
Written at the very end of his life, at a date which is still uncertain but which Mr. Tusiani places between 1592 and 1594 (*Introduction*, p. xii), Tasso’s *Mondo creato* is a complex work comprising nearly nine thousand lines of blank verse in hendecasyllables and drawing on a vast range of sources which not only include, as one might expect, the Bible and early religious figures like Saint Augustine and Saint Basil, but also demonstrate a wide knowledge of secular writers throughout the ages, as is clear from frequent references to Greek and Latin authors such as Aristotle and Virgil, and Medieval and Renaissance poets and thinkers of the stature of Dante and Pico della Mirandola. To this is added a phenomenal grasp of Classical mythology, history, both factual and intellectual, geography, and even astronomy, in an opus that well bears out the publisher’s description of it as “an encyclopedic poem . . . [which] is Tasso’s intellectual legacy” (p. 249).

The phrase, however, has a double edge which provides the reason for this work’s relative neglect over the last four centuries, for it is precisely what Mr. Tusiani calls “Tasso’s massive erudition and, above all, his desire to instruct his reader” (*Introduction*, p. xvii) which has, perhaps inevitably, led to the almost total dominance of scholarship over poetic fervour throughout the *Mondo*. The result is that, while we are undoubtedly impressed by the author’s learning and his ability to exemplify the Renaissance concept of the “complete man” proficient in all areas of knowledge, we are hardly ever moved by the text, and even more conscious of its poetic limitations on those rare occasions when Tasso provides what it is tempting to call a flash of the old genius that we associate with the author of the *Liberata* (e.g. the account of the phoenix’s death and rebirth in Day Five, ll. 1344-1591, the description of the ants in Day Six, ll. 512-542, the oft-quoted final invocation to God in Day Seven, ll. 1086-1127).

The point is freely admitted by many Italian critics, such as A. Galletti & E. Chiòrboli, who speak tellingly of “[la] stanca prosaicità del verso [che tradisce] la precoce decadenza del poeta” (*Letteratura italiana: storia e antologia*, vol. II, pt. 1. Bologna, Zanichelli, 1947, p. 117), and Natalino Sapegno, who mentions “un soverchio di enfiasti macchinosa e di barocca eloquenza” (*Compendio di storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. II. Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1959, p. 244); it is, however, accepted only in part by Giorgio Petrocchi, whose critical edition of the text has served as a basis for this translation (*v. Introduction*, p. xxii, note 5), and who, while conceding “una certa difficoltà di lettura” (*L’ultimo Tasso e il Mondo creato*, p. xxxvii of introduction to critical text, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1951, pp. vii-1), describes such general disapproval as “un’interpretazione frettolosa” (*ibid.*, p. xxxviii), and proclaims that “l’informazione erudita è spessissimo riscattata dalla poesia” (*ibid.*, pp. xxxviii-xxxix) while insisting that Tasso’s learning is at no time “pedantescas raccolta del materiale erudito, ma... meditata costruzione letteraria” (*ibid.*, p. xli ix). This view is shared by Mr. Tusiani, who believes the poet’s execution of his theme to be “the most awesome and intriguing attempt ever made in such a field” (*op. cit.*, p. xviii) and points out in
his defense of Tasso's finished product that, although at times "we still fail to understand why certain phrases sounded as verse even to their author's ear" (ibid., p. xv), one cannot expect consistent performance in a work of this length, and that "often dormitat Homerus himself" (ibid., p. xvi).

While it is for the reader to make up his mind which of these contrasting views is more valid, he is unlikely to find Tasso's Mondo creato an easily accessible work, and we must be grateful to Mr. Tusiani for having made it that much more so by providing us with a translation that appears to flow effortlessly from his pen and is rarely difficult to understand, even when deriving from what he rightly calls an "almost frightening labyrinth of verse" (ibid., p. xviii). In this sense one cannot but applaud his undertaking and be pleased that he has contributed to widening the knowledge of non-Italianists concerning Renaissance poetry and Renaissance learning by throwing light on what has until now remained an obscure work.

Judging the quality of the translation itself is a more difficult task. The principles that have guided Mr. Tusiani in his enterprise are outlined on pages xviii-xxi of the Introduction, and appear, at least to this reviewer, to be open to question. The first and most obvious point concerns "the impossible task of preserving the exact number of lines in each of the original Sette Giornate" (ibid., p. xix), a claim described somewhat surprisingly as "a misadventure that any translator would most likely call inconsequential" (ibid.). I do not have the advantage of access to either Mr. Tusiani's article on the translating of poetry or the two tesi di laurea on his work mentioned in note 18 on page xxii, and am thus unaware of any information relating to this idea which they may contain, but feel there is a basic confusion here between the two activities of poet and translator, something which is perhaps especially likely to occur when, as here, they are discharged by the same individual. There is an important difference between providing a faithful translation of a foreign text and creating an English version in blank verse of a poetic original, in that, while the former can and indeed should sacrifice lyrical flourishes, stylistic devices, and the whole paraphernalia of poetic expression on the altar of factual accuracy, the latter must endeavour, as far as such a thing is possible, to render the flavour of the original poetic expression, or, as a second best, create an English poetic equivalent, something that will inevitably involve taking liberties with the original text and cutting or amplifying as seems appropriate. Mr. Tusiani's brave decision to convert near on nine thousand hendecasyllables into what is, for English-speaking readers, a more familiar ten-line construction, while at the same time communicating the essence of the original Italian, is clearly an example of the latter activity, and can only be judged correctly if approached in these terms, for as a translation it must of necessity prove, as he himself acknowledges, "misleading and even irritating" (ibid.) for anyone who wishes to compare one text with the other. Clearly this irritation, which he correctly anticipates in his readers, would have been avoided a priori if the key word "Translated" had been omitted from the title-page and his work presented in the Introduction under different criteria. It is in the light of such criteria, that my remaining remarks are made, i.e. in the context of whether Tusiani's Creation of the World is an effective English version of Tasso's Mondo creato.

We may begin by reconsidering the question of the number of lines in each Day, and sympathising with Mr. Tusiani's desire to cut through what he rightly calls
“superabundance of tautological terms and entire phrases” (ibid.) in the Italian text to create a more concise and less tedious flow of discourse while preserving the spirit of the original. Some may feel that he has perhaps approached this part of his task with too much enthusiasm, in that all Days apart from the first two are reduced in length, in one case quite drastically (the fifth, from 1626 lines to a mere 1552), and it is tempting to deduce an understandable over-reaction on his part to the author’s cry in Day Three, “Ma pur troppo il parlar s’avanza e cresce” (l. 1445). In some cases this pruning has eliminated touches that might have been better preserved, e.g. in Day Seven ll. 1039-1040, the contrast between God’s “sublime e giusta legge / De la ragione” and fallen Man’s “Legge . . . / avversa e ribellante” disappears and is replaced by a simple reference to “the law given to rebellious reason” (l. 1015); in Day Five the pursuit of the smaller by the larger fish contains the line “E dal gran predator sia preso al fine” (342), which is omitted for no apparent reason; in Day Three two lines included in the condemnation of pride stemming from wealth have likewise been cut without it being clear why this should have been thought desirable (1004-1005). More serious are the straightforward errors in translation, perhaps to some degree inevitable in a work of this length, but nonetheless disturbing, especially when they result in a radical change of meaning. Alongside a few obvious misreadings, such as “the sun changes countless times each day” (Day Two, l. 766) for “muta in un sol di mille sembianze” (l. 757), and “seventh day” (Day Seven, l. 191) for “settimo anno” (l. 188), we find several more complex misinterpretations. Thus the temperament of a child born in Taurus, described in Day Two as “faticoso, e tolerante a l’opre” (l. 709), here figures as “wearisome, intolerant of toil” (l. 716); there is clearly confusion here between the modern and archaic use of “faticoso,” defined respectively by Zingarelli as “Che . . . procura fatica” and “Esercitato alla fatica” (N. ZINGARELLI, Vocabolario della lingua italiana. Bologna, Zanichelli, 1970, p. 648), with a quotation from Tasso himself as an example of the latter meaning (“sovrappone / l’arme a le membra faticose intorno,” with no indication of the source), this first mistake being then followed by a misreading of “tolerante” to fit in with the concept of “wearisome.” In Day Four we read that the setting of the sun “mai . . . / Non ci lascia partendo a pien contenti” (ll. 138-139), which is rendered as “always . . . it leaves the world / blissfully sated” (ll. 136-137), the very opposite meaning and one that does not tally with the point being made by the author in this section, namely that “eternal things in heaven” (l. 124) are by definition even more resplendent than those whose greatness overwhelms us on earth (the point is clarified in lines 143-145, which Mr. Tusiani correctly renders as “. . . if the lack of earthly splendour makes / a blind man grieve, how will a sinner bear / his loss of God’s eternal and true light?” (ll. 141-143). In Day Six Tasso writes “Non fece . . . il Fabro eterno / I muli o pur le mule” (ll. 1452-1453), the point being, as the text subsequently indicates, that these animals are “the illegitimate offspring” (l. 1426) of others; however, Mr. Tusiani renders this as “the Eternal Maker . . . / did not make mules different from hinnies” (ll. 1423-1424), thus substituting one concept for another.

Of less consequence are other readings, where we may assume that the difference in meaning vis-à-vis the original is an example of poetic licence rather than mistranslation, e.g. “our speech / will ever fail to number all their kinds”
(Day Five, ll. 50-51) for “potriansi a pena / Le varie sorti annoverar parlando” (ll. 51-52); “its mother’s art” (ibid., l. 256) for “Arte paterna” (l. 266); “bringing out its best” (Day Three, l. 1296) for “gli trasmuti in meglio” (l. 1306). One may likewise notice an apparently inconsistent use of the two meanings of “quasi” (e.g. “almost equal to the sea” in Day Three, line 399, for “quasi eguali al mare” (l. 393) in contrast to “like an obedient maiden” (ibid., l. 137) for “Quasi . . . obedient ancella” (id.), though this must ultimately depend on individual interpretation. In this context it is unfortunate that while stressing the difficulty of deciding between the conflicting claims of different readings Mr. Tusiani should have quoted as one of his two examples the phrase “de l’ordine suo divino Amore” (Introduction, p. xxi) which occurs in Day One, line 19, since although, as he correctly points out, the adjective “divino” can theoretically be linked to either of the two nouns the point is firmly resolved in Petrocchi’s text, his source, by the use of capital letters for both “Divino” and “Amore.” In light of my previous distinction between an English translation and an English version of Tasso’s poem, it would, however, be pedantic to attach too much importance to these sorts of discrepancies, if indeed they merit such a name.

Style is necessarily an important part of such an opus, and, perhaps inevitably, unlikely to produce a consensus of opinion among readers. I have already indicated that the general effect of Mr. Tusiani’s writing is positive by virtue of its clarity and limpidity of meaning, but there will doubtless be dissenting views, and it is not too difficult to imagine what form these may take. The English text frequently employs transpositions of adjectives, sometimes for reasons of metre, sometimes, one may assume, for general effect, and although the basic concepts at issue are not unduly altered by this technique it does lead to shifts in the balance of meaning. Thus “il suon de la canora tromba” (Day Five, l. 520) appears as “the trumpet’s clarion sound” (l. 499); “del bianco cigno / Il . . . dolce canto” (ibid., ll. 1255-1256) becomes “the white, sweet song . . . of the swan” (ll. 1200-1201); “erede immortal del Re del Cielo” (Day Seven, l. 878) is given as “heir / of the immortal Monarch of the sky” (ll. 861-862). The same point may be made in relation to what Mr. Tusiani himself refers to as the “artifical insertion” (Introduction, p. xix) of words into the text, or, correspondingly, their omission in the interests of clarity, both techniques being applied as standard practice throughout. At times we come across lines or phrases which appear at variance with the gravity of the theme, e.g. a somewhat colloquial “wild and wicked end” for “l’empia Morte” in Day Five, lines 1265 and 1323 respectively; a rather inelegant “the scorpion can also scare the big” (Day Six, l. 1160) for “Lo scorpio ancora orrido appare a’ grandi” (l. 1179); and an over-trendy rendering of “la Morte . . . entrò nel mondo / Per ampissima porta” (Day Seven, ll. 989-990) as “Death found . . . a very ample door / open upon the world, and walked right through” (ll. 969-970). In contrast to this kind of thing are occasional over-heavy or over-learned terms such as “centripetally” (ibid., l. 404) and a confusing use of the archaic “taste” to translate ‘odori’ (ibid., ll. 566 and 575 respectively). On the positive side it is gratifying to read such fine phrases as “the Adriatic’s frothy lap” (Day Five, l. 663) for “il seno ondoso / De l’Adrian” (ll. 699-700); “casting a darkening veil upon her sheen” (Day Six, l. 359) for the more pedestrian original “la sua luce imbruni” (l. 352); “golden stars immortal are fair” (Day Four, l. 63)
in no way inferior to Tasso’s “l'immortal belta de l'auree stelle” (l. 62).

Each of the Seven Days is accompanied by notes, which have been compiled by Professor Gaetano Cipolla and which elucidate the multifarious references in the poem. Many appear to have been translated from those provided by Petrocchi, who is only acknowledged once as a source, and then inaccurately (p. 223, note to l. 102 of Day Two: the reference should be to p. 58), though ultimately this does not detract from their usefulness as aids to understanding. There is some duplication on page 218 of the information provided by Mr. Tusiani on pages xii-xiii of the Introduction concerning the dating of the poem and its aims, but this is a minor point. Those parts of the Introduction itself that are not concerned with the principles of translation, and to which I have already referred, provide an interesting and useful account of the work’s aims and intentions, together with some well-chosen extracts from the English text in connection with critical points. It is a pity there is no identification of the quotations from five Italian writers mentioned on page x, or of that from a sixth on page xiii; one may also point out a certain inconsistency in the style of bibliographical listings on the part of both editors (“Oxford: Clarendon Press” but “Editori Laterza, Bari” in notes 4 and 8 on p. xxii; “ETS: Pisa” but “Firenze, La Nuova Italia” on p. 218), together with an occasional naivety of expression that is rather at odds with the publisher’s claim to provide “the highest quality scholarship” (p. 250), e.g. the last sentence of paragraph three on page xii or the contents of note 9 on page xxii. All in all, however, this is a welcome work that amply fulfills Mr. Tusiani’s modest aim of making Tasso “known a little more and a little better” (p. xxi), not only to those who do not have at least a reading knowledge of Italian but also students (and perhaps even some professional Italianists) who have not had sufficient time or energy to give this opus the attention it deserves.

The book is attractively printed, with wide margins and clear type, bound in sober blue with gold lettering on the spine. There are at least four misprints (on pp. 120, 147, 154, and 156) which hardly detract from the general positive impression.

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If the literary critic is always right, the literary historian is always wrong. The hypothetical “true picture” flaws all others. Best, then, to acknowledge one’s impossible role as copyist of an irrecoverable original—and to imagine a permanent empty space on the wall. Some very fine practitioners of the art, most notably Rosamund Tuve and Barbara Lewalski, have explored the use of typology by the devotional lyric poets of the English Renaissance. Ira Clark, as he states in his Introduction, has certainly benefitted from their ideas. But Christ Revealed provokes the wish that he had profitted more thoroughly from their methodological example.