

“SEASONING” MODERN HISTORICAL EPIC WITH MIRACLES:
THE «STRANI INCANTI» OF GIROLAMO GRAZIANI’S
CONQUISTO DI GRANATA

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RIASSUNTO: «Un labirinto nel quale si aprono altri labirinti»: la formula con cui Italo Calvino definiva l’universo poetico dell’*Orlando Furioso* è perfettamente applicabile anche al *Conquisto di Granata* (1650) di Girolamo Graziani. La poesia epica storica dedicata all’evento spartiacque relativamente recente della *Reconquista* – la conquista di Granada (1492) – ha assorbito alcune delle tendenze e trasformazioni più significative subite dal genere epico nel Seicento, tra cui la dialettica coesistenza del “meraviglioso” e del “verisimile”, la ricerca di novità e varietà, l’intrusione della storia moderna. Il saggio tratta dell’adozione e della ri-elaborazione di classici *topoi* epici appartenenti alla dimensione del “meraviglioso”: lo scontro allegorico tra Cielo e Inferno, armi celesti, *loci amoeni*, maghe affascinanti, orribili mostri illusori e altri espedienti magici ereditati dalla tradizione epica cavalleresca. Un’attenzione particolare è dedicata all’interazione degli elementi caratteristici dell’epica, come il ‘meraviglioso’ provvidenziale e ‘fantastico’, con la dimensione della storia moderna (incarnata dalla figura di Cristoforo Colombo), chiaramente percepita nell’intricato mondo del poema di Graziani che, similmente all’epica ariostesca, si rivela un «universo a sé in cui si può viaggiare in lungo e in largo, entrare, uscire, perdersi».

PAROLE CHIAVE: meraviglioso, verosimile, storia, *Conquisto di Granata*, Cristoforo Colombo, Girolamo Graziani

ABSTRACT: «Un labirinto nel quale si aprono altri labirinti»: the formula that Italo Calvino used to define the poetic universe of *Orlando Furioso* could be perfectly applied to Girolamo Graziani’s *Conquisto di Granata* (1650). The historical epic poem dedicated to the relatively recent watershed event of the Reconquista – the conquest of Granada (1492) – absorbed some of the most significant trends and transformations the epic genre underwent in the Seicento, among which the dialectic coexistence of the “marvellous” and the “verisimilar”, as well as the search for novelty and variety and

the intrusion of modern history. The essay deals with Graziani's adoption and re-elaboration of the classical epic *topoi* belonging to the dimension of the "marvellous", i.e. the allegorical confrontation of Heaven and Hell, celestial weapons, *loci amoeni*, enchanting sorceresses, horrible illusory monsters and other magic devices inherited from the chivalric epic tradition. Special attention is given to the interaction of such characteristic epic elements as the providential and the "fantastic" "marvellous" with the dimension of modern history (embodied by the figure of Christopher Columbus), clearly perceived in the intricate world of Graziani's poem that similarly to the ariostesque epic, reveals to be a «universo a sé in cui si può viaggiare in lungo e in largo, entrare, uscire, perdersi».

KEY-WORDS: marvellous, verisimilar, history, conquest of Granada, Christopher Columbus, Girolamo Graziani

[...] oltre tutte le misture è soavissima quella della favola e dell'istoria.

(TASSO, *Apologia*)

Chi non sa far stupir, vada alla striglia!

(Giambattista Marino, *La Murtoleide*)

1. THE "MARVELLOUS" AND THE "VERISIMILAR": THE UNION OF THE «QUALITÀ SÌ DISCORDANTI»

The necessity of astonishing and stupefying the reader, affecting his senses and imagination, could justly be considered not as a mere option, but as an aesthetic imperative of the Baroque literature, perfectly condensed in the well-known formula from Giambattista Marino's *Murtoleide*: «È del poeta il fin la meraviglia».¹ According to the Neapolitan letterato, the art of an «excellent poet» consisted in constantly filling

¹ BATTISTINI 2002: 53.

the reader with wonder («stupore») and literally making him raise his eyebrows («inarcare le ciglia») in utter surprise. This typically Baroque penchant for provoking amazement was particularly emphasized by Andrea Battistini, who wrote in his *Barocco*: «Al dovere della novità cui è tenuto il poeta corrisponde, sul versante della fruizione, l'effetto della meraviglia, nata dall'eccesso e dall'estremismo delle proposte che interrompono il corso normale degli eventi».² Indeed, starting from the second Cinquecento, the notions of marvels, wonder, novelty³ and variety go hand in hand under the aegis of another key Baroque notion – the one of *delectare* – constituting a “duty” for the author of an epic poem and accounting for the genre's gradual evolution.

Miracles and the miraculous are concepts that lay at heart of countless theoretical treatises composed between the Cinque and the Seicento, being a subject of continuous polemics in the most refined literary circles. To quote Erminia Ardissino, the brief Aristotelian reflection upon the nature and the usage of the “marvellous”, paradoxically enough, turned out to be crucial for epic poetry, as despite its succinct character, it had stimulated the «ricca discussione [...] sul valore del meraviglioso per la poesia»,⁴ the protagonist of the lively debates being the *peregrino* genius of Torquato Tasso.

In his *Apologia*, the poet recurs to his favourite form of the dialogue adopting the usual mask of the *Forestiero Napoletano* in order to disclose his vision of the “marvellous”. The whole discussion revolves around the question of the «cose» «degne di meraviglia»,⁵ the poet and his interlocutor, Vincenzo Fantini, identifying two main types of the “marvellous”: 1) the so-called «imagini fantastiche», or «fantasmi»⁶ and 2) all the phenomena that are brought to life by «the secret judgment of the divine Provi-

² *Ibidem*.

³ In the *Discorsi sull'arte del poema eroico*, Tasso insisted upon the importance of ‘novelty’ («novità») that was bound to amaze the Baroque readers, making them «or mossi ad ira, or a terrore, or a pietà [...] or allegri, or contristati, or sospesi, or rapiti» (TASSO, *Discorsi* [Poma]: 5).

⁴ Ivi: 19.

⁵ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. D2v.

⁶ Thus, Tassian *Forestiero Napoletano* states: «Dunque meraviglie, e miracoli chiamiamo i fantasmi: e quella parte della poesia ch'è facitrice dell'imagini fantastiche [...]» (TASSO, *Apologia*: f. D1v).

dence»,⁷ «delle quali son occulte in qualche modo le cagioni divine». ⁸ Having thus distinguished between the two categories of the «cose mirabili»,⁹ the poet and his interlocutor agree that of the two «maniere di meraviglie»,¹⁰ the “divine” or “providential” marvellous “appears” to have a greater impact on the reader as compared to the “fantastic” marvellous for one essential reason, i.e. its credibility. To quote the words of the *Forestiero Napoletano*, «dunque delle cose, o degli effetti creduti solo ci meravigliamo: e la meraviglia dell’altre cose, non solo è minore, ma non è pur meraviglia»,¹¹

In this way, Tasso introduces the much-discussed notion of credibility (*il verisimile*), emphasizing its primary role as far as the epic *favola* – «l’anima del Poema» –¹² is concerned:

[Il Forestiero Napoletano] Et le verisimili [azioni] possono essere e false, e vere, né sono vere necessariamente [...]. Dunque le favole si tessono d’attioni così vere come false, le quali habbiano sembianza del vero [...]. La verisimiglianza dunque è necessaria nella favola; e la verità e la falsità non è necessaria¹³.

Credibility turns out to be a major necessity for the author of an epic poem: in the given perspective even the “marvellous” elements may and should be credible to justify their presence in the text. This consideration upon the relationship between *il vero*, *il falso* and *il verisimile* brings us to the dichotomy of history and invention (crucial with Tasso and his imitators) sparking off an intense dialogue between the *Apologia della Gerusalemme liberata* and the *Discorsi del poema eroico*. In the poet’s opinion, it is essential to model

⁷ «[...] tutte le cose [...] che avvengono per secreto giuditio della Providenza di Dio seran meravigliose [...]» (*ibidem*).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Ivi: f. D2v.

¹⁰ Ivi: f. D2r.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Ivi: f. B8r.

¹³ Ivi: f. B8v.

the epic *favola* using namely the material of the *verisimile* – a «materia» that may be «tolta da l'istorie»,¹⁴ but might as well contain elements of invention. Credibility being the primary objective of the epic poet, Tasso insists upon the importance of the invention: in the *Apologia*, the poet states having “overcome” other authors namely in his use of the “marvellous”.¹⁵ First and foremost, the poet refers to the “marvellous” of the Christian origin that, in his opinion, is the superior category of the “marvellous”, i.e. the most credible one, as it refers to the religion that his contemporaries had «bevuta nelle fasce insieme co'l latte». ¹⁶ Miracles belonging to the above-mentioned category indeed appear to be the most “verisimilar” and therefore *lodevoli*: the ingredients, or the refined “condiments” with which the poet should “season” his poem to achieve gratifying novelty and variety. On the contrary, the miracles making part of a Pagan religion are the ingredients that are bound to produce a «freddo e insipido»¹⁷ epic poem, for, in Tasso's opinion, they are anything but credible.

Yet, the “recipe” of a “savoury” epic poem composed in the sophisticated period of the Baroque cannot but have a number of layers, the main principle of the Baroque *goût* being namely the one of *diletto*: an intention of *delectare* counterbalanced by the Counter-Reformation inclination towards *docere*. In other words, a «giudicious poet» has to “entice” the readers of all categories into his poem, with «meraviglie», «perché con esse invita e alletta il gusto degli uomini volgari, non solo senza fastidio, ma con sodisfazione ancora de i più intendenti». ¹⁸ It is not for nothing that the author of the *Discorsi* chooses the epithet *dilettevole* to introduce the second type of the “miraculous”, i.e. those «imagini fantastiche» that we had mentioned in the beginning:

¹⁴ TASSO, *Discorsi* [Poma]: 6. Later in his fundamental treatise, *Il Giudicio sovra la Gerusalemme riformata*, Tasso will continue to emphasize «in modo stringente» «la necessità di fondare il poema eroico su argomento storico» (*Introduzione*, in TASSO, *Giudicio* [Gigante]: XXVI).

¹⁵ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. D2r.

¹⁶ TASSO, *Discorsi* [Poma]: 6.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Poco dilettevole è veramente quel poema che non ha seco quelle maraviglie che tanto muovono non solo l'animo de gli ignoranti, ma de' giudiziosi ancora: parlo di quelli anelli, di quelli scudi incantati, di que' corsieri volanti, di quelle navi converse in ninfe, di quelle larve che fra' combattenti si tramettono; e d'altre cose sì fatte [...].¹⁹

Similarly, in the *Apologia*, the *Forestiero Napoletano* expands upon the notion of the miracles belonging to the category of the “fantastic” dwelling in particular on their function in the poem, specifying that they should comply with two main criteria: 1) be credible or *verisimil* and 2) should be «conjuncted» in a special way with other elements of the *favola*, being functional in the context of the poem's *scioglimento*.²⁰

In the poet's conception, both the “divine” and the “fantastic” «maniere di meraviglie» are considered as essential components of the epic poem of the late Cinquecento – early Seicento: the marvellous “condiments” that were to respond to the criteria of credibility and functionality, as well as to delight the reader by bringing the gratifying «varietà d'accidenti» (mostly the miracles of the second category). Last but not least, the marvellous elements were to *movere* the reader's senses, instructing him and instilling into him a deep sensation of *pietas* and marvel in front of the mysterious providential design. Such, in a nutshell, was the theoretic basis that Tasso put into practice into his own poem: a perfect “recipe” to be imitated, modified and amplified by the next generation of «miglior plettri» during the whole XVIIth century.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. B3r. The idea of functionality of the “miraculous” elements was further elaborated by Tasso in his *Giudicio sovra la Gerusalemme riformata*, where the “marvellous” tends to be indissolubly linked to the allegorical dimension, its primary function being the one of possessing a profound yet allegorically hidden significance. To quote Claudio Gigante's words, in this apologetical treatise, «il “meraviglioso” è – definitivamente – distinto dal “falso” e ancorato all'allegoria, che, agostiniamente, nasconde una verità sublime dietro l'apparenza della finzione [...]» (TASSO, *Giudicio* [Gigante]: XXIV). For an in-depth analysis of Tasso's use of the concepts of “*il vero*”, “*il falso*”, “*il meraviglioso*” and “*il verisimile*”, see *Introduzione*, ivi.

2. *IL CONQUISTO DI GRANATA* AS A «SOAVISSIMA MISTURA» OF POETRY AND MODERN HISTORY

The components of the epic poem described in Tasso's *Discorsi*, i.e. the Aristotelian principle of unity, the variety and novelty of accidents, the growing need for the *verisimile* combined with the “marvellous” of both divine and “fantastic” origin – all of these elements «si fissarono e cristallizzarono entro schemi convenzionali, in forme costanti, ripetendosi [...] e imponendosi alla coscienza e al gusto dei poeti»²¹ who continued to develop and transform the epic genre. Among this generation of «miglior plettri», the prominent Modenese poet, Girolamo Graziani, occupies special place. The author of a number of poetic and dramatic works, courtier²² and Secretary of State to Francesco I and Alphonse IV d'Este, as well as an experienced diplomat in charge of «onerevolissime e delicate missioni»,²³ Graziani can justly be considered one of the key figures acting on the literary scene of the time.²⁴

Following the crucial tendency of the epoch, the Modenese poet opted for the historical subject having generously “seasoned” it with the marvellous “condiments”. Thus, the *materia* of his second and most well-known epic was chosen from the recently modern historical past: the culminating event of the Reconquista, i.e. the conquest of Granada in 1492. The choice of a “foreign” subject of the war of Catholic Spain and the Islamic Al-Andalus could not surprise the reader of the time: the extremely complicated relationship with the Ottoman Turks contributed to stimulating the Crusade spirit

²¹ BELLONI 1893: 320.

²² As Simone Sirocchi notes in his monography dedicated to the French artists at the Modenese court in the XVIth-XVIIth centuries, Girolamo Graziani was a courtier poet *par excellence*, whose inclination for the epideictic genre revealed already in his early years (SIROCCHI 2018: 106). Yet, despite his distinguished career, Graziani's position at the court was an extremely unstable one, the poet frequently lamenting various «fatiche, disillusioni, amarezze» of the court life (NICOLETTI 1889: 468).

²³ Ivi: 448.

²⁴ For Girolamo Graziani's biography, see, among others, the comprehensive entry by TARZI 2002; see also TIRABOSCHI 1781-1786; *Vita del Conte Girolamo Graziani scritta da Camillo Marchesini* [1675-1695] (BERTONI 1937); NICOLETTI 1899; SABBATINI 1846 and the preface to the recent edition GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico]: VII-VIII.

already in the air. The allegorical perspective of a modern crusade²⁵ was particularly emphasized by Antonio Belloni:

È inutile, ch'io faccia rilevare l'importanza grandissima dell'argomento, per la quale certo il poema del Graziani può star con onore al fianco della *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Infatti dalla presa di Granata, che chiude una lunga e sanguinosa lotta di otto secoli contro i più feroci nemici di Cristo, procede non pur la posteriore grandezza della Spagna, ma, sotto un certo rispetto, la salvezza del mondo cristiano, il quale dopo la presa di Costantinopoli era, per dir così, minacciato da due fuochi all'occidente e all'oriente. *Era dunque non solo una impresa nazionale, che il Graziani cantava, ma una lotta combattuta in nome della fede contro quegli stessi nemici, ai quali Goffredo avea strappato di mano il Santo Sepolcro.*²⁶

The profound religious intention behind the «vaghezza delle forme» of Graziani's poem was not to escape the reader, the editor Soliani thus “warning” him against the superficial reading of the poem:

Resta che tu avverta che le parole dea, fato, destino, idolo, paradiso, adorare e simili sono usate per vezzo di poesia, non per errore di credenza. La vaghezza delle forme non deve pregiudicare alla purità della fede. Quelle si osservano per delizie della penna, questa si riverisce per oggetto del cuore. *Lo stile tutto poetico, e l'animo sempre cattolico:* così l'autore si protesta.²⁷

²⁵ The importance of the Catholic perspective – the historical conflict seen as an episode of the allegorical struggle between good and evil – was stressed by Mónica García Aguilar who noted upon the fundamental presence of «la doctrina cristiana y lo sobrenatural cristiano frente a la religión musulmana» in Graziani's epic. According to the scholar, the historical event of the Catholic Monarchs «propició en un breve espacio de tiempo numerosas muestras poéticas en las que, más allá de los motivos meramente políticos, se acentuaban las razones propagandísticas del triunfo de la religión católica sobre el ejército infiel» (GARCIA AGUILAR 2014: 109).

²⁶ BELLONI 1893: 322 (italics mine).

²⁷ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico]: 5 (italics mine).

Il Conquisto undoubtedly absorbed a number of the tendencies of the time, last but not least including the emblematic fluctuation between *l'epico* and *il romanzesco* and similarly to the Ariostesque *Orlando Furioso*, revealed its “in-between” position: «quasi animal d'incerta natura, e mezzo fra l'uno e fra l'altro».²⁸ Having “derived” «non poco» from *Gerusalemme Liberata*,²⁹ Graziani yet succeeded in modelling the historical epic in his own way, combining the epic and the romance modes with elements of drama, the poem being abundant in various chance encounters of the numerous characters who tend to disguise themselves and constantly change their protean identities. The variety of the «unexpected miraculous agnitions» appears to be a source of the reader's continuous marvel and delight (quite in line with the prescriptions of Tasso's *Discorsi*), functioning at the same time as those «soavi licor» of *il romanzesco* that together with the «succhi amari» of the “historical” form the «soavissima mistura»³⁰ of the heroic epic poem.

Having borrowed the «ricca pluralità»³¹ of episodes and characters from Ariosto, Graziani nonetheless chose to follow the example of Tasso as far as the providential historical perspective was concerned. Significantly enough, all of the numerous miracles present in the poem are organically inwoven in its texture, being not only functional to the poetic plot, but most importantly, conditioned by divine Providence bearing an accentuated divine character. In line with the ideas Tasso expressed in his *Discorsi* and *Apologia*, *Il Conquisto* contains a series of the “fantastic” miracles as well: the *incanti* mostly inherited by the chivalric epic tradition. These classical marvellous components, inscribed in the general manichaistic perspective of the poem, coexist with the “marvellous” of the strictly Christian origin, introduced by the figures pertaining to the divine world: God and his angels, Archangel Michael and the patron saint of Spain St. James. The “marvellous” in the poem is extended as well to another crucial category: the one of the “miracles” produced by human mind («ingegno

²⁸ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. A5v.

²⁹ BELLONI 1898, cit. in NICOLETTI 1889: 480.

³⁰ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. A6v.

³¹ CARETTI 1970: 32-33.

umano», capable of «meravigliose e diverse invenzioni».³² This kind of the “marvellous” reveals to be linked to the modern figure of Christopher Columbus: the illustrious Ligurian navigator occupying a special place in the fabula of Graziani’s poem.

To gain a better understanding of various manifestations of the “marvellous” in *Il Conquistato di Granata*, I shall consider the above-mentioned categories, paying special attention to the role and function each of them has to play in the complex architecture of Graziani’s poetic “palace” that, to quote once more Tasso’s words, is built «sovra i fatti di cortesia, di generosità, di pietà, di religione»,³³ being thus a perfect seventeenth-century incarnation of «l’illustre dell’eroico».

3. “VERISIMILAR” MIRACLES: POETIC MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIVINE “MARVELLOUS”

The relationship between *il meraviglioso* and *il verisimile* appears to be crucial as far as the tradition of the heroic epic poem is concerned. In his *Discorsi*, Tasso wrote upon the «diversissime [...] due nature»³⁴ of the “marvellous” and the “verisimilar” that being «almost contrary to each other», are both seen as «necessary» ingredients of an epic poem. The poet comes to an essential conclusion that «un’azione medesima possa essere e meravigliosa e verisimile»³⁵ and introduces the notion of “verisimilar” miracles (*miracoli “verisimili”*):

Attribuisca il poeta alcune operazioni, che di gran lunga eccedono il poter de gli uomini, a Dio, a gli anglioli suoi, a’ demoni o a coloro a’ quali da Dio o da’ demoni è concessa questa podestà, quali sono i santi, i maghi e le fate. Queste opere, se per se stesse saranno considerate, maravigliose parranno, anzi miracoli sono chiamati nel commune uso di

³² ARDISSINO 2019: 35.

³³ TASSO, *Discorsi* [Poma]: 12.

³⁴ *Ivi*: 6.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

parlare. Queste medesime, se si avrà riguardo alla virtù e alla potenza di chi l'ha operate, verisimili saranno giudicate [...].³⁶

This particular mode of «congiungere il verisimile co' l meraviglioso»³⁷ was adopted and meticulously followed by Girolamo Graziani in his poem dedicated to the «*strani incanti di Granata*»,³⁸ where all the miracles provoking «vario stupore», derive namely from the «virtù soprannaturale». ³⁹ The divine “marvellous” is introduced from the very beginning of the epic as the narrator presents the whole story of the *Reconquista* as an episode of the timeless struggle between Heaven and Hell: a direct consequence of the «sdegno eterno». ⁴⁰ The poem acquires a particularly salient allegorical scale starting from cantos IX-XII, as Idragorre, the main representant of the infernal world, enters the scene of Graziani's poem:

Gode anch'esso Idragorre e pien d'orgoglio
fa con gli urli tremar la valle e 'l monte,
indi prorompe: «Armati, o Ciel, ch'io voglio
contra l'armi divine alzar la fronte.
(XII 1, 1-4: 259)

In this manichaeistic perspective, the Moorish question is seen in direct continuity with the ideological opposition of absolute good and evil,⁴¹ the Demon's hindrance to the «armi terrene» of the 'magnanimous Ferrando' being only an instrument serving to score a major ultimate triumph over the celestial adversary:

Mossi contra Ferrando l'armi terrene,

³⁶ Ivi: 7-8.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXIII 5-6: 507.

³⁹ TASSO, *Discorsi* [Poma]: 6.

⁴⁰ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XII 2, 1-4: 259.

⁴¹ Thus, in canto XXII, Idragorre rhetorically exclaims: «Se poi cade soggetto il regno moro, / quale impero e qual tempio a noi rimane?» (ivi, XXII 11, 5-6: 484).

or tosto moverò l'armi d'Averno;
a danno del Cristiano oggi conviene
con l'arti esercitar lo sdegno eterno.
(XII 2, 1-4: 259)

The continuous allegorical struggle between the demonic and the celestial forces will eventually result in a direct confrontation in canto XXII in which Idragorre urges his demonic army to attack the ship of Christopher Columbus, fearing the support that the glorious «ligure nocchier»⁴² might bring to the Christian heroes. The violent storm caused by the horrific «turba acherontea»⁴³ is placated due to the effort of the divine messenger, «di Galizia Apostol santo».⁴⁴ With his celestial weapon, St. James easily triumphs over the «empi demoni», the whole episode of the marvellous «vision sì rare»⁴⁵ being summed up as a providential victory over the infernal forces precursing the actual historical triumph of Granada: «Ecco [...] vinto l'Inferno e soggiogato il mare».⁴⁶

One of the key manifestations of the Christian “marvellous” in *Il Conquistato* is linked to the figure of «la devota reina», Isabella I of Castile: an incarnation of the «virtù donnesca» that according to Tasso, was characteristic of those exceptional «heroic» female figures who tended to «trascendere e trapassare non sol la condizione dell'altre donne, ma l'umana virtù».⁴⁷ Thus, in canto XIX – one of the most suggestive and mysterious parts of the poem – the Spanish army suffers severe losses after the demonic attacks⁴⁸ under the aegis of Idragorre and the appalling massacre: the «spettacolo

⁴² Ivi, XXII 12, 4: 484.

⁴³ Ivi, XXII 14, 2: 484.

⁴⁴ Ivi, XXII 14, 1: 484.

⁴⁵ Ivi, XXII 16, 4: 485.

⁴⁶ Ivi, XXII 16, 5-6: 485.

⁴⁷ Cit. in FERRETTI 2013: 4. For the notions of «virtù femminile» and «virtù donnesca», see Tasso's *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca* (TASSO, *Discorso* [Doglioli]); for the role of these crucial Tassian concepts in *Gerusalemme liberata*, see FERRETTI 2013.

⁴⁸ Instigated by Idragorre, the demonic army sows chaos, misery and diseases to destroy the Christian army (GRAZIANI, *Il Conquistato di Granada* [Artico], XVIII 1-19).

atroce»⁴⁹ carried out by the Moorish warriors in the Spanish camp. The army is on the verge of fleeing from the battlefield, despite the exhortations of Ferdinand, yet due to the ardent prayers of Isabella, the situation changes, as Heaven puts an end to the miseries sent by the demons, making Christian warriors finally regain their momentum and military zeal. The miracle is immediately followed by a chain of other providential *meraviglie*: the queen, «accesa d'amor, di fé, di zelo»,⁵⁰ ascends to heaven and is granted the possibility of contemplating the divine angels, Vergin Mary and even Christ (being literally blinded by the divine «incomprensibile presenza»,⁵¹ Isabella is able to see only «ad or ad or ch'arde congiunto / l'abisso de la luce in un sol punto».⁵² The episode of the «visione estatica» contains various descriptions of the splendid celestial marvels that the queen contemplates «con stupore e con diletto»,⁵³ being amazed («stupida») by the «vista inusitata e nova». ⁵⁴ In the episode that appears to be a long digression from the dimension of «l'arme»,⁵⁵ the “marvellous” dimension is manifested mostly through its transcendental value: as Erminia Ardissino writes with regard to *Gerusalemme liberata*, the epic “marvellous” might be realized not only through direct supernatural interventions, but also through the «eventi che esulano dalla linearità e dalla comprensibilità [...]», leaving the effect of extreme «stupore e [...] sconcerto» with the «spectators». ⁵⁶ To continue the chain of the “divine” miracles, Isabella's mind is

⁴⁹ Ivi, XIX 1, 4: 401.

⁵⁰ Ivi, XIX 14, 7: 404.

⁵¹ Ivi, XIX 28, 6: 408.

⁵² Ivi, XIX 28, 7-8: 408.

⁵³ Ivi, XIX 33, 1: 409. It is noteworthy that the two key Baroque notions, well familiar to the reader of the time, appear in an episode bearing an extremely devout character.

⁵⁴ Ivi, XIX 38, 5: 410.

⁵⁵ According to Tancredi Artico, the mystical episode of Isabella's ascension occupying more than 40 octets can be considered a real digression from the core poetic action, especially if compared to the famous episode of Godfrey's prayers turning the tide of the events in canto XIII of *Gerusalemme liberata* (GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], n. 66: 417).

⁵⁶ ARDISSINO 2019: 25. It is in this sense that the narrator comments upon the impossibility for the humans to penetrate the providential «gran misteri»: «Conosce allor ch'è temeraria impresa / il tentar di capir quel ch'è infinito, / che quella luce è solo in sé compresa, / e che solo è quel cerchio in sé capito» (XIX 39, 1-4: 411). Special attention should as well be payed to the use of the lexemes belonging to the semantic field of

«illuminated»⁵⁷ by Christ's prophetic revelations as to the glorious future of her lineage, the resounding Christian triumph over the Moors, as well as the forthcoming discovery of the New World by Columbus.

«Di cor forte e di mente saggia»,⁵⁸ the queen stops «l'armi d'Averno»⁵⁹ acting as mediator between the «virtù soprannaturale»⁶⁰ and the earthly world, the above-mentioned miracles being possible only due to her devout zeal and fervour.

A similarly “credible” miracle only partly accessible to the human mind takes place in the final XXVI canto and involves the Moorish king Baudele: the “barbarous” tyrant despising the Christians suddenly decides to convert to Christendom. Thus, contrary to the historical truth, Graziani offers the reader an idyllic final, yet in this poetic interpretation, Baudele undergoes a complex psychological process, his conversion being another miracle performed by the divine Providence that all of a sudden – as was the case with Isabella's prophetic vision – illuminates the mind of the «feroce»⁶¹ Moorish king, so that he feels «liquefarsi a poco a poco / il giel del freddo core al dolce foco».⁶²

This transformation (followed by the solemn baptism of Baudele, «di cor mutato e di voler diverso»)⁶³ serves not only to prove the omnipotence of the divine will, but as well enables the poet to stress once more the *pietas* of Ferdinand,⁶⁴ who remains

the “marvellous”, i.e. «mirare», «ammirare», «stupore», «stupida», «attonita», extremely frequent in the episode.

⁵⁷ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XIX 40, 3: 411.

⁵⁸ Ivi, XXIV 62, 5: 546.

⁵⁹ Ivi, XVIII 79, 5: 397.

⁶⁰ TASSO, *Discorsi* [Poma]: 8.

⁶¹ Already in canto I, Baudele is characterized as a typical “pagan” «tiranno»: «uom che, feroce, / di costumi è crudel, di volto atroce» (GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], I 15, 7-8: 11).

⁶² Ivi, XXVI 104, 3-8: 602.

⁶³ Ivi, XXVI 105, 1: 602.

⁶⁴ For the model of an epic hero uniting in his character the virtues of «Prencipe e Heroe», endowed with such supreme qualities as «rara pietà e religione», see the crucial treatise by Paolo Beni (BENI, *Comparatione*: 3). According to Beni, the hero of an epic poem should, similarly to Tasso's Godfrey, «esprimer l'Idea di perfettissimo Capitano e Heroe», the central virtue of such a hero being «soprattutto Christiana fede e humiltà» (ivi: 7, 215-216).

«aperto alla pietà e alla comprensione nei confronti dei vinti»,⁶⁵ exactly as required by the ideology of the modern “crusade”.

An interesting example of the intrusion of the divine “marvellous”, accompanied by the metanarrative insertion stressing the *probable* character of the event, can be found in canto XXV. In the given episode, Ferdinand's inspiring discourse in front of his army is followed by a sudden clap of thunder and lightning: «Cinto Michel di luminoso velo / fu l'autor di quel tuono e di quel lampo, / de i Cristiani a favor schierò quel segno / (così crede pietà) l'empireo regno». ⁶⁶ The narrator might feel uncertain about the miracle, but he has no doubts as to the limits of the human possibilities of comprehending the «la divina Idea»: ⁶⁷ yet he ardently hopes that the thunder and lightning will prove a providential sign announcing the eventual victory of «l'arme pietose».

4. «IMAGINI FANTASTICHE» AS CRUCIAL POETIC INGREDIENTS: INNOVATING TRADITIONAL “MARVELLOUS” *TOPOI*

For the sake of the reader's *diletto*, Graziani “seasons” his epic with a whole chain of miracles and marvellous events. First and foremost, in his poetic interpretation, the historical fact of the Spanish victory over the Moors depends on two crucial conditions, both belonging to the dimension of the “fantastic marvellous”. The first one is a mystery revealed to the Queen Isabella by the phantom of her ancestor Rodrigo, that in line with the spectacular poetics of the Baroque, appears to her in chains and in flames. In order to be granted the divine “permission” to win the war, the Catholic Monarchs have to give a vow to build a holy temple immediately after their victory, as well as give a proper burial to the relics of Rodrigo, so that his soul might finally ascend to heaven in peace. Isabella

⁶⁵ As Francesco Ferretti noted upon the «integralismo cattolico tutt'altro che intransigente» di Tasso: an ‘integralism’ that reveals to be «emulo, piuttosto, dell'imperialismo angosciato di Virgilio, aperto alla pietà e alla comprensione nei confronti dei vinti, perché radicato in una ideologia di tipo tragico» (FERRETTI 2013: 42).

⁶⁶ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXV 16, 4-8: 555.

⁶⁷ Ivi, XIX (argomento), 7: 401.

and Ferdinand do not hesitate to follow these rites, «offering» to Christ «il nobil tempio e 'l glorioso acquisto»⁶⁸ in the end of the poem, thus fulfilling the essential – yet, not the only one – condition of the Christian triumph.

While the first requirement, although being linked to the fantastic image («larva») of Rodrigo, still bears direct reference to the divine will, the second condition, on the contrary, belongs to the world of the demonic magic. The «obscure mystery» of Granada is revealed by the Moorish princess Elvira – Christian at heart and by origin – who, similarly to Tassian Rinaldo, wishes to amend («emendare») «de i passati danni le colpe antiche».⁶⁹ According to Elvira's revelation, in order to defeat the Moors and “liberate” Granada, the heroes will first have to «superar l'insidioso incanto» of the «empia maga» Garnata,⁷⁰ the legendary founder of the city, by sneaking into the magic cave («l'antro fatal») and getting hold of the urn with the sorceress's «ceneri incantate».⁷¹ As can be seen, both mysteries are far from performing a merely ornamental role: exactly in line with Tasso's recommendation, both “marvellous” elements are fundamental for the poetic fabula, as they «disciolgono quei nodi, che senza l'aiuto loro non potevano essere sviluppati»,⁷² paving the way for the core event of the poem, i.e. the final conquest of Granada.

The above-mentioned mystery gives rise to a chain of miracles making part of the category of «imagini fantastiche»: various epic *topoi* inherited from the chivalric literary tradition. It is interesting to note that the miracles in question have some crucial elements in common: first and foremost, all of them are linked to the epic hero, Hernando (Hernán Cortés), a figure that by definition stands for the intrusion of a relatively recent

⁶⁸ Ivi, XXVI 109, 8: 603.

⁶⁹ Ivi, XXIII 38, 1-2: 515.

⁷⁰ Ivi, XXIII 40, 8: 515.

⁷¹ Ivi, XXIII 38, 8: 515.

⁷² TASSO, *Apologia*: f. B3r.

history⁷³ in the epic labyrinth of *Il Conquisto di Granada*.⁷⁴ Another element proper to all of the miracles present in the part dedicated to Garnata's enchantment, is a *topos* recurrent in the epic tradition: a divine weapon⁷⁵ – «la spada che temprò fabbro immortale» –⁷⁶ capable of breaking any spell and helping its master to overcome the infernal forces. It is namely with his magic sword that Hernando goes through the fearsome ordeals before getting in possession of the enchanted urn and breaking the sorceress's spell.⁷⁷ The whole canto is reminiscent of the enchantments of Tasso's «selva di Saron»,⁷⁸ the horrific marvels filling the hero with «alto stupore»:

Giunto colà sparsa d'intorno ei mira
di tartareo vapor nebbia mortale,
che la strada al guerrier copre con l'ombra,

⁷³ For the emblematic «presenza sotto le mura di Granada di Hernando, cioè Hernan Cortés, futuro conquistatore dell'Impero Mexica – nel ruolo di aggiornamento della tradizione letteraria in direzione di un'apertura ad argomenti moderni», see GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico]: X). A similar function of «innovating» the epic tradition is performed by another crucial character of the poem, Christopher Columbus whose role in the poem will be discussed further below.

⁷⁴ It should be noted that Hernando, in line with Graziani's theatrical poetics, first appears in the poem not as an intrepid Christian hero but disguised as Elvira's loyal servant Zoraida.

⁷⁵ The celestial «fatal brando» had been granted to King Ferdinand by St. James but was stolen from him due to the intrigues of Idragorre. After a series of intricate events, Hernando got in possession of the divine weapon by chance; later on, Ferdinand granted it to him so that the hero could break Garnata's spell and eventually reconstitute the magic sword to the king.

⁷⁶ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXIII 89, 6: 527.

⁷⁷ Quite in line with Tasso's proposition in the *Giudicio sovra la Gerusalemme riformata*, the «marvellous» sword in Graziani's poem displays profound allegorical value: overcoming the obstacles to satisfy the primary condition of liberating the city – removing Garnata's ashes and regaining the «urna reale» (GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXIII 49, 3: 517) – clearly stands for eradicating pagan idolatry.

⁷⁸ As pointed out by Mónica García Aguilar, the abominable forest («selva», «bosco» or «foresta») is a crucial background as far as the «epic space» of the poem is concerned: «el lugar por antonomasia donde culminan los valores negativos del bando pagano»; «un laberinto infernal» and «una auténtica personificación del caos» that, similarly to the besieged city, «se presente como un espacio sublime, de difícil acceso, que destaca por sus escarpadas montañas y su abrupto paisaje [...]» (GARCÍA AGUILAR 2014: 113-114).

*e d'un alto stupore il cor gl'ingombra.*⁷⁹

Stupisce il cavalier ma non paventa,
e spinge il passo in quell'opaco orrore [...]
(XXIII 58, 5-8; 59, 1-2: 520)

The intrepid «cavalier»⁸⁰ thus faces a number of ordeals: the horrid fog of the «vallea fatale», the violent «aspra tempesta»,⁸¹ the encounter with the «mostri spaventosi»,⁸² accompanied by «orche novelle»⁸³ of the terrible river and finally, the fierce combat with the horrific warrior Orgonte sent by the sorcerer Alchindo. Having surmounted all the obstacles due to his valour and, most importantly, due to the magic power of his sword, Hernando faces his last ordeal: the attack of a «smisurato dragon d'orrido aspetto».⁸⁴ Having overcome the monstrous adversary, the hero witnesses a «nuovo incanto»:⁸⁵ the fearsome monster reveals to be a «larva», as the «falso drago» turns into Alchindo, the perfid magician assisting the demons. All of the obstacles reveal to be mere illusions: upon his return to the Christian camp, the warrior is amazed to discover that «disparve ogni fallace imago / e con l'incantator cadder gli'incanti».⁸⁶ Yet, despite their illusory nature, all of the marvels and enchantments are «particolarmente degni di meraviglia, perché son congiunti alla favola»⁸⁷ and thus represent an important turning point in the poetic action: breaking Garnata's spell and getting in possession of the enchanted urn is a key

⁷⁹ Italics mine. In *Il Conquisto*, Graziani also uses a Baroque variation of the Tassian syntagm: «vario stupore», this time with regard to the 'miraculous' appearance of Columbus on the battlefield (GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXV 82, 1: 570).

⁸⁰ Ivi, XXIII 59, 1: 520.

⁸¹ Ivi, XXIII 60, 1: 520.

⁸² Thus, Monica García Aguilar stresses the inherent «mythical» or «legendary» connotations proper to the image of the forest in epic poetry: «Como forma imaginaria [...] el bosque es un lugar mítico en el que abunda la vida indómita, un espacio poblado de bestias feroces y monstruos legendarios [...] que resaltan la imagen salvaje de los espacios agrestes» (GARCÍA AGUILAR 2014: 114).

⁸³ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXIII 62, 6: 521.

⁸⁴ Ivi, XXIII 86, 6: 527.

⁸⁵ Ivi, XXIII 89, 2: 527.

⁸⁶ Ivi, XXIII 91, 3-4: 528.

⁸⁷ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. D2v.

requirement for conquering Granada. It is essential that this demanding task is entrusted to Hernando⁸⁸ – a character in possession of both epic and historical status. In this light, the victories of *Hernán Cortés* literally equal the triumph of modern history over the epic “marvellous”: a choice that could not be fortuitous in an époque when epic poetry was continuously contaminated with the topical trends of recent history, being subject to fundamental transformations and evolution.

The confrontation of history with the world of the “marvellous” becomes even more emblematic in canto XX, when Graziani introduces the dimension of “*gli amori*” aiming at delighting the reader with his «soavi carmi» in order to distract him and «raddolcir gli alti furori»⁸⁹ of the world of “*l’arme*”. Hernando, along with other Christian heroes, is captured by the ally of the infernal forces, the «dotto Mago» Alchindo. The demonic magician holds the captives in a labyrinthic prison situated on an enchanted cliff beyond the Pillars of Hercules, entrusting them to the care of his daughter Belsirena, a sorceress herself. It is in this “marvellous” context that Graziani revives the well-known episode of *Gerusalemme liberata*, i.e. the story of Rinaldo and Armida, as well as the traditional epic *topoi* of *loci amoeni*:⁹⁰ the edenic garden and the sumptuous magic palace of the sorceress’s constitute the edenic background for the characters’ «folli amori».⁹¹ Similarly to Armida, Belsirena falls in love with the Christian warrior, enveloping him with the atmosphere of lethargic *voluptas* – yet, the resemblance

⁸⁸ Despite the unquestionable valour of the hero, the role of the celestial brand – a persistent *topos* suggested by the epic tradition – should not be underestimated. In a similar way, the magic sword appears in canto XX, as it helps Hernando to break the magician Alchindo’s spell and liberate Elvira from the enchanted room: «Posa quinci la punta a caso Hernando / nel pavimento, e cessa il fiero incanto, / cui la spada fatal del gran Ferrando / dissipò la possanza e tosse il vanto» (GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XX 97, 1-4: 443). In this scene, the celestial sword breaks the enchantment almost on its own, the hero putting it in the right place indeed «by chance». Nonetheless, the qualities of the supreme «arte e possanza» of the modern ‘crusaders’ – Hernando and Ferdinand himself – are frequently stressed by the poet, as it is due to them that the Christian heroes «troppo superano» the Moorish adversary (ivi, XXV 105, 3-4: 575).

⁸⁹ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XX 4, 3-4: 422.

⁹⁰ For the overall catalogue of the epic *loci amoeni*, see BETTIN 2006: 957-978.

⁹¹ TASSO, *Gerusalemme liberata*, XVIII IX, 2. The syntagm appears in canto XX of *Il Conquisto*, Graziani making use of it in order to introduce the Ariostesque dichotomy of *l’arme* e *gli amori*: «Musa, tu non sdegnar che in mezzo a l’armi / spieghi del vano albergo i folli amori [...]» (XX 4, 1-2: 422).

with the Tassian episode ends here. Re-elaborating the *topoi* that by the second half of the XVIIth century had already turned into clichés, the poet adds interesting elements of novelty: thus, Belsirena's love for Hernando is described as a complex and instable «dubbio affetto», the heroine continuously oscillating between the «desio cocente»⁹² of revealing her feelings to Hernando and concealing her «poignant» secret. Unlike the experienced Armida, the «miserable» Belsirena from the very beginning reveals to be completely powerless against Hernando who, being «degli arcani d'amor giudice esperto»,⁹³ immediately uncovers her secret. Both characters try to disguise their feelings, the hero simulating total ignorance and incomprehension of the sorceress's «doglia ascosa», while the latter one does her best to dissimulate her «incerto» pathos.⁹⁴ Interestingly enough, Graziani adopts the crucial Tassian strategy – «una strategia del coprire e dell'occultare» –⁹⁵ yet, using it in a completely different context: thus, the enchanting sorceress does not simulate love⁹⁶ to seduce the warrior, but has to recur to the ploy of dissimulation to protect her own complex feelings. To enamour the Christian cavalier, Belsirena tries various strategies, alternating «minaccie di velen» with «preghi di mele»,⁹⁷ however, the hero courteously yet firmly rejects her love, opposing the intransigent ethic of a Modern “crusader” to the enchantress's «armi d'amor»: «Sol di studi guerrieri io son divoto».⁹⁸ Yet, this fervent assertion only partly corresponds to the truth, for Hernando as well adopts the strategy of dissimulation, aiming at concealing another core reason for his refusal, i.e. his love for the Moorish princess Elvira.

⁹² GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XX 6, 2: 422.

⁹³ Ivi, XX 7, 1: 422.

⁹⁴ Ivi, XX 6, 5: 422. In the episode, Graziani focuses on his character's complex affects, the canto containing a number of Belsirena's inner monologues, reminiscent of the Tassian «parlar disgiunto», while the actual *loci amoeni* receive less attention as compared to their analogues in *Gerusalemme liberata*.

⁹⁵ For the endless «gioco di finte e di simulazioni» characteristic of Tassian Armida che «fa' manto del vero a la menzogna» (*Gerusalemme liberata* IV 25, 7-8), see ZATTI 1996: 117-121.

⁹⁶ As pointed by Sergio Zatti, with Armida, the strategy of «coprire e occultare» assumes the form of «arte e calcolo della “dissimulazione”, volta a fini “disonesti”» (ivi: 119).

⁹⁷ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XX 48, 6: 432.

⁹⁸ Ivi, XX 43, 4: 431.

The notion of dissimulation, from the very beginning present in the complex relationship between the characters, becomes particularly important in the scene taking place at the «sublime balcon»⁹⁹ of Belsirena's enchanted palace. The sorceress, «tra vari desiri in sé diversa», is on the verge of disclosing her love to Hernando,¹⁰⁰ when she notices a distant «legno»¹⁰¹ that immediately acquires symbolic value. For both characters, the sailing ship embodies the desire of venturing a voyage beyond the Pillars of Hercules, marking a sudden intrusion of historical reality into the edenic space proper to the universe of the «folli amori». That is why Belsirena is outraged at the sight of the ship instinctively associating it with the hostile world of «l'arme» and discoveries.

«Mira» dicea «quel legno; egli trascorse
popoli immensi e pelago infinito,
e senz'aver lume o favor da l'Orse
girò d' Africa e d'India il curvo lito.
(XX 28, 1-4: 428)

Putting «tacito veneno» in her words, the sorceress urges Hernando to escape such fate, mocking the «follia de i mortali»¹⁰² and opposing the desire of glory and adventures symbolized by the ship to the world of «guerre felici» and «placidi furori»:¹⁰³

Saggio chi solca il mar cui non offende
il superbo furor d'Austro o di Coro,
quel mar che fra le pompe e fra gli amori

⁹⁹ Ivi, XX 24, 6: 427.

¹⁰⁰ Tancredi Artico justly compares the conversation of Belsirena and Hernando to a «duetto dalle movenze dialettiche, più tipiche del teatro che del poema epico» (ivi, n. 31: 428): both characters indeed avoid speaking directly, continuously recurring to metaphors and allusions.

¹⁰¹ The appearance of the distant ship seems to anticipate the upcoming liberation of Hernando, as well as the future glorious voyages of the hero. The image might as well contain an allusion to Columbus, the famous Ligurian navigator who will soon enter the scene of *Il Conquisto*.

¹⁰² GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XX 30, 1: 428.

¹⁰³ Ivi, XX 15, 3; 6: 424.

sommerge nel piacer naufraghi i cori.
(XX 30, 5-8: 428)

Yet, the Christian hero remains indifferent to the sorceress's passionate eloquence, firmly opting for the perspective of future military glories: «Vari istinti dal ciel piovono in terra, / altri segua gli amori, io vo' la guerra».¹⁰⁴ As can be seen, all the magic art and the fascinating «vezzi» of Belsirena seem to have no effect upon the modern 'crusader', the future conqueror of Mexico evidently craving for the «trionfi guerrieri»¹⁰⁵ rather than for the «futile» «premi d'Amor».¹⁰⁶ This intense dialogue, rich in allusions and implicit references, is followed by the ultimate triumph of history over the world of magic: the hero succeeds in breaking the enchantments of Alchindo, liberates his companions and his beloved Elvira and does not hesitate to leave for Granada on board a ship,¹⁰⁷ whereas the miserable Belsirena commits suicide throwing herself off the enchanted cliff.¹⁰⁸ Once again, the reader assists to a resounding victory of history over the traditional epic dimension of magical *loci amoeni*:¹⁰⁹ unlike Tassian Rinaldo, the modern epic hero,

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, XX 31, 7-8: 428.

¹⁰⁵ Ivi, XX 32, 8: 429.

¹⁰⁶ Ivi, XX 34, 1: 429.

¹⁰⁷ The image of the sailing ship appears in the poem on various occasions: the distant «battello» seen by Belsirena and Hernando, the glorious Columbus's ship and the vessels taken by the heroes in the course of the poem – all of them seem to embody the «nave [...] di scoperta salpata per un eroico viaggio epico» substituting the «barca romanzesca dell'avventura» of the previous epoche (QUINT 1985: 488).

¹⁰⁸ The ending, as well as the above-mentioned dialogue, reveals the existence of a clear boundary separating the "marvellous" and the historical dimensions, being emblematic as to the new historical and epic trends. The episode, drastically different from the one of *Gerusalemme liberata*, perfectly reflects the allegorical spirit of the revised and "reformed" *Conquistata*. In this sense, *Il Conquistato* continues the poetic tradition of the mature Tasso, the Modenese poet symbolically depriving the Pagan sorceress of any power of influencing the circumstances, as well as of the possibility of changing her own identity. Similarly, to the author of *Gerusalemme conquistata*, Graziani reduces the «vitalità multiforme» of the Pagan heroine to «una cifra simbolicamente compatta, a un emblema morale»: a choice perfectly in line with Tassian tendency of inscribing the "marvellous" into the allegorical dimension. (RESIDORI 1999: 135).

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that the sumptuous *loci amoeni* eventually reveal their illusory nature, as Belsirena, similarly to Tassian Armida, makes disappear her «bel giardino» and «palagio adorno», instantly transforming her *loci amoeni* into *loci horridi*.

carefully avoids «del cieco labirinto i vari errori»¹¹⁰ and is determined to continue his way, avoiding all temptations for the sake of the future triumphs. The “marvellous” elements seem to lose their seductive power when confronted with modern historical reality, so that the “gratifying” deviation announced by Graziani at the beginning of the canto only seemingly «disturbs the epic action».¹¹¹

5. «TIFIMAGGIOR, L'ARGO NOVELLO»:¹¹² THE “MARVELLOUS” DEEDS OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AS ELEMENTS OF MODERN HISTORICAL REALITY

The intrusion of modern history into Graziani's epic is introduced not only by the figure Hernando, the future conquistador of Mexico, but also by the crucial presence of the illustrious Ligurian navigator, Christopher Columbus. Following the popular trend of his epoque,¹¹³ Graziani turns to the subject «di poema degnissimo e d'istoria»¹¹⁴ transforming the episodal yet crucial element of *Gerusalemme liberata* into one of the most significant themes of his poem.¹¹⁵ In the interpretation of the Modenese poet, Columbus is indissolubly linked to the dimension of providential marvellous, being introduced as a modern 'crusader' whose glorious deeds are essentially guided by Providence. Columbus thus acquires a status of a full-fledged Christian epic hero: not

¹¹⁰ Ivi, XX 4, 6: 422.

¹¹¹ ZATTI 1996: 116.

¹¹² GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXII 17, 1: 485.

¹¹³ As pointed out by David Quint, «l'impresa dell'esplorazione e la crociata contro l'Islam» constitute the main «arene eroiche del [...] secolo», as far as the epic poetry of the time is concerned (QUINT 1985: 488). For the detailed catalogue of the epic poems forming the cycle dedicated to the New World, see BELLONI 1893: 427- 430; for the thorough analysis of the epic dedicated to Columbus's discoveries, see, among others, GIGLIUCCI 2014 and RODINI 1992.

¹¹⁴ TASSO, *Gerusalemme liberata*, XV XXXII, 8.

¹¹⁵ QUINT 1985: 470.

only a glorious “*scopritore*”,¹¹⁶ but most importantly, a distinguished warrior displaying such essential qualities as valour and *pietas*.¹¹⁷ Presenting the Ligurian navigator as a “crusader”, Graziani links modern history to literary epic tradition, aptly inweaving the figure of Columbus into the allegorical context of the war between Heaven and Hell. It is significant that Columbus instills terror with the demons who see the hero as a major threat to their plots: «Mirate là: vittorioso ei riede, / scorso il barbaro clima e 'l mar profondo, / portato il culto e la cristiana fede / con leggi peregrine al nuovo mondo [...] / e noi dannati al tenebroso fondo / oziosi miriam l'autor primiero / di tante alme rapite al nostro impero?».¹¹⁸

The demons justly fear Columbus's imminent intervention: the Ligurian hero reveals to be one of the poem's protagonists as far as the war with the Moors is concerned. In two fundamental episodes of the poem, «il gran Colombo»¹¹⁹ performs the theatrical function of a modern *deus ex machina* helping the Christian heroes in most desperate situations and largely influencing the course of military events. The first significant appearance of Columbus takes place in canto XIX, as the hero offers his help to Belsirena's prisoners, agreeing to bring the cavaliers back to the besieged Granada. During the voyage, the navigator unveils his companions the story of the New World discovery, the whole episode resulting a «soavissima»¹²⁰ mixture of history and fiction. The relation of the voyage to America indeed abounds in marvellous elements, Columbus continuously mentioning various «nuovi miracoli stupendi»: «crudi mostri», «finte larve», mermaids, giants and other similar creatures hindering his voyages. Along with

¹¹⁶ Despite the clearly prevailing providential perspective of a modern 'crusader', Graziani does not neglect Columbus's actual historical merits as «de l'indic' oceano il vincitore, / il ligustico eroe, Tifi secondo» (ivi, XIX 70, 2-3: 419), a significant part of canto XXII being dedicated to Columbus's narration of his discoveries.

¹¹⁷ Exactly in line with Paolo Beni's description of a «perfettissimo Heroe e Capitano», Graziani seeks to «formar Heroe in cui sia il colmo di tutte le virtù, massime militari e civili [...] in pace e in guerra» (BENI, *Comparatione*: 215-216).

¹¹⁸ GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXII 9, 1-4; 6-8: 483). It is noteworthy that the detailed presentation of Columbus as a hero performing a divine mission comes namely from the demon Idragorre.

¹¹⁹ Ivi, XXV 112, 7: 577.

¹²⁰ TASSO, *Apologia*: f. A6v.

the persistent presence of these «*imagini fantastiche*», Columbus introduces the marvellous of providential origin that in his narration clearly prevails over the “fantastic” and the historical elements. The marvellous adventures of his «sublime navilio» – the “providential” «*nave epica*» as opposed to the «*barca romanzesca dell'avventura*» – appear to be inscribed into the teleological perspective, their primary objective being the realization of «*la trama divina della storia*». ¹²¹ It is essential that the discoveries and the deeds of the «*Tifi secondo*» are shown as the result of his absolute, unshakeable faith: «*Quella fé che [...] può voi condurre a terre ignote, / fra l'onde procellose e l'aure avverse. / L'àncora de la fede immobil reste, / né si temano i mostri e le tempeste*». ¹²² It always under the aegis of divine Providence that Columbus performs his human “miracles”: ¹²³ unlike Hernando, the Ligurian hero needs no magic weapons to triumph over both the infernal forces and the Moorish adversary. Heaven protects the hero by sending immediate help upon his ardent prayers, but also offers him various occasions to prove his own military art and valiance.

Thus, in canto XXV of the poem, Columbus once again acts as a *deus ex machina*, entering the scene of a «*vario spettacolo d'orrore*» ¹²⁴ in a most spectacular way. The unexpected arrival of the hero from the very beginning is presented as a ‘miracle’, the hero literally appearing on the battlefield, similarly to a divinity:

Sorge la polve, indi di schiera in schiera
Si veggono apparir fanti e cavalli;
de l'armi luminose a i ferrei lampi
ride il sol, splende il cielo, ardono i campi.
(XXV 81, 5-8: 569)

¹²¹ QUINT 1985: 470-488.

¹²² GRAZIANI, *Il Conquisto di Granata* [Artico], XXII 49: 1; 5-8: 493.

¹²³ Thus, the old hermit Uderico stresses the invincibility of the Ligurian hero: «*Del magnanimo eroe tutto fa strada, / a la sorte, a l'ingegno ed a la spada*» (ivi, XXII 93, 7-8: 505).

¹²⁴ Ivi, XV 83, 6: 570.

The Christian warriors contemplate the scene with «vario stupore»¹²⁵ while the hero, accompanied by «sì fiorito squadron di gente eletta», approaches the battlefield, demonstrating «ne l'insegna maggior la croce eretta».¹²⁶ The poet continues to introduce allusions to the dimension of the “marvellous”: thus, Columbus’s «destriero» «precorre il vento e supera il pensiero»,¹²⁷ while the hero himself «seems» to be endowed with supernatural power:

Trema il ciel, trema il suol mentre che passa
a la cruda battaglia il gran guerriero;
sembra lampo a lo sguardo e tuono al moto,
sembra tempesta e folgore e tremoto.
(XXV 85, 5-8: 570)

«Inflamed» with both «pietà» e «furore», the Ligurian warrior miraculously turns the tide of the final battle, demonstrating incomparable military valour and inspiring the exhausted Christian army with his own example of an exemplary modern ‘crusader’.¹²⁸ It is essential to note upon the absence of direct supernatural interventions, magic swords or enchantments in the episode: in contrast to Ferdinand and Hernán Cortés, Columbus is fighting on his own, being inspired by his absolute faith.

The Ligurian hero intervenes in the course of the military events as well for the third time. Thus, in canto XXVI, the navigator reveals Ferdinand the story of the capture of Malaga: a remarkable victory that took place due to the hero’s cunning intelligence,

¹²⁵ Ivi, XXV 82, 1: 570.

¹²⁶ Ivi, XXV 82, 4; 6: 570.

¹²⁷ Ivi, XXV 85, 4: 570.

¹²⁸ «Ercol secondo», Colombo is celebrated and honoured by the Christian army and by the Catholic King. It should be noted that Graziani completely reinvents Columbus’s relationship with Ferdinand, actually inverting the chronological order of the two cardinal events of 1492: the historical fact of the Spanish conquest preceded the navigator’s voyage to the New World and, as noted by Irene Marchegiani Jones, played a crucial role «nella decisione finale dei re di Spagna di aiutare Colombo» (MARCHEGIANI JONES 1992: 417).

reminiscent more of Odysseus rather than of Achilles.¹²⁹ Accompanied by his squadron, Columbus decides to enter the city «in abito mentito»: a stratagem that enables him to attack the Moors by surprise catching them totally unprepared. Once again, Columbus proves to be a real protagonist of the struggle for Granada, Graziani tending to stress the superior military and personal qualities of a hero who combines the essential traits of a militant epic hero, an experienced and curious navigator, and finally, a modern “crusader” fervently carrying out a divine mission. It is namely in the versatile figure of Columbus that Graziani brings together the dimensions of the providential “marvellous” and the one of modern history: the character serves as a mediator between the two universes, eventually dominating over the fantastic world of *larve* during his navigation and, most importantly, scoring a resounding triumph over the historical adversary of the Catholic Spain.

6. CONCLUSION

As can be seen, the poetic texture of *Il Conquisto di Granata* abounds in the elements pertaining to the dimension of the “marvellous”: various «*imagini fantastiche*» borrowed from classical epic tradition and the crucial models of Ariosto and Tasso coexist and closely interact with the dimension of the divine or providential “marvellous”. In this sense, the poet follows one of the key principles of the Baroque, prescribing the

¹²⁹ In the given episode, Graziani seems to have followed the recommendation of Alessandro Tassoni who in his «lettera scritta ad un amico sopra la materia del Mondo nuovo» suggested imitating the model of the *Odyssey* rather than the one of the *Iliad* when dealing with «questa benedetta materia del Mondo Nuovo». According to Tassoni, the *Odyssey* was to serve «di Faro a chi disegna di ridurre a Poema Epico la navigazione del Colombo all'India Occidentale» (TASSONI, *La secchia rapita*: 211). Yet, as we have seen, in other episodes of *Il Conquisto di Granata*, Graziani insists on the military identity of his hero, thus opposing the opinion of Tassoni who defines the Ligurian navigator as «piuttosto gran prudente che gran guerriero», recommending the poets not to deviate from the historical truth (ivi: 212). For the detailed analysis of Tassoni's interpretation of the figure of Columbus and his polemics with Stigliani, see MARCHEGIANI JONES 1992: 410-414.

poets to «rubar con lode [...], imitar con giudicio»,¹³⁰ in an attempt of re-elaborating the “marvellous” *topoi* in the light of actual historical and literary trends. On the whole, Graziani remains faithful to the classical models of heroic epic poem, preserving in particular the traditional chivalric atmosphere in a text that contains numerous descriptions of duels taking place totally in line with the notions of honour, *pietas* and valour, while the allegorical struggle between Heaven and Hell makes the basis for the whole poem. Yet, the topical marvellous components are largely innovated due to the poet’s introducing the dimension of the modern history: it is emblematic that most of the “fantastic” elements of the poem are linked to the historical figure of Hernando (Hernán Cortés) who successfully overcomes all of the magic obstacles, revealing to be a perfect example of a modern epic hero, firmly determined to pursue his supreme objective.

While Hernando most often deals with the world of “fantastic” marvellous *topoi*, the figure of Christopher Columbus appears to be linked to the dimension of the “marvellous” of strictly providential order. The Ligurian navigator assumes the versatile identity of a prominent military hero (reminiscent of both Achilles and Odysseus). Following the literary trend of the time, Graziani tends to expand on the invented military identity of his character, yet making references to Columbus’s actual historical merits seen mostly in the light of his religious awareness. It is essential that the hero does not have to recur to marvellous expedients, winning the battle due to his own «buona spada», cunning «ingegno» and unshakeable faith.

As we have seen, all of the “marvellous” episodes reveal to be of primary importance for the poetic fabula: thus, Hernando breaks the age-long spell of the sorceress Garnata hindering the Christian victory, Isabella fulfills the vow given to the spirit of her ancestor, while the confrontation with the enchanting Belsirena and her *loci amoeni* serves to test the hero’s firmness and resolution. Symbolically enough, it is to the character of Christopher Columbus that the poet entrusts to determine the outcome of the final battle: thus, in the «soave» mixture of history and magic of an epic in which

¹³⁰ BARTOLI, *La povertà contenta*: 20.

«una componente non si annulla nell'altra, ma si somma, proprio come in un'elissi un fuoco non si sovrappone mai all'altro [...] ma crea con l'altro una tensione dovuta alla compresenza»,¹³¹ modern history apparently has the last word.

¹³¹ BATTISTINI 2007: 174-175.

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