

"Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*: The Conflict between the Ideal World of the Poet and the Real World of Politics and Commerce."

Perspectives on German Literature

The tragic life and monumental works of Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) have long been the inspiration for musicians, painters, and poets. A symphonic study by Liszt and operas by Lully, Händel, Glück, Haydn, Rossini, and Dvorak all arise out of Tasso's writings. Poussin's painting of "Tancred and Erminia" in the Hermitage Museum in Russia, Tiepolo's four canvases depicting "Rinaldo and Armida" at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Delacroix's two studies of "Tasso in the hospital of Sant' Anna," a part of the Oscar Reinhart Collection in Winterthur, Switzerland, are examples of glorious and moving art masterpieces that owe their existence to this troubled genius. Spenser, Milton, Goethe, Byron, and Baudelaire are some of the most accomplished literary figures to have been directly influenced by the poet's works, especially by his *Gerusalemme liberata* (1575/81), a celebrated heroic epic concerned with the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 during the First Crusade launched in 1095 by Pope Urban II to liberate the Holy Land and free Eastern Christians from Muslim rule.

Today, few outside of the academic world are familiar with Tasso and his epic poem, but from its first appearance in a 1579 pirated edition through the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, this work was admired by all levels of European society who compared the author to Homer, Vergil, Dante, and Ariosto. *Gerusalemme liberata* is a blend of the classical forms of the *Aeneid* and the fanciful invention of romance. In the character of Goffredo appears the religious morality of Tridentine Catholicism modeled on "pius Aeneas," that had come forth from the three sessions of the Council of Trent between 1545 and 1563 wherein the Church endeavored to confront the challenges of the Protestant Reformation. The real beauty of the epic is not in the message of Christian morality in the form of classical theory, but it is in the elements of romance where Tasso allows his muse to give freedom to his imagination. The exploits of Rinaldo, Ruggiero, and Tancredi, filled with passion and adventure, interest the reader more than the religious polemics and moralizing surrounding Goffredo. The tender emotions and pathos that arise out of the

adventures of the pagan heroines Armida, Clorinda, and Erminia produce some of the most moving and musical verse of literature.

Of the many men of letters to fall under the spell of Tasso and his *Gerusalemme liberata*, J.W. von Goethe (1749-1832) is perhaps the most eminent. His *Torquato Tasso*, written between 1780 and 1789, published in 1790, and first performed in Weimar in 1807, stands as one of his great dramatic masterpieces.

It is a well-known fact that Goethe had read both *Aminta* and *La Gerusalemme liberata* as a young man and had begun to think about Tasso's life as a theme for a dramatic work as early as 1780. By 1786 Goethe's official life at the court of Karl August of Weimar had become so burdensome, especially with the problems of managing the failing mining operations of Ilmenau, that the poet-minister finally fled to Italy where he hoped to experience personally the classical ideal of beauty, heretofore known to him only through Johann J. Winckelmann's (1717-1768) "edle Einfalt und stille Größe."<sup>1</sup> For Winckelmann the neo-classical ideal was a purely literary, philosophical, and artistic concept which was best exemplified by the frescoes of Raffaello in the Papal Stanze. Goethe's experiences in Italy gave him a new perspective on Winckelmann and his ideas. After Goethe had visited the Cappella Sistina and viewed the frescoes of Michelangelo, he could consider Raffaello nothing more than a mere ornamentalist. One might draw the analogy between Goethe's opinion of Raffaello and Lessing's criticisms of the Baroque writers whom he thought to be guilty of excessive word painting. In his diary on the *Italienische Reise*, dated 2 December 1786, Goethe relates: "I am, at present, so taken with Michelangelo that after him I have no taste for even Nature herself; especially as I am unable to contemplate nature with the same eyes of genius as he did."<sup>2</sup> In the spring of 1787 Goethe rewrote in verse the first two acts of *Tasso* which he had originally written in prose. This revision and the rest of the play were accomplished by the poet during a sea voyage from Napoli to Palermo.

The description of the Este court of Ferrara, of Tasso's unfulfilled love for the Princess Leonora, and of the stern but compassionate Alphonso II can be paralleled with the court in Weimar, with Goethe's chaste friendship with Frau von Stein, and with his close relationship with Duke Karl August. Although

Goethe, after being in Weimar since 1775, had received in 1782 letters patent of nobility from the emperor at his patron's behest, it is doubtless true that he was still considered a burgher by the old nobility. Tasso's position as a court poet in Ferrara, a position held by Ariosto more than fifty years before, is in the play only an exaggerated version of Goethe's real social position in Weimar. Charlotte von Stein was an intellectual inspiration to Goethe much in the same manner that the Princess Leonora contributed to Tasso's great epic poem in the play. Both poets were never able to realize their amorous ambitions as the objects of their love were socially beyond reach: Frau von Stein was an older married woman with children and the Princess was the daughter of Duke Ercole II and his wife, Renée, the daughter of King Louis XII of France.

More important than these rather obvious historical influences is the delineation of the problem of polarity in the characters of Tasso and Antonio. Ronald Gray in his *Goethe: A Critical Introduction* asserts that the Latin phrase "nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse,"<sup>3</sup> which appears in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, contains the quintessence of Goethe's theory that the universe is made up of contradictory forces of good and evil, light and darkness, birth and death, etc. For Goethe man was a microcosm of the universe, and nowhere in his works is this conflict of opposites more poignantly revealed than in *Faust der Tragödie Erster Teil*:

"Two souls dwell, alas, in my breast, and the one wants to separate itself from the other (1112-13)."<sup>4</sup>

The problem explored by Goethe in this play, which takes place on a single day in the Spring of 1577 at Alphonso's pleasure palace, "Belriguardo," is essentially the conflict between the ideal world of the poet and the real world of political and commercial actuality. It is reasonable to assume then that Goethe fled his Weimar duties in September 1786 while on holiday in Karlsbad because the material and political side of his life was overshadowing his artistic nature. Finally, Goethe crossed the Alps after two earlier attempts from which he had turned back at the last moment. In Italy he exposed himself to two fruitful years in the fertile atmosphere of the neo-classical culture as embodied in the writings and creations of the most illustrious minds of the Italian Renaissance. Thus, through experience and wisdom

Goethe was able to achieve a fusion of the two contradictory forces within him and to reach a personal state of unity, harmony, even perfection. But, was Goethe as successful with his characters as he was with himself in resolving the problem of polarity? Leonora Sanvitale, Countess of Scandiano in Act III ii, (1704-7) realizes the basis for the animosity between Tasso and Antonio in a conversation with Princess Leonora.

Two men they are, who therefore are opposed,  
I've felt it long, because by Nature cast  
In moulds so opposite, that she the twain  
Could never weld into a single man.<sup>5</sup>

Antonio is the epitome of the Renaissance statesman in the Machiavellian sense. He is always quite prepared to permit the end to justify the means. All men should be proud to obey the wise ruler, he maintains. Yet, he overlooks corruption and nepotism of the Borgias, of the delle Rovere popes, and of Gregory XIII who was pope (1572-1585) during the time of the play's action. Tasso, on the other hand, is a dreamer who dotes on friendship with ladies of the Este court at Ferrara and suffers from a persecution complex because he is not understood or appreciated for his poetic genius by the nobility. The ladies and Duke Alphonso compare him to Vergil and Ariosto and even want to crown him with the laurel wreath. Yet, Tasso is never allowed to forget that he is patronized by the Este family and that his *Gerusalemme liberata* is written only for their greater glory and fame. Antonio succeeds in insulting Tasso to the extent that the latter draws a sword in anger. For this breach of court etiquette, Tasso is confined in abject despair to his rooms. Alphonso prevails upon Antonio to go to Tasso and reason with him. In spite of the vacillating attitudes of Antonio throughout the play, the final speech of Tasso in Act V, v. 3434-53 can most assuredly be interpreted as a fusion of the two opposites, of the ideal and the real, of the poet and the politician. Antonio approaches Tasso and takes his hand and Tasso continues his speech.

Oh, noble man! thou standest firm and calm,  
While I am like the tempest driven wave.  
But be not boastful of thy strength. Reflect!  
Nature, whose mighty power has fixed the rock,  
Gives to the wave its instability.  
She sends her storm, the passive wave is driven,  
And rolls and swells, and falls in billowy foam.  
Yet in this very wave the glorious sun

Mirrors his splendor, and the quiet stars  
 Upon its heaving bosom gently rest.  
 Dimmed is the splendor, vanished is the calm!—  
 In danger's hour I know myself no longer,  
 Nor am I now ashamed of the confession.  
 The helm is broken, and on every side  
 The reeling vessel splits. The riven planks,  
 Bursting asunder, yawn beneath my feet!  
 Thus with my outstretched arms I cling to thee!  
 So doth the shipwrecked mariner at last  
 Cling to the rock whereon his vessel struck.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, Goethe, the consummate artist, leaves the final interpretation to the educated reader. He himself had declared: "My works can not become popular, they are not written for the masses."<sup>7</sup> Goethe's Tasso begins his speech with two images that can only be considered opposites—water (Tasso) and rock (Antonio). The two elements of nature destroy one another when nature's fury is unleashed. The rock can disperse the storm driven waves, but eventually those waves can erode the rock. The water image changes to one of a sailor on a rudderless ship. Tasso is now the mariner whose vessel is destroyed by the raging of the water against the rock, but who in turn can find shelter and safety on the rock. Whether or not Tasso and Antonio resolve the problem of polarity and unite into a force that is both positive and edifying is answered by Goethe himself. One needs only to read history's records of the life and achievements of Germany's greatest genius!

Surpassing the biographical data in importance, however, is the artistry of the poet, Goethe, who through his sense of history and critical expertise develops the character of Tasso ever so subtly from a dreamy state of idealism in Act I of the play to extreme madness in Act V. The Counter-Reformation was one of the results of the Council of Trent, and Tasso as a faithful adherent to the teachings of the Jesuits strove to make his poetry moral philosophy. The rules of poetry had also become increasingly strict in the fifty years since Ariosto had written his *Orlando Furioso* (1532). It was important for writers to follow the rules laid down by the Renaissance interpreters of Aristotle's *Poetics* (344 BC). Tasso himself was very much a religious zealot who begged to be questioned by the Inquisition in order to be certain he was guilty of no heresy in his writing. In addition to his religious fanaticism, Tasso had two souls within his breast that desired to separate. He consciously desired to write epic poetry that would be in the spirit of

Counter-Reformation theology; however, deep within him seethed an innate ability to write sensuous, lyrical, mysterious poetry as Ariosto had done. This unresolved conflict eventually drove him insane. The real world for Tasso was the papacy of Gregory XIII who was jubilant over the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Protestants in Paris on 24 August 1572. The Middle Ages, when knight errantry and the crusades set the tone of the period, was Tasso's ideal world. This was an age without religious strife among Christian men in Europe. They were all united against a common Muslim foe and they were all fighting to recapture the holy places in Jerusalem. It is rather ironic that Tasso's contemporary, Cervantes (1547-1616), would write a satire on the romances of knight errantry which glorified an age past. Don Quixote, like Tasso, could not face the real world of the Renaissance, but preferred to live in a dream world of knights and maidens in distress. The genius of Cervantes was able to compare, contrast, and mingle the idealism of Don Quixote with the realism of Sancho Panza. Yet, Tasso was unable to adjust to the social conditions in Italy at the end of the Cinquecento and sought to hide in the medieval world of his *Gerusalemme liberata*. Josef Kunz expresses Tasso's problem very succinctly: "Therefore, only in the drama is the inadequacy of the artist in facing life treated, because this is suited to make completely transparent in an especially clear way the aporia of the historical situation"<sup>8</sup> (446-7). Lawrence Ryan identifies the crisis in poetry of Tasso's time by tracing the modulation of the poet's tone from stylized epic to personal confessional (312). And T.M. Holmes insists that

We may discern the social-political contradictions of an epoch of transformation in the way Tasso's gesture of homage is interrupted by his attitude of revolt. The formula of loyalty, like the epic poem, projects backward to a stable, self-contained feudal pattern of human relations; but the posture of revolt, mounting to strident abhorrence of an unsanctioned absolutism that encroaches, not merely unjustly, but sacrilegiously, on the freedom of the individual, belongs already to the history and sensibility of the bourgeois era (819).

One observes how Goethe brilliantly depicts the developing madness of Tasso over five acts of the drama. In Act I, iii..527-38 the inability of Tasso to come to grips with the real world is shown in his description of the dream world where he would like to find peace and security.

Oh, let me, then, ashamed from hence retire!  
Let me in deepest shades my joy conceal,  
As there my sorrow I was want to shroud.

There will I range alone: no eye will there  
 Remind me of a bliss so undeserved.  
 And if perchance I should behold a youth  
 In the clear mirror of a crystal spring,  
 Who in the imaged heaven 'midst rocks and trees,  
 Absorbed in thought appears, his brow adorned  
 With glory's garland,—there methinks, I see  
 Elysium mirrored in the magic flood<sup>9</sup>

Antonio returns to Ferrara from a diplomatic mission to Rome where he has arranged for some territorial acquisitions for the Duke through Pope Gregory XIII. No longer are men of state imbued with the same high religious principles that guided men like Saint Louis (1214-70) who led the Sixth and Seventh Crusades. Through Antonio's eyes in Act I, iv..634-43 we see the Vicar of Christ as a mere political manipulator.

The world lies spread before his searching gaze,  
 Clear as the interests of his own domain.  
 In action we must yield him our applause,  
 And mark with joy, when time unfolds the plans  
 Which his deep forethought fashioned long before.  
 There is no fairer prospect in the world  
 Than to behold a prince who wisely rules;  
 A realm where every one obeys with pride,  
 Where each imagines that he serves himself,  
 Because 'tis justice only that commands.<sup>10</sup>

Praising Tasso, Alphonso mentions the laurel wreath with which the former had been crowned. In *Gerusalemme liberata* Tasso has recreated the Jerusalem of the Middle Ages and in so doing shames the adulterated Christian values of the Renaissance. A subtle contrast between the pious religiosity of the crusaders and the corruption of the Renaissance princes and prelates is revealed by Alphonso in Act I, iv. 686-90.

Meanwhile the poet hath enriched us too:  
 He by his conquest of Jerusalem,  
 Hath put our modern Christendom to shame.  
 With joyous spirit and unwearied zeal,  
 A high and distant goal he had attained;  
 For this achievement thou beholdest him crowned.<sup>11</sup>

In Act II, i, 928-37 Tasso is speaking with the Princess who assures him that her brother would be more than willing to listen to his problems. Tasso replies by insinuating that he is no more than an

obedient servant. Here one sees the beginnings of the persecution complex that will lead Tasso to madness.

He is my prince!—Yet do not hence suppose  
That freedom's lawless impulse swells my breast.  
Man is not born for freedom; and to serve  
A prince deserving honour and esteem  
Is a pure pleasure to a noble mind.  
He is my sovereign—of that great word  
I deeply feel the full significance.  
I must be silent when he speaks, and learn  
to do what he commandeth, though perchance  
My heart and understanding both rebel.<sup>12</sup>

The Princess says that her brother, Duke Alphonso, is a kind and compassionate ruler, but Tasso insists that he, like all powerful Renaissance princes, "acts ever as he lists, and whatsoe're he doth is deemed"<sup>13</sup> (Act II, i, 1009-11). For Tasso, the Duke symbolizes oppressive authority that keeps him a prisoner and asks "within the palace is free thought imprisoned? Here must the noble spirit be oppressed?"<sup>14</sup> (Act II, iii, 1348-9).

But in his every action and thought the Duke shows himself to be a reasonable and fair ruler. In Act II, iv. 1523-30 when Tasso has drawn his sword in defiance of the law, the Duke does suggest that perhaps Antonio is partly to blame; however, only Tasso and not Alphonso or Antonio drew the sword in a moment of rage. Tasso's inability to control his temper is yet another indication of his disintegrating mental state.

For here the right and wrong are near allied.  
If Antonio hath offended thee,  
Due satisfaction he must doubtless give,  
In such a sort as thou shalt choose to ask,  
I gladly would be chosen arbiter.  
Meanwhile thy misdemeanour subjects thee  
To brief confinement, Tasso. I forgive thee,  
And therefore, for thy sake, relax the law.<sup>15</sup>

Tasso fails to comprehend the generous attitude of Alphonso and blames the Duke for his own difficulties. He imagines the Duke has extraordinary powers over him which he will use to punish him. Beginning with line 1536 in Act II, iv. Tasso laments to Alphonso:

Thine earnest word, O prince, delivers me,

A freeman to captivity. So be it!

and Tasso continues by describing his situation to himself;

Henceforth inure thy spirit to obey.  
Weak mortal! To forget where thou didst stand!  
Thou didst forget how high the abode of the gods.  
And now art staggered by the sudden fall.

My lot is to obey, and not to think!  
And destiny, alas! demands from me  
Renunciation of this precious gift.

Ill doth a crown become become a captive's brow.  
For who is justly armed if thou art wroth?  
Who justly crowned, on whom thy brow is bent?  
I go captive and await my doom.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout Act III Leonora, Antonio, and the Princess discuss the reclusive and anti-social behavior of Tasso whose growing persecution complex leads the poet to irrational and violent outbursts. Conversing with Leonora, Antonio describes Tasso's inability to control his temper in his dealings with those around him in lines 2140-8.

Yet others he do outrage grievously.  
Canst thou deny, that in his passion's height,  
Which o're his spirit oft usurps control,  
The prince and e'en the princess he contemns,  
And dares at whom he may to hurl abuse?  
True, for a moment only it endures;  
But then, the moment quickly comes again.  
His tongue, as little as his breast, he rules.<sup>17</sup>

Act IV begins with Tasso alone in his room rambling about his imagined ill-treatment at the hands of Duke Alphonso and his unrequited love for the princess. Leonora joins him and gives him much needed encouragement. She endeavors to convince him of his great genius and of the Duke's sincere respect and friendship for him. In this exchange of wise counsel between Leonora and the poet, one is reminded of Goethe's reliance on the sound advice of Frau von Stein during those periods of personal doubt he experienced in Weimar.

In Act V, iv, 3274-83 Tasso and the princess are alone and he declares his love for her. The princess does her utmost to make him understand that her social position forbids any intimacy between

them. Tasso's actions finally cross the limits of propriety and in an act of mad passion he embraces the princess resulting in an unforgivable breach of court etiquette.

A charm unspeakable, which masters me,  
Flows from thy lips. Thou makes me all thine.  
Of my own being naught belongs to me.  
Mine eye grows dim in happiness and light,  
My senses fail; no more my foot sustains me;  
Thou drawest me to thee with resistless might,  
And my heart rushes self-impelled to thee.  
Me hast thou won for all eternity,  
Then take my whole of being to thyself.<sup>18</sup>

The final mad outburst of Tasso occurs in Act V, v. 3304-10 when he accuses Antonio of serving the Duke as the poet's torturer, jailer, and executioner.

Yes, tyrant go! Thou couldst not to the last  
Thy wonted mask retain; in triumph go!  
Thy slave thou hast well pinioned, hast reserved  
For predetermined and protracted pangs;  
Yes, go! I hate thee. In my heart I feel  
The horror which despotic power excites,  
When it is grasping, cruel, and unjust.<sup>19</sup>

But Goethe in Tasso's final speech in Act V, v. 3434-53 cited above has the poet take the hand of Antonio. Tasso likens him to a steadfast rock where he Tasso, the mariner, has found refuge from the stormy sea. The play is not a "Tragödie" but a "Schauspiel" because Tasso "has saved from the wreck of his fortunes, what is, after all, his best possession, and has also found a friend; a friend in the very person of the man whom he had tried to win by storm in the ill-fated scene that had been the beginning of his troubles. Manly friendship and a purified faith in his own poetic endowment are not so poor a compensation for what he has lost (Thomas li-ii).

It is clear that Goethe through his study of the Middle Ages, his reading of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, and his experiences in Italy centering on the achievements of Renaissance men of art and letters was able to create an historical personage whose personal conflicts and inner turmoil come alive in this play. This alone makes Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* a timeless dramatic masterpiece.

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<sup>1</sup> Das allgemeine vorzügliche Kennzeichen der griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Größe, sowohl in der Stellung als in Ausdrücke. The general excellent indicator of the Greek masterpieces is finally a noble simplicity and a quiet greatness, both in the position as in the expression.

<sup>2</sup> Und bin ich in dem Augenblicke so für Michelangelo eingenommen, daß mir nicht einmal die Natur auf ihn schmeckt, da ich sie doch nicht mit so großen Augen wie er sehen kann.

<sup>3</sup> No one against God unless God himself.

<sup>4</sup> Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meiner Brust, die eine will sich von der andern trennen:

<sup>5</sup> Zwei Männer sind's, ich hab's lang' gefühlt,  
Die darum Feinde sind, weil die Natur  
Nicht einen Mann aus ihnen beiden formte.

<sup>6</sup> O edler Mann! Du stehest fest und still  
Ich scheine nur die sturmbewegte Welle,  
Allein bedenk' und überhebe nicht  
Dich deiner Kraft! Die mächtige Natur,  
Die diesen Felsen gründete, hat auch  
Der Welle die Beweglichkeit gegeben.  
Sie sendet ihren Sturm, die Welle flieht  
und schwankt und schwillt und beugt sich  
schäumend über,  
In dieser Woge spiegelte so schön  
Die Sonne sich, es ruhten die Gestirne  
an dieser Brust, die zärtlich sich bewegte.  
Verschwunden ist der Glanz, entflohn die Ruhe.—  
Ich kenne mich in der Gefahr nicht mehr  
Und schäme mich nicht mehr, es zu bekennen.  
Zerbrochen ist das Steuer, und es kracht  
Das Schiff an allen Seiten. Berstend reißt  
Der Boden unter meinen Füßen auf!  
Ich fasse dich mit beiden Armen an!  
So klammert sich der Schiffer endlich noch  
Am Felsen fest, an dem er scheitern sollte.

<sup>7</sup> Meine Sachen können nicht populär werden, sie sind nicht für die Masse geschrieben.

<sup>8</sup> Um die Disproportionalität des Künstlers dem Leben gegenüber geht es in dem Drama nur deshalb, weil diese geeignet ist, in einer besonders deutlichen Weise die Aporie der geschichtlichen Situation im ganzen transparent zu machen.

<sup>9</sup> So laßt mich denn beschämt von hinnen gehn!  
Laßt mich mein Glück im tiefen Hain verbergen,  
Wie ich sonst meine Schmerzen dort verbarg.  
Dort will ich einsam wandeln, dort erinnert  
Kein Auge mich ans unverdiente Glück.  
Und zeigt mir ungefähr ein Klarer Brunnen  
In seinem reinen Spiegel einen Mann,  
Der, wunderbar bekränzt, im Widerschein  
Des Himmels zwischen Bäumen, zwischen Felsen

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Nachdenkend ruht: so scheint es mir, ich sehe  
Elysium auf dieser Zauberfläche  
Gebildet.

<sup>10</sup> Es liegt die Welt so klar vor seinem Blick  
Als wie der Vorteil seines eignen Staats.  
Wenn man ihn handeln sieht, so lobt man ihn  
Und freut sich, wenn die Zeit entdeckt, was er  
Im stillen lang' bereitet und vollbracht.  
Es ist sein schöner Anblick in der Welt,  
Als einen Fürsten sehn, der Klug regiert,  
Das Reich zu sehn, wo jeder stolz gehorcht,  
Wo jeder sich nur selbst zu dienen glaubt,  
Weil ihm das Rechte nur befohlen wird.

<sup>11</sup> Indessen hat mich Tasso auch bereichert:  
Er hat Jerusalem für uns erobert  
Und so die neue Christenheit beschämt,  
Ein weit entferntes, hoch gestecktes Ziel  
Mit frohem Mut und strengem Fleiß erreicht.

<sup>12</sup> Er is mein Fürst!—Doch glaube nicht, daß mir  
Der Freiheit wilder Trieb den Busen blähe.  
Der Mensch ist nicht geboren, frei zu sein,  
Und für den Edlen ist kein schöner Glück,  
Als einem Fürsten, den er ehrt, zu dienen.  
Und so ist er mein Herr, und ich empfinde  
Den ganzern Umfang dieses größ'nen Worts.  
Nun muß ich Schweigen lernen, wenn er spricht,  
Und tun, wenn er gebietet, mögen auch  
Verstand und Herz ihm lebhaft widersprechen.

<sup>13</sup> Das ist der Fall bei meinem Bruder nie.

Was sich denn ziemt! anstatt daß jeder glaubt,  
Es sei auch schicklich was ihm nützlich ist!

<sup>14</sup> Ist im Palast der freie Geist gekerkert?  
Hat hier ein edler Herrsch nur Druck zu dulden?

<sup>15</sup> Denn hier sind Recht und Unrecht nah verwandt.  
Wenn dich Antonio beleidigt hat,  
So hat er dir auf irgendeine Weise  
Genugzutun, wie du es fordern wirst.  
Mir wär es lieb, ihr wähltet mich zum Austrag.  
Indessen, dein Vergehen macht, O Tasso,  
Dich zum Gefangnen. Wie ich dir vergebe,  
So lindr' ich das Gesetz um deinetwillen

<sup>16</sup> (zu Alfons) O Fürst, es übergibt dein ernstes Wort  
Mich Freien der Gefangenschaft. Es sei!

.....  
Gewöhne dich von nun an, zu gehorchen,  
Ohnmächtiger! Du vergaßest, wo der standst;

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Der Götter Saal schien dir auf gleicher Erde,  
Nun überwältigt dich der jähe Fall.

Gehorchen ist mein los und nicht zu denken.  
Und leider eines herrlichen Geschenks  
Verleugnung fodert das Geschick von mir.  
Die Krone kleidet den Gefangnen nicht:  
Denn wer ist wohl gewaffnet, wenn du zürnst?  
Und wer geschmückt, O Herr, den du verkennst?  
Gefangen geh' ich, warte des Gerichts.

<sup>17</sup> Und doch verletzt er andre nur zu sehr.  
Kannst du es leugnen, daß im Augenblick  
Der Leidenschaft, die ihn behend ergreift,  
Er auf den Fürsten, auf die Fürstin selbst,  
Auf wen es sei, zu schmähn, zu lästern wagt?  
Zwar augenblicklich nur; allein genug,  
Der Augenblick kommt wieder: er beherrscht  
So wenig seinen Mund als seine Brust.

<sup>18</sup> Unsägliche Gewalt, die mich beherrscht,  
Entfliehet deinen Lippen; ja, du machst  
Mich ganz dir eigen. Nichts gehöret mehr  
Von meinem ganzen Ich mir künftig an.  
Es trübt mein Auge sich in Glück und licht,  
Es schwankt mein Sinn. Mich hält der FuB nicht mehr.  
Unwiderstehlich ziehst du mich zu dir,  
Und unaufhaltsam bringt mein Herz dir zu.  
Du hast nich ganz auf ewig dir gewonnen,  
So nimm denn auch mein ganzes Wesen hin!

<sup>19</sup> Ja, gehe nur, Tyrann! Du konntest dich  
Nicht bis zuletzt verstellen; triumphiere!  
Du hast den Sklaven wohl gekettet, hast  
Ihn, wohl gespart zu ausgedachten Qualen:  
Geh' nur, ich hasse dich, ich fühle ganz  
Den Abscheu, den die Uebermacht erregt,  
Die frevelhaft und ungerecht ergreift.

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