

# THE MYTH OF LEPANTO AND ITS LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS IN EUROPEAN EPIC POETRY OF THE LATE CINQUECENTO-EARLY SEICENTO

Maria Shakhray  
Università di Bologna

RIASSUNTO: Stimolata da fondamentali eventi storici come la guerra d'Oriente e in particolare il suo momento culminante – il leggendario trionfo di Lepanto –, la tradizione epica europea del secondo Cinquecento e primo Seicento subisce profonde trasformazioni. L'adozione stessa dei fatti storici recenti come argomento epico significava una deviazione radicale dal percorso tradizionale in quanto faceva abbandonare agli autori dell'epica eroica “moderna” i modelli classici per avventurarsi in audaci esperimenti poetici. Questo articolo intende analizzare alcuni degli aspetti più importanti privilegiati dagli autori dei tre testi selezionati, appartenenti alla tradizione epica italiana, francese e spagnola: *La Christiana vittoria maritima* di Francesco Bolognetti, *L'Austriade* di Pierre de Deimier e *La Austriada* di Juan Rufo. Il presente saggio è un tentativo di stabilire affinità e differenze semantiche e formali nel discorso poetico della nuova realtà storica, politica, militare e ideologica, esaminando più da vicino la natura dei nuovi fermenti responsabili dell'innovazione profonda di *topoi* epici tradizionali – il processo che secondo Mikhail Bachtin, costituisce la condizione essenziale per l'evoluzione e per il rinnovamento continuo di ogni genere letterario.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Lepanto, storia, mito, crociata, Francesco Bolognetti, Juan Rufo, Pierre de Deimier

ABSTRACT: Stimulated by fundamental historical events, such as the Oriental war and especially its culminating moment – the legendary naval triumph of Lepanto –, the European epic tradition of the late Cinquecento and early Seicento underwent profound changes. The very adoption of the recent historical facts as a subject for epic poetry meant a radical deviation from the traditional path,



as it made the authors of “modern” heroic epic abandon classical models and venture into bold poetic experiments. This article aims to analyse some of the most important aspects and tendencies privileged by the authors of three texts belonging to the Italian, French and Spanish epic traditions: *La Christiana vittoria maritima* by Francesco Bolognetti, *L’Austriade* by Pierre de Deimier and *La Austriada* by Juan Rufo. The present work is an attempt at identifying formal and semantic differences and affinities in the poetic discourse of the new historical, political, military and ideological reality, while having a closer look at the nature of the new ferments accounting for the profound innovation of the traditional epic *topoi* – a process that according to Mikhail Bakhtin, constitutes the essential condition for the continuous renaissance and evolution of any literary genre. KEY-WORDS: Lepanto, history, myth, crusade, Francesco Bolognetti, Juan Rufo, Pierre de Deimier

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[...] come mai infatti cantare in forma epica e rivestir del mirabile un avvenimento di cui tutti potevano conoscere i precisi particolari?  
(Antonio Belloni, *Gli epigoni della Gerusalemme liberata*)

## 1. INTRODUCTION: EPIC POETRY AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY

Reflecting upon the dialectic nature of the relationship between history and myth, Italo Calvino put special emphasis upon the unique ability of literature to transform – or, to put it more precisely, to ‘magnify’ («ingigantire») some of the historical facts, so that they might assume a different perspective in the collective imagination, extending themselves ‘to the whole terrestrial globe and becoming a subject inspiring an impressive

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number of authors'.<sup>1</sup> In this logic, literary representations seem to acquire the power of a magic prism, or a kaleidoscope free to rearrange historical patterns, favouring the more visionary – mythological – rather than the strictly historical perspective: «Nell'immaginazione dei poeti – e prima ancora nell'immaginazione popolare – i fatti si dispongono in una prospettiva diversa da quella della storia: la prospettiva del mito».<sup>2</sup> The particular prism of the mythological perspective refracting historical facts finds its emblematic incarnation in the creative potential proper to the epic poetry that, according to Sergio Zatti's definition, since time immemorial has been indissolubly linked to the significant historical events, conferring them a status of a legend or a myth: «A epico è legata infatti l'idea di gesto, o testo fondatore: ciò che fissa in forma mitica le origini di una civiltà».<sup>3</sup>

The close interaction between the original historical reality and the transforming power of myth results in the complex, ambiguous nature of the epic poetry: a literary genre that, on the one hand, had to comply with the rigid Aristotelian tenets prescribing, to quote Bakhtin's famous formula, «an absolute epic distance»,<sup>4</sup> and on the other hand, displayed an inherent ability to absorb various kinds of historical, political, literary and socio-cultural changes, having thus proved to be capable of profound transformations and of an eventual renewal.

This plasticity revealed by the epic genre can be best observed namely in the epoch embracing the late Cinquecento and the early Seicento: a period that had known a true epic «fever»<sup>5</sup> and produced an extremely rich variety of texts. Evoking Ariosto's prophetic discourse, Riccardo Brusaglia thus remarked upon the epic “mania” which was anything but “easy to catalogue”: «I “miglior plettri” si moltiplicano in effetti, dal

<sup>1</sup> CALVINO 2017: 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>3</sup> ZATTI 2000: 15.

<sup>4</sup> BACHTIN 1976: 191.

<sup>5</sup> BELLONI 1893: viii.

Cinquecento al Settecento almeno, configurando un universo testuale tanto variegato quanto, probabilmente, incontrollabile, o, almeno molto difficile da catalogare».<sup>6</sup>

Among various crucial factors accounting for this sudden epic revival there is one that undoubtedly deserves careful consideration, i.e. the profound changes in European political and social climate that inevitably influenced the literary context. We refer first and foremost to a series of religious wars that Fernand Braudel considered as «a clash» between two antagonistic universes of the Mediterranean world: the Christian (European) and the Islamic (Ottoman) civilizations.<sup>7</sup> It was namely the impending Oriental threat, commonly perceived as a palpable menace to the integrity of Mediterranean Christian Europe (already endangered by harsh internal religious discords), that brought about a marked revival of the medieval myth of the Crusade, deeply rooted in the collective imagination of the Western civilization. The whole historical and political conjuncture favoured the historical embodiment of the Crusade myth in a series of major military conflicts with the Islamic East,<sup>8</sup> culminating in an unprecedented European triumph: the glorious Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571).

The resounding naval triumph of the Holy League – a watershed event of the long-term history of the Oriental war<sup>9</sup> – not only largely influenced the historical and

<sup>6</sup> BRUSCAGLI 2003: 85. For a detailed account of the numerous epic poems composed in Italy at the end of the Cinquecento, see BELLONI 1893; for the overall catalogue of poems dedicated to the Battle of Lepanto, see *ivi*: 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> BRAUDEL 1966: 170-172.

<sup>8</sup> For a number of valuable reflections on the crusade spirit that accompanied European identity up to the early modern period, see PELLEGRINI 2015. For the revitalised idea of a new crusade, see ALPHANDÉRY - DUPRONT 1954: 213-453; for the essential political circumstances that favoured the historical realization of the «cristiana impresa», see NEGRUZZO 2019, the author offering a meticulous comment of the reasons behind the idea of the “modern” crusade. For a comprehensive analysis of the historical background of the Oriental war, see, among others, BARBERO 2010; CROWLEY 2008; CAPPONI 2006; PETACCO 2005.

<sup>9</sup> For the historical meaning of Lepanto – a victory that put an end to a «genuine inferiority complex of Christian Europe», as well as refuted the presumed maritime supremacy of the Ottoman Empire – see BRAUDEL 1966: 397.

socio-political European context, but also exerted a profound impact on the most refined literary minds of the epoch. As noted by Carlo Dionisotti, «nessun evento storico di quel secolo valse a commuovere l'ingegno, se non la fantasia e il cuore, dei contemporanei letterati italiani quanto la battaglia di Lepanto»:<sup>10</sup> words that applied not only to the complex reality of Italy, «necessariamente e costantemente differenziata»,<sup>11</sup> but could as well refer to other European countries. In line with the epic “mania” reigning on the European literary scene, poets of Mediterranean Europe fervently pursued the intent of celebrating Lepanto triumph, having produced an impressive number of texts that formed a totally new current in the epic tradition. For the first time in history, epic poets transgressed the already mentioned principle of the “absolute past”, according to which, to adopt Tasso’s words, the poet was to consider times «neither too modern, nor too remote»<sup>12</sup> for the sake of poetic plausibility (‘il verisimile’). Needless to say, this profound change put the authors of epic poems in front of various dilemmas that they had to tackle without delay to be able to offer an immediate literary response to the crucial events of modern history.

Which were the approaches epic poets adopted to deal with the novelty of the “materia epica”? Did they still, as suggested by Calvino, take as point of departure the mythological rather than the historical perspective? Last but not least, was it still possible to speak of the continuity and the renewal of the European epic tradition? These are the

<sup>10</sup> DIONISOTTI 1967: 202.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi: 203. The resounding victory of Lepanto had a major impact on literature that extended beyond the epic genre, generating a number of short poetic forms (see, for instance, the extremely interesting anthology of *rime per la vittoria sul Turco* in MAMMANA 2007).

<sup>12</sup> As Tasso stated in a well-known passage from his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, history offered perfect choice of subject matter for the epic, yet the poets were strongly advised to avoid contemporary historical themes: the latter ones, being too familiar to the audience, were likely to deprive the poets of their “licence to invent”, essential in the case of epic poetry: «Portano le istorie moderne gran commodità in questa parte ch' a i costumi e all'usanze s'appartiene, ma tolgiono quasi in tutto la licenza di fingere, la quale è necessariissima a i poeti, e particolarmente a gli epici [...]» (TASSO, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico* [Poma]: 10).

questions we shall try to answer by analyzing some of the essential aspects of the three texts belonging to the Italian, Spanish and French epic poetry of the late Cinquecento and the early Seicento.

2. «DIEU PRESENT DANS LA BATAILLE»:<sup>13</sup> THE REVIVAL OF THE CRUSADE MYTH

If the historians continue to argue upon the role that the Battle of Lepanto had in the history of Mediterranean Europe, the eyewitnesses of the combat unanimously agreed upon the providential character of the Holy League's victory. Thus, Gerolamo Diedo, the Venetian counsellor at Corfu, published a detailed relation of the event that he witnessed in person, putting special emphasis upon the role of the «divine favour» in the outcome of the battle:

[...] il divin favore [...] ci ha non solamente renduti umili e datoci maggior forze, con farci mettere insieme più numero di legni [...], ed ha donato ogni cosa opportuna alle genti per mantenerle vive e sane, onde ne è seguita una sì chiara vittoria, ma Egli è ancora piaciuto che quella sia avvenuta fuor d'ogni opinione, e che appresso, malgrado di molte difficoltà che bastavano ad impedirila, sia stata riconosciuta venir solamente dal suo divino provvedimento e potenza.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar spirit, Onorato Caetani – another witness of Lepanto – thus wrote on the «felicissima vittoria concessaci dall'infinita bontà di Dio»: «Del tutto ne dovremo

<sup>13</sup> The formula of 'God present in the battle' belongs to A. DUPRONT, who stressed the «onirologie et la conscience physique du Dieu présent dans la bataille» (DUPRONT 1987: 17).

<sup>14</sup> CAETANI - DIEDO 1995: 178-179.

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rendere infinite grazie a Nostro Signore, dalla mano del quale dovremo tener questa tanto gran vittoria che si è degnata concedere a tutta la Cristianità [...]».<sup>15</sup>

As can be deduced from the above-quoted fragments, the divine presence in the naval battle was a commonly shared, an almost palpable sensation that accounted for the impact Lepanto exerted upon European collective imagination that transposed the myth of the Crusade upon the actual historical reality of the Oriental war.

In his detailed analysis of the phenomenon of a “new Crusade”, Géraud Poumarède insisted upon the «religious foundations»<sup>16</sup> of the war with the Ottoman Empire:

*À l'époque moderne, la croisade s'incarnerait plus particulièrement dans la lutte contre les Turcs vécue comme une exigence profonde [...] chez quelques grandes figures solitaires [...] ou encore au sein de ces ordres militaires, et notamment de l'ordre de Malte, qui assurent par leur combat une «présence vivante» de la croisade à des époques tardives.*<sup>17</sup>

Similarly to Poumarède, another French historian, Alphonse Dupront, drew attention to the «irrational» component underlying the notion of the Crusade – this «guerre sainte et sanctifiante» that was to be considered in terms of «une nostalgie d'héroïcité», «la volonté d'absolu» and «une démarche humaine vers le sacré».<sup>18</sup> This “longing for the absolute” was echoed by the flourishing European «ideal of historical grandeur» rapidly gaining impetus with the new generations, «sazie di prudenza e di misura, avida di grandezza e di certezza».<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ivi: 138.

<sup>16</sup> POUMARÈDE 2004: 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*. Emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup> DUPRONT 1987: 21-29.

<sup>19</sup> DIONISOTTI 1967: 219-220.

Thus, already by the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the historical reality was imbued with high expectations, a new Crusade being fervently awaited by nearly all parties: the Roman Catholic Church, the Spanish Empire and the Most Serene Republic. This religious engagement was especially reinforced by the militant ideology of the Counter-Reformation, explicitly appealing for a new “Crusade” against the unfaithful: in this perspective, the Crusade myth was seen as a perfect antidote to heresy, consolidating both «la già scossa barca»<sup>20</sup> of the Christian unity and the authority of the Roman Church by shifting the focus from internal religious discords to the imminent external menace.<sup>21</sup>

The complex process of the renewal of the epic tradition was bound to bring about a number of thorny issues that inevitably sparked off major literary controversies. Time-honoured epic authorities started to be intensely questioned by the modern poetic generation that had to invent new modalities of representing historical reality in line with the new political and literary trends: from now on, poets had to decide on their own whether to turn to the traditional catalogue of themes, *topoi* and stylistic choices, or, on the contrary, opt for the continuous pursuit of innovation, transforming and breathing new life into a genre that numerous critics of the time believed to be definitely in decline.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> BOLOGNETTI, *La Christiana vittoria maritima*, I 33: 8.

<sup>21</sup> DIONISOTTI 1967: 212-213.

<sup>22</sup> For the hypothesis of the epic's decline and “the end” of the heroic ideal, see CAPUCCI - JANNACO 1986: 408-409.



### 3. LITERARY POLEMICS UPON “MODERN” HISTORICAL EPIC: PROBLEMS, TENDENCIES, PERSPECTIVES

Starting with the late Cinquecento, the revisited myth of the Crusade indeed saw a major revival: the dynamic of a continuously evolving relationship between history and myth proved to be an ideal “materia” to fill the already existing “moules épiques” offered by the canonical epic authorities. If the appeal to resist the impending Eastern menace was a recurrent literary motive already with Dante, Petrarca and at a later time with Ariosto, the new generation of epic poets made the culminating moments of modern religious wars the thematic nucleus of their epic. The “alta impresa” of Lepanto was particularly apt to form a new tradition of celebrative epic texts, since it perfectly corresponded to the most important condition «constituting the nature of the *epopeia*» as formulated by Tasso: «[...] oltre tutte queste condizioni richieste nel poema, una n'addurrò semplicemente necessaria: questa è che l'azioni che devono venire sotto l'artificio dell'epico siano nobili e illustri».<sup>23</sup>

The exemplifying function of epic poetry was particularly emphasized by Mario Domenichelli who viewed the epic texts of the time as crucial «attempts at recodifying or reactualising the chivalric code»<sup>24</sup> in the context of a new historical reality: «un manuale in molli versi»<sup>25</sup> that was to «educate» the modern «Cavaliere cristiano» by instilling into him «una disciplina di vita» and «un codice di virtù»<sup>26</sup> in line with the core values of the Counter-Reformation.

It is important to note that the “prodesse” component was tempered by the need of “pleasing” (‘delectare’) the modern recipient of epic texts. Epic poets of the late

<sup>23</sup> TASSO, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico* [Poma]: 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> DOMENICHELLI 2002: 152.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

Cinquecento were to consider the “diletto” as much as the “utile” aspects due to the need of conforming to the “indolent” (‘isvogliato’) taste of the epoch. Thus, Tasso severely criticized Gian Giorgio Trissino’s attempt to produce an epic entirely based on the models provided by Homer and Aristotle:<sup>27</sup> an epic poem totally lacking in the marvellous element made the poem «insipid» and incapable of «seducing» the extremely «delicate tastes»<sup>28</sup> of the modern reader. Opting for the marvellous of a strictly Christian origin, Tasso nonetheless insisted upon the necessity for a sagacious poet to “season” (‘condire’) his epic with elements of variety, romance (‘il romanzesco’) and evidently with the marvellous, since «poco dilettevole è veramente quel poema che non ha seco quelle maraviglie che tanto movono non solo l’animo de gli ignoranti, ma de’ giudiziosi ancora [...] delle quali, quasi di sapori, deve giudizioso scrittore condire il suo poema [...]».<sup>29</sup>

The presence and the nature of the marvellous and its dialectic relationship with the historical truth, the dichotomy of epic and romance, the notions of unity and variety, the necessity of “pleasing and instructing”, as well as “moving” the reader – all of these notions came to the fore in the debates upon modern historical epic, being all merged in a crucial dilemma: the one of choosing between the desire to imitate the ancient authorities and the urge to surpass the latter ones, opting for a complete renewal of the classical models.

The literary polemic was even more intense in the case of the epic texts celebrating the naval triumph of Lepanto. It is a well-known fact that the contemporaries of the Holy War witnessed an unprecedented technological progress that largely influenced the military reality of the time: the extensive use of heavy artillery and modern

<sup>27</sup> Ivi: 6.

<sup>28</sup> In the preface to his *Italia liberata dai Goti*, Trissino stated that he had chosen Aristotle «per Maestro» and Homer «per Duce e per Idea» (TRISSINO, *L’Italia liberata dai Goti*, 1835: 3).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

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firearms no longer corresponded to the traditional literary representations of military action. The entire previous epic tradition was based upon such essential notions of the chivalric code as honour and valiance: qualities that were revealed in the classical one-to-one combats, the illustrious epic heroes fighting with swords, spears, and other traditional weapons (often given to them by the divine forces and thus possessing magical power). The modern way of waging war, being indissolubly linked to the employment of the heavy artillery and minor firearms, as well as to the devastating collective combats rapidly substituting traditional duels, put the poets in front of the demanding task of transposing the above-mentioned changes onto the poetic texture of their epics. To paraphrase the famous words of Gabriello Chiabrera, in order to compose an epic on Lepanto, one had no choice but to follow the example of Columbus: «trovar nuovo mondo o affogare».<sup>30</sup> It is to the poetic discoveries of the navigators in the ocean of late Renaissance - early Baroque epic that we shall now turn to with a view of exploring inevitable changes in the chivalric code inherent to the traditional “poema cavalleresco”.

4. A MODERN CRUSADE: THE UNION OF THE MARVELLOUS AND THE HISTORICAL  
IN FRANCESCO BOLOGNETTI'S *CHRISTIANA VITTORIA MARITIMA*

On 7 October 1571, the “new Crusaders” finally confronted the Ottoman enemy: four hours of an extremely violent combat ended with the absolute triumph of the Christian coalition – a triumph that definitely destroyed the myth of indisputable naval superiority of Ottoman Empire<sup>31</sup> and provoked a unanimous literary response in Europe. As far as the epic on modern historical events is concerned, it can be generally observed that poets of the late Cinquecento - early Seicento largely contributed to the mythologisation of the

<sup>30</sup> ‘To find a new world or drown’ (Letter 126 of Chiabrera quoted in BELLONI 1893: 173).

<sup>31</sup> BRAUDEL 1966: 395.

glorious battle, but at the same time they used the historical event to renew the preceding epic tradition. As a major consequence of the effect the actual historical reality had on the literary world, the ratio between the two primary motives of Italian epic poetry converging in the ariostesque formula of «l'arme e gli amori» was subject to a fundamental transformation. To quote Stefano Jossa's words, to the increasing importance of the theme of war («l'arme»), conditioned by the «realtà storica caratterizzata dal mutamento delle armi e della tattica bellica», corresponded a significant reduction of the dimension of «gli amori».<sup>32</sup> Similar transformations could be observed in the relationship between the historical and the marvellous: as will be demonstrated below, the marvellous remained a primary presence in the epic, yet its character and function underwent essential changes.

The tendency of merging the historical and the marvellous elements was linked to another crucial literary trend of the epoch: the one of the “interiorization” of the historical events by inscribing them into the allegorical context of the war between the Christian Good (represented by God assisting the Christians) and the infernal Evil (represented by the demons favouring the Islamic adversary, respectively). As Mario Domenichelli puts it,

[...] si fa davvero evidente il funzionamento allegorico del poema che è un tutt'altro con la tendenza di affondare nella soggettività, e a trasognare le figure dell'epica in una geografia tutta simbolica, fatta di luoghi e istanze interiorizzate, sicché la guerra [...] diventa la Santa guerra delle istanze psichiche, fra bene e male, inferno e paradiso.<sup>33</sup>

In line with the tendency in question, all of the texts selected for the comparative analysis appear to be inscribed into the allegorical framework of the war between the divine Good

<sup>32</sup> JOSSA 2002: 179.

<sup>33</sup> DOMENICHELLI 2002: 162.

and the demonic Evil. Thus, in Francesco Bolognetti's *Christiana vittoria maritima* (1572) – a poem composed by the Bolognese politician, lawyer and poet<sup>34</sup> to celebrate the triumph of Lepanto – the Manichean struggle between God and the demonic forces functions as the actual “movente” of the poetic narration, the war between East and West being a direct consequence of the war waged by «l'empio Infernal Sathan» and Christ, «il gran figlioul di Dio».<sup>35</sup> The allegorical basis undoubtedly accounts for the continuous presence of the marvellous, the poem containing a number of traditional epic *topoi* related to the dimension of the *mirabile*, such as infernal councils,<sup>36</sup> magic weapons and frequent divine and demonic interventions in the course of the battle. Yet, it is important to observe that the marvellous introduced by Bolognetti bears a strictly Christian character,<sup>37</sup> forming a dialectic relationship with the historical element. Thus, after the traditional protasis in which the Bolognese poet promises to celebrate «il bel fatto di Lepanto», the narrator presents the Ottoman aggression as a part of a greater infernal plot: the ‘insatiable’ Demon sows the false doctrine in Asian and African continents striving for his primary aim: to conquer the entire Christian civilisation. To fulfil this ambitious plan, the demonic forces inspire the Ottoman Turks to attack the Mediterranean Europe, Beelzebub himself instigating Selim II to wage war against the Christians, so that «anco in Europa l'odiata insegna / Spiega il rio Turco, e in Occidente

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed account of Francesco Bolognetti's life and poetic legacy, see MANCINI 1989: 19. Bolognetti – an influential politician and a refined Bolognese intellectual – composed his second poem as a prompt reaction to Lepanto, on the one hand launching a peremptory appeal to celebrate the modern “Crusade” to the *letterati* from his intellectual circle, and demonstrating profound solidarity with the ideology of the Counter-Reformation, on the other hand (ivi: 155-160).

<sup>35</sup> BOLOGNETTI, *La Christiana vittoria maritima*, I 4: 3.

<sup>36</sup> According to Giancarlo Bettin, one of the crucial *topoi* of the epic genre: see BETTIN 2006: 717-735.

<sup>37</sup> Exactly as Tasso wrote some years later recommending to use the marvellous linked exclusively to the Christian faith that the Christians «hanno bevuta nelle fasce insieme co'l latte», in order to stay in the limits of the “verisimile” (TASSO, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico* [Poma]: 7-8).

regna».<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to observe the intrusion of the historical element inwoven in this “marvellous” scene: the Demon explicitly refers to the absence of unity in the Mediterranean Christian Europe, an argument that perfectly corresponded to the actual historical conjuncture.<sup>39</sup> As the Demon argues in his lamentation, the unity between the Christians, seemed impossible not only due to the internal discords between Catholic and Protestants, but was also conditioned by the expansionist ambitions of the European states, each of them looking for their own profit even in face of the Islamic threat: «Ma posto anchor che uniti fosser [...] / L’Hispano al Gallo, e l’Italo molesto, / L’uno a l’altro ubidir mai non vorrebbe; / Tal che per le discordie non palesi / Sarian tutti sconfitti, e morti, e presi».<sup>40</sup> Having introduced the historical reasons, Beelzebub does not limit himself to fiery rhetoric, resorting to a magic device: the infernal «atro veneno» used to affect Selim’s senses and to instigate his rage towards Christian world. In line with the poem’s structure based on the principle of contrastive parallelism, all of the infernal plots are paralleled by the divine actions: the infernal *messo* is contrasted by the divine *nuntio* who affects Pope Pius V with «celeste almo liquore» in order to encourage him to arrange the alliance of the Holy League. The interaction between the marvellous and the historical elements continues throughout the whole text: infernal councils alternate with

<sup>38</sup> BOLOGNETTI, *La Christiana vittoria maritima*, I 8: 4.

<sup>39</sup> As clearly demonstrated in the poem, the unity between the major Christian states was extremely unlikely to be achieved, for, on the one hand, Spain was largely engaged in the confrontation with the Protestants in Flanders, not to mention the internal war with the Moors (ivi: 12), while on the other hand Italy, France, Germany and England were deeply involved with controversies sparked off by the Reformation process (ivi: 13).

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, I 60: 113. As is well-known, the European states succeeded in overcoming political and religious discords and joined their efforts to resist the Ottoman threat. The motive of the European unity in face of the common external danger became a *topos* in the thematic repertoire of the late Renaissance – early Baroque epic tradition. As Antonio Belloni put it, «la cristianità era minacciata dal Turco invadente, la cui audacia provocava ne’ fedeli più vivo, con lo spavento, il desiderio di riscossa; bisognava destare gli animi all’entusiasmo [...] ricordando loro le fiere lotte già combattute cogli infedeli. Era quindi naturale che si presentasse come ottimo argomento di epopea la guerra santa per la conquista del Sepolcro» (BELLONI 1893: 23).

the negotiations in the divine realm, as well as with the ones between Pius V, Venetian Doges and Philip II of Spain; the demonic forces intervene directly, spreading the infernal «tosco» to instigate discords between the parties to the Holy League – controversies to be placated only by the divine messengers infusing «gratia divina» in the hearts of the rebels.

In this perspective, the whole course of the war between East and West seems to be determined by the allegorical war between Heaven and Hell: it is yet in this marvellous background that the ferments of the new historical trend reveal their presence. This happens first and foremost due to the introduction of a wide range of historical details: aspects pertaining to the actual historical reality of Lepanto, such as for example, the detailed catalogue of the «Heroi Moderni» taking part in the naval combat,<sup>41</sup> the embittered account of the Ottoman aggression in Cyprus,<sup>42</sup> the mention of the numerical superiority of the Ottoman fleet<sup>43</sup> and the actual historical disposition of the Holy League's fleet,<sup>44</sup> as well as the references to the modern warships. The latter ones constitute one of the most striking historical details in the poem: a radical deviation from the classical tradition that could not provide models nor recommendations for dealing with the new military *realia*. The famous six galleasses – extremely innovative warships of the epoch – are represented through the numerous panegyric descriptions in which the destructive weapons act almost as the real protagonists of the naval combat:<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The real historical characters are a fundamental presence with Bolognetti: the poem contains numerous celebrative passages dedicated to Don John of Austria, Giovanni Andrea Doria, as well as to Agostino Barbarigo, Marcantonio Colonna and Sebastian Venier and other valiant warriors of the Holy League.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, III: 51-52. It is worth noting that the numerical advantage of the Ottoman fleet was not unquestionable: according to Alessandro Barbero, the Christians were superior to the Ottoman Turks in some crucial aspects, e.g. the power of their military equipment (BARBERO 2010: 536).

<sup>43</sup> For the relation of the atrocities committed by the Ottoman army during the Siege of Famagusta, see ivi, I, 65-77: 13-15.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, III 89-91: 34; 94-95: 53.

<sup>45</sup> See also ivi, II 143: 36.

Quelle sei navi tutte, che maggiori  
de l'altre, innanzi a l'altre poi fur poste,  
l'aria fendean con strepiti, e romori,  
per le dense bombarde in lor disposte.<sup>46</sup>

In these “odes” to modern warships, special attention is given to the dramatic effect the warships produced on the Ottoman Turks: a factor that according to Bolognetti, was a decisive one for the triumph of Lepanto: «Non è tra queglii di cor si franco, / Che non si mostri e sbigottito, e bianco».<sup>47</sup>

Having introduced the essential historical elements, Bolognetti continues to insist on the general allegorical framework: along with the elevated descriptions of warships, cannons and other modern firearms prevailing in the impressive scenes of collective combats, the reader assists to three episodes that clearly pertain to the domain of the marvellous: (1) A divine messenger protects the valorous Don John of Austria by diverting a hostile arrow;<sup>48</sup> (2) Archangel Michael killing the Ottoman commander-in-chief, Ali Pasha with his celestial sword<sup>49</sup> (a traditional *topos* creating an oxymoronic union with the use of the innovative firearms) – an episode that, as always with Bolognetti, is paralleled by the action of the demonic forces: (3) Beelzebub killing Agostino Barbarigo, the commander of the left wing of the League's fleet, with his «*empia saetta*».<sup>50</sup> The last episode might seem a concession to the epic tradition requiring direct supernatural interventions in the course of the battle, yet in this case, the marvellous is once again merged with the historical dimension. The death of Ali Pasha

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, III 27: 42.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, III 27: 42.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, III 56: 46. Needless to say, a divinity helping valiant heroes in the combat is a *topos* belonging to the classical epic tradition.

<sup>49</sup> Ivi, III 72: 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, III 107: 55.



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remained a mystery that provoked many legends and historical hypotheses:<sup>51</sup> not being able to omit an episode crucial for the battle, the Bolognese poet resorted to the Christian marvellous, playing on the mystery surrounding the historical fact.

The presence of modern history in Bolognetti's epic becomes even more evident due to the episode of the tragic defeat of the Knights of Malta, the poet paying tribute to the warriors' bravery: no supernatural interventions are introduced to decorate or reinvent the episode of the destroyed ship of the «Guerrieri da la bianca Croce»,<sup>52</sup> the narrator remaining faithful to the historical truth.

The dramatic tone of the episode reaches its crescendo in the poem's surprisingly realistic open ending: the scene of the triumph over the Turks who, as shown by Bolognetti, lose their confidence, being «colmi [...] di timor, e privi di speme»,<sup>53</sup> is followed by the topical episode of Don John praising his army and sending prayers of gratitude to Heaven: an idyll that is all of a sudden disturbed by the arrival of a warrior survived from the Siege of Famagusta. The messenger narrates the tragic news, his monologue abounding in realistic details concerning the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Turks in Cyprus. The historical perspective completely dominates in the scene, while the whole meaning of Lepanto is being significantly reconsidered: the naval triumph of October 7 cannot be seen as a definitive victory, for there is no doubt that other "crusades" will be necessary in order to put an end to the Ottoman menace. It is not by chance that the poem ends with the Christian commander's-in-chief solemn promise to resume military action as soon as possible,<sup>54</sup> the author expressing his deep awareness of the Eastern danger: despite all of the miracles and supernatural interventions dispersed in the poetic text, the ending of *La Christiana vittoria maritima* remains open,

<sup>51</sup> Roger Crowley remarked upon the existence of about ten different versions of the event that largely contributed to its gradual transformation into a myth (CROWLEY 2008); cf. BARBERO 2010: 558.

<sup>52</sup> Ivi, III 75-78: 50.

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, III 118: 57.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, III 123: 62.

perfectly reflecting the extremely unstable historical mood. Yet, Bolognetti's attitude is not a pessimistic one: in his global historical vision, a Christian victory at a moment when Europe had already lost Cyprus to the Ottoman Empire definitely refuted the myth of the invincibility of those who «de lo schermir perduta havendo l'arte; / che a vincer stati in fino alhor sempr'usi». <sup>55</sup> As can be seen, with Bolognetti the historical perspective – although firmly inscribed in the allegorical context of the war between Good and Evil – comes to the fore, the poet justly focusing on the crucial ideological value of Lepanto: a moral victory demonstrating «a mille prove note, / Ch'anco esser vinto il fero Thrace puote». <sup>56</sup>

## 5. THE *MIRACLES* OF HUMAN EFFORT: JUAN RUFO'S PROVIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

A similar tension between the marvellous and the historical aspects merged in the poetic reality of the historical epic can be observed in Juan Rufo's *Austriada* (1584): a text that according to Esther Cicchetti, was perfectly in line with the atmosphere of the “epic fever” proper to the Iberian Peninsula in the period between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: «un'epoca che vede il fiorire di una quantità ingente di poemi, grazie alla fortunata espansione politica della Spagna e al fondamentale influsso della cultura italiana». <sup>57</sup> As in the case with *La Christiana vittoria maritima*, the historical narration in *La Austriada* is collocated at the same allegorical level of the Manichean struggle between God and infernal forces, echoing the structure of Bolognetti's epic. The Bolognese and the Cordovan poets adopt the same optic of a new “Crusade”: similarly to

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, III 119: 57.

<sup>56</sup> Ivi, III 116: 56.

<sup>57</sup> In RUFO, *La Austriada* [Cicchetti]: 10. For the «numerous [...] attempts at reflecting, recollecting and bringing new life to the deeds of the so-called imperial epoch» proper to the Spanish epic of the *Siglo de oro*, see also PIERCE 1968: 220.

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Bolognetti's «gloriosi, e sempre invitti Heroi» united by the «zelo ardente» of their faith,<sup>58</sup> Rufo's characters are introduced as modern "Crusaders" fervently defending the cause of «la divina eternal providencia» that can be justly considered as the essential *movente* of the poem: «No es humana pasión, ni otro artificio, / La Iglesia santa en fe representamos, / Y por Dios uno y trino peleamos».<sup>59</sup> Yet, despite the seemingly close affinity between the two texts, a crucial difference concerning the thematic and the ideological structure of the two poems can be observed. In Rufo's poetic interpretation, Lepanto, as well as the Oriental war itself, is by no means a result of the infernal plotting, but rather an incarnation of the divine justice: a *Leitmotiv* permeating the whole texture of *La Austriada*. It is namely the supreme divine will – «Dios [...] poderoso y justiciero»<sup>60</sup> dissimulating *pietas* and compassion behind a mask of severity<sup>61</sup> – that postulates the necessity of a modern "Crusade" with a view of punishing the unfaithful and restituting justice to the whole world. This Counter-Reformation perspective is proved by the transformation of the traditional ratio between the divine and the infernal forces: in contrast to Bolognetti's principle of parallelism almost equalling the allegorical adversaries, in Rufo's text, the antagonism between Heaven and Hell is from the very beginning resolved in favour of the divine will. Thus, the Demon's first attempt of sowing discord during the Holy League's navigation fails, as Don John of Austria immediately succeeds in placating the rebels, with his 'essential words' putting the demons to a 'desperate' flight.<sup>62</sup> Significantly enough, the commander-in-chief does not even need to resort to divine help, nor to marvellous devices, his ardent discourse along with his own wise example being enough to encourage the Christian warriors to persist

<sup>58</sup> BOLOGNETTI, *Capitolo poetico al Sig. Gio. Battista Pigna* in *La Christiana vittoria maritima*: 63.

<sup>59</sup> RUFO, *La Austriada* [Cicchetti], V 16: 799.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, XII 16: 431.

<sup>61</sup> The explicit rigidness and the carefully dissimulated piety are the essential characteristics of God in *La Austriada* (ivi, III 42: 186).

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, XX 41: 713.

in uniting their efforts for the sake of their divine mission. Moreover, unlike the demons in Bolognetti's poem, Lucifer in *La Austriada* is an extremely ambiguous figure: in his lamenting monologue he expresses an immense regret as to his own irreversible condition of an «angel arrojado desde el cielo» resulting in complex affect of 'raging envy' and 'eternal sorrow'.<sup>63</sup> In the Cordovan poet's interpretation, the Demon, torn with the desire of revenge, is at the same time affected by a profound sense of guilt and hatred towards himself.<sup>64</sup> In this logic, the Demon is presented as an extremely weak adversary, defeated even before the start of the battle, whereas the new "Crusaders" continue to reveal the 'miracles of their own effort'<sup>65</sup> throughout the whole combat, the element of the marvellous thus being almost absent from the Lepanto episode. In contrast to Bolognetti's *Christiana vittoria maritima*, such classical *topoi* as direct interventions of supernatural forces cannot be found in Rufo's description of the battle: yet, the divine forces *a priori* determine the basic course of the events in *La Austriada*, providing inspiration for the Christian heroes so that their own military art and chivalric valiance might produce *miracles* on the battlefield.

It should be noted that compared to Bolognetti's epic, the marvellous in the Spanish poem bears a more subtle character, all of the divine interventions manifesting an implicit character, with the exception of the two episodes. Thus, in canto XIII, the reader almost witnesses to the explicit manifestation of the marvellous, when the ship of the Ottoman general Mustafa carrying 'innocent' Christian souls, captured after the Cyprus expedition, all of a sudden explodes before its departure, the macabre episode being related in an extremely detailed, realistic way.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly enough, the narrator offers a 'Catholic reading' of the tragic episode refusing to provide a definitive answer as

<sup>63</sup> Ivi, XXI 12: 709.

<sup>64</sup> Thus, in the dramatic monologue, the Demon reveals his contradictory affects: «Aborresco mi ser mil veces reo, / maldígome con ansia encarecida [...]» (ivi, XXI 17: 709).

<sup>65</sup> «Mostrando de su esfuerço maravillas» (ivi, X 42: 376).

<sup>66</sup> Ivi, XIII 94: 468.

to the reason of the ship's explosion. Only the narrator's rhetorical question alludes to a highly probable providential character of the event: «quién duda que en son triste y lloroso / no llamasen a Dios, padre y abrigo, / y que él, como tan justo y piadoso, / socorro diese al bien y al mal castigo?»<sup>67</sup> This uncertainty by all means functions as a confirmation of the religious basis underlying the poem: in line with the providential conception of the Counter-Reformation, man is not able to fully penetrate the mystery of the divine plan: it is precisely for this reason that the rare divine interventions in the historical reality of the combat tend to bear an allusive, hypothetical character.

A similar partial "miracle" is narrated in canto VIII, when Luis de Requesens, following the order of Don John, navigates to bring military support to the Christian commander-in-chief. In the course of a terrible tempest, the hero sends ardent prayers to Heaven, but the divine response is neither an immediate, nor an absolute one: «Oyole Dios, y concediole parte / de aquello que humildemente pedía, / y parte no: la causa ignora el arte humana, que juzgando desvaría».<sup>68</sup> Similarly to the preceding episode, the narrator prefers to leave the veil of mystery, accounting for the partial character of the marvellous in the text. In this way, the episode does not contradict the principle of poetic plausibility, while it remains faithful to the Counter-Reformist providential conception. As Rufo frequently shows in his poem, in line with the ideas of the Counter-Reformation, man should resist «los contrastes y fortuna»,<sup>69</sup> being guided by an unquestioning faith, yet acting on his own: that is why explicit supernatural interventions are absent from the detailed description of the Battle of Lepanto, the Christian marvellous yet permeating the episode in an implicit way and constituting the essential mythological background to the historical event.

<sup>67</sup> Ivi, XIII 103: 470.

<sup>68</sup> Ivi, VIII 31: 320.

<sup>69</sup> Ivi, XX 20: 673.

Similarly to Bolognetti, Rufo does not hesitate to introduce elements of modern historical reality as he draws the reader's attention to the innovative firearms. «La fiera tempestad y el son horrendo de las espesas balas y cañones», «los nocivos turbiiiones», «el aire que se condensa y escurece»: the latest achievements of military art are related in a way that particularly emphasizes the destructive power and the disastrous, stunning effect of «el juego de la brava artillería» upon the Ottoman adversary, the poet faithfully witnessing the decisive role of the impressive firearms and collective combats in the triumph of Lepanto.

An important ideological difference between Bolognetti and Rufo consists in the union of the providential Counter-Reformist and the nationalistic imperial perspectives displayed by *La Austriada*: thus, in an essential fragment of the final canto the poem, the Cordovan poet anticipates the future role of Spain as a Catholic world empire: «Tiempo vendrá en que el mundo de aposento / a un pastor solo y a una monarquía, / por una sola ley será guñada / la tierra y de un gobierno sojuzgada».<sup>70</sup> In Rufo's vision, of all European powers, Spain, with her resounding triumphs during the Reconquista period, as well as her substantial contribution into the crucial battle with the Ottoman Empire, could indeed be considered as an ideal monarchy capable of uniting, dominating and guiding the rest of the Christian world in the long term. In other words, similarly to the author of *La Christiana vittoria maritima*, Rufo does not consider Lepanto as a definitive triumph, clearly foreseeing other battles to be fought before 'the time comes' for the realization of his nationalistic providential ideal.

<sup>70</sup> Ivi, XXIV 95: 850.

6. THROUGH THE PRISM OF MODERN HISTORY: “THUNDERING CANNONS” AND “VALIANT PALADINS” IN PIERRE DE DEIMIER’S *AUSTRIADE*

It is interesting to observe how the above-analysed tendencies were manifested in the French heroic epic poem *L’Austriade* composed by the Avignonese poet Pierre de Deimier in 1601: a text that constituted a poetic attempt to focus on the notion of Christian unity, providing a model of a heroic poem that according to Siegbert Himmelsbach, was especially needed in an époque when the country was torn by internal religious discords.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of the ariostesque formula, *L’Austriade* definitely favoured the dimension of «l’arme» rather than the one of «gli amori», having absorbed the general European tendency towards renewing the epic genre by dealing with fragments of actual historical reality. Similarly to the Italian and the Spanish texts, the idea of a modern “Crusade” became the genetic nucleus of the new «heroic Christian epic»,<sup>72</sup> its heroes being animated by the idea of the divine mission symbolized by the «humble crucifix»<sup>73</sup> carried by Juan de Cardona. The ‘precious image’ of the ‘humble crucifix’ serves to ‘reinforce zeal and courage’ of the ‘sacred army’, the nationality of each warrior being no longer important, since in the discourse of the commander-in-chief, all of them – Italians, French and Spanish – are viewed as the «valiant Cavaliers» united under the standard of the Christian faith: «Mais, braves Chevaliers, quel’honneur du grand Dieu, / Et l’amour des vertus commande vostre vœu [...]».<sup>74</sup> In his ardent monologue, Don John of Austria introduces the essential themes pervading the poetic texture of *L’Austriade*, i.e. the

<sup>71</sup> See HIMMELSBACH 1988: 7.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>73</sup> DEIMIER, *L’Austriade*, I: 15.

<sup>74</sup> *Ivi*, I: 18.

warriors' acute awareness of their Christian mission,<sup>75</sup> the need for unity in front of the Ottoman threat and finally, the chivalric code remaining in vigour and determining the heroes' attitude. Similarly to Rufo's epic, Deimier's poem reveals the same tendency towards poetic plausibility, the commander-in-chief of the Christian fleet advising the warriors to rely on their own bravery and effort, as well as on the potent weapons at their disposal: «[...] les excedons nous pas en force et en courage? / Quand vous serez meslez aux horribles combas [...] / La tonnerre et l'effort, des canons et des armes, / Vous soit un clair triomphe au plus noir des vacarmes».<sup>76</sup> In this fragment, the historical element acquires primary importance as it anticipates the actual ratio between the marvellous and the historical in the poem: unlike the "Cavaliers" in Bolognetti's *Christiana vittoria maritima*, Deimier's characters do not enjoy an explicit divine support during the naval battle. In the descriptions of the fierce combat, the historical perspective undoubtedly prevails over the allegorical one, the divine forces being an implicit presence guiding and inspiring the Christians, whereas the references to the demonic forces are reduced to the desperate prayers and blasphemy of the Ottoman warriors.

It is interesting to consider a rare example of Heaven's assistance unfolding in the narrator's mind («esprit») or imagination: the narrator emphasizes the visionary character of the scene with the syntagm «il me semble de voir» ('I seem to see'). The classical epic *topos* of a hero transposed to the divine realm is complicated and inverted by Deimier, since the narrator's mind is not immediately transposed to the divine realm, but on the contrary, the latter one appears to be transferred into the narrator's «esprit» transforming it into a pure "celestial pathos" («celeste fureur»): «Il me semble de voir sur la sainte Montaigne / Par moyen de la foy ma fidelle compaignie, / Le Roy de

<sup>75</sup> The awareness of the divine mission along with the connotations of a modern Crusade is perfectly summarised in the appeal the commander-in-chief makes to his warriors: «Le Ciel combat pour nous, nous ne manquerons pas» (ivi, I: 15).

<sup>76</sup> Ivi, I: 17.



l'univers au throsne glorieux, / Qui s'esleve tout grand, haut sur les Cieux des Cieux [...]».<sup>77</sup>

As in the case of the episode of the exploded ship in Rufo's poem, the reader is left uncertain as to the real nature of the scene in which God sends Archangel Michael to support the Christians at Lepanto. The poet adopts an even more subtle subjective perspective as he alludes to the episode's probable imaginary character: a dream or possibly a prophetic vision brought to life by the union of the vivid poetic imagination and, above all, his 'faithful companion', the genuine Christian faith.

A similar transformation of the classical *topos* can be observed in the episode of Don John's passionate discourse delivered in front of the Holy League fleet. In the given scene, the reader encounters no topical apparitions of the divine messenger, the Spanish hero merely "sensing" the divine presence and support: «Sans doute le Chrestien restera le vainqueur, / Un Ange, ie le sens, me le dit dans le coeur».<sup>78</sup> Once again, we assist to a subjective sensation, this time experienced by the commander-in-chief of the Christian fleet whose fervent speech is centred upon the idea of the warriors' being inspired by the divine presence.

The marvellous in the poem bears an ambiguous character, the text revealing to be imbued with the innovative elements pertaining to modern historical reality. Thus, *L'Austriade* makes use of a wide range of military innovations showing the new modalities of *ars belli* in both realistic and hyperbolized spectacular way proper to the poetic of the Baroque, aimed at provoking the reaction of extreme horror and amazement. The extremely efficient power of the above-mentioned warships is considered a primary factor of the Christian victory – an aspect that develops into a

<sup>77</sup> Ivi, I:10-11.

<sup>78</sup> Ivi, I: 18.

*Leitmotiv*, the narrator of *L'Austriade* offering various descriptions of the «six Galeasses des Venitiens [...] tant redoutables que les Turcs ne les oserent iamais atquer». <sup>79</sup>

If the historical *realia* of modern warships and weapons was a crucial presence in Bolognetti's and Rufo's poems, with Pierre de Deimier they become the real protagonists of the battle:

Le bruit haut resonnant fait effrayer la Mer,  
on la voit frissonner, palir, et escumer,  
et cest horrible son en passant ces campagnes  
va gronder sur les flancs des prochaines montaignes [...].  
La fumée soulfhreuse, espaisse et tenebreuse,  
rase de son manteau la vague genereuse,  
et poussée des mains d'un vent doux respirant  
sur la face des Turcs noire va demeurant. <sup>80</sup>

In the given fragment, the solemn epic narration focuses on the apocalyptic atmosphere of the battle, merging the hyperbolic references to the stunning effect of *human* military actions ('the horrible sound' that terrifies the sea and is echoed by the mountains) with the realistic details of modern firearms, such as 'the obscure, dense sulphurous smoke' leaving appalling 'black' traces on the faces of the Ottoman warriors. Interestingly enough, the passage reveals a tendency that becomes emblematic with Deimier: the effect of the thundering cannons is a direct allusion to *Iuppiter Tonans* – Thundering Jove –, the author resorting to the classical epic tradition in order to render the calamitous effect of modern firearms. A similar trend is present in the verses that with a genuine epic zeal describe the famous six galleasses. This time the old epic *topoi* refer to the new military

<sup>79</sup> DEIMIER, *Argument de "L'Austriade"*: 3.

<sup>80</sup> DEIMIER, *L'Austriade*, I: 21-22.

reality in an explicit way: «Deux Galeasses guidaient leur afreux esperons, / Et semblaient iustement cette superbe armée / L’oiseau de Iupiter, la foudrière emplumée». <sup>81</sup> In this double metaphor, the innovative realia – the latest achievement in war technique – is merged with the mythological image of the ‘superb’ Jove’s eagle, both of the elements being assimilated to a ‘feathered lightning’ by virtue of their being potent and extremely prompt in action. Allusions to the ancient myth frequently reappear in the text, the narrator playing upon the figure of the supreme deity: the Christian warriors may assume the appearance and the power of Jove («Cependant le Chrestien tousiours foudroye et tonne, / Ce sont dix mille mort autant de coups qu’il donne»; <sup>82</sup> «Faites, que le Soldat tousiours batte ou canonne, / et que le Canonnier brusle, foudroye et tonne»); <sup>83</sup> Jove’s thunder may act as a metonymy of the calamitous cannons, or may as well refer to the classical swords («Le Prince des combas orné de lauriers d’or, / Qui tournat en ses mains son glaive et son tonnerre, / Rallumait par les camps les ardeurs de la guerre [...]»; <sup>84</sup> «leurs glaives sont un foudre, et ce foudre une parque» <sup>85</sup>), while the “thundering” sound of cannons («un bruit si copieux tonne en toutes pars») is compared to «l’horrible baterie / De cent mille Vulcans et Cyclopes fumeux». <sup>86</sup> In this mythological interpretation, the fire of the “furious” cannons literally equals the infernal flames: «Les canons [...] de leur gosier affreux / Vomissent de nuax et de balons soulfpreux, / L’air semble estre tout flame, et la fumée oblique / L’esgale avec les feux au manoir plutonique (...)». <sup>87</sup>

It is essential to note that despite the active presence of the innovative elements, best summarised by the formula of the «merveilleuses descriptions des bruits, eclairs,

<sup>81</sup> DEIMIER, *L’Austriade*, I: 9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ivi*, I: 22.

<sup>83</sup> *Ivi*, I: 16.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ivi*, I: 59.

<sup>86</sup> *Ivi*, I: 35-36.

<sup>87</sup> *Ivi*, I: 25.

fureurs et ravages des coups de canons»,<sup>88</sup> the poet remains faithful to the notion of the chivalric code that as in the case with the poems by Bolognetti and Rufo, is a crucial presence in the French poem. The fundamental chivalric concept of honour is aptly inscribed in the context of the new military reality, as the narrator compares the heroes of Lepanto to ‘the valiant Paladins’ of the past: «Maintes braves Chevaliers de la vaillante France [...] / Et combattans hardis en vaillans Paladins, / Semaient les bleus sillons de soldats Bisantins. / C’estaient tous des Renauds et des Rolands encore [...]».<sup>89</sup>The chivalric dimension converges with the rhetoric of the modern “Crusade”, as well as with the decorative presence of classical mythology and the essential historical element: the heroes of Lepanto are viewed not only as exemplary “Crusaders” guided by the divine Providence, but also as modern ‘Rinaldos and Rolands’ – “Cavaliers” whose actions are dictated by the law of honour. To render the complex image, the French poet coins a strikingly modern, oxymoronic syntagm «l’honneur du canon»,<sup>90</sup> thus emphasizing the irrevocable changes in the status of modern heroes, as well as adding new elements to the existing literary tradition. It becomes clear that modern historical reality based on the principle of the ‘honour of the cannon’ influenced the identity of the epic hero: while valour and honour remained his essential characteristics, the historical phenomenon of collective combats imposed on him the requirement of wielding cannons, bombards, arquebusiers and other modern weapons. This tendency is perfectly illustrated by the episode of the first shot of the Holy League’s “thundering cannons” made by the commander-in-chief, Don John of Austria, to encourage the Christian heroes to the battle: «Le Prince fait trembler le rempart ondoyant / Par le coup d’un canon

<sup>88</sup> Ivi, *Argument de “L’Austriade”*: 1.

<sup>89</sup> Ivi, II: 104.

<sup>90</sup> Ivi, II: 93.

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fumeusement bruyant, / Pour faire tenir prest à la guerre cruelle / Tous les grands Chevaliers de troupe fidelle». <sup>91</sup>

It is important to mention in this connection that the predominance of the historical element – the innovative descriptions of the firearms and their calamitous effect, the heroes adopting modern war techniques and the latest technological military achievements – is an essential characteristic displayed by all of the three texts celebrating the glorious Holy League's victory. Yet, it is namely with Pierre de Deimier that the coexistence of modern and classical dimensions receives a particularly detailed attention as the narrator adopts a rich variety of mythological metaphors, transforming the poetic discourse of *L'Austriade* into «un pien teatro di meraviglie» in line with the tendency of the early Baroque: <sup>92</sup> a formal spectacularity perfectly adapted to render the equally spectacular historical content.

A fundamental historical aspect that the three poets show to have in common is their intense historical awareness: thus, Bolognetti gives his poem a symbolically open ending narrating the tragic episode of Famagusta; Rufo alludes to the temporary character of Lepanto triumph through the image of a certain, yet distant global triumph of the Catholic Church; finally, Deimier concludes his epic with an emblematic poem <sup>93</sup> displaying a similar awareness of the menace of further Ottoman aggression. At the historical level, *L'Himne de la paix* functions as a poetic warning against the raging “Erinyes” of the internal religious wars in Europe and their possible tragic consequence: the irreversibly weakened ability of Europe to resist potential external danger in the future.

<sup>91</sup> Ivi, I: 8.

<sup>92</sup> TESAURO, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* [1670] quoted in BATTISTINI 2002: 55.

<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that *L'Austriade* actually remained uncompleted, the poet having concluded the text with the two hymns permeated with the Christian spirit. The first and the most important one – *L'Himne de la paix* – is devoted to the latest events of Franco-Savoyard War of 1600-1601 and contains an urgent appeal for putting an end to further internal European discord.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The three poems taken into consideration clearly witness the complex processes the epic genre undergoes in the period between the end of the Cinquecento and the beginning of the Seicento. Imbued with the spirit of the Counter-Reformation, the texts reflect the main political and historical tendencies of the epoch that largely favoured the revitalization of the idea of a new crusade: a myth that provoked considerable changes in the historical and literary reality of the time.

The general tendency towards a more historical or epic “mode” can be traced in all of the texts in question, all of them being contaminated, as Tasso would have put it, not only with the “flavours”

of the *mirabile*, but also with the “condiment” of modern history, each of the poems privileging different aspects of the rapidly changing historical reality. Yet, as our analysis has shown, the tendency towards historicity went hand-in-hand with the continuous attempt of merging history with the marvellous, the poets remaining faithful to some of the epic *topoi* of the past and, most importantly, inscribing the union of the marvellous and the historical into the ideological context of a modern “Crusade”. All of the above-mentioned transformations took place precisely under the sign of the Crusade myth favouring the providential perspective of the Battle of Lepanto and the crucial divine presence – either explicit, as in Bolognetti, or implicit, as with Rufo and Deimier. While the Italian text still contains a number of direct loans from the classical epic, the later texts of Rufo and Deimier tend towards a more subtle perspective in which the allegorical struggle between the divine and the infernal forces acquire a more implicit character, the emphasis being put on the “miracles” produced by the human effort of the new *milites Christi*.

In all of the poems, the chivalric code with its key notion of honour continues to act as a crucial basis of the poetic action, re-elaborated and reactualized in view of the

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new social, ideological, political and historical processes. This tendency is perfectly demonstrated by the complex change of the status of the new epic hero: the protagonists of the battle act as the modern “Crusaders” guided by the divine Providence, being at the same time the “valiant Cavaliers” continuing the classical chivalric tradition, as well as “modern Heroes”, perfectly well-versed in the new *ars belli*.

Finally, a crucial change towards historicity can be observed if we compare the definitive, unquestionable endings of the classical models with the open ending of Bolognetti’s poem, as well as with the unstable, explicitly wary intonations of the poetic finals offered by Rufo and Deimier. All of the three poets reveal a historical awareness that could not but strike the reader, forming a vivid contrast with the poetic narration entirely focused on the celebration of the resounding triumph of the Christian fleet.

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