

The Image of Muslims in Torquato Tasso's *Le Gerusalemme liberata*

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Abstract

This paper examines Italian Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso's epic poem titled *Gerusalemme liberata* (Jerusalem Delivered [1581]). Tasso imaginatively narrates events and details from the siege of Antioch and Jerusalem in the First Crusade and compares historical Muslim characters with their Christian counterparts. Like other Orientalists, Tasso in his epic adopts a stereotypical image of Muslims and portrays them as savages and worshipers of idols. This paper explains these images, their sources, and the effects of representations by way of applying analytical and critical descriptive method. It will address Tasso's epic style, blending specific titles of history and magic with his fantasy in his portrayal of Muslim characters as compared to their Christian counterparts. It concludes with a critique of the Orientalist practice of associating the Muslims with terrorism, violence, and inhumanity in contemporary Western culture.

Keywords

Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, Muslim, Italian Renaissance, First Crusade

Introduction

Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), a devout Catholic and a court poet to Alfonso II d'Este (1533-97), Duke of Ferrara, is considered arguably the greatest Italian poet after Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (Jerusalem Delivered), an epic poem published in (1581), is set in 1099 during the First Crusade. Tasso, like other medieval Orientalists, provides a stereotypical image of Muslims. Questions that can be raised about this epic poem are: How does Tasso present Christian characters as opposed to Muslims? Does this study on Tasso differ from Said's postcolonial view? What are the effects of Tasso's presentation of Muslims in his work? Tasso narrates the story of the First Crusade that led to the occupation of Jerusalem and the holy lands. In the epic, Tasso

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mixes history and myth with his individual fantasy and portrays Muslims as inhuman, terrorist, and violent.

Tasso's view of Muslims is based on a number of premises. First, Islam has a great effect on people and their lives in the medieval ages, and classical civilisation has been transformed by contact with the religion. As Southern says that, the "existence of Islam was the most far-reaching problem in medieval Christendom" (3). Blanks and Frassetto state that European Christians developed negative images of Muslims because they felt that the latter were far ahead of them in literature, law, philosophy, and most areas of knowledge and human experience. Moreover, this stereotypical identification is related to European Christians' fear and anxiety of being dominated by Muslims of the East. Western authors knew little about Islam and believed that Muslims were enemies of Christendom (Southern 14). These views continue to live throughout different ages and contribute to form the current Western and American attitudes to Islam and Muslims.

In addressing this Western cultural tendency or Orientalism, Said focuses on the false image that has been fabricated by Westerners and their imperial attitudes since the French Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798. Said emphasises the "European representation" of the Orient as a "place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). According to Said, Orientalism "commenced its formal existence" during the Middle ages (49-50); and he regards medieval Orientalism as religious, whereas modern Orientalism as secular and political.

This study differs from Said's in its emphasis on one of the medieval works, Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, that have led to form this stereotypical image of Muslims. Moreover, it is not only religion that has caused the European Crusade wars against Muslim lands but also the desire to impose Western values or lifestyles, and occupy and annex Eastern territories, including holy places. The qualities attributed to Muslims, whether in the medieval or in the colonial or postcolonial era are almost the same. Tasso as well as other medieval European and Italian Renaissance authors reveal prejudice based on a sense of superiority of Western over Eastern civilisation.

Italian Renaissance authors like Dante Alighieri regard the Crusade wars as holy. In the *Inferno*, Canto IV, Dante refers to the pilgrim Virgil descending into the First Circle and pointing to the presence of the Muslim leader, Salah Ad-Din (1137-93), who led the Muslims against the Crusaders, stating: "e solo, in parte, vidi 'l Saladino"² (129). Dante also revealed his hostility towards Islam and Muslims when he included the Prophet Muhammad in *Inferno*: "See how dismembered now is Mahomet" (*The Divine Comedy* Canto XXVIII). Another major Renaissance epic author, Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533) includes 130

² He is alone, partly, I saw Saladin.

“Saracen” characters in his *Orlando Furioso* (1516), portraying the Muslims in a very demeaning manner.

***Gerusalemme liberata*: Major influences**

The Italian Renaissance began with the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century. It is a period of renewed artistic, literary, and architectural creativity that spread across Europe. The major Renaissance artists include Michael Angelo (1475-1564), Leonard de Vinci (1452-1519), and Titan (1488-1576); writers such as Machiavelli (1469-1527), Petrarch (1304-74); and poets such as Ludvico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso. Tasso was considered the last of the major Italian poets.

During this period, literature was written in Italian, not in Latin. Tasso composed *Gerusalemme liberata* as the first epic which was published in 1581. Few years after writing the poem, Tasso became poet laureate of Rome in 1594. Most of Tasso's *liberata* was composed between 1565 and 1575. Tasso served as the court poet in Ferrara where he was confined for years in a madhouse after attacking a servant with a knife.³ Although Italian critics look at the epic as not one of their favorites, they claim that Tasso is the poetic successor to Virgil and Dante. After the death of Tasso, the Italian Renaissance collapsed and the rise of the Baroque period began.

Tasso's *liberata* was influenced by the Italian Ludvico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (The Frenzy of Orlando) which was published in 1532, and from this work he borrowed plot elements and character types.⁴ Ariosto's epic had a great influence not only on Tasso's work but on the whole of Italian culture. Ariosto used the setting of the war between the French Charlemagne's Christian Paludins and Muslims, referred to as “Saracens”, whose army invaded Europe, believing that Muslims are going to overthrow the Christian Empire. Tasso believes that Ariosto's poem lacked structural unity (Reynolds 7) whereas he was committed to the unity of his work. Another major influence on Tasso is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Tasso attempted to “appropriate Aristotle's ‘Poetics’ to the Christian moralistic needs propagated by the Council of Trent” (Motyka 1). Tasso believed that he had to write for an oriented public who needed to observe Aristotle's precepts of unity. The last major influence on Tasso's epic was the Council of Trent (1545-63), the ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church. This Council published decrees, resolutions, and statements regarding church doctrines in Europe. The publications aimed at arriving at a common unified Christian view to confront internal Protestants, Martin Luther, and his successors, or external

³ Tasso fled the court for two years. On his return, his patrons, Gardinal Luigi d'Este and his brother Alfonso, the Duke, neglected him and refused to give him access to his manuscript. Tasso was incarcerated as a mad man in a hospital where he remained until 1580.

⁴ See Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

challenges, that is, Muslims. This could be seen in Tasso's focus on the First Crusade.

Tasso rewrote the poem before his death under a new title *Gerusalemme conquistata* (Jerusalem Conquered). He chose the historic conflict between the Christians and the Muslims as his subject matter. Tasso's *liberata* gained popularity in Europe. The Ottomans, who ended Byzantine Empire with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, advanced through Eastern Europe. Argan remarks that the text is loaded with exciting episodes and scenes that inspired painters and composers to employ the material and become part of the cultural memory of Europe (221). As Dilmac puts it, "It was above all the theme of love in *Gerusalemme liberata* that met with the greatest response from artistic posterity" (288). Dilmac emphasises that Tasso desires "to embrace the cultural heritage of classical antiquity and the Aristotelian notion of the epic" (288).

Although the poem in detail has no resemblance to the actual history or cultural setting of the Crusades, the incidents had historical grounding. It tells about the occupying of Jerusalem in 1099 by the main historical leaders of the First Crusade and the siege which gave Christian armies control over Jerusalem and the holy lands of the time. Undoubtedly, Tasso's *liberata* focuses on war, particularly the nature of leadership and loyalty during wartime, with the importance of sacrifice. Tasso's poem is about the disunity at the beginning and setbacks of the Christians and their ultimate success in taking Jerusalem in 1099. The poem directs more focus towards the various leaders of the First Crusade. However, Tasso falls into magical extravagance that has contributed to the narrative confusion of his poem. The medieval Europeans' view of Muslims is uniformly hostile. It is a combination of the fictitious and the imaginative fabrication that addresses their audience's passions. In fact, this pretended religious cause is superficial.

Tolan remarks that Pedro Pascual, the bishop of Jaén in Spain, who was captured by Muslim troops in 1298, attempted to discourage his fellow Christian captives to convert to Islam. Pascual composed an anti-Islamic and hostile discourse in his description of the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (*Sons of Ishmael* 146). It was the Europeans' belief in the medieval times that the Easterners were idolaters and nonbelievers. *Jerusalemme liberata* "can be considered one of the first epic fantasies" (Burrow "I Don't Know Whats"). Burrow also remarks that Tasso's poem set during the siege of Jerusalem reflects his fear of an Ottoman invasion of Italy before the Battle of Lepnato in 1571. A Turkish fleet landed in Sorrento in 1558 where Tasso was born and where his sister lived (Burrow, "I Don't Know Whats"). Moreover, the poem reveals a remittance of the threat from the Saracens. Daniel rejects the idea that the notions of Saracens as idolaters was a matter of ignorance; he suggests that it was "deliberate fiction intended to amuse" (143). In fact, the term "Saracens", associated with the Crusades, is applied by the Europeans in the Middle Ages referring to any person

who believes in the religion of Islam (Szczepanski 2020). This word “Saracens” is derived from Arabic. The verb in Arabic is *saraq* (to steal). According to the Europeans, Muslims “stole” Jerusalem and the holy land from the Christians. Reference to the incident of stealing is mentioned in the poem. The speaker claims that Ismen, a Muslim from Jerusalem, makes plans for stealing an effigy of Mary, which has disappeared, from the Christian temple in Jerusalem.

The medievalists also use the adjective “pagans” to describe non-Christians. Their writers describe Muslims as idol-worshipping pagans. The Europeans use this idea of worshipping idols as a justification for their Crusades.⁵ In the *La Chanson de Roland* (The Song of Roland), one of the major works of French medieval literature of the twelfth century (ca.1100-20), legendary historical figures are praised for their faith, loyalty, and courage celebrated against pagan Saracens. The Crusade war arrested the imagination of the European writers, as they produced their romances and literary works, implementing European textual responses to that war as the background. They view the “Saracens” as the Other which they must dominate and control. The conflict is between the medieval centric Self and the Other Saracen. The Self sees the Muslim as an embodiment of violence and oppression or contrariwise of romance. As one of these medievalists, Tasso is no different from them.

Cozzarelli emphasises that Tasso's approach to both religion and war and his views to gain the blessings of Christianity are formed by his conception of passion and imagination (173). According to Zatti, Islam represents the negation of Christianity as well as Hell (219). The medieval Christians had the perception of “Self” and the “Other”. They depicted Muslims as believers in false miracles that justified their Crusade war (Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad* 2). Moreover, “[t]heir perceptions of Muslims are based less on Islam than on their own Christian preconceptions of divine history and divine geography” (Tolan, *Saracens* 4). The “Self”, nurtured by myth, is able to destroy, conquer, or rule over the “Other”: In this relationship “of power, of domination, of varying degree of a complex hegemony” (Said 5), the medieval Christian writers misrepresented Muslims.

Tasso adopted the idea that Jerusalem must be liberated from Muslims. Jerusalem is ruled by Aladine, Prince or King. Aladine is a follower of Mahaoan (Mohamet) or Muhammad, a Muslim. According to Tasso's speaker, Aladine oppresses the local citizens of Jerusalem who are not Muslims. Tasso portrayed Muslims as oppressors and tyrannical. Tasso saw Muslims, who possessed of Jerusalem, not only “*Arabi preator*” but also “*palestin*” and are described as

⁵ The Crusader army is drawn from all kingdoms of Christendom led by Lord Godfrey, the historical Godfrey of Bullion, the mystic Peter, the Hermit, featuring many heroes familiar from medieval epics. For more information on the Crusades' history in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Setton and Lee.

worshipping “*Macone*” as often as “*Maometto*”. The Muslim characters are unable to speak. Tasso says:

The Pagan patience never knew, nor used,
Trembling for ire, his sandy locks he tore,
Our from his lips flew such a sound confused,
As lions make in deserts thick, which roar;
Or as when clouds together crushed and bruised,
Pour down a tempest by the Caspian shore;
So was his speech imperfect, stopped, and broken,
He roared and thundered when he should have spoken. (*Jerusalem Delivered* [JD] 6:38, 98)⁶

Undoubtedly, Tasso attempts to present these people as if they are subhumans, because they are unable to give a coherent speech. When they try to speak, they produce confusing sounds or broken speeches; it is like the roaring of predators. Muslims, the “pagans,” are portrayed as predators who often kill and cut up their prey, the Christians.

On the contrary, Tasso depicts Christian characters as savior figures, who rescue people. The Christian characters possess all human qualities in the world of Tasso. For example, Sophronia, the Christian maid, is described as a selfless person who suffers for the sake of others and makes sacrifices.

Sophronia she, Olindo hight the youth,
Both or one town, both in one faith were taught,
She fair, he full of bashfulness and truth,
Loved much, hoped little, and desired nought. (*JD* 2:16, 22)

Both of them, Sophronia and her love Olindo, take responsibility because Olindo wanted to be united with her in death. Aladine, the Muslim ruler, is portrayed negatively, as he condemned both to be burnt at stake.

Tasso’s characters

Christian theologians and writers attempted to find an explanation for the expansion of Islamic civilisation to areas formerly ruled by Christians, including Spain and Byzantium. These writers portrayed Islam as a heresy designed to have Christians away from their religious heritage. That is why those who lived in Northern Europe imagined Islam as a return to idolatry and paganism. This misconception was used to justify their Crusades.⁷

Tasso began the plot with the idea that God chooses Godfrey as the leader of the Christian army. He saw Godfrey, who was motivated by zeal for his

⁶ *Jerusalem Delivered*. <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/51/22.pdf> All subsequent quotations from this text will appear in parentheses as *JD* followed by chapter, section, and page numbers.

⁷ In *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient 1100-1450*, Akbari provides an important theoretical link to postcolonial and post-imperial scholarship on different periods. See Akbari. “Imagining Islam: The Role of Images in Medieval Depiction of Muslims” pp. 9-27.

faith, longed to drive the pagans from the holy city, making no account of any mortal glory: "Nor need he guide, the way right well he could, / That leads to sandy plains of Gaza old" (*JD* 10:4,175). Godfrey's mission was to take over the holy land, without paying any minimal thought to all obstacles and confrontations he was going to encounter: "And rode revolving in his troubled thought / What course to take, and yet resolved on naught" (*JD* 10: 3, 174).

Turchi remarks that Tasso tried to combine Ariosto's freedom on invention with a more unified plot structure (xxxii-xl). Tasso's *liberata* deals with a variety of themes. The main theme of the epic is the war between Christians and Muslims who are called "infidels": "The Pagans loud cried out to God and man, / The Christians mourned in silent lamentation" (*JD* 6:37, 26). Other topics include love and the romantic ideal of chivalry. There is a combination of realism, based on historical events, and fantasy; the poem is concerned with romantic subplots involving fictional characters, with the exception of Tancred, Prince of Galilee. The three major female characters in the poem are Muslims, who have been involved in romantic entanglements with Christian knights; eventually they are converted to Christianity. These women fight in the battles and one of them is portrayed as a sorceress.

The medieval Christians considered Muslims "the worst adversaries" of the Church (Tolan, *Saracens* 159). They used passionate terms to emphasise this image: "Crusading literature and propaganda played on the existing xenophobia by the use of emotive terms – enemies of God, servants of the Devil, and servants of Anti-Christ – to describe the Muslims" (Smith 56). Moreover, Western authors portray Islam "as a variant, heretical version of Christianity" (Tolan, *Saracens* 148). That is why during the medieval ages, such writers referred to Prophet Muhammad as a "trickster," deceiver, pseudo-prophet, and representative of the power of anti-Christ. Tasso's presentation of the characters reflected his abhorrence and prejudiced attitude towards Muslims in Jerusalem. In order to prove the supremacy of power and faith in the Western Christian character, Tasso drew a courageous image of Arganates, the second commander of the Arabs, "Saracens". In an open challenge to the Christian knight in combat, Arganates defeats most of the Crusaders' knights and he almost kills Tancred. However, Tancred raises from his sickbed, rallies the Christians, kills Arganates, and saves the day. The Christian characters have honour and are endowed with what makes someone good and virtuous. According to the medieval belief, the major element of honour is the character's ability to fight. Tasso's speaker refers to Godfrey, Rinaldo, and Tancred as examples of honourable men because they are able to fight when called upon for the side of the Christian God.

In Tasso's epic, one of the major Muslim women characters is Armida. Armida raises an army to kill Rinaldo, the bravest of the warriors, and fights the Christians, who defeated all the Muslim champions. The Europeans are always presented as victorious. Attempting suicide because of losing the battle, Rinaldo

prevents Armida when he finds her in time. The Muslim character from Jerusalem has extravagant love for witchcraft. Armida, the witch of the poem, summons Satan to reduce and destroy Godfrey. Tasso's over exaggeration made her powerful witch abilities reduce and capture over thirty knights, including the commanders, Rinaldo and Tancred, who have followed her to the castle on the Dead Sea. Armida with a hundred virgins, serving wines for them, tries to make them convert to Islam; her seductions have divided the knights against each other only to be transformed into animals by her magic, then she turns them into fishes for refusing, except one apostate. According to the speaker, the majority of her captives escaped or were rescued, but Rinaldo has fallen in love with her and Armida has abducted him with her chariot (*JD* 4:53-72). Rinaldo takes the position of a superior guide to Armida: "Thus taught he her, and for conclusion, saith, / All things are lawful for our lands and faith" (*JD* 4:26, 59). Armida accepts Rinaldo's instructions: "The sweet Armida took this charge on hand, / A tender piece, for beauty, sex and age" (*JD* 4:27, 59).

Tasso praised Rinaldo for possessing virtue and courage: "Rinaldo, whose high virtue is his guide / To great exploits, exceeding human thought" (*JD* 4: 55, 64). Moreover, according to Tasso's speaker, Rinaldo is endowed with the protection from heaven in order to perform virtuous deeds: "He lives, and heaven will long preserve his days, / To greater glory, and to greater praise" (*JD* 10: 71, 188). In this war environment, Tasso added a romantic fantasy to the battle by dedicating much of the poem to Armida's and Rinaldo's living on an island in the Atlantic Ocean, where she reigns as queen and is willing to live in bondage in her "empire of sense and delight." "In slavery me, the other is mastery / glories, she in herself, and he in her." The speaker describes Armida's condition:

Two crystal streams fell from her watery eyes;
Part of her sad misfortunes then she told,
And wept, and with her wept that shepherd old. (*JD* 7:16, 116)

Rinaldo's reply to her: "If you disdain me, and at last behold / your own face where all joys and greens reign." Then "She [Armida] used those looks and smiles that most beloved / To melt the frost which his hard heart embraced" (*JD* 5:63, 84).

In another incident, Muslim character is obsessed with magic and witchcraft. One of Selim's devils inspires Hydronote, ruler of Damascus, to send Armida to the Christian camp to seduce men with witty and magical ways. Rinaldo enters a world of love, magic spells, hidden enemies, disastrous shipwrecks, and enchanted castles. Undoubtedly, the sorceress Armida has a controlling power of magic where she has transported Rinaldo to "the Fortunate Isles" off the coast of Africa. Armida's singing siren sound has infatuated Rinaldo. Both of them have enjoyed their time in that magical palace. Armida is craving for a kiss with Rinaldo, hoping to marry him.

Oh, take this part, or render that to me,

Else kill them both at once, ah tarry, tarry:
Hear my last words, no parting kiss of thee
I crave, for some more fit with thee to marry. (*JD* 16:40, 280)

Tasso constructs the Muslim woman in a way that has dehumanised her and systematically devalued her. Armida to Rinaldo: “Kiss me, embrace me, if you further venture, / Love keeps the gate, the fort is eath to enter” (*JD* 17:32, 312). Tasso imagines and transfers his own ideas and pre-conceptions about Muslim character to create a very entertaining subject to his audience. He presents this portrayal of Muslim woman character as purely sexual and sensuous in nature.

These naked wantons, tender, fair and white,
Moved so far, the warriors' stubborn hearts,
That on their shapes they gazed with delight;
The nymphs applied their sweet alluring arts,
And one of them above the waters quite,
Lift up her head, her breasts and higher parts,
And all that might weak eyes subdue and take,
Her lower beauties veiled the gentle lake. (*JD* 15:59, 270)

Tasso's speaker describes Armida as femme fatale, attempting to seduce Rinaldo.

Thence came a lady fair with locks of gold,
That like in shape, in face and beauty was
To sweet Armide; Rinaldo thinks he spies
Her gestures, smiles, and glances of her eyes. (*JD* 19:30, 312)

Despite the fact that Rinaldo remains captive on the paradisiacal island by Armida, Tasso emphasises that his participation in the religious war against the “infidels” is essential for a Christian victory. Rinaldo seems to assert his love for Armida by pledging himself as her knight:

In joys, in woes, in comforts, hopes and fears,
Call me your soldier and your knight, as far
As Christian faith permits, and Asia's war. (*JD* 16:53, 282)

Armida believes that Rinaldo's words are not true but out of her love for him, Armida converts to Christianity.

According to Tasso, since they are not Christians, Muslims have no honour to fight and gain victory. However, when they gain victory, he refers to these victories as murders and crimes committed against God's religion and Christians, the believers. Christian characters, according to the narrative, are noble, human, and emotional, aiding all those who are in need. That's how Tancred is described.

. . . Tancredi crossed
His way, and gently prayed the man to say,
To Godfrey's camp how he should find the way. (*JD* 7:27,
118)

In his description of Erminia, another Muslim woman, Tasso's speaker recalls how nobly Tancred has treated her after his defeat of her father Cissaro, King of Antioch, and how Tancred has granted her liberty. That is why she came to Jerusalem declaring her love to Tancred.

At this the princess bent her eyes to ground,
And stood unmoved, though not unmarked, a space,
The secret bleeding of her inward wound
Shed heavenly dew upon her angel's face. (*JD* 4:70, 67)

Tasso's speaker describes Erminia as a virtuous Muslim woman, a blushing virgin, who has heavenly beauty of angelic face. Looking for her unrequited love, Erminia leaves the city in disguise. She intends to use her medical skills to heal an enemy. Instead of falling in love with Tancred in her father's prison, she falls in love with him when he has taken her captive after defeating and killing her father: "And when her city and her state was lost, / Then was her person loved and honored most" (*JD* 6:54,102). Erminia abandons her Muslim people and goes over to the Christian side, helping Tancred after a Muslim warrior dangerously wounded him in the combat; Erimina has cut off her hair and bound Tancred's wounds. Erminia is a close friend to Clorinda. Tancred also loves Clorinda. Out of her jealousy, Erminia has stolen Clorinda's armor and fled the city to a forest and found refuge with the shepherds by the River Jordan. Before Clorinda's death, she converts to Christianity.⁸

Muslim women are given the messengers' missions. Muslim characters who sympathise with the Christians come from other countries and cities which are not ruled by the Arabs. Clorinda, a warrior woman from Persia, comes and rescues Sophronia and her lover by making a special plea to Aladine. Another "fierce Circassian" woman from Russia, visited the Crusades at Immaus, Syria, to ask them to desist in their campaign, but their leader Godfrey refuses to give up and chooses war. Tasso's speaker makes the devil side with Muslims. According to the narrative, Satan-Dis-Pluto, the greater enemy of the human race, gathers the devils, who are, of course, envious of the Christians, and wants to disrupt the Crusade.

The Crusader leader Tancred begins his fight. Tasso's speaker presents Tancred, who is taking his religious responsibility towards the Crusaders, as an astounding, charismatic, fearless, and wary leader of his army.

But Tancred chosen, he and all retired;
Now when his slackness he awhile admired,
And saw elsewhere employed was his thought,

⁸ These Muslim women convert to Christianity whereas Christians never convert to Islam in the world of Tasso. Moreover, the Muslim characters move to their enemy and help them, whereas Christian women stand by their people, feeling their personal duty towards the country and its religion, in an attempt to save and protect them. For more on the love between Ronaldo and the pagan ("Muslim") princess, Angelica, see Waley's Introduction.

Nor that to just, though chosen, once he proffered,
He boldly took that fit occasion offered. (*JD* 6:29, 97)

Tancred encounters his enemy, Clorinda, whom he adores off the battlefield, believing her, when she is armed, to be a man. Clorinda joins Muslims when she sets out to make a military sortie:

Against their foes Clorinda sallied out,
And many a baron bold was by her side,

. . . .

“Let us by some brave act,” quoth she, “this day
Of Asia’s hopes the groundwork found and lay.” (*JD* 3:13,
41)

During a night battle, Clorinda sets the Christian siege tower on fire. Earlier and according to the poem, a romantic relationship is established between the Christian knight Tancred, the historical Trancred, Prince of Galilee, and the warrior Muslim maiden, Clorinda. Clorinda, taking part in the significant battle for Jerusalem, is a warlike maid. Clorinda mistakenly dies at the hands of her beloved, Tancred. She is the object of Tancred. When Tancred drives his sword into her bosom, he puts an end to her life.

Ah, had I gone, I would from danger free
Have brought to Sion that sweet nymph again,
Or in the bloody fight, where killed was she,
In her defense there nobly have been slain. (*JD* 12:103,

226)

Earlier before her death, Clorinda has discovered that she is actually a Christian by birth, daughter of a black queen and king of Ethiopia. According to the poem, her mother has sent her to be mistakenly raised in “*Macon*” lore. It is only when Tancred has wounded mortally, she requests baptism. She converts to Christianity before dying.

“Friend, thou hast won, I pardon thee, nor save
This body, that all torments can endure,
But save my soul, baptism I dying crave,
Come wash away my sins with waters pure.” (*JD*16:103,
278)

In order to inspire his contemporaneous readers, Tasso’s speaker says:

For if the Christian Princes ever strive
To win fair Greece out of the tyrants’ hands,
And those usurping Ismaelites deprive
Of woeful Thrace, which now captived stands,
You must from realms and seas the Turks forth drive,
As Godfrey chased them from Juda’s lands,
And in this legend, all that glorious deed,
Read, whilst your arm you; arm you, whilst you read. (*JD*:

1,2:2)

This call on all the Christian rulers in Europe is to assist Greece in its struggle against the tyrannical Muslims, who captivated their land. Tasso “thereby links the exploration of his time to both the classical Greek heritage and the Crusades, loading territorial expansion with ideological value for the very cultural identity of Europe” (Kahf 79). In his allusion to Thrace, Tasso referred to north-eastern Greece, which the Turks had occupied, as they had taken over Constantinople in 1453. For Tasso, Alfonso can declare war against the Turks as he had already done in Hungary in 1566. No one can deny that Tasso saw the Turks as a threat to Italy whose coasts were always vulnerable to attacks from Turkish ships. Muslims’ threat occupied the European minds of popes and princes that made them plan for a crusade to conquer and preoccupy their territories.

Conclusion

Tasso’s *Jerusalemme liberata* is an epic that celebrates the liberation of Jerusalem from Muslims, who are described as subhumans and Saracens. Tasso, like other medieval Christian Orientalists, is no different from the colonial or postcolonial Orientalists. The study, by way of analysing Muslim and Christian characters, men and women, confirms that the origin of the stereotypical image of the Muslim as terrorist, violent, inhuman, and sensual, can be traced back to the medieval Christian view. This study analysed Tasso’s epic, supporting this analysis with details from the poem. It differs from Said’s in the sense that Said focuses on the colonial and postcolonial periods and emphasises that Orientalism is secular and political; but medieval Orientalism is religious. This study confirms that the religious cause is superficial and one can consider it one, but no one can deny that preoccupation, annexation of Muslim territories, and imposing their values and lifestyle is another cause.

However, this study is consistent with Said’s view of the stereotypical image of the Muslim character as inhuman, terrorist, violent, sensual, and exotic. Moreover, it contributes to the field of literary studies in its examination of a medieval European Renaissance work that is not different in its presentation of Muslim characters from colonial or postcolonial or even modernist works. Like almost all modern Western and American Hollywood presentations in a new global form, Tasso describes his Christian characters in the most favorable terms. They are Christ-like figures, human, kind, religious, helping humanity, and fighting evil in the world and trying to get rid of Muslims, who are called “pagans.” Tasso’s attitude is typical of the medieval writers’ view of Muslims that gives rise to this long-lived image and prejudice that has continued to form current Western and American attitudes.

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