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Erminia Delivered: Notes on Tasso and Romance

Perhaps more than any other single character, Erminia, “la bella Erminia,” brings the perspective and dynamic of romance into the Gerusalemme Liberata.¹ The sheer variety of Erminia’s adventures is of the essence of romance. The genesis and nature of her love for Tancredi, her masquerade in Clorinda’s armor, her fearful flight and subsequent pastoral interlude, her kidnapping by Egyptian marauders, and her eventual reunion with the wounded Tancredi imitate romanesque motifs dear to the chivalric tradition. The restless movement of her adventures, the wandering from kingdom to kingdom, from Antioch to Jerusalem to Gaza and back to Jerusalem, has the open-ended rhythm of romance. Tasso’s development of the figure of Erminia shows us his solutions to the problem of harmonizing the conflicting demands of romance dispersion and epic convergence. Tasso redeems the pagan Erminia, grants her a “felice fine” (despite the misgivings he expressed about that happy ending in his correspondence with his “revisori,” Tasso did retain it in the Liberata),² and in a sense he also redeems romance, assimilating its most vital impulses within his classical epic poem.

Towards the end of the poem Erminia encounters Tancredi’s squire Vafrino and confesses to him that she has been a “donzella errante” (XIX, 91), an “Errante ancella” (XIX, 101),³ suggesting with the repeated use of that polysemous adjective that her physical and spiritual itinerary through the poem has in some way been similar to that of Goffredo’s “compagni erranti.” (The verb “errare” in Tasso often carries several meanings, the literal spatial sense of adventure and wandering, the general sense in Renaissance epic of spiritual confusion, and the more Tassesque sense of moral error and sin.⁴) The two-fold movement towards redemption in the Gerusalemme Liberata, the deliverance of the Holy City from its Saracen occupation and the spiritual salvation of the individual heroes,⁵ finds a particularly interesting expression in the romantic figure of Erminia. Erminia is the only pagan notable who sets out from occupied Jerusalem and returns to liberated Jerusalem. The
city to which she returns is not the same city that she left, and she is not the same woman. Erminia's movement through the poem is marked by a growth in moral vision and strength that parallels the growth and regeneration experienced by Goffredo's paladins.6

Erminia first appears at the beginning of Canto III, high up on a tower in Jerusalem gazing down on the first engagement of the pagans and Christians. Like Helen with Priam on the walls of Troy in Iliad III, she is identifying the enemy heroes for King Aladino. We learn that she is hiding strong feelings for Tancredi, one of the Christians who has conquered her people ("già sente palpitarsi il petto" III, 17). Lafranco Caretti observes how we get two perspectives on the same battle in this scene, that of the close and bloody clashes on the field and that of Erminia's tranquil descriptions of the same knights, descriptions which are distancing not only spatially but also emotionally. Her reflective and sentimental reveries relieve the tension of the heroic battlefield narrative.7

The presence of Erminia generally brings this perspective of romance to the stark epic drama. Her love for Tancredi provides a softening complication to the heroic rigor of the love story of Tancredi and Clorinda. Her adventures in the pastoral Arcadia provide a respite from the heroic martial narrative and color our perceptions of the false idyll of Armida's garden. Finally, and most importantly, the romantic division and self-delusion in her soul mirror the lack of heroic moral unity in Goffredo's army.

I

The Erminia-Tancredi-Clorinda triangle is one of Tasso's most interesting resolutions of the conflict between epic and romance, between the abstract Aristotelian canons of unity of action and the proven success of variety in such predecessors as Boiardo and Ariosto. The open-ended, discursive nature of amatory adventure in the chivalric romance is inherent in the love stories of Erminia and Tancredi. Chase after illusions, flight into the woods of Arthurian tradition, mistaken identities, blind and unrequited love, immature judgement, entrapment by evil powers, the very stuff of the errare (in all senses) of romance, are the very stuff of their stories.8 What makes their adventures different from those of their romance predecessors is the sense of structure and balance that the triangle itself provides. Tancredi as the object or subject of both of the love stories presents a single point of reference for a multiplicity of actions.9 Tasso would not abandon himself to the multiple unrelated digressive adventures of a Ruggiero. The friendship of the heroic Clorinda and the romantic Erminia closes the triangle and assures "quell'unità che è mista" which Tasso says is the goal of the epic poet.10
The triangle firmly encloses the variety of tones elicited by the themes of love and war. The Penthesilean reserve of Clorinda and the softly feminine escape of golden hair from her falling helmet embody the essential interpenetration of these two themes in the poem. Despite herself she constantly brings the theme of love onto the battlefield. Each time Tancredi becomes aware of her presence there is a lull in his attention to the combat. Chasing after Erminia in her disguise as Clorinda, he abandons the battlefield and the interrupted duel with Argante and flies into Armida’s power. Finally, having killed Clorinda unwittingly, he is ready to abandon arms altogether. Only the reproach of Pietro l’Eremita and the dream of the glorified Clorinda encourage him to remain true to his mission as “cavalier di Cristo.”

Erminia also brings together the themes of love and war, but in a way that attenuates the epic intensity and tragic resonances of the Tancredi-Clorinda relationship. Early in the poem, in the scene where she identifies the Christian knights for Aladino, Erminia interposes a filter of romance between the stark martial combat and the reader. The poet’s allusions in the same scene to her passion for Tancredi complicate our perception of Tancredi’s love for Clorinda and provide sentimental balance to the more elevated drama of Tancredi’s encounter with Clorinda. When Erminia puts on Clorinda’s armor to go to the aid of the wounded Tancredi, the themes of love and war, of Tancredi’s love for Clorinda and Erminia’s love for Tancredi, fuse in a peculiarly romantic plot complication. Tancredi rushes off in pursuit of what he thinks is Clorinda and ends up a prisoner of Armida, far from Jerusalem and his mission as a crusader. Erminia flees the Christian sentries and begins the series of adventures which will eventually bring her back to Jerusalem in Tancredi’s company. In the union of love and war in the Erminia-Tancredi relationship there is neither ecstatic contemplation nor tragic immobilization; there is movement, action, and, ultimately, hope. For, as we know, the final interaction of the amatory and martial themes in the poem occurs when, in a scene with many details reminiscent of the Aminta, Erminia rescues the wounded Tancredi and stanches his blood with her hair, thus making possible the return of both of these disordered characters of romance into the moral equilibrium figured in the liberated Jerusalem. Love is now a positive, healing, unifying force, no longer a principle of dispersion and disorientation.

The triangle is completed by the close friendship of Clorinda and Erminia. The two share everything, even their bed, but Erminia does not confide her love for Tancredi.
Soleva Erminia in compagnia sovente
de la guerriera far lunga dimora.
Seco la vide il sol da l'occidente,
seco la vide la novella aurora;
e quando son del dì le luci spente,
un sol letto le accolse ambe talora:
e null'altro pensier che l'amoroso
l'una vergine a l'altra avrebbe ascoso. (VI. 79)

They are both beautiful young women, both golden-haired, both vergine, but they are essentially different in their femininity. Clorinda rejects women's clothes and women's seclusion for the freedom of the battlefield:

Costei gl'ingegni feminili e gli usi
tutti sprezzò sin da l'età più acerba:
a i lavori d'Aracne, a l'ago, a i fusi
inchinar non degnò la man superba.
Fuggì gli abiti molli e i lochi chiusi,
ché ne' campi onestate anco si serba;
armò d'orgoglio il volto, e si compiacque
rigido farlo, e pur rigido piacque. (II. 39)

Erminia envies Clorinda's freedom of movement:

quant'io la invidio! e non l'invidio il vanto
o 'l feminil onor de l'esser bella.
A lei non tarda i passi il lungo manto,
né 'l suo valor rinchiuide invida cella,
ma veste l'armi, e se d'uscirne agogna,
vassene e non la tien tema o vergogna. (VI. 82)

There is an interesting contrast here, evident in the thematic echoes of the two passages. Lillian Sara Robinson remarks on the ironic tension in this situation where each woman's condition sharpens and clarifies the image of the other.11 Both women express the rejection of the traditional female model and thus face a risk to their onestate. Clorinda spurns a woman's role to assume that of a man on the battlefield, and goes off fully armed against threats to her chastity. Erminia, on the other hand, would only temporarily give up the traditional restrictions of the female life, and only in order to fulfill her very feminine desire to win a man's heart. Thus, as Onore had warned her, she truly risks losing her good name:

Dunque il titolo tu d'esser pudica
sí poco stimi, e d'onestate il pregio,
che te n'andrai fra nazion nemica,
notturna amante, a ricercar dispregio?
Onde il superbo vincitor ti dica:
"Perdesti il regno, e in un l'animo regio;
non sei di me tu degna", e ti conceda
vulgare a gli altri e mal gradita preda". (VI. 72)

II

Erminia's pastoral interlude is a period of education both for her
and for the reader. She begins to realize the depth of the spiritual
disorientation in her immoderate love for Tancredi, and the reader
has a glimpse of a true Arcadia which will be a foil to the artificial
earthly paradise of Armida's garden. There are also some interesting
themetic correspondences between the episode of Erminia's stay among the shepherds and Tasso's pastoral drama, the Aminta.
The differences, though, are particularly instructive for, in a sense, the poet is commenting on the moral implications of values
endorsed in his earlier work. In Erminia's pastoral there are no
worldly-wise and cynical shepherds debating questions of love and
counseling the pursuit of pleasure. The chorus of the Aminta had
lamented the passing of the Golden Age when the sense of honor
had come to destroy that wonderful law, "s'ei piace, ei lice." Erminia is in trouble now because she followed the similar counsel
of Amore ("consiglier fallace"), who had told her to go to Tancredi,
"vanne omai dove il desio t'invoglia" (VI. 74). Rinaldo will be
seduced by Armida's siren with the same advice, "Solo chi segue
ciò che piace è saggio" (XIV. 62).

While the spring landscape in Erminia's pastoral has all the ideal
elements of the traditional locus amoenus, it has none of the sen-
suality of Armida's garden, none of the seductive power of an
artificial and enchanted nature where it is "perpetuo aprile." Here
is Erminia's charming scene:

Non si destò fin che garrir gli augelli
Non sentí lieti e salutar gli albori
e mormorar il fiume a gli arboscelli,
e con l'onda scherzar l'aura e co i fiori.
Apre i languidi lumi e guarda quelli
alberghi solitari de' pastori,
e parle voce udir tra l'acqua e i rami,
ch'a i sospiri ed al pianto la richiami. (VII. 5)

And here is Armida's garden, where the very same elements take
on a heightened sensuality in the extended and insistent description:

Vezzosi augelli infra le verdi fronde
Temprano a prova lascivette note;
mormora l'aura, e fa le foglie e l'onde
garrir che variamente ella percote.
Erminia first finds the natural elements of the place responsive to her grief, "e parle voce udir tra l’acqua e i rami/ch’a i sospiri ed al pianto la richiami" (VII. 3 — italics mine), but she soon learns that (unlike those in the Aminta) the trees are in reality deaf to her laments, "Così ragiona a i sordi tronchi" (VII. 22). This is a realistic Arcadia, a productive pastoral, a natural world which is not opposed to the values of the spirit, which does not shirk duty for pleasure. Erminia dons humble clothes here, milks cows, and makes butter. Her experience is in sharp contrast to that of Rinaldo in Armida’s false garden, where, clad in effeminate clothes and perfumes, he is enslaved to idle sensuality.

The shepherd does not scold Erminia for her youthful passion and error; he grieves with her and offers her the peace of his world. She offers him gold, the power of her world. His rejection of that power underscores the division between their worlds. The motif of rustic innocence versus courtly corruption in the episode underscores the poem’s general theme of spiritual liberation. In his scorn for worldly values the old shepherd recalls Goffredo and what Giovanni Getto calls the Buglione’s “nostalgia di cieli immacolati.” We can imagine "il Capitano" coming to just such a garden once he has reached Jerusalem and fulfilled his vow. This is the garden of the mature person, the garden to which one retires, like the shepherd, after his work and life in the world. Erminia’s stay in the shepherds’ Arcadia is brief because Erminia is young and still dominated by love. This garden gives her momentary peace and a glimpse of the wisdom of maturity. It is a chance for her to see an alternative to the worldliness and strife of life, and it functions in the poem as a clear foil to the false and immoral idyll of Armida’s artificial garden.

III

From the beginning of the poem Tasso emphasizes the division in the souls of his characters. God looks down from heaven in Canto I and passes the major Christian knights in review. They are almost all torn between their collective duty to the cause of Jerusalem and the centrifugal, divisive pull of the things of this world. Baldovino has greedy ambitions ("vede in Baldovin cupido ingegno,/ch’a l’umane grandezze intento aspira" I. 9). Tancredi is in the throes of a vain love ("Vede Tancredi aver la vita a sdegno,/tante un suo
vano amor l’ange e martira” I. 9). Boemondo is distracted from the crusade by the establishment and management of his new rule in Antioch, and Rinaldo’s effectiveness is vitiated by an immoderate desire for glory (“d’onor brame immoderate, ardenti” I. 10). The vanity in all these efforts to gain power and prestige are underscored later in the poem when Goffredo has a vision of the earth from the perspective of heaven. The divinely appointed leader of Baldovino, Tancredi, Boemonde, and Rinaldo looks down and smiles,

ché vide un punto sol, mar, terre e fiumi,
che qui paion distinti in tante guise,
ed ammirò che pur a l’ombre, a i fumi
la nostra folle umanità s’affise,
servo imperio cercando e muta fama,
né miri il ciel ch’a sé n’invita e chiama. (XIV. 11)

Tasso’s story of the liberation of Jerusalem is really the story of the liberation of the souls of these heroes from servitude “a l’ombre, a i fumi.” Jerusalem is not taken until they have all faced their errors and their weaknesses in the Enchanted Woods and realized their need for divine help. Similarly Erminia is not reunited with Tancredi until she faces her self-delusion and accepts her need for guidance.

Erminia’s language of love with its tortured imagery, its ambiguities, paradoxes, and antitheses expresses the deep divisions that exist within the souls of Tasso’s heroes. From her first dissembling words about Tancredi when she identifies him to Aladino we sense in Erminia a desperation born of spiritual disorder:

Ahi quanto è crudo nel ferire! a piaga
ch’ei faccia, erba non giova od arte maga.
   Egli è il prence Tancredi: oh prigioniero
mio fosse un giorno! e no ‘l vorrei già morto;
vivo il vorrei, perch’ in me desse al fero
desio dolce vendetta alcun conforto. — (III. 19-20)

The two striking enjambements (“prigioniero/mio,” “fero/desio”), the accumulation of oxymoron in the juxtaposition “fero/desio dolce/vendetta,” and the chiasmatic phrasing of “nol vorrei già morto;/vivo il vorrei” are evidence of Tasso’s felicitous use of metrical-syntactical structures to convey spiritual incoherence.15

In Canto VI Tasso tells us more about Erminia. We hear how Tancredi had treated her like a queen when Antioch had fallen, how he had given her her physical freedom while unwittingly
enslaving her affections. The theme of the opposition of liberty and freedom begins to develop:

Così se 'l corpo libertà riebbe,  
fu l' alma sempre in servitute astretta.  
Ben molto a lei d'abbandonar increbbe  
il signor caro e la prigion dilettà; (VI. 58)

The recurrent paradoxical expression of the theme of liberty and imprisonment in love is a figure both of the central narrative subject of the poem, the historical liberation of occupied Jerusalem, and of the essential spiritual theme of the poem, the liberation of the soul for the attainment of the other Jerusalem, that inner Holy City of virtue sought by each hero.  

When Amore and Onore debate Erminia's desire to go out to Tancredi's tent in the Christian camp, Onore reminds her of the chastity she preserved in captivity:

e tu libera or vuoi perder la bella  
verginità ch'in prigionia guardasti? (VI. 71)

Once again Erminia dreams of having Tancredi as her prisoner:

e forse or forà qui mio prigioniero  
e sosterria da la nemica amante  
giogo di servitù dolce e leggiero,  
e già per li suoi nodi i' sentirei  
fatti soavi e alleggeriti i miei. (VI. 84)

In her final appearance toward the end of the poem, Erminia's words to Vafrino immediately pick up the theme of sweet imprisonment and bitter liberty:

Ne de la dolce prigion due lieti mesi  
pietoso prigionier m'avesti in guardà,  

Anzi pregar ti vo' che, quando torni,  
mi riconduca a la prigion mia cara.  
Torbide notti e tenebrosi giorni,  
misera, vivo in libertate amara. (XIX. 82-83)

When Erminia decides to tell her story to Vafrino she bids Vergogna to go away; it is no longer appropriate since she has become a "donzella errante." Her confession takes up the same arguments and accusations that Onore had used to dissuade her from going to Tancredi's tent. Onore had warned Erminia that she risked the loss of herself as well as that of her kingdom:
Onde il superbo vincitor ti dica:
"Perdesti il regno, e in un l'animo regio; (VI. 72)

Now Erminia admits that she lost herself from the very beginning:

— La notte a me fatale
ed a la patria mia che giacque oppressa,
perdei piú che non parve; e 'l mio gran male
non ebbi in lei, ma derivò da essa.
Leve perdita è il regno; io co 'l regale
mio alto stato anco perdei me stessa:
per mai non ricovrarla, allor perdei
la mente, folle, e il core e i sensi miei. (XIX. 92)

When Tancredi gave her her freedom she lost herself to him:

Oimè! che fu rapina e parve dono,
ché rendendomi a me da me mi tolse. (XIX. 95)

All of these terse expressions of the double loss of kingdom and self, of the paradox of theft and gift, are reminiscent of Dantesque moments where the grammar functions to disclose spiritual disorder and division (for example, Pier delle Vigne’s “Ingiusto fece me contra me giusto” Inferno XIII. 72, or Pia de’ Tolomei’s “Siena mi fe, disfecemi Maremma” Purgatorio V. 134). Now Erminia realizes that she should not have hidden her love but should have sought help in restraining her passion from the beginning:

Sfortunato silenzio! avessi almeno
chiesta allor medicina al gran martire,
s’esser poscia dovea lentato il freno,
quando non giovarebbe, al mio desire. (XIX. 97)

Erminia’s self-accusation is harsh, but it represents her ability to look more honestly at her emotional disorientation. “Tante volte liberata e serva” (XIX. 100), she is still enmeshed in her love for Tancredi, but she now has the integrity of self-knowledge. The secretive, solitary young girl who once hid her feelings from even her best friend now confesses all to the worldly-wise Vafrino and acknowledges her guilt in the very terms which Onore had used in the earlier tenzone with Amore.

In leaving Gaza Erminia tells Vafrino that she is motivated by two things, by her love for Tancredi and by her decision not to give further help to the pagans, who have relied on her familiarity with the Christians for aid in making insignia to disguise themselves as Goffredo’s guards. She now rejects all forms of deception:
schivo ed aborro in qual si voglia modo
contaminarmi in atto alcun di frodo. (XIX. 89)

Up to this point Erminia’s actions have all been based on forms of masquerade and deception, deception of others and, inevitably, deception of herself.

Early in the poem, as we have seen, she hides her true feelings for Tancredi from King Aladino, disguising them as hate:

nasconde
sotto il manto de l’odio altro desio: (III. 19)

That “cloak” of hate finds its expression in the subtle double meanings and antitheses of a linguistic masquerade that is ultimately a source of pain to Erminia:

Così parlava, e de’ suoi detti il vero
da chi l’udiva in altro senso è torto;
e fuor n’uscì con le sue voci estreme
misto un sospir che ’ndarno ella già preme. (III. 20)

The theme of disguise comes in literally when Erminia decides to dress up in Clorinda’s armor to gain an easier exit from Jerusalem to seek Tancredi in his tent. Tasso points to the irony and self-deception in her masquerade when she refers to her scheme as “un ingegnoso inganno” (VI. 87), “innocenti frodi” (VI. 88). The distance between reality and disguise in Erminia and the physical and spiritual self-betrayal in her action are underscored nicely in this description. The weight of her armor is in sharp contrast to the delicacy of her body:

Co ‘l durissimo acciar preme ed offende
il delicato collo e l’aurea chioma,
e la tenera man lo scudo prende,
pur troppo grave e insopportabil soma.
Così tutta di ferro intorno splende,
e in atto militar se stessa doma. (VI. 92)

When Erminia finds herself among the shepherds she once again puts on a “cloak” of self-delusion. Hoping to find peace of mind she dons their rustic clothes and settles into pastoral life:

Forse fia che ‘l mio core infra quest’ombre
del suo peso mortal parte disgombre. (VII. 15)

Once again the masquerade is useless; the disguise will not contain the reality:
Non copre abito vil la nobil luce
e quanto è in lei d’altero e di gentile,
e fuor la maestà regia traluce
per gli atti anch’or de l’essercizio umile. (VII. 18)

Once again Erminia is deluded in her attempt to find lasting peace. Her burning love for Tancredi will not be quenched by a change of costume.

When, however, Erminia encounters Vafrino in Canto XIX, she is ready to put these self-delusions behind her, and though Vafrino himself is in disguise in order to spy at the Egyptian court, she, the maestra of masquerade, recognizes him. Her statement of rejection of more involvement in fraud anticipates her full disclosure to Vafrino of the story of her love for Tancredi. Erminia no longer represents herself as someone she is not. She is returning to Jerusalem a different woman. She had departed in disguise and had been sent, because of that disguise, into a flight in which, Tasso says, "errò senza consiglio e senza guida" (VII. 3 — italics mine). Now she returns, with a new self-awareness and under proper guidance:

Vafrino al fianco di colei si pose,
si come uom sòle a le guardate cose. (XIX. 117)

And now that she has been restored to herself, it is truly fitting that she be finally reunited with Tancredi, for whatever "guiderdone" may be in store for her, about which Tasso is characteristically vague. Erminia calms the waking Tancredi and says:

taci e riposa.
Salute avrai, prepara il guiderdone. —
Ed al suo capo il grembo indi suppone. (XIX. 114)\(^\text{18}\)

In the Discorsi dell’arte poetica Tasso states that the multiple actions of the ideal epic poem should be so organically related that the subtraction of one would bring the collapse of the entire narrative structure.\(^\text{10}\) In the Discorsi del poema eroico he further stipulates that the multiple actions be all directed to a single end. He divides them into two types based on their narrative function, "mezzi di questo fine ed agevolezze" or "impedimenti e disturbi."\(^\text{20}\) The sentimental disorientation of her character and the romantic vagaries of her adventures make Erminia emblematic of the centrifugal forces and temptations (the "impedimenti" or "disturbi") which distract the heroes from their epic moral goal. In his concern for the unity of his poem, however, Tasso makes Erminia both an
impediment and a means to the end of his story. Her disclosure of the pagans' plans in Egypt give the Christians the final advantage they need to at last win Jerusalem, and her succor to the wounded Tancredi gives him the strength to enter the Holy City. Thus Tasso resolves the tension between romantic discursiveness and epic unity by making the former finally serve the latter.

Erminia expresses the basic struggles in the souls of all of Tasso's heroes, the self-delusion, the divided allegiances, and the tension between the pursuit of virtue and the many obstacles to its attainment and conservation. The constantly recurring play on words like "prigione" and "libertate" in Erminia's language is more than a precious conceit; it is representative of the essential spiritual dilemma of Tasso's heroes and of Everyman in his struggle to "liberate Jerusalem" to attain that "felicità civile" which is figured in Tasso's poem. The movement of the narrative is a movement toward the resolution of that perennial human struggle to free oneself from servitude to false values, "a l'ombre, a i fumi."

Erminia is first presented to us in occupied Jerusalem, a prey to her disordered emotions. She returns at the very end of the poem to "Gerusalemme liberata," to a redeemed city. And she is a redeemed woman. Like the Christians, like her beloved Tancredi, she has had to liberate the Jerusalem of her own soul. Now she returns, under Vafrino's guidance, with her emotions at peace. The dispersive, centrifugal, romantic energy of her adventures is resolved in a circular movement which achieves a final epic unity. Erminia's story, then, is a story of spiritual evolution, and because it is spiritual evolution in the context of romance convention, we can see a certain redemption of the romance in Tasso's epic. The structures and themes of romance serve as means to greater moral awareness.

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**NOTES**

1 By "romance" I refer to the literary form which arose in France in the late twelfth century when poets turned from the tradition of the heroic epic to the realm of Arthurian chivalry, a genre of narrative in which digressive stories of love, magic, and individual knightly adventures unrelated to any common goal diffuse the sharp and unified focus of the traditional theme of the defense of Christendom.

2 See Torquato Tasso, *Liberata*. ed. Cesare Guasti (Firenze, 1852), I, pp. 150, 182, 186, and especially p. 168, where he expresses the desire for a "good" end, not just a "happy" one: "Solo l'amor di Erminia par che, in un certo modo, abbia felicie fine. Io vorrei anco a questo dar un fine buono e farla non sol far cristiana ma religiosa monaca." In the *Liberata* Tasso remains true to his original inspiration, "Ho condotto a fine la favola d'Erminia, come ha voluto la musa, se non
come avrebbe voluto l'arte" (Lettere, I, p. 180), but in the Gerusalemme Conquistata Erminia becomes Nicea, the daughter of Solimano, and does end her adventures in a convent.

3 All quotations from Tasso's poem are from Gerusalemme Liberata, ed. Lanfranco Caretti (Torino, 1971).

4 Petrarch's first sonnet, the prologue to his Rime sparse, similarly connects moral error with spiritual confusion and wandering. His youthful love, his "primo giovenile errore," was above all a "vaneggiar," a "raving" of the soul.

5 For a thoughtful discussion of this two-fold movement towards redemption in the Gerusalemme Liberata and of the concomitant redemption of chivalric romance in its conversion to a vehicle of epic unity, see Andrew Fichter, "Tasso's Epic of Deliverance," PMLA 93 (1978), 265-74.

6 Eugenio Donadoni notes the congruence of Erminia's physical wanderings and her spiritual vagaries, but his misleading biographical inferences and insistence on the heroine's adventures as an allegory of Tasso the "peregrino errante" limit his discussion and distort his interpretation. See Torquato Tasso (Firenze, 1967), p. 232.


8 Dante Della Terza comments on Tasso's openness toward the Arioste an example of the multiple plot in "History and the Epic Discourse: Remarks on the Narrative Structure of Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata," Quaderni d'italianistica 1 (1980), 30-45. Della Terza observes that the role of the chivalric and romanesque tradition within Tasso's poem largely coincides with the "error" of his Christian knights.

9 For a discussion of this point see Giovanni Getto, Nel Mondo della Gerusalemme (Firenze, 1968), p. 130.


12 In his discussion of Armida's garden A. Bartlett Giamatti asserts that there is no middle ground in Tasso, that his vision did not include a garden that would be acceptable to the city, a sensuality that would not bring damnation. See The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic (Princeton, 1969), pp. 208-09. I believe, however, that we are meant to see the shepherd's garden as just such a reconciliation of sensuality and spirituality, a middle ground where, in the wisdom of maturity, the demands of the whole person are satisfied.

13 Nel Mondo della Gerusalemme, p. 35.

14 Goffredo's spiritual liberation is of a different order from that of his compagni erranti. He is painfully aware of the vanity and illusory gratification of the things of this world and isolated in his dedication to the Holy Cause. His final redemption is in the "scioccare del voto," in the fulfillment of the tremendous moral responsibility of his leadership and the liberation from its attendant fear, doubt, and uncertainty. Getto analyzes the psychological complexity of the figure of Goffredo and the tension between the practical demands of his role as Capitano and his intimate "ansa di trascendenti solitudini e di suprema quiete contemplativa." Nel Mondo, p. 35.

15 Fredi Chiappelli closely analyzes the expressive content of Erminia's language in Studi sul linguaggio del Tasso epico (Firenze, 1957), pp. 152-54. Chiappelli observes how the strong positive relief of "mio" in the lines quoted signals the depth of Erminia's conflict of feelings.

16 Tasso sets forth his poem's subject in the allegory which he wrote after its composition thus: "Gerusalemme, città forte, ed in aspra e montuosa regione collocata, alla quale, siccome ad ultimo fine, sono drizzate tutte le imprese dell'esercito fedele, ci segna la felicità civile, qual pero conviene al buon Cristiano, come più sotto si dischierà: la quale è un bene molto difficile da conseguire, e posto in cima all'alpestr e faticoso giogo della virtù; ed a questo sono volte, come ad ultima meta, tutte le azioni dell'uomo politico." See Opere di Torquato Tasso (Pisa, 1830), 24, p. vii.

Beatrice Corrigan sees fulfillment in Christian love implicit in the "peregrina gonna" which Erminia is wearing in Canto XIX when she finds the happiness she had sought in vain dressed in Clorinda’s armor and in the rustic garb of Arcadia. Corrigan traces a double journey in the story of this "pellegrina d’amore" with the final achievement of two almost indivisible objects — Tancredi and entrance into the Christian camp. See "Erminia and Tancredi: The Happy Ending," Italica XL (1963), 325-33.

"Ma che nondimeno uno sia il poema che tanta varietà di materie contenga, una la forma e la favola sua, e che tutte queste cose siano di maniera composte che l’una l’altra riguardi, l’una a l’altra corrisponda, l’una da l’altra o necessariamente o verosimilmente dependa: si che una sola parte o tolta via o mutata di sito, il tutto ruini." Scritti sull’arte poetica, I, pp. 41-42.

"Tutta dunque la varietà nel poema nascerà da’ mezzi e da gli impedimenti: i quali posson esser diversi e di molte maniere e quasi di molte nature, e non distruggeranno l’unità de la favola, nondimeno, s’uno sarà il principio da quale i mezzi dependeranno, ed uno il fine a cui sono dirizzati. . . ." Scritti sull’arte poetica, II, p. 252.