficult to see Macareo and Canace as tragic figures, not only after the arguments put forth in the *Giuditio* but even before because they do not undergo two prerequisites to earn the title of tragic characters. The confusion arises when we assume that the only prerequisites of tragedy are the expressions of pity and fear leading to a cathartic end. These sentiments alone do not account for the necessary formal elements of what constitutes tragic. What Macareo and Canace lack in their respective experiences are both *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*; both of these are required under the accepted tragic paradigm. The twins do not undergo a reversal of fortune in the tragedy despite the ending. They spend their time in a constant state of fear and worry that their secret will be discovered. It is a fallacy to assume that their state begins happily simply because they are alive and furthermore changes to an unhappy one. In reality, we are meant to sense their worry and preoccupation from their first introduction onstage. This lack of a reversal of fortune for Macareo and Canace is our first clue that they are not the tragic characters after all.

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The second clue in our determination that Macareo and Canace are not the tragic characters is their lack of experiencing an *anagnorisis*, or recognition. Again, Macareo is fully conscious and aware of what he has done, and he even wishes that he did not harbor these erotic/romantic feelings for his sister, but he never recognizes that he is under Venus' spell or comes to any other significant realization. Likewise, Canace undergoes no particular *anagnorisis*; she laments her crime but is urged to persist in it by Nutrice to protect everyone involved including herself and her yet unborn child. It is a misapprehension on the reader's part thus to assume that Canace and consequently Macareo, or even the shade, are the tragic characters. Perhaps the reader is drawn to this conclusion by way of the title of the work or by the prominence of the twins in the plot. There is no doubt that Macareo and Canace suffer, but I reiterate that suffering alone is not the sole requirement of a tragic character.

The final clue in identifying our tragic hero is actually much easier to notice than the aforementioned clues. Speroni follows in the same tradition of beginning his tragedy *in medias res* and very often, or dare I say always, the tragic hero is introduced straightaway to situate and contextualize the action to come. Yet in *Canace*, the first person to appear onstage is the shade. For the same reasons stated above, the shade lacks all of the qualities to be a tragic character, and his role is to help in narrating the *antefatto*. I argue that Speroni had not quite worked out how to report the background information and that Venus' and the shade's appearance onstage testify to this compositional problem.[118] The first living character who actually appears onstage is Eolo who does in fact exhibit all of the characteristics of a tragic character.

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[118] A fact which is all the more credible when we recall that Venus' monologue in the prologue is left unfinished. Also, let us recall that the choruses are not all intact and speaks to a need for more development of working within the genre.

Eolo begins the play in a state of joy and exuberance at the arrival of the twins eighteenth birthday. His happiness is laid bare to the reader in his opening verses:

> EOL: Giorno fausto, felice,
>   Se del regno e del ciel fossi sbandito,
>   Se nel centro del mondo
>   Tra dei spergiuri
>   Catenato sedessi,
>   Lieto ti vederei,
>   Amerei, loderei, onorerei. (145-151)

His companion in this opening scene, Consigliero, cautions him that the pride he feels for his *children* borders on hubris. This pride is born from the gratitude that Eolo feels toward Juno who helped him attain his wife and consequently his family. In honoring Juno, however, Eolo fails to honor the goddess Venus; this is not to mention that Eolo attempted to hinder her son Aeneas from reaching Italian shores. Eolo decides to pay Consigliero no mind trusting in the one who has given him so much good fortune. He, therefore, continues in his state of happiness. Yet, unknowingly, Eolo describes his own downfall in this first hypothetical period cited above. After Eolo departs, Consigliero reasons that something is amiss with the king's unusual good cheer surrounding his offspring.[119] Brancaforte identifies this as the classical topos of *coniectura animi*, that is to say, using descriptions of physical behavior to diagnose an injured psyche which he argues often precedes some catastrophe (Brancaforte 144 n.31). Consigliero, although left alone at the end of the scene, expresses his worry and he foreshadows the change of fortune that will unfold.

Eolo's reversal of fortune is made clear to the audience in Famiglio's messenger speech which begins in v.1163.[120] Here Famiglio narrates how Nutrice attempts to smuggle out

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[119] The counselor reasons with himself in vv. 305-357.
[120] This corresponds to Act IV Scene 1.

Canace's newborn infant disguised as a gift for the goddess Juno. Eolo wanting to see and extol

the virtue of his daughter for all to see, commands Nutrice to approach with the basket of flowers

underneath which is the child. Inopportunely, the infant cries out revealing immediately to

Deiopeia what she had subconsciously been expecting. Eolo, on the other hand, is taken

completely unaware, as seen by the description of his recognition, "muto dallo stupor" (1239).

He immediately reacts by seizing hold of Nutrice and dragging her into Canace's room to obtain

the truth. After having done so, he decrees the death of Canace and Nutrice sending them poison

and a dagger alike as well as ordering the death of the infant. Upon hearing the news of the death

of his sister, Macareo decides to take his own life. It is here that Eolo undergoes his *anagnorisis*

when he says:

> EOL: Or conosco, ma tardi, che nel caso
> De' miei figli infelici
> Padre né re non fui; onde io dovrei
> Non esser dio né uomo.
> Misero me, che senza altra ragione
> Doveva il mio furore
> Non punir, ma scusare il loro errore.
> Soffrirò che uno sdegno
> Vinca del tutto mia divinitade
> E faccia che io mi scordi
> O non voglia esser padre;
> E non potrò patire
> Che i miei cari gemelli,
> Ingannati d'Amore,
> Non abino in memoria
> D'esser nati fratelli (1881-1896)

Eolo is finally able to see himself beyond just the role of king and of father by being able to feel

compassion and offer forgiveness to his children. The emphasis on his "furore (1886)," almost

madness, is an expression of his lack of self-control. The virtues of *temperanza* and *prudenza* are

lacking within Eolo's psychological make-up, character traits which are important for a man but

even more so for a king/divinity who must dispense justice and judgment fairly. Consigliero reminds the king of this fact:

> CON: Se la vostra prudenzia
> Dianzi, signor, fu vinta dallo sdegno,
> Provedete al presente
> Che 'l dolor non la vinca, onde l'affanno
> Cieda o sia pari al danno. (1897-1901)

In the end, Eolo's recognition of his own fault is too late to save Macareo, and Eolo's tragic reversal of fortune is complete.

What then are the implications of our reordering of the tragic characters? Does our understanding of the ideological message change? Perhaps to state more simply we may ask is there any message in the tragedy? Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche* gave us a meditation on the ends and extremes of power. Speroni's *Canace* does not grant us so clear an ideological moral. The simplicity of the narrative and our comprehension of what is to transpire from the play's opening prevent us from focusing too heavily on the horror of the punishment meted out by Eolo or even the shock of the original crime itself. The tragic structure, inaugurated by Giraldi Cinzio, that of overt moralizing about current social issues, is dissolved into a lyrical expression of sentiment that represents an internalized and psychologized reflection of the self.

> Le scene della Canace sono negate ad una coerenza dialogica che ne assicuri la necessità nell'economia drammatica: lo spessore della trama gestuale e concettuale si assottiglia in un discorso inevitabilmente generico tanto il momento tragico è visto non nella sua sovente pressione icastico-concettuale, ma è allungato e dimediato in una semplicità atteggiata e a volte leziosa, comunque troppo debole per sostenere l'orrore dell'azione agita. (Ariani *Classicismo* 182)

Speroni is very attentive to the literary dictums of his time in that poetry should encapsulate the *dolcezza* and *utilità*. Far from being an overtly moralistic tale, Speroni's *Canace* puts equal weight on both categories, though perhaps slightly more emphasis on pleasure considering his

own views of the role of literature. Malhomme speaks to Speroni's conceptualization of genre

theory and the blending of his two fields of study:

> Après l'imitation, la question du plaisir, tout aussi centrale dans la conception spéronienne de l'art oratoire, est le point où l'on voit se poursuivre la fusion de la théorie rhétorique avec celle de l'art. De fait, c'est par le plaisir, essentiellement, que Speroni définit l'art de persuader : '…la rhétorique n'est pas autre qu'un aimable artifice pour disposer justement et gracieusement les paroles, par lesquelles nous les hommes nous signifions les uns aux autres les concepts,' pose-t-il dans le *Dialogo della rettorica*. Des trois buts de l'orateur – enseigner, plaire, et émouvoir – Speroni fait de la recherche du plaisir le principal le plaisir est 'la vertu du discours ; par laquelle il prend la beauté et la force de persuader celui qui l'écoute.' (Malhomme 177-178)

We have seen how this focus on the pleasurable aspect of poetry manifests itself in the

versification, but it goes beyond that and influences the rhetorical messaging.

It is no coincidence that Speroni ideates Eolo as the tragic character. *Canace* begins and

ends as a meditation on the nature of love. Venus feels spurned by the lack of honor paid to her

and the dishonor that she feels from Eolo's slight against her own son. She sets out to teach the

characters in the tragedy a lesson about the proper nature of love. The inversion of the natural

order of love between Macareo and Canace serves as the catalyst; Eolo is properly the student

and focus of the lesson. Venus' interference is not simply to punish Eolo, although she certainly

does, but rather to test Eolo's love of his children and his family. The audience too is a part of

this lesson. We already are treated to the outcome of the play from the beginning, and we are left

to wonder what is more important, duty to the natural order or duty to the family. The proofs and

the arguments find their way into the dialogue. Both Consigliero and Deiopeia offer examples of

divinities and their children who participate in incestuous relationships. The examples offered

provide Eolo with a path to forgive his children and to move beyond the current predicament.

Eolo, in making his choice, fails on several occasions because he neglects to search his feelings

and to temper them, to flesh out what is more important to him personally which in the end he

realizes is his children and family. The answer is less important than how one gets there in Speroni's tragic conceptualization, which involves Neo platonic self-reflection. The central and core theme animating this text is love and its misplacement; it is misplaced in the sense that Eolo's love for his children seems more a love of his own accomplishment and self-aggrandizement. The twins' love is misplaced in that it is an inversion of the natural order of things. Speroni claims that people often love because they see a reflection of their own value in the other person. This becomes all the more complicated in light of Canace and Macareo being twins and Eolo's exuberant joy towards his children. The love that the twins feel for one another is really the paternal love that both need and want to feel. This is evidenced by the fact that before Eolo exhibits any cruelty, both twins refer to their father as cruel. The audience is brought along this path of self-discovery and is forced to confront their own feelings and choices in light of the denouement. The lesson learned is then able to be carried forth from the theater itself and into the daily lives of the audience. I will end with Malhomme's contextualization of Speroni:

> La poésie est « mensonge, lequel a du vrai, ayant du possible. » Par la fiction et le plaisir supérieur qu'elle procure, le poète est semblable au bouffon, à l'adulateur, à la peinture, au rêve, et semblables balivernes. La poésie n'est pas science, mais fureur céleste. Son écriture est jeu. Le poète, écrit Speroni, "ne vas pas tant à l'intérieur de la chose écrite, qu'il puisse atteindre sa substance ; mais il lui tourne autour, presque en dansant, de telle manière qu'il n'enseigne jamais rien: car qui ne sait pas n'enseigne pas, mais semble savoir et enseigner en devenant semblable au petit enfant, qui saute et danse, et ne sait pas encore marcher. (Malhomme 192)

CHAPTER FIVE

TORQUATO TASSO'S *RE TORRISMONDO* AND THE ENDS OF CINQUENTO TRAGEDY

   The last tragedy that I would like to address in my study is Torquato Tasso's *Re Torrismondo*. Tasso's tragedy represents a polar opposite to where we began this investigation with Trissino and Giraldi Cinzio whose tragedies served specific political and ideological ends. *Re Torrismondo* has been subjected to a number of interpretive readings ranging from the linguistic and compositional (Getto and Scarpati), the historical and political (Carta and Scianatico), and the theoretical (Ariani). The numerous interpretations present the reader with a difficult starting point. Almost all of the aforementioned scholars begin by analyzing Tasso's revision of his original tragic composition, the *Galealto Re di Norvegia*. My own analysis accepts that the dramatic nucleus of the *Galealto* is essentially the same as the *Re Torrismondo*. What differs between these two versions is the poetic language used and Tasso's sustained theoretical engagement with the tragic compositional elements. The two most significant factors which affected Tasso's completion of *Re Torrismondo* are his psychological state upon exiting the Ospedale di Sant'Anna and the ideals of the Counter Reformation. I intend to examine these factors and their involvement in Tasso's tragic (re)composition through the themes of love and friendship, fraud, fate, and hope. Unlike previous tragedians, who played with similar themes to comment on their political and social realities, Tasso's exploration of these themes is a self-conscious, psychologized investigation of the inner psyche. I will argue that through this self-investigation Tasso frees himself and the audience from the inexorability of pre-determination and emphasizes man's free will in light of the structured rigidity of the Counter Reformation.

<u>Historical Background</u>

Tasso was born into an intellectual household; his father Bernardo was a courtier and poet in his own right. Tasso's intellectual formation was a product of court life as he spent time around his father's fellow courtiers both at Urbino and at Venice. Tasso's father had on occasion fallen on hard times; firstly, he lost his land holdings in Salerno when the Salernian prince, Ferrante Sanseverino, fell out of favor with the Spanish government and again when his own poetry was not well received in Venice. Bernardo Tasso desired that his son should enter a more lucrative profession than that of courtier and poet; therefore, he sent young Tasso to Padua to study law. His son did not find a passion for his studies, and he dedicated himself principally to philosophy and poetry. Tasso showed a remarkable ability in poetic composition from an early age, and while still a student, he produced *Rinaldo*, an unfinished epic poem in twelve cantos. Although the work still showed signs of inexperienced stylistics, it won significant acclaim for its author, and Bernardo Tasso allowed his son to enter the service of Cardinal Luigi d'Este at Ferrara. It is at Ferrara where the majority of Tasso's significant literary compositions were written including his early interpretations of poetic theory in the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*. Certain disagreements led Tasso to leave the cardinal's service and he attached himself to the court of his brother, Duke Alfonso II d'Este. The later years that Tasso spent at Ferrara were fraught with various troubles and disagreements that were only made worse by his failing health. Tasso was consigned to the Hospital of Sant'Anna in 1579 where he spent seven years for what was believed by Duke Alfonso II to be insanity. With his status suffering and physical condition changing, many scholars see that there are two marked periods of his literary composition: the works composed before his consignment to the Hospital of Sant'Anna, which are characterized

by a hopeful and visionary poetic style, and those during and after his hospitalization, which register a strong sense of solemnity and psychologization.[121]

<u>Narrative Summary</u>

Re Torrismondo opens with the Princess of Norway, Alvida, and her Nutrice who are discussing Alvida's discontent at being ignored by her soon-to-be husband, Torrismondo. Torrismondo had come to claim her hand in marriage from her father three weeks earlier, and he requested that the marriage take place in his home of Arana. During the trip from Norway to Arana, a storm drove their ship aground and the couple consummated their relationship. Since that time, Torrismondo has been avoiding Alvida while her desire for Torrismondo has only grown. Her Nutrice warns her not to worry about the situation and advises her that the behavior that she is describing in Torrismondo is love. Torrismondo, for his part, is just as concerned as Alvida but for different reasons. After having been intimate with Alvida, Torrismondo is racked with guilt because she was meant to be the wife of his best friend Germondo, King of Sweden. The entire situation has been a ruse, because Alvida's father would never have allowed Germondo to marry Alvida under normal circumstances. Torrismondo agrees to ask for Alvida's hand in marriage and then to deliver her to Germondo, but in the course of the deceit, Torrismondo himself has fallen in love with the princess. Torrismondo relates his fears to his trusted Consigliere and his desire to rid himself of the guilt by committing suicide. The Consigliere ends up expiating some of Torrismondo's guilt; he proclaims that Torrismondo is not wicked but suffers a moment of impetuous affection. Throughout the monologue, the Consigliere

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[121] It is important to note that Tasso produced his *Dialoghi* while imprisoned, which elucidates clear and coherent thought and oftentimes philosophical framework.

takes a very Christian tone claiming suicide would only make matters worse. At the end of Act I, the chorus invokes Wisdom to look favorably on the Nordic people.

The second act unfolds now in Arana as preparations are underway for the impending nuptials of Germondo and Alvida. Germondo arrives in the land of the Goths and Torrismondo's anxiety increases significantly as he worries about what to do. It would be dishonorable to give Alvida to his friend since she is no longer a virgin and could be carrying his unborn child. He concocts the idea that his sister, Rosmonda could marry Germondo instead. In the meantime, Rosmonda declares her own love for Torrismondo as she hints at her true identity and how inappropriate it would be to act on her feelings. Rosmonda and the Queen Mother discuss Rosmonda's beauty and the nature of marriage and the Queen Mother hopes that Rosmonda will accept Germondo as her husband so that double nuptials may be celebrated in Arana. At the conclusion of the act, the chorus sings about the virtues of the chaste maiden.

The third act sees the arrival of Germondo in the city of Arana. Once Torrismondo and Germondo meet for the first time in the tragedy, Torrismondo cannot bring himself to ask Germondo's permission to marry Alvida and to propose that Germondo marry Rosmonda. Germondo proves himself to be a real friend to Torrismondo, who continues to be tortured by feelings of betrayal. Elsewhere in the palace, Alvida is presented with gifts by Germondo's Cameriera. Initially, Alvida feels honored to have such gifts bestowed upon her, which contain an image of herself engraved upon them. But her joy soon turns to sadness when she recognizes that the gifts are the accoutrements of her slain brother as well as the trophy given by Alvida herself to a disguised Germondo. She is depicted with a crown and a helmet at her feet holding an arrow in her right hand; and there is also a crowned lion submitted to a yoke. While the opposite side depicts myrtle, arrows, torches, and knots. The ekphrasis symbolizes that

Germondo is offering Alvida the honor that he gained from killing her brother. She is unsure how to receive these gifts; on the one hand, decorum insists that she be receptive and cordial to her future husband's best friend, and on the other hand, she cannot shake the enmity that she holds for Germondo. Again, we see the bonds of friendship and love tested as Alvida tries to reason out her responsibilities.

In Act Four, Torrismondo's Consigliero pays Germondo a visit in order to make the request that Torrismondo could not. His discourse is at first encomiastic as he praises Germondo's kingdom, his power, and the protection that he has afforded the Nordic peoples. His speech has the effect of discounting the power of romantic love and prioritizing the love of friendship that has developed between the two sovereigns. The Consigliero believes that this relationship is the more important, and it is at this point, that he asks Germondo to join himself to Rosmonda instead of to Alvida. The Consigliero attempts to rhetorically manipulate Germondo saying that he prefers a marriage based on friendship. He believes that the alliances formed between the two marriages would strengthen the North against their other enemies such as the Greeks, Germans, or Pannonians. Germondo accepts this argument, and he bears enough love to allow Torrismondo to wed Alvida if he chooses. Assuming now that Germondo's permission has been secured, Torrismondo goes to see Rosmonda who finally recounts the secret deception that she has perpetrated her entire life. Rosmonda relates how the former Goth king, Torrismondo's father, learned of a prophecy that his daughter would bring about the ruin of his kingdom. He, therefore, sought to send her away and replace this daughter with that of a loyal servant. He finally had his real daughter transported from the kingdom into another in order to maintain his deception. In the beginning, Torrismondo cannot understand the cryptic replies that Rosmonda gives. After having narrated her tale, Torrismondo seeks to get to the bottom of it. He calls for a

Soothsayer, but much like the prophet Teiresias in *Oedipus Rex*, he gives enigmatic responses

that do not satisfactorily answer Torrismondo's questions. Eventually the servant, Frontone, who

ferried the king's daughter away is brought before Torrismondo to corroborate Rosmonda's

story. Through a circumstance of chance, Frontone is in the palace relating what he knows of

Torrismondo's sister's whereabouts when a Messenger arrives to inform them of the death of

Araldo, the King of Norway and Alvida's father. In that moment, Torrismondo realizes that

Alvida, the woman he loves, is his sister who had been taken prisoner from the ship upon which

she had been placed as a young girl. The act concludes with Torrismondo informing Germondo

of Araldo's death and commending Alvida and the kingdom of Norway to him. Lastly the chorus

sings the praises of virtue and its ability to overcome anything ordained by the stars.

Act Five begins with Alvida explaining to her Nutrice the reason for dismay after having

learned the truth from Torrismondo. He has told her that she is to be the wife of Germondo, her

sworn enemy, and that he is her brother. Alvida does not take the news well and believes that he

is lying. She rightly sees the fraud that was to be perpetrated at the beginning of the tragedy, but

she now cannot accept the truth. Her suspicions have been aroused considering that Torrismondo

kept the death of her father from her. Torrismondo's Cameriero acts as the messenger who

relates the tragic dénouement to the chorus. The Cameriero announces their deaths before

describing in detail what exactly transpired. In a fit of rage, Alvida stabs herself in the chest with

a blade. Torrismondo finds her dying and apologizes for all of the mistakes that have been made

both past and present. Overcome with grief, Torrismondo composes a letter for Germondo and

he follows Alvida in suicide. Germondo sadly receives the news of the deaths of his friend and

one true love. The tragedy concludes with Germondo and Rosmonda telling the Queen Mother

that both of her children are dead. Germondo promises, however, that he will be her surrogate

son and her faithful servant. Lastly, the chorus sings about the uncertainty of fate and the futility of mortal things.

<u>Historical Context</u>

Tasso's literary corpus is one that must be described as ever evolving. Tasso commits himself to a process of substantial re-writing that can be seen in both his theoretical work as well his epic and tragedy. Before discussing this process of re-writing, it is important to get a sense of the dating of his primary works and where they fall in relation to his time spent at Ospedale di Sant'Anna. I have already mentioned Tasso's *Rinaldo*, his first major work, which was published in 1562. In addition to this, Tasso completed *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1565), *Aminta* (1573), *Galealto Re di Norvegia*, and *La Gerusalemme Liberata* (1574-75). All of these works were completed before his hospitalization at Sant'Anna. Three of the above-mentioned works would undergo substantial changes, which can be understood as more than simple revisions, in the second phase of his writing post Sant'Anna: *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* will become *Discorsi del poema eroico* (1594), *Galealto Re di Norvegia* will become *Re Torrismondo* (1587), and *La Gerusalemme Liberata* will become *La Gerusalemme Conquistata* (1593). Returning to the evolving nature of Tasso's corpus, even the two *Gerusalemme* epics were completed versions of an early, incomplete attempt to engage with the epic genre entitled *Gierusalemme*. Tasso spent a significant portion of his life and writing process contemplating his own works and his reception of current literary theory in order to edit and revise these works into perfect examples of the genres to which they belonged. Irene Samuel writes:

> As the *Discourses on the Poetic Art*, following close on *Rinaldo*, work out the kind of poem Tasso was even then in the process of planning and writing, the *Jerusalem Delivered*, the revised and enlarged *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* defend in detail the kind of epic poem Tasso had produced—and in a measure portend its revision into *Jerusalem Conquered*. In between Tasso never stopped reading and debating critical thought, old and new, assimilating the learning of that immensely learned era, but also

testing theory by reading his poets, especially in his own tongue, and by his own practice of poetry. (Irene Samuel xvi-xvii)

This will also be the case with the *Re Torrismondo*, whose origin is the *Galealto Re di Norvegia*, which Tasso originally left incomplete and to which he would return the year after exiting the Hospital of Sant'Anna.

The *Re Torrismondo* is, in fact, a *rifacimento* of *Galealto Re di Norvegia*, which scholars often refer to as *Tragedia non finita* because Tasso only completed the first two acts. The rewriting that Tasso effects is evident in a couple of ways. First, we immediately notice that the title of the work has changed. *Galealto* became a work in progress, due in part to Tasso's fascination with Nordic history and in another part to his continued poetic experimentation. The most significant changes that occur between the overlapping parts of both plays are geographical. Tasso was attracted by the seminal work of Olao Magno, the *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, published in 1555 and which related the customs and habits of the Swedish people. His familiarity with Magno's historical and geographical work allowed him to refine his narrative and make it more versimilar. It also allowed him to create a background with an otherworldly nature in order to put some critical distance between his audience and the material. This is an important aspect of Tasso's poetic theory, and he takes his example from Sophocles who would set his tragedies in faraway Thebes. Tasso wanted to use the Nordic climate as a backdrop to add to the solemnity of the narrative. Getto puts it thusly:

> …ove si pensi al fascino destato dalle regioni settentrionali sulla fantasia dei contemporanei, nell'imminenza di quella civiltà barocca che doveva singolarmente prediligere, nelle sue forme letterarie, gli sfondi cupi evocati da quegli sconosciuti paesi. In proposito è anzi interessante ricordare come in Spagna e in Portogallo, nel comune linguaggio, «Norvegia» fosse sinonimo di oscurità. (179)

Tasso removed Norvegia from the title in all likelihood to approximate Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and to avoid the novelty of his Nordic source material.

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Secondly, Tasso rewrote the existing dialogue of *Galealto*; he did not simply return to the text and complete it thirteen years later. He spent a significant amount of time revising the dialogue and planning the new material. Tasso continued to use the traditional topoi of the tragic genre including incest, betrayal, and suicide. The essence of the tragedy remains the same, but the way that he structured the story differs to remove the culpability of his characters and to make them more likeable which was the problem that Speroni faced in *Canace*.[122] Ambra Carta agrees that there are not substantial differences between the two texts, "Il nucleo drammatico dell'opera non variò dall'abbozzo alla tragedia finita" (73). And while on a certain level this is true, the lyric language does diverge enough that Getto and Scarpati both note the significance of the changes that Tasso made.[123] Scarpati characterizes the process of re-writing as follows:

> La quale crisi conserva tutta la sua esasperazione pur sotto la limatura della colpevolezza. Nel restauro del testo della Tragedia non finita διάνοια e λέξις *sententia* ed *elocutio* sono oggetto di cure eguali. L'analisi di questo rifacimento, certo uno dei più insigni casi di 'riscrittura' del nostro Rinascimento, mostra che due forze lo guidano, congiurate tra loro, il riassetto delle dinamiche della responsabilità e il *re-styling* del dettato tragico. Lo scrutinio di una rielaborazione compiuta dopo circa tredici anni di riposo del testo potrà suggerire, al di là del tentativo che qui si compie, nuove indagini sull'evoluzione del linguaggio poetico cinquecentesco e correzioni esegetiche circa l'immagine complessiva del Tasso nel decennio ultimo della sua attività, non meno fecondo di quanto fossero stati i ferventi anni sessanta e settanta. (Scarpati 127-8)

Tasso's re-write will move the dialogue found in the first attempt away from its approximation to his predecessors, and it looks forward to the foundation of his own tragic style, that is to say, a style that embodies anti-classicizing characteristics. The *Galealto* does not possess the originality that we will come to see in the *Re Torrismondo*, but it does contain echoes and elements of the

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[122] I will discuss Tasso's desire to render Torrismondo less culpable and more tragic a little later in the chapter.

[123] For further information see Getto "Dal Galealto al Torrismondo" in *Interpretazione del Tasso* (171-209) and also Scarpati "Classici e Moderni nella Costruzione del Torrismondo" in Tasso, I Classici e I Moderni (105-178).

major tragedians and tragedies of the early Cinquecento, most notably Giraldi Cinzio and

Speroni. Getto notes that Alvida's opening speech in the *Galealto* (Act 1 Scene 1 25-43), while

indicative of Tasso's poetic and linguistic ability, is rather derivative of these predecessors. He

writes:

> Dove non si può negare il persuasivo effetto di quella situazione di angoscia mista di
> vaneggianti fantasmi e di perplessità dolorose, modulato sull'intervento del caratteristico
> « non so che » tassiano, che qui si svolge a sensi di stupito orrore.
> …………………………………………………………………………………………
> I versi che seguono all'interiezione sono infatti piuttosto « generici », privi di un accento
> individuale, e risentono di quel fondo di linguaggio proprio del teatro di Seneca,
> riecheggiato (soprattutto dopo la presa di posizione teorica di G. B. Giraldi Cinzio, nel
> suo *Discorso ovvero lettera intorno al comporre delle commedie e delle tragedie* del
> 1543, esaltante Seneca sopra i tragici greci) da un po' tutte le tragedie del secondo
> Cinquecento. (Getto 174)

As Getto confirms, the dialogue is undeniably Tassian, that is to say, it represents his poetic style

by relating the interior anguish of his characters. The *Re Torrismondo* differs because Tasso

focuses on the interiority of his character's psychological turmoil. He does this by altering the

linguistic style, which is slower and more serious. The *Re Torrismondo* draws on his earlier

experimentation with the epic and borrows heavily on epic themes and language to create a sense

of *gravitas* that is interwoven throughout the r*ifacimento*.[124]

I have already mentioned that the *Re Torrismondo* is published after his stay in

Sant'Anna, and it is during his time in hospital that he returns to the tragic genre in an effort to

improve his earlier attempt. After his hospitalization, Tasso's reworking of his literary works in

the principal genres becomes ever more theological and moral. I do not mean to deny those

qualities in his earlier works, but I want only to point out that his solitude refocused his writing

process. Tasso's early formation included scientific and philosophic study while at Ferrara, but

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[124] I will return to discuss this point later in the chapter.

the effects of the Counter-Reformation and his imprisonment in Sant'Anna possibly made his isolation and search for philosophical answers all the more acute. Carta characterizes Tasso's philosophical and theological influences in the *Re Torrismondo* in this way, "Anzi, proprio la vicenda tragica del *Torrismondo* rivela la coscienza filosofica e teologica acquisita da Tasso a quell'altezza di anni, l'interesse per questioni di natura filosofica, etica e civile, e il progressivo incupimento di un orizzonte storico che non lascia speranza alle utopie rinascimentali" (69). Carta is specifically referring here to Trissino's *Sofonisba*, which was never far from Tasso's mind both as an influence and a model for critique. The utopic vision found at the end of Trissino's tragedy looks forward to an establishment of peace within the narrative, which Trissino hoped would be reflected as an end to the conflict between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor. Sofonisba's sacrifice projects a political message onto the ideological landscape, and it leaves open the possibility of hope. Tasso's *Re Torrismondo* operates on a deeper philosophical and psychological level than Trissino's tragic discourse because any ideological message is individuated and shaped by self-conscious reflection.

Theoretical Framework

Tasso thought very much about poetic theory and how to improve upon his own work as he adapted the prevailing theory and practice of the day to his own needs. Tasso is most famous for his re-working of the epic genre. He disagreed with Ariosto's employment of language and his lack of a serious style, but he also spent a lot of time thinking about the tragic genre. To begin his studies into tragic genre theory, he possessed a copy of Trissino's *Sofonisba* and his *Poetica*, which he heavily annotated. He also mentions Trissino's work both in the *Discori dell'arte poetica* and in the *Discorsi del poema eroico*. Edward Williamson dates Tasso's postils and annotations to the year 1587, which was the same year that Tasso published the *Re Torrismondo*

(158). Williamson also notes that the majority of Tasso's comments are, "…grouped most heavily in the sections dealing with metrics, stanza form, and rhyme, with another, lesser concentration around the treatment of words permissible in poetry" (155-56). This makes sense when we consider that his revision process does not revolve around altering the nucleus of the plot but around the appropriateness of the language and the narrative's verisimilitude.

The finished version of the tragedy, *Re Torrismondo*, is as experimental as it is complete. The final version highlights the culmination of Tasso's poetic practice, which he had begun to set out years earlier. Tasso's process of imitation and invention was originally formulated in the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, which re-elaborates Aristotle's precepts and discusses contemporary literary examples. Tasso's poetic theory is principally concerned with the construction of the tragic plot and its disentanglement, its verisimilitude, and the linguistic code. Tasso lays out his own concerns in this passage from the *Discorsi*:

> La novità del poema non consiste principalmente in questo, cioè che la materia sia finta e non più udita, ma consiste nella novità del nodo, e dello scioglimento della favola. Fu l'argomento di Tieste, di Medea, di Edipo da vari antichi trattato, ma, variamente tessendolo, di comune proprio e di vecchio novo il facevano; sí che novo sarà quel poema in cui nova sarà la testura di i nodi, nove le soluzioni, novi gli episodi che per entro vi saranno traposti, ancoraché la materia sia notissima e da altri prima trattata; e all'incontra novo non potrà dirsi quel poema in cui finte sian le persone e finto l'argomento, quando però il poeta l'avviluppi e distrighi in quel modo che da altri prima sia stato annodato e disciolto; e tale per avventura è alcuna moderna tragedia, in cui la materia e i nomi son finti, ma 'l groppo è cosí snodato come presso gli antichi Greci si trova, sí che non vi è né l'auttorità che porta seco l'istoria, né la novità che par che rechi la finzione. (Tasso 105)

This passage highlights Tasso's belief that the core of a story does not have to be new and that old stories can be re-presented by the poet as long as he alters the nature of the conflict and its resolution. He goes on to say that a tragedy cannot be called new if the tragedy has new characters, but the material is constructed and resolved in ways already done prior. This idea

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speaks not only to Tasso's desire to revise his own works but also the intertextuality woven into the very fabric of Tasso's tragic narrative.

Tasso's conception of imitation consists of two parts: the wondrous and the verisimilar. The difficulty for the poet is to know his boundaries and not exceed the limits of either. If the poem is too fantastical, specifically for a Christian audience, it becomes too unbelievable. Although Tasso calls for moderation and modulation of the wondrous and the verisimilar, he holds that the poem should at all times be verisimilar. His argument is that all poetry is nothing more than an imitation, the making of a likeness, which in and of itself cannot be separated from verisimilitude. In order to accomplish this in the *Re Torrismondo*, Tasso researches the histories of other cultures in order to find a suitable new veil with which to cloak the traditional tragic *topoi*. In the *Galealto*, the material is a mixture of Nordic and Britain matter recalling the narrative of Tristan and Iseult.[125] The finished tragedy relies solely on the historical and geographical source material of one cultural tradition. After having chosen the subject matter, Tasso goes about adapting the material to approximate Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Here, Tasso is following Aristotle's judgment that Sophocles' tragedy is the pinnacle of tragic development because it exemplifies how to properly resolve the conflict into its most tragic form.

The next thing that Tasso does is to alter his original language from the *Galealto* which approached Giraldi Cinzio's language in an attempt to inspire a sense of the horrific and of the eventual dreaded end. Tasso's tragic language is actually borrowed from his own formulation of the epic genre. He believed that the two greatest literary genres were the epic and the tragic with the former superseding the latter. In order to draw the tragic genre closer to the esteem of the epic, it was necessary to restructure the language into a more serious style. Tasso maintains

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[125] See Scarpati (106-7) for the comparison and analogue to the matter of Tristan and Iseult.

Trissino's use of the *versi sciolti*, but he pays very close attention to his word choice. He maintains in the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* that Trissino employed a low style,[126] which Tasso says is necessary for tragedy. Yet, he goes further in the second discourse of the *Discorsi del poema eroico* in which he calls Trissino's verses too prosaic and erudite, "(…) ma in questo schivi il soverchio e temperi il rincrescimento di troppo esquisita dottrina, perché non abbiamo esempio di Virgilio o d'Omero o d'altro antico poeta, ma del Trissino solamente" (Tasso qtd. in Società tip de' classici italiani 81). Tasso's erudition concerning classical scholarship is telling in this citation, because he is identifying elements of the classical epic cycle in their relation to the tragic genre just as modern classicists see tragedy's origins in the epic genre.

In order to understand how Tasso adapts his language into a new but appropriate style in the *Re Torrsimondo*, it is necessary to look at Tasso's definition of tragic style in his third essay of the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*. Tasso defines tragic style in this way:

> Lo stile della tragedia, se ben contiene anch'ella avvenimenti illustri e persone reali, per due cagioni deve essere e più proprio e meno magnifico che quello dell'epopeia non è: l'una, perchè tratta materie assai più affettuose che quelle dell'epopeia non sono; e l'affetto richiede purità e semplicità di concetti, e proprietà d'elocuzioni, perchè in tal guisa è verisimile che ragioni uno che è pieno d'affanno o di timore o di misericordia o d'altra simile perturbazione; e oltra che i soverchi lumi e ornamenti di stile non solo adombrano, ma impediscono e ammorzano l'affetto. L'altra cagione è che nella tragedia non parla mai il poeta, ma sempre coloro che sono introdotti agenti e operanti; e a questi tali si deve attribuire una maniera di parlare ch'assomigli alla favola ordinaria, acciò che l'imitazione riesca più verisimile. Al poeta all'incontro, quando ragiona in sua persona, sì come colui che crediamo essere pieno di deità e rapito da divino furore sovra se stesso, molto sovra l'uso comune e quasi con un'altra mente e con un'altra lingua gli si concede a pensare e a favellare. (852)

The function of tragedy is to bring about a catharsis in the audience through pity and fear, but its characters often portray the very same emotions expected from the audience. Tasso finds that

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[126] Tasso intends low style here to be that which is not adorned or ornate and is well suited to tragedy.

these strong emotions would make it unlikely, or better, less verisimilar, if characters were to speak in an elevated style appropriate to the epic or an ornate style suitable to the lyric genre. What then is Tasso's solution? In theory, he navigates a middle road in which the principal characters speak in a plainer style at all times fitting to the material and subject matter but accompanied by a selective vocabulary. It is this selective vocabulary which brings his tragedy closer to the epic style and adds particular weight to his tragic verse. Tasso envisions that tragedy deals with lofty families and noble deeds, and therefore, it is sometimes necessary to elevate the word choices of his characters.[127] The dialogue that Tasso creates avoids the slow, rhetorical dialogue of Trissino in *Sofonisba* and encompasses elements of Virgilian language. In fact, he does not hesitate to draw on a number of sources both ancient and contemporary; his primary source for the language, however, is Vergil. The choruses do show Tasso's attempt to add lyricism to the text. This is what I mean when I say that Tasso navigates a middle road; he is actively combining the linguistic styles of his predecessors in an effort to perfect it. Ariani has given us some insight on the experimental nature of Tasso's language in the *Re Torrismondo*:

> Il Tasso ha concepito la tragedia come necessità impellente di sperimentare il concentrarsi, nella prepotente incisività del segno, di un ingorgo ideologico e sentimentale rimasto bloccato nella tortura irrisolta della prigionia: uno stile dunque aperto alla capacità della *parola teatrale* di sutturare la propria risentita semanticità al risentimento umano di personaggi a cui viene decisamente rifiutata ogni qualifica di *tipo*, per farne il simbolo immediato e consapevole di una ricerca filosofica ed esistenziale. Linguaggio e azione nascono dunque, nel *Torrismondo*, già saldamente contestuali, condotti ad una tragicità nuova che non sia né l'eloquio svagato dei fiorentini né la furia retorica dell'orrido giraldiano. (Ariani 232-233)

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[127] Tasso justifies this in the same passage from the third of his *Discorso dell'arte poetica*, "Il magnifico, il temperato e l'umile dell'eroico non è il medesimo co 'l magnifico, temperato e umile de gli altri poemi…" (851).

Ariani believes that Tasso imbues even the minor characters with this elevated style, and the language itself, in conjunction with the construction and unraveling of the tragic node, creates the pathetic effect felt by the audience. The modulation of the high and low styles creates what Verdino calls an "anti-mimetic effect" that ruptures the previous tragic precedents (137). What Verdino means here is that *Re Torrismondo* has less to do with ideological messaging, although I do not deny that there is an internal ideological framework. I only mean to say that Tasso is more concerned with the ways one arrives at meaning through his modality of storytelling. Tasso's goal is to create a self-consciousness on the part of his characters that is carried over to his audience and which in turn promotes argute self-reflection. The inner turmoil reflected in the characters of the tragedy is echoed in the audience member's psyche. Any particular ideological message is therefore at a critical distance from the audience's perception so that the audience has no choice but to become co-involved with the sentiments of the characters. The interest in the ways that the tragedy unfolds rather than the ends has an important impact on the interpretation of the *Re Torrismondo*.

In order to arrive at an interpretation of the *Re Torrismondo*, it is necessary to understand Tasso's organization of the tragic elements, specifically catharsis and the role of the chorus. I will start with catharsis and how Tasso formulates his own conceptualization. Principally, in his theoretical writing, Tasso stays in keeping with Aristotle's construction and elicitation of the catharsis, that is to say, it is reached by means of pity and fear. In practice, Tasso is not wholly convinced about Aristotelian catharsis. Verdino notes that Tasso's conception, while not fully elaborated in either of the *Discorsi*, is made clearer in his annotations of Casteveltro. Tasso's annotation to Casteveltro's opinion says:

> Il piacere che nasce dalla compassione e dallo spavento è piacere obliquo: ed è quando noi, sentendo dispiacere delle miserie altrui ingiustamente avvenute, ci riconosciamo esser

buoni poichè le cose ingiuste ci dispiacciono. La qual riconoscenza, per l'amor naturale che ciascuno porta a se stesso, è di piacer grandissimo: al quale piacere s'aggiunge l'altro d'impara l'incostanze dell'umane cose. (Tasso qtd. in Verdino 34)

Tasso's conceptualization of catharsis is when the subject derives pleasure from learning more about himself. This is the essence of the psychologization and interiorization of the tragic that I mentioned above. Tasso's tragic is self-reflective and self-conscious, therefore, it renders it difficult to assume any one specific ideological framework at work within the tragedy. The meaning is transported beyond the terrestrial and into the metaphysical and psychological as it is instantiated in the subjective experience of each individual. The commonality of experience then revolves around a shared set of ethical values as each individual reacts to the scenes playing out before them.

The role of the chorus in *Re Torrismondo* is twofold both participating in the dialogue at times and also cryptically commenting on the action of the previous scenes. When the chorus participates in the dialogue, Tasso uses blank verse as recommended by Trissino; yet, during the intermezzi between acts, he employs various metrical forms including three, five, and seven-syllable verses. In the intermezzi, the chorus speaks in a loftier style than the other characters. In these moments, Tasso conceives the chorus as a mouthpiece for the poet. He writes in the fourth discourse of the *Discorsi del poema eroico*:

Ma il coro peravventura dee parlar più altamente, perch'egli, come dice Aristotele ne' Problemi, è quasi un curatore ozioso e separato; e per l'istessa ragione parla più altamente il poeta in sua persona, e quasi ragiona con un'altra lingua, sì come colui che finge d'esser rapito da furor divino sovra se medesimo (Tasso qtd. in Società tip de' classici italiani 205).

Tasso's chorus is imbued with an otherworldly almost prophetic quality, which is completely not verisimilar. Peter Brand recalls an essence of the *Aminta* in Tasso's choruses, "The Choruses of the *Torrismondo* with their combination of seven- and eleven syllable lines recall, without repeating, the metrical variety of the *Aminta*" (176). I believe that this further demonstrates

Tasso's experimentation in *Re Torrismondo*. He was still actively working to firmly define the compositional elements of the tragic genre, and he relied heavily on the two genres that had already brought him much success. Tasso's choruses in the *Aminta* recall a youthful decadence in the restrained hedonism advocated in its dialogue. Tasso's marriage of the epic and pastoral in his tragedy creates a slow and almost prosaic-like quality of which Tasso accused Trissino. In the end, the function of the chorus is not involved in the dénouement of the tragic node. The chorus' most explicit comment on the action represented comes at the end of the tragedy which seems to dissolve the tragic moment into hopelessness. The final choruses of Trissino and Giraldi Cinzio are also somber in their tone, but there is a hope that the ideological outcome that they have described will be effectuated. Tasso's final chorus seems to relate the meaningless of everything in a short, nihilistic lament.

Thematic Analysis

Tasso's thematic development in *Re Torrismondo* is difficult to conceptualize because there is so much material present. Brand believes the tragedy as a whole fails because of the multiplicity of themes that Tasso presents the audience. He writes, "His complicated plot is indeed largely original—it is a weakness of his drama that he has over-elaborated his subject" (172). He writes on the following page, "Yet, very little dramatic effect is achieved from this involved story, which is so clumsily handled as to be barely incomprehensible until one has thumbed backwards and forwards between Acts I and II…" (173). Scarpati recalls Carducci's words concerning the entirety of the tragedy and judging it in relation to his youthful work, the *Aminta*:

> E poi il Tasso ripigliava a far la tragedia uscito da Sant'Anna, a quarantatré ani già vecchio e malato, nell'aer crasso della corte dei Gonzaga. Povero Torquato! forse dieci anni prima, súbito dopo l'Aminta, avrebbe fatto meglio. Ora egli allunga, aggrava, ritarda, impedisce

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e avvolge tutto, favola, dialogo, stile, nel suo adombramento di poeta e di critico. (Carducci qtd. in Scarpati 108)

The bifurcation of Tasso's corpus into two periods sets the critic up with two choices: to accept or not accept that the hospitalization at Sant'Anna had an effect on Tasso's writings. I myself feel that the solitude and psychological anguish coupled with Tasso's philosophical and theological writings play out in the *Re Torrismondo*. Tasso reworked the *Galealto* into the *Re Torrismondo* almost immediately upon exiting Sant'Anna, which suggests that he was working on his ideas while still hospitalized. It is the psychological and metaphysical aspects of *Re Torrismondo* that I believe predominate and I will turn my attention toward them. *Re Torrismondo* is an examination of earthly and metaphysical virtue mediated by our interpersonal relationships. Tasso investigates the role of love and friendship and the duties that one must perform in those relationships, fraud, fate, and hope.

Love and friendship are obvious themes that arise in the tragedy.[128] Love takes many forms in the *Re Torrismondo*; there is erotic love, philia love, and familial love throughout the drama. Tasso privileges love as a theme because it is a powerful bonding force. The expression of love generates a set of duties and responsibilities between lover and beloved, so much so, that we even codify that behavior into social institutions. The transgressions of those duties and responsibilities present us with a choice about how to respond. Tasso examines the ethics of love and friendship in the tragedy by examining the transgressions of these relationships. The love triangle of Torrismondo, Alvida, and Germondo must be separated into dyadic pairs: Torrismondo—Alvida and Torrismondo—Germondo. The Torrismondo—Alvida pairing represents a tortured, illicit love from the beginning, but this information remains privileged to

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[128] I differentiate them separately for clarity, although they share many of the same characteristics.

only the audience and Torrismondo. From Alvida's perspective, Torrismondo has asked and received her hand in marriage from her father, Araldo. Before arriving in Arana Torrismondo and Alvida prematurely consummate their relationship. The bond between the two is sealed and Alvida burns with passion for Torrismondo. Alvida suffers psychological distress but this distress manifests physically in her description of her suffering to her Nutrice.

> ALV: Lassa me, simil sono a quella inferma
> che d'algente rigor la notte è scossa,
> poi su 'l mattin d'ardente febre avampa:
> perché non prima cessa il freddo gelo
> del notturno timor, ch'in me s'accende
> l'amoroso desio che m'arde e strugge.[129] (55-60)
> ……………………………………………………………………………………………………
> ALV: Già venti volte è il sol tuffato in grenobo,
> da che giungemmo, a l'ocean profondo,
> e pur anco s'indugia; ed io fratanto
> (deggio 'l dire o tacer?), lassa, mi struggo
> come tenera neve in colle aprico. (120-124)

Alvida's description of her suffering is physical, and she describes how she "burns and freezes" (57-58). Her psychological suffering manifests itself physically because her love is rooted in the carnal. Her description of her suffering then turns geographical situating the audience within the setting that she describes. Though her anguish is psychological, the geographical locations call our attention literally outside of Alvida herself and into the broader world. I believe that this point is important because the description of her anguish differs significantly from Torrismondo's. The exteriorization of her mental anguish is, in my opinion, due to her innocence in the tragic action. Alvida has absolutely no culpability for the things that are happening to her and around her; therefore, it makes sense that she assume this geographical language to describe her inability to comprehend or even see the fraudulent acts in which she has become involved.

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[129] The burning and freezing sensation described by Alvida is reminiscent of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* Sonnet 134.

Torrismondo's description to his Consigliero of his first encounter with Alvida is long and complex; it must fill in the gaps where Alvida's antefatto was inadequate. Torrismondo, before beginning his long monologue, describes the sentiments that he is feeling.

> TOR: Ma che mi può giovar, s'io non m'ascondo
> a me medesmo? Oimè, son io, son io,
> quel che fuggito or sono e quel che fuggo:
> di me stesso ho vergogna e scorno ed onta,
> odioso a me fatto e grave pondo. (265-269)

What Torrismondo feels is the interiorized guilt at having transgressed one relationship for another. Torrismondo, in the process of returning home, was forced to endure the advances of Alvida. He managed to rebuff her at great mental expense to himself. One night, a large storm forced their ship onto an island, and in a moment of weakness, Torrismondo makes love to Alvida and breaks his promise to Germondo. The storm agitating the sea is a metaphor for the mental anguish that Torrismondo suffers.

> TOR: Contaminato di novello oltraggio,
> traditor fatto di fedele amico,
> anzi nemico divenuto amando,
> da indi in qua sono agitato, ahi lasso,
> da mille miei pensieri, anzi da mille
> vermi di penitenza io sono trafitto,
> non sol roder mi sento il core e l'alma,
> né mai da' miei furori o pace o tregua
> ritrovar posso. (571-579)

Yet, there is no calm after the storm. Torrismondo suffers from remorse and regret (576-79). Friendship was a highly complex relationship with codified duties and responsibilities. Torrismondo is very much aware of what he has done. He imagines that he sees Germondo standing before him accusing him and enumerating his faults:

> TOR: Ivi mi s'offre in spaventosa faccia
> il mio tradito amico, odo l'accuse
> e le giuste querele, odo i lamenti,
> l'amor suo, la costanza, ad uno ad uno

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> tanti merti, tante opre e tante prove
> che fatte egli ha d'inviolabil fede. (586-591)

Torrismondo juxtaposes himself in relation to his friend and he relates Germondo's positive

qualities beside his own negative ones. Despite his sad lament and awareness of his fraud that he

has twice now perpetrated, he cannot find peace from his "furori" (578) nor from the "amorosi

martiri" (594). Torrismondo is caught between his feelings for Alvida and the responsibility that

he owes to his best friend. Tasso's presentation of Torrismondo as a likable character is very

important. In fact, he works quite hard throughout the tragedy to ensure that he redeems

Torrismondo's character. Outside of Torrismondo himself, Tasso has the Consigliero work to

make Torrismondo more likable and less culpable throughout the *Re Torrismondo*. The first

attempt comes in his response to Torrismondo who has declared that suicide is the only remedy

for his difficult situation.

> CON: Lunge per Dio, signor, sia lunge, e sevro
> da questa questa opra e da voi titolo indegno.
> Non soggiacete a non dovuto incarco:
> ché s'uom on dee di falsa laude ornarsi,
> non dee gravarsi ancor di falso biasmo.
> Non sete, no, la passion v'accieca,
> o traditore o scelerato od empio. (637-643)

………………………………………………………………………………………………

> CON: Ma chi senza fermar falso consiglio
> di perversa ragion trascorra a forza
> ove il rapisce il suo desio tiranno,
> scelerato non è, per grave colpa
> dove amore il trasporti o pur disdegno.
> D'ira e d'amor, possenti e fieri affetti,
> la nostra umanitade ivi più abonda
> ov'è più di vigore; e rado aviene
> che generoso cor guerriero ed alto
> non sia spinto da loro e risospinto,
> come da venti procelloso mare. (653-663)

The Consigliero's discourse turns increasingly metaphysical and theological approximating the unintentional sin to a lapse in reason. He goes on to say that it does not warrant Torrismondo's death, which would only make the situation worse. In the end, the Consigliero privileges the faith and constancy of friendship over the erotic love that Torrismondo feels for Alvida, and he encourages him to honor his promise to his friend. The Consigliero only relents when presented with the choice of losing his king to death or the betrayal of Germondo's friendship. The attenuation of Torrismondo's culpability allows the audience to more easily to relate to him and to his tragic suffering. If Torrismondo were held more responsible, the audience may be less willing to enter into the tragic action. Tasso is purposefully trying to decouple absolute right and wrong from the action of the drama. The audience is meant to relate to all of the characters in the spectacle, and the fluidity of their tragicity allows for the distancing of precise ideological messaging.

Torrismondo's and Alvida's interaction throughout the tragedy is limited and their encounters are always reported indirectly. In one of the final scenes of Act V, the deaths of the two lovers is reported by the Cameriero. Torrismondo finds Alvida after she has already stabbed herself and lies dying. The love that Alvida feels for Torrismondo cannot be transferred to someone else simply because Torrismondo wills it, and she kills herself rather than be without him. Torrismondo suffers twice in Alvida's death scene to account for his double transgression. Alvida was not only Torrismondo's lover but also his newly discovered sister. He loses both types of the love that Alvida represents: the erotic love that he felt for her and his newly born familial love for his sister.

The psychological torment that Torrismondo has suffered throughout the drama culminates at the end of Scene 4:

TOR: Poi disse: 'Alvida, tu sei morta, io vivo
senza l'anima?' E tacque" (3061-62).

The disconnect between the confluence of feelings that intersect in Alvida juxtaposes Torrismondo's inward desires with his responsibilities to others. It calls the audience to question their ethical choices about their responsibilities to their own personal wants versus what is expected of them. Tasso's text seems to echo his own internal turmoil caused by a world balanced between competing ethical value systems. Humanism and the Renaissance placed man at the center of his universe, but the Counter Reformation began the process of encoding man's responsibilities within society. Carducci claimed that Tasso's tragedy would have been better if written earlier, but *Re Torrismondo* is a vivid, momentaneous representation of Tasso's lived experience.

The Torrismondo—Germondo dyadic pair represents the type of philia love present in the spectacle. This type of love is characterized as virtuous and was forged between Torrismondo and Germondo on the battlefield and at jousting competitions. It is a friendship predicated on "l'amor" (589) and "d'inviolabil fede" (591). The loftiness of these moral values would seem to supersede the carnal bond between Torrismondo and Alvida. The relationship between Germondo and Torrismondo is described as transcending friendship and as eternal (1620). In Act III Scene 3, Torrismondo and Germondo finally meet in person. The previous characterization of their friendship, which has been wholly one-sided, is now brought into the open as both receive each other. Germondo proves himself to be every bit the true friend that Torrismondo describes, and he feels the same way in return.

GER: Già voi foste di me la miglior parte,
or nulla parte è mia, ma tutto è vostro,
o tutto fia: se pur non prende a scherno
vera amicizia quanto amore agogna,
ch'è d'altrui vincitor, da lei sol vinto. (1627-1631)

One might argue that Germondo does not yet know the extent of the truth, and his opinion is not yet based totally on the facts. Looking ahead, however, in Act IV Scene 1, Germondo's reception of the news from Torrismondo's Consigliero confirms his faithfulness.

> GER: Primo sono in amare. Amai l'amico,
> di valor primo e 'n riamar secondo
> ed amerò finché 'l guerrero spirto
> reggerà queste pronte o tarde membra.
> E mi rammento ancor ch'a lui giurando
> la fede i' diedi, ed egli a me la strinse,
> che l'un de l'altro a vendicar gli oltraggi
> pronto sarebbe. Or non perturbi o rompa
> nuovo patto per me gli antichi patti.
> E s'ei per liete nozze è pur contento
> di pacifico stato e di tranquillo,
> io ne godo per lui. Per lui ricovro
> ne la pace e nel porto, e lascio il campo
> e l'orrida tempesta e i venti aversi.
> Vera amicizia dunque il mar sonante
> mi faccia, o queto; il ciel sereno, o fosco;
> e di ferro m'avolga e mi circondi.
> e mi tinga in sanguigno i monti e l'onde,
> se così vuole, o 'l sangue asciughi e terga,
> e mi scinga la spada al fianco inerme.
> Vera amicizia ancor mi faccia amante,
> e, se le par, marito, e tutte estingua
> d'Amore e d'Imeneo le faci ardenti,
> o di Marte le fiamme e 'l foco accresca.
> Così direte al re: lodo e confermo
> che 'l vero amico mi discioglia o leghi. (2136-2161)

Germondo speaks of the "fede" (2141) that he has given and received from Torrismondo, and that he will not allow any new "patto" (2144) to supersede the old one. The purity and honesty of this friendship creates a metaphysical and theological restlessness, because, to the audience, only the sanctity of the divine achieves this level of perfection. The peace that Germondo finds in the scene is just that and he is open to any eventuality; he does not choose one way or the other:

> GER: Vera amicizia dunque il mare sonante
> mi faccia, o queto; il ciel sereno, o fosco (2150-51).

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Germondo's is a self-conscious awareness of his duty and responsibility toward his friendship with Torrismondo. The audience is left to wonder what is the source of this rare ability? Peace is the reward of faith and constancy. It does not come from the outside world and it signals that one must turn inward. In the era of the Counter Reformation Tasso's representation of Germondo's keen self-awareness, inward journey most likely projects a desire of metaphysical exploration of identity and ethics.

Fraud is another central theme of *Re Torrismondo* around which the action unfolds. Tasso changes the configuration of the *Oedipus Rex* slightly in that the incest topos does not impel the action. The tragedy takes its start from the agreement that Torrismondo and Germondo enact to deceive Alvida and her father. There are several instances of fraud that appear in the text: Torrismondo and Alvida, Torrismondo and Germondo, and Rosmonda. We have seen how the fraud between Torrismondo and Alvida and Torrismondo and Germondo affected the bounds of love and friendship. I would like to address briefly the role that fraud plays in Rosmonda's character. Rosmonda suffers psychologically because of the truth that she has kept secret for many years. Rosmonda's real identity gives us some insight into the other characters' behavior as well. We first meet Rosmonda in Act II Scene 3 in which she speaks a monologue of her love for her brother, Torrismondo. She wants nothing more than to run away from the life that she is living:

> ROS: …de' regi invitti e gloriosi in grembo,
> e son detta di re figlia e sorella,
> dal piacer, da l'onore a da le pompe
> e da questa real superba vita
> fuggirei, come augel libero e sciolto
> a l'umil povertà di verde chiostro. (1036-1041)

She feels that what she is doing is wrong and the mental anguish is agonizing her. She seeks refuge in a simpler existence (1041) away from the royal celebration (1038-39). Rosmonda like Tasso is out of place and she longs for different circumstances. Yet, Rosmonda does not only remain because of her now dead mother's wishes, although this is what she tells Torrismondo in her admission scene. I will recall what Rosmonda says in her private monologue followed by her later encounter with Torrismondo in Act IV.

> ROS: Misera, io non volendo amo ed avampo
>   appresso il mio, signor, ch'io fuggo, e cerco
>   dapoi che l'ho fuggito: indi mi pento,
>   del mio voler non che del suo dubbiosa.
>   E non so quel ch'io cerchi o quel ch'io brami,
>   e se più si disdica e men convenga
>   come sorella amarlo o come serva.
>   Ma s'ei pur di sorella ardente amore
>   prendesse a sdegno, esser mi giovi ancilla,
>   ed ancilla chiamarmi e serva umile. (1050-1059)

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> ROS: Son miei voti i suoi voti, e poi s'aggiunse
>   al suo volere il mio volere istesso
>   quel sempre acerbo ed onorato giorno
>   che giacque essangue e rendé l'alma al Cielo;
>   mentre io sedea dogliosa in su la sponda
>   del suo vedovo letto, e lagrimando
>   prendea la sua gelata e cara destra
>   con la mia destra. E le sue voci estreme,
>   ben mi rammento, e rammentar me 'n deggio,
>   tra freddi baci e lagrime dolenti
>   fur proprio queste: "È pietà vera, o figlia,
>   non ricusar la tua verace madre,
>   che madre ti sarà per picciol tempo.
>   Io ti portai nel ventre e caro parto
>   ti diedi al mondo, anzi a quel Dio t'offersi
>   che regge il mondo e mi salvò nel rischio.
>   Tu, se puoi, de la madre i voti adempi,
>   e disciogliendo lei, sciogli te stessa." (2282-2299)

Rosmonda's two recountings are quite different. She does not tell Torrismondo how she, "amo ed avampo" (1050) in his presence. Rosmonda was committing another fraud beyond just

pretending to be his sister. She loves Torrismondo too, but she is unable to bring herself to admit it. She does not characterize her pretense of being his sister as being fraud:

> ROS: Per mia madre e per me breve io rispondo
> Fé l'inganno gentil pietà, *non fraude*,
> e 'l discopre pietà" (2261-2263).[130]

Her argument rests upon the fact that it was carried out as a duty, and she feels since it was effectuated by comparison, the fraud is redeemed.

Rosmonda represents the lies that we tell others but also the lies that we tell ourselves. The equivocation that some deceits are allowable when done for the right reasons forces us to address Germondo's and Torrismondo's fraudulent behavior. Can we redeem the lie that they perpetrated at the beginning of the tragedy? Just like the theme of love and friendship, fraudulent behavior and its ends are projected outside of the world of the spectacle and into the psyche of the audience. The audience is presented with another ethical dilemma, and it is one that is not easily answerable. The casual reader may assume that the deceptions which fuel the action give rise to the tragic ends of Alvida and Torrismondo. I believe that Tasso is calling the audience to reflect on the rigidity and fixed nature of ethical values. The purpose of redeeming all of his characters and making them nearly blameless is to create an ethical conundrum that is not easily disentangled. The free will of the characters and their tragic ends highlight the fact that people can believe that they are doing everything for the right reasons and still end up erring.

Conclusion

Tasso's tragic theater breaks significantly with prior sixteenth-century forms. The specific cause lies in the fact that Tasso distances himself from the political, utopic vision of Trissino, the horrific and ideological of Giraldi Cinzio, and the melic and sentimental of Speroni.

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[130] Emphasis mine.

Tasso introduces a tragedy that psychologizes its multiplicity of themes and condenses them into

a self-conscious referent that acts on an individual and personal level:

> Il genere tragico come *autocoscienza* di un'élite esautorata si convince sempre più della validità del *messaggio*, della *coscienza* contenuta e perentoriamente offerta dall'oggetto artistico, non più semplice merce per riunioni eleganti: il teatro come apertura ad una riferibilità di messaggi di denuncia e di polemica, come *struttura* avversa e opposta al pubblico che non viene così corteggiato ma spinto violentemente ad una scelta senza compromessi. (Ariani 236)

I disagree with Ariani on this last point in that Tasso's ethical message is not black and white.

Within the *Re Torrismondo*, Tasso diminishes the culpability of his characters, but he does not

completely cancel out their responsibilities for their actions. To do this, he ignores a very key

point that Aristotle requires in his tragic theory and Sophocles employs in *Oedipus Rex*, Fate.

Fate plays little role in *Re* Torrismondo and the chorus says it plainly that man is responsible for

his own choices. In the choral song of Act IV, the chorus sings:

> COR: Ma, se pur d'alta parte a noi minaccia
>   e da' suoi regni in questi
>   di rea fortuna or guerra indìce il fato,
>   Leon, Tauro, Serpente, Orse celesti,
>   qui dove il mondo agghiaccia,
>   e gran Centauro ed Orione armato,
>   non si renda per segno in ciel turbato
>   l'animo invitto, e non si mostri infermo,
>   ma co 'l valor respinga i duri colpi;
>   che 'l destin non è fermo
>   a l'intrepido schermo.
>   Perch'umana virtù nulla s'incolpi,
>   ma de l'ingiuste accuse il ciel discolpi,
>   sovra le stelle eccelse
>   nata, e scesa nel core, albergo felse. (2730-2744)

The Chorus' interjection that man is not subject to Fate emphasizes the free will of the tragedy's

characters. These characters have all had choices whether to participate or not participate in the

action. The characters' freedom to choose is reflected in the audience and does not anchor the

tragedy to the binary of right and wrong of traditional Cinquecento tragedy. The self-conscious

nature of the characters and the work itself allow for a flexibility of interpretation as it becomes a personal experience for each individual audience member. Ariani goes on to say:

> Col Tasso, il personaggio statuario della tragedia classicheggiante (Trissino, Aretino e anche Giraldi) si flette, si rompe, si incrina, in una figura dall'umanità duramente contrastata; l'azione drammatica non cerca più la sua efficacia nella contrapposizione dei *tipi* (di eroi, negativi e positivi) ma nella rottura di tutti gli equilibri, fino alla manomissione dei valori: Alvida e Torrismondo vivono nell'equivoco, ambiguamente inconsapevoli. (237)

The only certainty in Tasso's tragic and cosmological framework is death and our own inexorable move towards it. Our arrival at death, however, depends very much on our own choices. Tasso challenges the pessimism of his world of the Counter Reformation by imbuing his characters with the freedom to decide while not yoking their desires to unbridled hedonism.

Ariani concludes his study of *Re Torrismondo*:

> Ma il *Torrismondo* è anche la sconfitta dell'ipotesi mitici di edonismo: negare il mondo dell'*Aminta* significava per il Tasso, oltre che negare la soluzione facile dell'idillio in un'obliterazione della necessità in favore della libertà (il « s'ei piace, ei lice »), escludere anche la possibilità che l'io si alleasse con la Fortuna, la possibilità che l'uomo, in una immobilità senza tempo e spazio, potesse vivere libero secondo la sua volontà in armonia con le forze trascendenti. (286)

I mentioned before that the final chorus dissolves into a nihilistic lament of the vanity of all things. This chorus would seem to indicate a fatalistic acceptance of the ideals of the Counter Reformation. I do not think that this is Tasso's intent in light of everything that has transpired before. The hopelessness of the final chorus would cancel the message just witnessed by the audience. Germondo has come to the Queen Mother to tell her of the loss of her two children. Beyond just relating this news to her, he makes a promise that assumes upon himself the roles of those she has lost.

> GER: A voi dunque vivrò, regina e madre:
> voi sarete regina, io vostro servo
> e vostro figlio ancor, se troppo a sdegno
> voi non m'avete. A voi la spada io cingo,

per voi non gitto la corona o calco,
non spargo l'arme sì felici un tempo,
e non verso lo spirto e spando il sangue.
Pronto a' vostri servigi, al vostro cenno,
sinché le membra reggerà quest'alma,
sarà co 'l proprio regno il re Germondo. (3297-3306)

Germondo will be her protector, servant, and son; he will be the continuation of her existence and family line. The friendship of Torrismondo and Germondo has reached its ultimate test. Germondo's promise of continued fidelity and protection engenders a sense of hope for tomorrow. The futurity of "vivrò" (3298), "sarete" (3299), and the implied "fia" (3299) projects a temporality outside of the play where Germondo's faith still holds constant and retains the memory of what has transpired. Also, it implies the Queen Mother still lives and life in Torrismondo's kingdom goes on. It is the dissolution of the tragic structure in the sense that it projects hope where it is not traditionally expected. The final chorus must be read as a lament of mortality and terrestrial affairs. The metaphysical projection of hope is beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the tragedy; the chorus laments physical and earthly constructs such as "regno" (3325), "onore" (3322), and "trionfo e palma" (3337). The chorus' final question, "Che più giova amicizia, o giova onore? (3339)," is rhetorical and highlights the eternal nature of these relationships. Tasso's seeming nihilism is in fact only nihilistic in the terrestrial sense and supports my interpretation that Tasso, despite his psychological turmoil and those of his characters, felt a sense of redemptive hope in man's mental makeup.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Italian Renaissance authors were the first in the early-modern tradition to embark on the recovery and composition of neoclassical tragedy; consequently, their work had to begin with a complete redefinition of the constituent elements. It has been my assessment that due to the challenges of re-defining the classical definitions of tragedy and having to incorporate them into existent theoretical frameworks, modern criticism has been prejudiced against the enormous task that Italian Renaissance tragedians faced. The Cinquecento represented a period of profound experimentation of the tragic genre and its theoretical elements. The century has wrestled with Aristotelian influence, source materials, and lyric stylistics; and the practices and conclusions of these authors has had an influential impact on several other tragic, literary traditions. In several of his tragedies, Shakespeare would end up borrowing material from Giraldi Cinzio's tragic corpus along with that of Luigi Groto. Beginning with Mellin Saint Gelais' *Sophonisbe*, the French often imported and translated Italian tragedy. Corneille too would compose a *Sophonisbe* in the following century as well as other mythological tragedies borrowing from the Italian tradition.

Tragedy represents a unique cultural perspective that must speak to its destined audience. As a genre, it is the confluence of many literary forms including: the epic, the dialogue, the oration, and lyric poetry. Within its scenic representation, we see the intersection of politics, religion, and philosophy. The multiplicity of possible meanings gave each author the freedom to create a vivid representation of their particular literary and historical moment. For example,

Trissino's *Sofonisba* has been undervalued for the prosaic quality of its lyrics and the lack of a fatalistic narrative. Yet, Trissino's audience was scholarly and the way that his tragedy was initially presented, that is to say recited and not performed, greatly affected his compositional process. Trissino relied on the ethics and rhetoric of his characters to move the action forward. Also, the fact that the tragedy served as a metaphorical presentation of a utopic vision rooted in the political moment necessitated a reformulation of Aristotle's theoretical paradigm.

Trissino's political motivations were only one example of the creating of meaning in sixteenth-century tragedy. It has become clear that tragic meaning is intimately bound to each author's theorization of the utility of tragedy and the role of the poet. What is interesting is that theoretical formulation of the tragic differed from person to person and region to region. The decentralized nature of the Italian intellectual and political landscape rendered tragic formulation unique to the intellectual, historical, and political environs. Italian Renaissance tragedies were written with specific courts and audiences in mind, and the translation of the tragic narrative was difficult to assimilate from court to court. This difficulty was particular to tragedy and not comedy due to the disparity in the definition of the tragic elements and tragedy's social utility. Giraldi Cinzio's preoccupation with Horace's dictums, that poetry must be both pleasing and useful, caused him to fixate on the ideological. Giraldi Cinzio's fixation, which was less rooted in his precise historical moment, forced him to be more flexible concerning his theorization of the tragic. Giraldi Cinzio thus ushered in a new style of tragic composition in the mid-Cinquecento. His *Orbecche* relied on a catharsis that was motivated by surprise and horror in the way the action unfolded. Giraldi Cinzio's tragic formulation was grounded in a very strict moralism that saw the function of the learned poet as educator and teacher of ethical values. The overt educative function of Giraldi Cinzio's theater did not diminish its popularity, but instead,

its direct ideological message appealed to a culture confronting the religious pessimism caused by the Counter Reformation. Giraldi Cinzio did not allow his poetic style to ossify, and he continually updated his conceptualization of the tragic function. In the end, his continued engagement with audience taste and the function of the poet would bring about the evolution of a new genre, the tragicomedy.

The evolution of style and form, not just the thematic elements, is an important component in the development of tragedy in the Cinquecento. Initially, it would seem that tragic form was static, but this was not the case as the debate grew surrounding the episodic and five-act divisions. Increasingly as more and more tragedies were staged, authors became aware that the scenic representations and lyric language were as important as the content choices. Experimentation with form and meter began with Alessandro Pazzi de' Medici's *Dido in Cartagine*. Pazzi decided to compose his tragedy in dactylic hexameter in order to add a sense of *gravitas* to his work. His contemporaries were not in favor of the slow and languid versification of a proparoxytonic meter imposed upon paroxytonic language. Pazzi's failures did not discourage Speroni from attempting a similar experiment, although he worked within established metrical and prosodic bounds. Speroni felt that tragedy's auditory experience was as impactful as its scenic representation. His usage of *quinari*, *settenari*, and *endecasillabi* opened the debate about the importance of the lyric language and word choice appropriate to tragedy. Although Speroni never finished *Canace*, the debate that ensued set the stage for Tasso's tragic composition, *Re Torrismondo*.

Tasso stands on the boundary between two distinct literary periods: the Renaissance and the Baroque. The *Re Torrismondo* represents the culmination of a century of theoretical engagement and experimentation. Tasso's vision of the tragic has evolved from the earlier

practice of Trissino and Giraldi Cinzio. Tasso no longer saw the poet's role as that of a teacher. He altered the balance of Horace's theoretical underpinnings of tragedy, the utility/delight function, by privileging the latter. This change to the function of tragedy divested it of the need to maintain strict verisimilitude. Tasso was able to designate new source material and branch away from the repetition of previous narratives. He situated his tragedy in the historical Nordic matter taken from Olao Magno. Tasso did not divorce himself wholly from classicist ideals because he still relied heavily on Aristotelian definitions of the basic tragic elements. This classicism caused him to still use classical models, due to their tragicity, as formulaic shells onto which he could map his own narrative. Many tragic elements of *Re Torrismondo* have their origin in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Tasso's innovation to the tragic genre lay in the redemption of his tragic characters. He removed culpability and responsibility from his characterizations in order to decouple his tragedy from explicit ideological meaning. The effect rendered each of the characters as the potential tragic hero. The audience was then moved by a psychological affinity that they felt with a particular character. The personal, psychologized experience of the mental anguish of the character propagates the tragic *pathos*.

The migration from the political and culturally ideological meaning of the earlier tragedies to the personal and psychological experience in Tasso marks a large step forward in the development of the genre. It brings the tragic experience more in line with what we have to come to expect from Shakespeare and later tragedians. The differences that emerge over the course of the sixteenth-century grant us the opportunity to better appreciate and critique the tragic formulation of each author. There are two major points that should by now be made clear. The first, is that modern criticism must take into account the enormity of the task of redefining the genre as a whole and each of its critical elements. The student, critic, or scholar approaching

Italian Renaissance tragedy must appreciate and understand the importance of these definitions to the compositional process. Secondly, sixteenth-century Italian tragedy represents a unique nascent moment in the historical period that is particular to Italy alone. It is unfair to judge the merits or failures of these tragedies on the basis of other literary and cultural traditions.

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