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# Elements of Mock Epic

### ITALIAN ROMANCE EPIC

Authors critical of Homer and Virgil found a counter-tradition in the Italian romance epic, especially in the *Orlando furioso* (1532) of Ludovico Ariosto. Several of the mock-epic poems to be discussed in this study, especially those by Voltaire, Wieland, and Heine, owe a vast amount to this tradition. The Italian romance epic is probably not much more present in today's literary consciousness than it was three-quarters of a century ago, when C. S. Lewis lamented its fall from favour.<sup>1</sup> Yet a period in which fantasy, thanks to *The Lord of the Rings*, is as popular a genre as chivalric romance was in Ariosto's day, ought to be able to enjoy his fantastic inventions.<sup>2</sup>

In the period under discussion, 1750–1850, the *Orlando furioso* and its later counterpart and rival, the *Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1581) of Torquato Tasso, were familiar to every educated person, and widely and deservedly admired. A taste for them was encouraged by the appreciation of medieval romance that developed after the mid-eighteenth century. Voltaire, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), rates Ariosto far above Homer, praising the naturalness of his verse, the wealth of his invention, and his success in interesting us in the fates of his characters while retaining a humorous distance; indeed, Voltaire adds, on finishing the *Furioso* he has more than once wished only to read the whole poem again.<sup>3</sup> Gibbon writes in chapter 70 of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, referring to the overrated Petrarch: 'I may hope or presume that the Italians do not compare the tedious uniformity of sonnets and elegies with the sublime compositions of their epic muse, the original wildness of Dante, the regular beauties of Tasso, and the boundless variety of the incomparable Ariosto.'<sup>4</sup> Goethe, who visited Ariosto's grave in Ferrara, gives a famous appreciation of

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 298.

<sup>2</sup> For introductions to the Italian romance epic, see Graham Hough, *A Preface to 'The Faerie Queene'* (London: Duckworth, 1962), and *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *Ceuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Louis Moland (henceforth 'Moland'), 50 vols. (Paris, 1877–83), xviii. 573–4.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (London: Dent, 1910), vi. 503.

Ariosto in his play *Torquato Tasso* (1790).<sup>5</sup> Scott read the *Furioso* through once a year;<sup>6</sup> he called Goethe the Ariosto of Germany, and Byron called Scott 'the Ariosto of the North', while Ariosto was 'the southern Scott' (B ii. 137).<sup>7</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the tide seems to have turned against the romance epic. Burckhardt in 1860 thinks Ariosto wasted his talents on trivia: 'From a poet of such fame and such mighty gifts we would gladly receive something better than the adventures of Orlando.'<sup>8</sup> An English reviewer in 1884, noting that Tasso's poem is 'now less read, I imagine, than formerly', assigns it only 'a foremost place in the second-class poetry of the world'.<sup>9</sup>

Among many tributes to Ariosto, here is one by Friedrich Schlegel which neatly sets him in the literary context of Renaissance Italy:

Now that poetry had again become art, its form and structure were applied to the adventurous material of chivalric tales, and this gave rise to the Italians' *romanzo*. Originally intended to be read aloud in company, it transformed the ancient tales of marvels, broadly or subtly, into something grotesque, by adding a touch of social wit and intellectual spice. Yet even in Ariosto, who, like Boiardo, adorned the *romanzo* with inset stories and blooms plucked from the ancients, in accordance with the spirit of his age, and attained a high degree of charm in his *ottava rima*, the grotesque appears only occasionally and does not dominate the whole work, which hardly deserves such a term. Thanks to this quality and to his lucid intellect, he stands above his predecessor; his wealth of clear images and his happy mixture of earnest and jest make him the master and archetype in relaxed storytelling and sensual fantasies.<sup>10</sup>

As Schlegel indicates, Ariosto followed his predecessors in developing the chivalric narratives which were popular in late medieval Italy, often presented orally by wandering minstrels (*cantastorie*). Their material combined the 'matter of France' (tales of Charlemagne and his paladins) with the 'matter of Britain' (tales of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table). A succession of authors before Ariosto developed this material in narrative poems which found an enthusiastic readership. The poetic form they adopted was *ottava rima*, first

<sup>5</sup> 'Tagebuch der italienischen Reise', G xv/1. 722; *Torquato Tasso*, lines 711–23, G v. 753.

<sup>6</sup> J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*, New Popular Edition (London, 1893), 747.

<sup>7</sup> For these and other testimonies, see Barbara Reynolds's Introduction to her translation of *Orlando Furioso*, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth, 1973–7), i. 83. This translation—a magnificent achievement, especially considering that Ariosto's *ottava rima* obliges the translator to find two sets of triple rhymes in each stanza—is to be recommended above Harington's Elizabethan version, *Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso*, translated into English heroic verse by Sir John Harington (1591), ed. Robert McNulty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972): Harington has a pleasing 'period' tone, but Reynolds is far better at capturing Ariosto's wit. How Harington sobered Ariosto up is well analysed in Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of 'Orlando Furioso'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 134–57.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon Press, 1944), 198.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Brand, *Torquato Tasso*, 275.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Gespräch über die Poesie' (1799), in *Kritische Schriften*, ed. Wolf Dietrich Rasch (Munich: Hanser, 1970), 486.

used by Boccaccio in his *Teseida* (1339–41) and thereafter associated with romance. But they combined their post-classical material with classical allusions, in a syncretism which Ariosto made even more complex.<sup>11</sup>

As Ariosto's immediate predecessor, Schlegel mentions Matteo Boiardo, who gave the Carolingian material a new turn by showing the hero Roland ('Orlando' in Italian), previously a sexually gauche and inexperienced character, falling in love.<sup>12</sup> Boiardo died with his poem *Orlando innamorato* (1494) unfinished; Ariosto continued it. Boiardo's poem begins with Charlemagne and his knights celebrating the feast of Pentecost, as Arthur does at the beginning of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c.1375). In comes the maiden Angelica, daughter of the king of Cathay, accompanied by her brother Uberto and four giants. She offers a challenge: any knight who can unhorse her brother in single combat can claim her as his reward. The knights do not realize that she is a decoy sent to distract them from the war being waged against Charlemagne by Gradasso, king of Sericana, and the Saracen king Agramante (a distant recollection of the Arab invasion of Spain and France in the eighth century, combined with memories of the Crusades). Thereafter Boiardo, followed by Ariosto, develops three basic narratives: Orlando's love for Angelica; Agramante's war against Charlemagne; and the love between the Saracen hero Ruggiero and the Christian warrior-maiden Bradamante. These narratives are interwoven, inasmuch as only the ending of the war can enable Ruggiero to marry Bradamante, while Orlando must be cured of his madness before the Christians can win.<sup>13</sup>

Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* was immensely popular with the reading public, but less so with critics. The definitive 1532 text had an unusually large print-run of 3,000 copies, and at least 113 editions appeared between 1540 and 1580.<sup>14</sup> But critics worried about its uncertain relation to classical standards. With its three interwoven narratives, it lacked the focus on a single action that an epic should have. It had no single outstanding hero, and its candidates for hero status, Orlando and Ruggiero, were disqualified by their many shortcomings.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Ariosto went even further than his predecessors in the narrative technique of *entrelacement* or interlace, constantly breaking off one narrative strand and jumping to another, resuming the first strand some cantos later. As Harington

<sup>11</sup> See Jane Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic in the Age of Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> See Marco Dorigatti, 'Reinventing Roland: Orlando in Italian Literature', in Karen Pratt (ed.), *Roland and Charlemagne in Europe: Essays on the Reception and Transformation of a Legend* (London: King's College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1996), 105–26.

<sup>13</sup> On the structure of the *Furioso* see C. P. Brand, *Ludovico Ariosto: A Preface to the 'Orlando furioso'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974), 127; id., 'L'entrelacement nell'*Orlando Furioso*', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 44 (1977), 509–32.

<sup>14</sup> Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Usefully listed by Jane Everson, 'Ariosto and the *Orlando furioso*: An Epic?', *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies*, 2 (1993), 223–42 (pp. 236–8). See Weinberg, 972 (Minturno on Ariosto's multiple plots), 1033 (Oddi on his immortality).

puts it: 'he breaks off narrations verie abruptly so as indeed a loose inattentive reader will hardly carrie away any part of the storie.'<sup>16</sup> Even attentive readers lost the thread. As early as the Venetian edition by Valgrisi in 1556, paratextual aids were provided in the form of marginal notes telling the reader where each plot-strand would be resumed (like present-day hyperlinks), and these were given also by Harington in his translation.<sup>17</sup> Some critics argued that the *Furioso* was a new genre of literature which should not be judged by classical standards; others, anxious to dignify Italy with an epic of its own, argued that it *was* a classical epic, with the unity of action provided by Agramante's war. One of its defenders, Lionardo Salviati, summarized the plot in a single sentence which almost entirely omitted the magical adventures and concentrated on the war, thus making the poem seem more like the *Iliad* or the second half of the *Aeneid*.<sup>18</sup>

Ariosto's borrowings from classical epic were spotted by his first commentators. The Saracens' siege of Paris recalls the Greek siege of Troy and the war in Latium in the second half of the *Aeneid*. The Saracen warrior Rodomonte recalls Virgil's Turnus, especially when he slaughters the denizens of the besieged city and when he escapes from it by diving into the Seine, as Turnus escapes by swimming from the Trojan stronghold. The final duel between Ruggiero and Rodomonte is based on that between Aeneas and Turnus. The sortie from the besieged city by Cloridano and Medoro (*OF* xviii. 165–xix. 7) is based on the episode of Nisus and Euryalus in Book IX of the *Aeneid*. The poem ends with the wedding of Ruggiero and Bradamante, as the *Aeneid* ends on the threshold of Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia. The sorceress Alcina corresponds to Circe, the sea-monster called the Orca to Polyphemus. And so on.

The interesting question was and is: what is Ariosto doing with these intertextual references? Is he playing off the classical against the romance elements? Are we to understand the *Furioso* as a parody of the classical epic, perhaps as debunking its values, showing its heroes to be unheroic? The answer is not quite straightforward. Commentators agree that the diverse elements are meant to be harmonious, not discordant. Ariosto and his immediate predecessors were writing 'a new sort of heroic poetry whose originality lay in this very syncretism'.<sup>19</sup> The all-encompassing irony that unifies his poem is not comical, extravagant, or debunking.<sup>20</sup> And the exploits of his heroes are genuinely brave and ingenious, however far-fetched, as when Orlando manages to kill the Orca (something Ruggiero could not manage) by holding its jaws open with an anchor, leaping into its cavernous mouth, and inflicting fatal wounds on it from inside (xi. 37–45).

<sup>16</sup> Harington, 'Preface' in *Ariosto's Orlando Furioso*, 1–15 (p. 13).

<sup>17</sup> See Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*, 144.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* 116–17; see also Weinberg, 1040.

<sup>19</sup> Javitch, 'The Grafting of Virgilian Epic in *Orlando furioso*', in Valeria Finucci (ed.), *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 56–76 (p. 72); likewise Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic*, 336.

<sup>20</sup> See Benedetto Croce, *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, tr. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1920), 71.

At the same time, Ariosto's intertextual allusions are often distinct, and at times one can see him revising epic values. A stumbling-block for Virgil's admirers, as we have seen, was the rigidly upright behaviour of his hero Aeneas. While pursuing his love-affair with Dido, Aeneas is reminded by Mercury, the messenger of the gods, that his duty is to proceed to Italy and found Rome, whereupon he tears himself away and the abandoned Dido commits suicide. Early in the *Furioso* the warrior maiden Bradamante is given a similar choice between duty and love. She is urged to protect Marseille against the Saracens, but she wants to rescue Ruggiero from the enchanter's castle where he is held captive. Unlike Aeneas, she chooses love (Ruggiero) over duty (ii. 65). And this turns out to be the right choice, for the treachery of Pinabello, who throws her into an underground pit, leads her to Merlin's cave, where Merlin from his tomb greets her as progenitrix of the Este family (iii. 16–19). The friendly enchantress Melissa then shows her the future Este family, down to its present members who, of course, are Ariosto's patrons. Elsewhere, Ariosto gives his heroes all-too-human foibles which don't undermine the value of their heroic actions. Thus Ruggiero, having rescued Angelica from the Orca, no sooner has her safe on a grassy bank than (forgetting about his beloved Bradamante) he resolves to enjoy her; but while he is struggling to get his armour off Angelica escapes with the help of the magic ring (x. 112–xi. 9).<sup>21</sup> Most likely Ariosto means us to read this with the unillusioned understanding that Fielding, two centuries later, invites for Tom Jones, when Tom, though officially in love with Sophia Western, makes no attempt to resist the charms of Molly Seagrim.<sup>22</sup>

Ariosto also modified the epic, in a way which many writers of mock epic down to Byron and Heine would adopt, by introducing an obtrusive narratorial presence. Whereas Aristotle demanded that the author of an epic should be invisible, like Homer, Ariosto begins all but one of his cantos with a *proemio* in which he reflects on his tale and the issues it raises. This technique establishes a friendly intimacy with the reader, in contrast to the impersonality of classical epic, and reminds us of the narrator's sovereign control over his fictive world. In forming a relationship with the reader, the *proemi* anticipate the reflections with which Fielding begins each book of *Tom Jones*, while in foregrounding the narrator and his artifice they look forward to the self-consciousness which Sterne displays in *Tristram Shandy* and bequeaths especially to German Romantic fiction.

Ariosto's narrator also intrudes whenever he jumps from one narrative to another, and sometimes explains his poetic method while doing so. Thus,

<sup>21</sup> On these and other revisions of Virgilian *pietas*, see Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 53–65.

<sup>22</sup> Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Fredson Bowers, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), i. 175.

when he leaves Rinaldo in danger of shipwreck and turns to Bradamante's adventures:

Ma perché varie fila a varie tele  
uopo mi son, che tutte ordire intendo,  
lascio Rinaldo e l'agitata prua,  
e torno a dir di Bradamante sua.<sup>23</sup>

But many threads are needed for my tale,  
And so, to weave my canvas as I please,  
I'll leave Rinaldo and the plunging prow,  
And turn to talk of Bradamante now.<sup>24</sup>

The tapestry image well conveys the unity amid diversity of Ariosto's poem. Looked at closely, each detail is enjoyable but its place in the whole is obscure. Only when you have read the whole poem can you stand back and admire the completed tapestry.

Such a reader can finally attain the perspective which Ariosto the narrator has throughout the poem. For to manage his *entrelacement*, the narrator cannot just accompany the narrative. He has to know what is going to happen, and to let us know that he knows, and thus he occupies a vantage-point unavailable to the reader. For example, Angelica on her wanderings finds a young man lying wounded in a wood (xii. 65). Ariosto here breaks off the narrative. The young man is somebody whom we have not yet met: he is the African soldier Medoro, who will not be introduced until xviii. 165, when he and his companion Cloridano make a night expedition to recover the body of their slain lord. They are found, Cloridano is killed, and Medoro is left with a wound which would have been fatal if Angelica had not happened along (xix. 17) and nursed him back to health. Nor is this a mere episode: Angelica falls in love with Medoro and marries him, and the news that the unattainable Angelica has yielded to a mere footsoldier precipitates Orlando's madness.

The romance epic deviates from the rigid heroic values and the objectivity of classical epic; it also differs from its masculine bias. In the courtly culture Ariosto knew at Ferrara, women were admitted alongside men to intellectual discussion and encouraged to develop their literary talents. So it is perhaps not surprising that Ariosto should begin Cantos XX and XXXVII with eulogies of women: the former is confined to classical women warriors and poets, but the latter (added in the 1532 edition) goes down to the present and singles out the poet Vittoria Colonna. In the background we can sense Ariosto's patroness, the highly cultivated Isabella d'Este, whom he explicitly celebrates (xiii. 59–61). Perhaps as a compliment to her, Ariosto includes not one but two warlike maidens, Ruggiero's sister Marfisa and his lover Bradamante, but while Marfisa is merely an Amazon,

<sup>23</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), ii. 30. This and future references are to canto and stanza numbers.

<sup>24</sup> Here and elsewhere I quote the translation by Barbara Reynolds.

Bradamante corresponds to the Renaissance ideal of the accomplished and independent woman, until she voluntarily enters into marriage with Ruggiero.<sup>25</sup> Bradamante, who appears in twenty-three of the poem's forty-six cantos, has a central role as ancestress of the Este family. Of the seven visions of the future in the poem, three are beheld by Bradamante alone, including the detailed survey of the Este family's history down to Ariosto's present (iii. 16–62). Thus Bradamante replaces Aeneas, not only, as we saw earlier, in choosing between love and duty, but also in being granted a vision of her descendants.

In the contemporary debate about women's capacities Ariosto adopts a broadly pro-feminist standpoint, as his early readers recognized.<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, there are many deceitful or fickle women in the poem, notably the alluring but ever-mobile Angelica and the malign sorceress Alcina, and his women share the sensual passion that animates almost all his characters. However, Ariosto's naturalistic presentation of love as primarily sexual desire marks a reaction against the medieval idealization of women and the ethereal Neoplatonism often professed in the Italian Renaissance.<sup>27</sup> He recognizes the claims of healthy appetite in both men and women. When Rinaldo undertakes to fight for Ginevra at St Andrews, he is not convinced of her chastity but wants to oppose the harsh law of Scotland (iv. 65) that prescribes the death-penalty for unchastity. He asserts that women and men should not be judged by a double standard (iv. 66):

S'un medesimo ardor, s'un disir pare  
 inchina e sforza l'uno e l'altro sesso  
 a quel suave fin d'amor, che pare  
 all' ignorante vulgo un grave eccesso;  
 perché si de' punir donna o biasmare,  
 che con uno o più d'uno abbia commesso  
 quel che l'uom fa con quante n'ha appetito,  
 e lodato ne va, non che impunito?

If the same ardour, if an equal fire  
 Draws and compels two people ever more  
 To the sweet consummation of desire  
 (Which many ignoramuses deplore),  
 Why should a woman by a fate so dire  
 Be punished who has done what men a score  
 Of times will do and never will be blamed,  
 Nay, rather, will be praised for it and famed?

<sup>25</sup> On the differences between Marfisa and Bradamante see Roger Baillet, *Le Monde poétique de l'Arioste: essai d'interprétation du 'Roland furieux'* (Lyon: Éditions L'Hermès, 1977), 474–8, 495–7; Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 124–31. Both are important discussions of Ariosto's women in general.

<sup>26</sup> On contemporaries' acknowledgement of Ariosto's pro-feminism, see Benson, 92–3.

<sup>27</sup> See Dieter Kremers, *Der 'Rasende Roland' des Ludovico Ariosto: Aufbau und Weltbild* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 89.

On the other hand, we have the apparent anti-feminism of the *fabliau* in which two men are deceived by a woman who manages to sleep with a third while lying in bed between them; each of the deceived parties thinks the other is making the bed rock (xxviii. 1–74). But this Chaucer-like tale leads to a discussion in which a spokesman opposes the double standard, pointing out that sexual incontinence, though common among women, is universal among men (xxviii. 83). Even this earthiness is not the whole story, for, without idealization, Ariosto also shows Ruggiero being purified by his love for Bradamante which ends in their marriage.<sup>28</sup> The end of their story requires Bradamante to negotiate the opposition from her parents, who want her to marry the son of the Greek emperor. These domestic difficulties have been criticized as too *borghese* ('middle-class'), but Pamela Benson has convincingly replied that Bradamante and Ruggiero are meant to behave in a middle-class, down-to-earth way.<sup>29</sup> Their story is very much that of a couple; they want to start a family as well as found a dynasty.

While Bradamante's desire is channelled into domesticity, it is a different and more troubling matter with the desire embodied in Angelica. She is the archetypal damsel in distress, constantly fleeing from the advances of unwanted suitors. The repeated situation where two knights fight over her, and she escapes while their attention is diverted, makes her the embodiment of what René Girard called mimetic desire, where something is desirable because another person desires it.<sup>30</sup> She seems to lack interiority. She rarely speaks. Her only wish is to escape her male assailants. Even to call her a narcissistic woman, as Valeria Finucci does, may exaggerate her psychological complexity.<sup>31</sup> Her function, as embodied desire, is to generate action and cause confusion: knights in pursuit of her lose their horses, are distracted from the war effort, and put the Christian cause at risk. And, as already mentioned, she precipitates the central crisis of the poem: when Orlando learns that she has taken up with the common soldier Medoro (at last following her own desire), he falls into madness.

Angelica is at her most alluring when tied naked to the rock and waiting to be devoured by the Orca (x. 95–6):

La fiera gente inospitale e cruda  
 alla bestia crudel nel lito espose  
 la bellissima donna, così ignuda  
 come Natura prima la compose.  
 Un velo non ha pure, in che richiuda  
 i bianchi gigli e le vermiglie rose,  
 da non cader per luglio o per dicembre,  
 di che son sparse le polite membre.

<sup>28</sup> See Hough, 29–30, who contrasts the idealization of love found later in Tasso and Spenser.

<sup>29</sup> Benson, 150–1.

<sup>30</sup> See René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

<sup>31</sup> Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 107–44—a study of Angelica to which I am much indebted.

Creduto avria che fosse statua finta  
 o d'alabastro o d'altri marmi illustri  
 Ruggiero, e su lo scoglio così avinta  
 per artificio di scultori industri;  
 se non vedea la lacrima distinta  
 tra fresche rose e candidi ligustri  
 far rugiadosa le crudette pome,  
 e l'aura sventolar l'aurate chiome.

The harsh, inhospitable islanders  
 Exposed the lovely maiden on the strand.  
 So absolute a nakedness was hers,  
 She might have issued thence from Nature's hand.  
 No veil or flimsiest of gossamers  
 Had she to hide her lily whiteness and  
 Her blushing roses, which ne'er fade or die,  
 But in December bloom as in July.

He might have thought she was a statue, made  
 By skilful and ingenious artistry  
 Of alabaster or fine marble, laid  
 Upon the rock, but that he chanced to see  
 A tear steal down her countenance, amid  
 The roses and white lilies, tenderly  
 Bedewing the young fruit, so firm and fair,  
 And breezes softly lift her golden hair.

Here Angelica's body is described in euphemistic but luscious terms. The description is all the more sensual if we remember that she is chained to a desolate rock somewhere in the Hebrides. It is an image of voluptuousness, as powerful as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), who gazes at the viewer so frankly that some viewers have assumed she is a courtesan, while many art historians have evaded her sensuality by resorting to formalist or iconographic readings.<sup>32</sup> Even if Titian's *Venus* is presented as a bride (as is suggested by the *cassone*, a receptacle for wedding trousseau, in the background), that does not diminish her erotic impact.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in an age when images could not yet be reproduced by photographic and similar means, and their impact could not easily be dulled by over-familiarity, erotic images probably carried a stronger charge than they do now. Angelica presents a literary counterpart. Ariosto repeatedly reminds us that she is naked, or rather nude. Nudity in art, according to John Berger, is not a natural but a conventional state, in which a woman's body signifies her submission to her male owner by being exposed to the gaze of the male spectator.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> As David Freedberg complains in *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17.

<sup>33</sup> See Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 146.

<sup>34</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 49–56.

Angelica is triply exposed: to the visual imagination of the reader, to the devouring gaze of the Orca, and to the gaze of her male rescuer Ruggiero, who expects to enjoy her sexually as the reward for rescuing her, and anticipates his enjoyment as he gazes at her. Bound to the rock and ready for martyrdom, Angelica invites the complex response, possessive, erotic, and even sadistic, which is also evoked by some Renaissance paintings of suffering female saints.<sup>35</sup> By trying ineffectually to cover herself, in a gesture that is simultaneously modest and provocative, Angelica 'confirms in him [Ruggiero] the idea that she is but a body and that he can control and appraise what he sees'.<sup>36</sup> She is further objectified by being described piecemeal and compared to a statue. Here the pictorial analogy works in reverse. While a picture that arouses strong emotions may seem to be alive, like Browning's *Last Duchess*, Ariosto shows that in Angelica a living person who arouses strong emotions comes to resemble a sculpture (as Tadzio also does for the enraptured Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*). Thus she is turned into an object and made to seem available for a male observer to possess. These complexities surrounding sexual desire will recur especially in the mock epics of Voltaire and Wieland.

The realism with which Ariosto treats sexual desire also enters, strange as it may seem, into his treatment of the marvellous. His epic machinery is provided by magicians, both male and female. A particularly useful device is the hippogriff, not a magical creature but the offspring of a griffin and a mare, which first carries off the helpless Ruggiero and then, when he has learnt to manage it, bears him and later Astolfo over large tracts of the globe. Yet, with comic incongruity, Ruggiero, when travelling on the hippogriff, always stops for the night at an inn (x. 73). Everyday reality thus enters in an unfamiliar way: 'Within the context of the poem, the reference to the mundane ironically appears more fantastic than the fantastic itself: the inn, not the hippogriff, takes the reader by surprise by its subversion of the *romanesque* illusion.'<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere the adventures are so fantastic that the narrator's tongue is obviously in his cheek. Thus, in a famous episode, Astolfo flies on the hippogriff to the earthly paradise, whence St John the Evangelist ascends with him in Elijah's fiery chariot to the moon, and as all things lost on earth are preserved in a certain lunar valley, Astolfo finds there

<sup>35</sup> See James Clifton, "Being lustful, he would delight in her beauty": Looking at Saint Agatha in Seventeenth-century Italy', in Pamela M. Jones and Thomas Worcester (eds.), *From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 143–77. See further Margaret Olin, 'Gaze', in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 318–29; Edward Snow, 'Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems', *Representations*, 25 (1989), 30–41.

<sup>36</sup> Finucci, 124. On the *putica* gesture, such as Angelica makes, see Goffen, 151; on its ambiguity, see Clifton, 156; and on how these complexities were developed by Ariosto's illustrators, see Sarah Patricia Hill, 'Bodies Concealed and Revealed in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and the Visual Arts', in Elizabeth Rodini and Elissa B. Weaver (eds.), *A Well-Fashioned Image: Clothing and Costume in European Art, 1500–1850* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 2002), 44–55.

<sup>37</sup> Will McMorran, *The Inn and the Traveller: Digressive Topographies in the Early Modern European Novel* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 20.

Orlando's lost wits in a neatly labelled bottle. Restored to his senses, Orlando rejoins the French side, but the victory results also from Astolfo's piety. Not only does he raise an army in Egypt, but once they have crossed the Atlas Mountains stones turn into horses and leaves turn into boats to get them across the Mediterranean. 'Oh quanto a chi ben crede in Cristo, lece!' (xxxviii. 33)—'How much a firm belief in Christ can do!' says Ariosto drily. Ariosto's treatment of the marvellous both satisfies the imagination and strengthens the claims of ordinary reality.

With Torquato Tasso and his *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) we enter a distinctly different poetic world. Tasso adjusted the romance epic to the demands of neoclassical criticism and of the Counter-Reformation. His epic has a single action, the conquest of Jerusalem in the First Crusade, located at a suitable distance of time. He simplifies Ariosto's *entrelacement*, making all the episodes subordinate to his main narrative. Instead of Ariosto's mysterious forests and stormy seas, most of the action is set on the open, sunlit plains of Palestine, as Colin Burrow notes: 'the very geography of Tasso's poem suggests a polarized confrontation between Christian virtue and pagan sacrilege.'<sup>38</sup> The Christian marvellous is deployed: God himself summons Goffredo to undertake the assault on Jerusalem (*GL* i. 12), and Satan summons an infernal council to find ways of frustrating it (iv. 1). This permits Tasso to introduce magic and supernatural elements which were denounced by strict neoclassicists but enjoyed by all other readers. To prevent the Crusaders from obtaining timber to make their siege-engines, the pagan sorcerer Ismeno creates an enchanted forest which no one can enter without being overcome by terror. The hero Tancredi penetrates it, but when he strikes a lofty cypress with his sword it speaks to him in the voice of Clorinda, the Saracen woman warrior whom Tancredi accidentally killed (xiii. 42–3), and he flees. Now the Crusaders' only hope is the hero Rinaldo, but he has left them in anger, like Achilles, because he was not permitted to lead a relief expedition. He has fallen prey to the wiles of the sorceress Armida. Two warriors, guided by Peter the Hermit, travel to Armida's paradisaical island somewhere in the Atlantic (suggesting Mount Tenerife) and manage to restore Rinaldo to reason and duty. He succeeds in disenchanting the forest, and the way is clear for the Crusaders to conquer Jerusalem.

Tasso's adaptations of Ariosto—Bradamante becomes Clorinda, Alcina becomes Armida, Orlando's madness becomes Rinaldo's infatuation—are shaped by the ideological imperatives of the Counter-Reformation. In his anxiety about offending the religious authorities Tasso wrote an abstruse allegorical explanation of his poem and rewrote the poem itself as the *Gerusalemme conquistata* (1593), reducing the Ariostan elements. But even in the *Liberata* the pleasure principle of Ariostan romance is in conflict with the reality principle of Virgilian epic. In Ariosto's poem the Christians and pagans are mostly on good terms, despite

<sup>38</sup> Burrow, 76.

being on opposite sides in the war. Near the beginning of the *Furioso* the Christian Rinaldo and the pagan Ferraù agree to search together for Angelica, both riding on the same horse (*OFi*. 21). The only really reprehensible Saracen is the savage Rodomonte, who corresponds to Virgil's furious warriors Mezentius and Turnus, and is killed by Ruggiero, as Turnus is by Aeneas. In the *Liberata*, however, the Saracens are all animated by fury, as well as being assisted by devils. The one exception, the admirable Clorinda, turns out to be the daughter of the Christian king of Ethiopia. And by a troubling paradox, in order to overcome the Saracens the hero Rinaldo has to share their fury.<sup>39</sup> First he tears himself away from Armida, despite her grief-stricken pleas; then, in the enchanted wood, he confronts her phantom, but instead of being cowed like the concupiscent Tancredi, who was still in love with Clorinda, Rinaldo ruthlessly chops down the myrtle representing her and thus destroys her enchantments. The hero has to harden himself by destroying something he loves, at the cost of destroying something in himself. An obvious parallel is with Guyon's destruction of the Bower of Bliss in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where the work of devastation is so thorough that Guyon seems to be punishing himself for his former enjoyment: 'And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place' (*FQ* ii. 83).<sup>40</sup> Thus Tasso ends up reaffirming the savage and ruthless military values of epic, which the romance epic, and later the mock epic, criticized and undermined.

The publication of the *Liberata* gave rise to a critical war between the admirers of Tasso and those of Ariosto.<sup>41</sup> Outside Italy, however, the differences between the *tassisti* and the *ariostisti* were easily overlooked. Italian romance epic was judged as a whole. By the late seventeenth century its vogue had passed, and it found little favour with neoclassical critics. Boileau, in his *Art poétique*, dismissed it as too fanciful, lacking in good sense:

Laissons à l'Italie  
De tous ces faux brillans l'éclatante folie.  
Tout doit tendre au Bon sens: mais pour y parvenir  
Le chemin est glissant et penible à tenir.<sup>42</sup>

Let us leave to Italy the glittering folly of all these false jewels. Everything must aim at Good Sense, but the way thither is slippery and hard to hold.

Chapelain dismissed the romance epic as 'a type of poetry without art, sharing the ignorance and weakness of the barbarian centuries'.<sup>43</sup> Although Tasso, unlike Ariosto, met many of the requirements of neoclassical critics, they shook their

<sup>39</sup> See *ibid.* 90.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed comparison, see Brand, *Tasso*, 234–5. On the implications of the Spenser passage, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 169–92.

<sup>41</sup> See Weinberg, 954–1073.

<sup>42</sup> Boileau-Despréaux, *Épîtres*, 82.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Chandler B. Beall, *La Fortune du Tasse en France* (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1942), 83.

heads over his use of the marvellous. Sir William Davenant disapproved of Tasso's 'Fables', 'Such as are his Councell assembled in Heaven, his Witches Expeditions through the Aire, and enchanted Woods inhabited with Ghosts', as unsuitable for a Christian poet 'whose Religion little needs the aydes of invention'.<sup>44</sup> Gottsched was still more scathing about Tasso's fantasies, mocking his depiction of devils with gigantic horns and long tails (*GL* iv. 4, 6) and the enormous diamond shield borne by Raimundo's guardian angel (*GL* vii. 82).<sup>45</sup>

Such poems were also too heterogeneous. As Boileau complained in his essay about the 'Giocondo' episode in which a woman deceives both her lovers at once, Ariosto disobeyed the rules set down in Horace's *Ars poetica* by including comic stories in a serious work. It was as though Virgil, on Aeneas' arrival in Italy, had introduced an innkeeper to recount the tales of Mother Goose.<sup>46</sup> Dryden censures Ariosto's sensuality and extravagance: 'his style is luxurious, without majesty or decency, and his adventures without the compass of nature and possibility.'<sup>47</sup> René Rapin agrees in condemning the disregard for verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*) with which Ariosto introduced not only enchanters, giants, and monsters, but even brave women: 'that gallantry of the [female] sex, which he makes into a warrior, contrary to her natural timidity.'<sup>48</sup> His compatriot Le Moyne called the *Furioso* not a poem but 'a magical rhapsody' ('une rhapsodie de sortilèges'), resembling the adventures of Doctor Faustus.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Ariosto was downright immoral. 'Ariosto's pravity is generally known', complained Samuel Johnson.<sup>50</sup> When Richardson's Lovelace and his correspondent Belfort turn out to be readers of Ariosto, we should doubtless see this as underlining their libertinism.<sup>51</sup>

A renewed appreciation of romance epic came in the mid-eighteenth century, when critics took a new interest in medieval romance and its Renaissance developments. Early in the century such tastes were thought deplorably vulgar. The Earl of Shaftesbury censured the plebeian taste for the exotic and the marvellous, 'which makes us prefer a Turkish history to a Grecian or a Roman, an Ariosto to a Virgil, and a romance or novel to an *Iliad*'.<sup>52</sup> To the antiquary

<sup>44</sup> 'The Author's Preface', in *Sir William Davenant's 'Gondibert'*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Gottsched, vi/1. 237–38.

<sup>46</sup> 'Dissertation sur la Joconde' (1665), in Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Dissertation sur la Joconde, Arrest Burlesque, Traité du Sublime*, ed. Charles-H. Boudhors (Paris: Société Les Belles Lettres, 1942), 9–28 (p. 11). Cf. Tasso, *Discourses*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> 'A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire' (1693), in *Essays of John Dryden*, ii. 15–114 (p. 27). Earlier, Dryden was more positive about 'that admirable Italian' Tasso and his '*Enchanted Wood*': 'An Essay of Heroic Plays' (1672), in *ibid.* i. 148–59 (p. 153).

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Alexandre Cioranescu, *L'Arioste en France des origines à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Éditions des Presses Modernes, 1939), ii. 36.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in René Bray, *La Formation de la doctrine classique en France* (Paris: Nizet, 1951), 236.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, 'Milton', *Lives*, i. 287.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747–8), ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), 1431.

<sup>52</sup> 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author' (1710), in Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70–162 (p. 154).

Sainte-Palaye, however, though the Middle Ages were a barbarous epoch, their romances were a valuable historical source.<sup>53</sup> His colourful reconstruction of medieval chivalry, *Mémoires sur l'ancienne chevalerie* (1751), inspired not only Gibbon, Scott, and Chateaubriand, but also Richard Hurd, whose *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) put the case for 'Gothic' romance as a literary form different from, but not inferior to, classical epic. While the *Iliad* presented 'every imaginable scene of rage, revenge and slaughter', the romance centred on gallantry, love, and friendship. In its treatment of the marvellous, romance epic, especially in the hands of Tasso, was far superior to the classics: 'what are Virgil's myrtles dripping blood, to Tasso's enchanted forest?'<sup>54</sup> It was even a pity that Tasso had striven to fit his poem to classical norms, when his strength lay in the presentation of magic and enchantment: 'I stick to my point and maintain that the fairy tales of Tasso do him more honour than what are called the more natural, that is, the classical parts of his poem. His imitations of the antients have indeed their merit; for he was a genius in every thing. But they are faint and cold and almost insipid, when compared with his original fictions. We make a shift to run over the passages he has copied from Virgil. We are all on fire amidst the magical feats of Ismen, and the enchantments of Armida.'<sup>55</sup> William Duff, writing in the same decade, preferred Tasso to Ariosto. He found the *Furioso* too chaotic, and too often merely ludicrous, though he admitted that Astolfo's journey to the moon 'has something of that romantic wildness which characterizes a great Genius'.<sup>56</sup> Like Hurd, he enjoyed Tasso's magic, and regretted that the advance of enlightenment had banished from poetry 'those enchantments which are calculated at once to please, astonish and terrify the imagination'.<sup>57</sup>

Not only Tasso's magic, but, even more, his romantic love-stories delighted readers. As a young woman, the Viennese novelist and *salonnière* Caroline Pichler (1769–1843) read the *Liberata* regularly every year, and she remembered the most moving passages all her life.<sup>58</sup> Goethe, who read the *Liberata* in German translation as a boy, was deeply moved by the story of Tancredi and Clorinda, which he reworked in the most emotionally searing parts of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.<sup>59</sup> Leigh Hunt included three love-stories from the *Liberata* in his *Tales*

<sup>53</sup> See Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment*.

<sup>54</sup> *Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), 109, 110.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 142. On the rediscovery of romance, see Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964).

<sup>56</sup> William Duff, *Critical Observations on the Writings of the most Celebrated Original Geniuses in Poetry* (1770), facsimile reproduction with an introduction by William Bruce Johnson (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1973), 281.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>58</sup> Caroline Pichler, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben*, ed. Emil Karl Blümml, 2 vols. (Munich: Müller, 1914), i. 101.

<sup>59</sup> G ix. 378; Hans-Jürgen Schings, 'Wilhelm Meisters schöne Amazone', *JDSG* 29 (1985), 141–206; Günter Sasse, 'Wilhelm Meister als Leser Tasso's', in Achim Aurnhammer (ed.), *Torquato Tasso in Deutschland* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 370–81.

from the Italian Poets (1846).<sup>60</sup> These stories also inspired many operas, the most famous being Gluck's *Armide* (1777).<sup>61</sup> Less sentimental readers might prefer Ariosto; but it is clear that throughout our period these two great representatives of romance epic were familiar to all readers, and that to imitate and vary their magical adventures could only enhance the pleasure of mock epic.

## MOCK HEROIC AND TRAVESTY

The predecessors of mock epic are described by critics with a variety of terms which are often used inconsistently: burlesque, mock heroic, parody, travesty.<sup>62</sup> Beneath the diversity, however, there is a clear antithesis between poems which use lofty language for low objects, and poems which use low language for noble objects. Joseph Addison, who places both under the heading of burlesque, distinguishes them succinctly: 'Burlesque is . . . of two kinds, the first represents mean Persons in the Accoutrements of Heroes, the other describes great Persons acting and speaking, like the basest among the People. *Don Quixote* is an Instance of the first, and *Lucian's Gods* of the second.'<sup>63</sup> About half a century later, in 1754, Arthur Murphy agrees: 'if any Object which comes before the *Burlesque* Writer, be low in its own Nature, he immediately bethinks himself on conferring on it a mock Dignity, in which it begins to look big'; while 'The other Method of *Burlesque* is, if an Object has any Thing respectable about it, to join it with Images, not only inferior, but in themselves contemptible'.<sup>64</sup> In what follows I shall avoid the term 'burlesque', as redundant and potentially confusing, and describe these two forms of writing by the terms which, on the whole, are most commonly applied to them. The comic elevation of low objects by high language is mock heroic; the comic degradation of noble objects by low language is travesty—though, when we come to it, the latter term will require more precise definition.

Both mock heroic and travesty depend on the poetic doctrine of style levels, going back to classical rhetoric and formulated in the Renaissance by J. C. Scaliger among others. The grand or lofty style requires dignified and sonorous language, while the humble style must be plain and simple. Between the two, Scaliger recognizes a moderate or equable style.<sup>65</sup> Mock heroic applies the grand style to

<sup>60</sup> Brand, *Tasso*, 273.

<sup>61</sup> On the reception of Tasso in our period, see Beall, 134–274; Brand, *Tasso*, 226–76; Maria Moog-Grünwald, 'Torquato Tasso in den poetologischen Kontroversen des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Torquato Tasso in Deutschland*, ed. Aurnhammer, 382–97.

<sup>62</sup> Thus John D. Jump, *Burlesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), subsumes under 'burlesque' travesty, parody, Hudibrastic (i.e. poems imitating Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*), and 'the mock-poem', which in turn conflates mock heroic and what this study calls mock epic.

<sup>63</sup> Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 249, Saturday, December 15, 1711, in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), ii. 467–8.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> *Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics*, 70.

incongruously humble objects, just as travesty treats of lofty objects in the humble style. This hierarchical conception of style corresponds to a hierarchical conception of society. The breakdown of the doctrine of style levels coincides in time with the overthrow or flattening of social hierarchies, signalled by such events as the Revolution in France and parliamentary reform in Britain. When these distinctions cease to be recognized, mock heroic and travesty also become obsolete.

### Mock heroic

Mock heroic applies heroic language to unheroic subjects. The earliest known example is the *Batrachomyomachia* or *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, written perhaps in the fifth century BC, in which a battle among small creatures is described in a grandiloquent style. The English translation (c.1624) by George Chapman, who had previously translated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, allows us to find, entertainingly and inventively presented, many features of subsequent mock heroic. The *casus belli* is the Aesopian incident in which a mouse, unwisely accepting a ride on a frog's back, is drowned when the frog dives to avoid a water-snake. The other mice take up arms to avenge his death. Preceded by grand speeches, the battle takes the familiar Homeric form of encounters between individual warriors, and the council of the gods watches with concern. All the epic features are trivialized. The combatants have funny names (helpfully glossed by Chapman): thus the drowned mouse is called Psicharpax ('Gather-crum'): 'Surnam'de the Mighty-Minded', son of Troxartes ('Sheare-crust') and Lichomye ('Lick-mill'), who was the daughter of King Pernotroctes ('Bacon-flitch-devourer, or gnawer').<sup>66</sup> The frogs have such appropriate names as Crambophagus ('The cabbage-eater'), Borborocoetes ('Mudd-sleeper'), and Craugasides ('Vociferator', i.e. loud croaker).<sup>67</sup> The mice don bean-pods for boots and nutshells for helmets, and carry needles for spears, while the frogs wear mallow-leaves and cockle-shells and wield bulrushes. The gods refuse to intervene, following the lead of Pallas Athena, who complains that the mice have gnawed her clothes and the frogs have kept her awake with their croaking; but when a giant mouse threatens to exterminate the frogs, Jove decides that things have gone far enough and sends two (elaborately described) lobsters that frighten the mice away.

We are not invited to sympathize with the combatants; this is not an anticipation of the heroic mice in Brian Jacques' *Redwall* (1986). The poem's appeal lies in the animals' absurd bombast and in an early version of the comedy of humours. Just as a comic miser must always be miserly, so everything the frogs do must be

<sup>66</sup> *Chapman's Homer*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), ii. 516. Other English translations include one by Pope's friend Thomas Parnell (1717) in heroic couplets, and one by William Cowper (1791) in Miltonic blank verse. On all these, see Friedrich Wild, *Die Batrachomyomachia in England* (Vienna and Leipzig: Braumüller, 1918), who also reprints (pp. 99–124) the oldest English translation, by William Fowler (1603). For the influence of the *Batrachomyomachia* on English poetry, see Broich, *The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem*, 77–80.

<sup>67</sup> *Chapman's Homer*, ii. 522.

frog-like, and the boastful mice must constantly undermine their heroic pretensions by reminding us of their actual lives (their love of cheese, fear of cats, etc.). Thus the author must show as much invention as possible within the narrow limits he has imposed on himself. These limits permit frequent reference to food: the frogs are supposed to eat water-plants, the mice to devour kitchen scraps. Such references are of course trivial and unheroic, but they remind us of the basic human—as well as animal—necessities which would increasingly be omitted from the epic and would therefore become a prominent theme of mock epic.

Presumably we cannot now know whether the *Batrachomyomachia* expresses a criticism of Homer's style or simply a pleasure in incongruity. We are on surer ground, however, with the author always cited as the first modern exponent of mock heroic, Alessandro Tassoni (1565–1635), for besides his mock-heroic poem *La secchia rapita* (*The Stolen Bucket*, 1622), he wrote an essay highly critical of Homer which forms part of his *Pensieri diversi* (*Diverse Thoughts*, 1620). Tassoni was among the more radical of the 'moderns' who in early seventeenth-century Italy challenged the authority of the ancients in both literature and science: they included Galileo and Campanella, and their leading literary critic was Paolo Beni, whose writings on Tasso rank him and Ariosto far above Homer and Virgil.<sup>68</sup> In his essay on Homer, Tassoni first treats with scorn the idea of Homer's learning and philosophy, then examines the *Iliad* book by book, finding all sorts of incoherencies and absurdities, and comparing them, much to Homer's disadvantage, with similar incidents in Ariosto and Tasso. Some of his criticisms are part of the neoclassical armoury. Thus, although he praises Homer's language, he finds fault with such low comparisons as that of Ajax to a donkey surrounded by boys (*Il. xi. 558–60*), which is a simile of 'abietta viltà' ('object baseness').<sup>69</sup> He complains of the narrative that an account of Achilles' wrath is not an imitation of an action; that wrath is a vice, not a stimulus to heroism, as love is in the Italian epic; and that much of the poem consists not of action at all, but of idle chatter. He seems to follow Aristotle with such literal-mindedness as to think that an epic, being an imitation of an action, should not contain any dialogue, and he quotes the humanist Francesco Patrizi as having worked out that the *Iliad* contains 8,474 lines in which Homer speaks in his own person, 7,286 in which characters speak. Their speeches are often trivial and irrelevant: 'the episodes for the most part do not contain actions, but idle and ill-timed chit-chat by sundry characters, who in the middle of a battle recount the genealogies of their grandparents and great-grandparents.'<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See P. B. Diffley, *Paolo Beni: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), esp. 'The Writings on Tasso', 121–35; more generally, Buck, 19–24.

<sup>69</sup> 'Se Omero nell'*Iliade* sia quel sovrano poeta, che i greci si danno a credere', in Tassoni, *La secchia rapita: Rime e prose scelte*, 435–75 (p. 461).

<sup>70</sup> Tassoni, *La secchia rapita: Rime e prose scelte*, 447. This refers to the encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes in Book VI of the *Iliad*. Their need to identify each other comes from the institution of guest-friendship: see M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), 109–10.

Tassoni thinks poorly of Homer's gods. His objection is not, however, to the pagan marvellous as opposed to the Christian marvellous. In a more modern manner he complains that, by intervening in the action, the gods undermine the autonomy of humans, reducing them to rag dolls moved by puppeteers. Moreover, he finds the gods ridiculous. Zeus—or rather Jove, for Tassoni, who may not have known Greek, quotes the *Iliad* in Latin and gives the gods their Latin names—silences his wife by threatening to beat her (*Iliad*, Book I) and later tries to persuade her to sleep with him by the unlikely method of recounting all his extramarital affairs (Book XIV). In Book V Venus and Mars are wounded and flee to heaven, where they are cured by 'Peone barbiere di Giove'. In calling the divine physician Paeëon a barber-surgeon, Tassoni admits that he is joking: 'I'm joking, because I think Homer and those who praise him must intend such pranks as a joke.'<sup>71</sup> Thus his commentary itself falls into the mode of parody. Tassoni's view of Homer's gods is the same as that taken, a century and a quarter later, by Fielding, who surmises that by sending his gods on trivial errands and making them act contemptibly, 'this most glorious Poet, as he certainly was, had an Intent to burlesque the superstitious Faith of his own Age and Country'.<sup>72</sup> Their irreverence makes Tassoni and Fielding look far more modern than the pious critics who insisted on the rules of epic.

In Tassoni's opinion, the behaviour of Homer's humans is no better. It lacks the most ordinary consistency and coherence. Paris, having avoided death at Menelaus' hands only by Venus' intervention, flees in disgrace to Troy, where he quite calmly takes his armour off and goes to bed with Helen (Book III). In Book X Odysseus and Diomedes set out at night to discover the Trojans' plans. They catch Dolon and promise to spare his life if he discloses the Trojan plans to them, but, having learnt only how to plunder Rhesus' quarters, they unnecessarily and treacherously kill him. Having robbed Rhesus they bathe in the sea, then have a hot bath, then a meal. Thus they are not only distracted from their mission of espionage, but ignore the anxiety of their fellow-Greeks and sit down to dinner at daybreak, having dined only the previous evening. Or again, Achilles is constantly given the epithet 'fleet of foot', yet he chases Hector round the walls of Troy three times without catching him. In dwelling on these incoherencies Tassoni may seem flatfooted and literal-minded. But his comments are interesting because they point in a different direction from his neoclassical strictures on Homer's stylistic deficiencies. Far from idealizing Homer's gods and heroes, he considers them in a realistic light and asks how they would actually behave. And the obvious next step is to write a humorous mock epic in the low style with people behaving consistently.

Tassoni did this in *La secchia rapita*. Its twelve cantos recount a war in 1393 between the Guelfs of Bologna and the Ghibellines of Modena over a wooden

<sup>71</sup> Tassoni, *La secchia rapita: Rime e prose scelte*, 453.

<sup>72</sup> Fielding, *Tom Jones*, i. 398.

bucket stolen by the Modenese. Having chased their Bolognese attackers back to Bologna, the Modenese return in triumph with the bucket as their trophy; they wreath it in flowers, carry it in a procession, and attach it to their highest tower. To regain it the Bolognese threaten war to the death, and hostilities spread all over northern Italy till a truce is finally agreed. The poem is mock heroic in focusing on a trivial object, in including many allusions to Tassoni's own times, in advertising its descent from Ariosto (a fine horse is said to be descended from Frontino, the steed of Ariosto's hero Ruggiero), and above all in humorously degrading its characters. Ordinary townsfolk are supposed to be as unlikely combatants as the ancient frogs and mice. Attacked unexpectedly by the Bolognese, the people of Modena issue forth in disarray, one with a frying-pan instead of a shield, another with a bucket on his head instead of a helmet. Plebeian people are killed for comic effect: Bertolotto, a drunkard whose corpse shudders at contact with water; and Galasso, a tooth-extractor and quack who, the narrator says callously, should not have exchanged his profession for fighting (i. 27).<sup>73</sup> The slaughter, which takes place by the river, is compared to the fight in which the furious Achilles made the River Xanthus run with Trojan blood (*Iliad*, Book XXI), and the theft of the bucket is compared to the abduction of Helen of Troy.

Not all the characters are mocked, however. While the mayor of Modena is treated humorously, and called by the obscene dialect term *Potta* (for *podestà*), the Modenese hero Gherardo and his beautiful and warlike sister Renoppia are treated seriously. In Canto VII Renoppia and her fifty female soldiers avert defeat by rallying the fleeing Modenese, and she is compared, without apparent satiric intent, to the warlike poetess Telesilla of Argos who is said by Pausanias to have armed the women to defend their country against a Spartan invasion (vii. 68). Renoppia's only shortcoming is a trivial one: she is said to be deaf in one ear (i. 17). She is clearly descended from Virgil's virgin warrior Camilla, but with an important difference. Virgin warriors in epic do not survive. Sometimes they are killed, like Camilla in Book XI of the *Aeneid* and Clorinda in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. Or they stay alive, but marry the hero and dwindle into ordinary women, like Bradamante in *Orlando furioso*. It is as though male writers could only depict a woman in a man's role on condition that her autonomy is punished, or at least limited. Renoppia, however, survives. The law that limits women's activity does not hold in the world of mock epic. Renoppia's bravery incurs no penalty. In her presentation there is a further questioning of epic conventions, along with a touch of feminism that gives further evidence of Tassoni's modernity.

Much the funniest part of Tassoni's poem is the presentation of the gods in Canto II. Jove, alarmed by the outbreak of war over the bucket, and reminded of the battle of frogs and mice, summons a divine assembly, at which he appears in dignity recalling that of the pope. The captain of his guard is Hercules who, not

<sup>73</sup> References to the poem, in the edition already cited, are by canto and line number.

having recovered fully from his madness, swings his club as dangerously as a drunken Swiss Guard at the Vatican. The gods arrive in comic guise, Apollo in a farm-cart instead of the solar chariot, Venus in an elegant coach with a large staff of servants, and Saturn, a decrepit, farting, grumpy old man, in a litter which contains a concealed chamber-pot. Mercury carries Jove's hat, his spectacles, and a bag full of petitions from mortals, which Jove reads and signs twice daily in his lavatory. Some gods send their apologies: Diana is doing her laundry in the Tuscan marshes (an allusion to Homer's Nausicaa), Juno is washing her hair, and the Fates are baking bread. Those who do attend are so quarrelsome that Jove has to call them to order. They side, some with Bologna, others with Modena, just as some of Homer's gods support the Greeks and others the Trojans. Venus, Mars, and Bacchus, who back Modena, descend there incognito and put up at an inn, sharing a bed; Tassoni's chaste and modest muse does not recount 'la congiunzione di que' pianeti' ('the conjunction of these planets', ii. 57), except to say that by the end of the night Mars and Bacchus had cuckolded Vulcan (Venus' husband) thirty times. After that the poem rather falls off, and Voltaire was not unjust in calling Tassoni 'De vers prodigue, et d'esprit fort avare' ('prodigal of verses, but very sparing of wit').<sup>74</sup> Long battles are recounted in evident homage to Ariosto, and nearly two cantos are taken up with the gruesomely comic story of a count who goes mad (like a domestic Orlando) and tries unsuccessfully to poison his wife.

Even if he lacked enough invention to sustain twelve cantos, however, Tassoni succeeded in writing an enjoyable poem which, in rejecting the conventions of epic, also rejected some of the values accompanying them. By burlesquing the gods, he upholds human autonomy, shown best in Gherardo and Renoppia; and some touches of anticlerical satire—Jove represents the pope; the Bishop of Modena prefers playing dice to holding services—point in the same emancipatory direction.

The more familiar mock-heroic poems by Boileau, *Le Lutrin* (1674), and Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (1712–17), can be discussed more briefly.<sup>75</sup> Unlike Tassoni, one would not initially suspect either author of criticizing Homer. Both showed their loyalty to neoclassicism by composing *artes poeticae*—Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674) and Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711)—which set out its precepts. Boileau was present when Perrault read out his manifesto of the moderns, *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*, and protested vigorously on behalf of the ancients; Pope's translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have been called, along with Dryden's Virgil, 'the true epic poems of English neoclassicism'.<sup>76</sup> Yet, while the deployment of the epic

<sup>74</sup> *La Guerre civile de Genève*, Moland, ix. 545.

<sup>75</sup> The first version of *The Rape of the Lock*, in two cantos, was published in 1712 along with other works by Pope. The five-canto version appeared separately in 1714. The version that appeared in Pope's collected works in 1717 was enlarged by the addition of Clarissa's speech in Canto V. I follow *TE*, vol. ii. References are given by canto and line number.

<sup>76</sup> Broich, *The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem*, 6.

apparatus for mock-heroic purposes implies first and foremost a homage to serious epic, covert criticism of the serious epic can be found in both poems.

Developing the precedent of Tassoni, who located the fictional conflict over the bucket within an actual war, Boileau and Pope deal with actual and trivial incidents. Boileau versifies a conflict between the treasurer and the precentor of the Sainte-Chapelle at Paris. The treasurer had a lectern installed which blocked the precentor's view of the choir. Not having been consulted, the precentor took the presence of the lectern as a personal affront, and on the night of 31 July 1667 sent men to remove it secretly. The dispute was brought to the Parliament of Paris and resolved by its President, Guillaume de Lamoignon, to whom Boileau pays tribute both in the 'Avis au lecteur' and in the final canto of his poem. Pope was asked to write the *Rape* in order to reconcile two families in his close-knit Roman Catholic circle, the Petres and the Fermors, who had been estranged since Robert, Lord Petre had cut off a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair. Both advertise the triviality of the subject in the openings of their poems, where they announce their topic and invoke the Muse. Boileau further invokes the mock-epic muse who inspired Homer to write the *Batrachomyomachia* and Tassoni to sing the stolen bucket:

O Toy, qui sur ces bords qu'une eau dormante mouille,  
 Vis combattre autrefois le Rat et le Grenouille,  
 Qui par les traits hardis d'un bizarre pinceau  
 Mis l'Italie en feu pour la perte d'un Seau  
 Muse, prête à ma bouche une voix plus sauvage . . .<sup>77</sup>

O Thou, who on the banks washed by still waters once beheld the combat of the Rat and the Frog, who by the bold strokes of an eccentric brush set Italy on fire for the loss of a Bucket, Muse, lend my mouth a wilder voice . . .

Subsequent events follow epic precedent, leading up to the mock combat. Boileau makes his two clerical parties, after visiting the law-courts, encounter each other in Barbin's bookshop, where their choice of books as weapons permits some literary criticism. The novels of Madame de Scudéry prove destructive: an old man sinks 'accablé de l'horrible Artamène' ('struck down by the horrible *Artamène*'); another combatant seizes a Christian epic called *Jonas* which Boileau, here as elsewhere, mocks for its unpopularity: 'le seul *Jonas* qu'on ait vû relié' ('the only *Jonas* that anyone ever saw rebound').<sup>78</sup> Pope does even better by having two mock combats. The first is the game of ombre between Belinda and the Baron in Canto III, in which Homeric warfare is sublimated into a game of cards which is also a sexual combat ('ombre' comes from the Spanish *hombre*, 'man'); Belinda's victory at cards is promptly followed by her humiliation in having her lock severed by a pair of scissors. Similar sexual undertones

<sup>77</sup> Boileau-Despréaux, *Épîtres*, 145–6.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 156; cf. 'Épître VII', line 88 (p. 41).

accompany the combat in Canto V, which is stirred up by Belinda's Amazonian friend Thalestris, though it is fought only with glares, a pinch of snuff, and a bodkin. Belinda assails the Baron, who 'sought no more than on his Foe to die' (v. 78), and when threatened with the bodkin he warns her: 'Thou by some other shalt be laid as low' (v. 98). In place of epic bloodshed, modern life offers the battle of the books and the battle of the sexes.

Can we see here an implied criticism of serious epic? Pope's editor, Geoffrey Tillotson, thought the *Rape* had this implication: 'The epic, a dying mammoth, lives long enough to see its perfected self-criticism in Pope's poem.'<sup>79</sup> Pope himself was not uncritical of Homer. Like other neoclassical critics, he found Homer's language sometimes inexcusably low. When Homer compares Ajax to an ass, Pope refuses to use such a commonplace word, instead employing the kind of periphrasis that gives heroic diction a bad name—'the slow Beast with heavy Strength indu'd' (*TE* viii. 65). Above all, Pope was sharply aware of the gulf between Homer's primitive society, with its unrestrained bloodshed, and his own civilized and peaceful society: 'It must be a strange Partiality to Antiquity to think with Madam *Dacier*, "that those Times and Manners are so much the more excellent, as they are more contrary to ours." Who can be so prejudiced in their Favour as to magnify the Felicity of those Ages, when a Spirit of Revenge and Cruelty, join'd with the practice of Rapine and Robbery, reign'd thro' the World, when no Mercy was shown but for the sake of Lucre, when the greatest Princes were put to the Sword, and their Wives and Daughters made Slaves and Concubines?'<sup>80</sup> Although he used Homer as a stick to beat modern 'luxury', and though the *Rape* mocks the triviality of society ladies ('the moving Toyshop of their heart', i. 100), Pope shows delight in commodities, such as Belinda's combs (i. 134):

The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,  
Transform'd to *Combs*, the speckled and the white.

These lines not only register appreciation of the pretty objects, a tortoiseshell and an ivory comb, but remind us that they come from distant regions. To Pope and his contemporaries it was a commonplace that international trade was an important means of civilization by strengthening links between far-flung countries and making wars less attractive.<sup>81</sup> The *Rape* is not only a critique, but also and still more a celebration of modern civilization, including the sublimation of conflict into social rituals like card-playing and courtship.

The most striking way in which Boileau and Pope diverge from the epic tradition is their use of epic machinery. The use of gods and their messengers

<sup>79</sup> Tillotson, 'Introduction', *TE* ii. 107. My interpretation is deeply indebted to Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, 296–328.

<sup>80</sup> 'Preface', *TE* vii. 14. Pope's reservations about Homer are summarized by Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, 301–3.

<sup>81</sup> See Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, 257–64.

to bring about events had long been criticized as clumsy and undignified in itself, and also as an unsuitable model for poems written by and for Christians. Boileau, as we have seen, also rejected the poetic use of Christian figures, such as angels and devils. Instead, he introduced allegorical figures. This had a theoretical precedent in the frequent claim that Homer's and Virgil's gods were to be understood as allegorical personifications, and a practical precedent in the *Civil War* (also known as the *Pharsalia*) by the Roman epic poet Lucan.<sup>82</sup> The clerical conflict in *Le Lutrin* is stirred up by Discord, who wanders round Paris seeking to extend to the Sainte-Chapelle the hostilities which already afflict other churches and the law-courts. However, she seems superfluous. She summons Night to her aid, which seems a roundabout way of underlining that the assault on the lectern takes place at night, and a laborious way of adding dignity to the poem.<sup>83</sup> The drawback of allegorical figures is that they can only ever do one thing. 'The employment of allegorical persons always excites conviction of its own absurdity', wrote Johnson; 'they may produce effects, but cannot conduct actions; when the phantom is put in motion, it dissolves; thus *Discord* may raise a mutiny, but *Discord* cannot conduct a march, or besiege a town.'<sup>84</sup> Perhaps to palliate these limitations, Boileau gives his Discord a taste for gratuitous mischief. She hides an owl inside the lectern so that it flies out and frightens the champions who have come to demolish the structure. To prevent them from abandoning their enterprise, Discord then appears in human shape and rouses their spirits, an effort she need never have made but for her trick with the owl. In the latter half of the poem the allegorical figures largely disappear. Piety and Justice make a token appearance in the final canto, where, without their aid, the conflict is resolved by human means, through the wisdom of the President de Lamoignon. Boileau thus underlines, not only that disputes are now settled by legal process instead of warfare, but also that we have moved from a past ruled by the gods to a present where human agency is all-important.

Pope's machinery is far more original. From the fanciful work of natural philosophy by the Comte de Gabalis he took the fiction that each element is inhabited by spirits: the air by sylphs, the earth by gnomes, the water by nymphs, and the fire by salamanders. In the poem we have to do mainly with sylphs, led by Ariel, who do their best to guard Belinda's chastity, and with the gnome Umbriel, who after Belinda's loss of her lock descends to the Cave of Spleen in order to reinforce her anger and depression. His name, from Latin *umbra* ('shadow'), picks up the French meaning of *ombre* and confirms that the card-game, placed in the poem's central canto, is also central to its meaning: 'she who scorns a Man, must die a maid' (v. 28)—a woman who fails to obtain a man must live in shadows as an old maid.

<sup>82</sup> See Le Bossu, *Treatise*, 216–21, followed by Gottsched, vi/2. 306–7.

<sup>83</sup> Probably part of Boileau's purpose, as suggested in Gordon Pocock, *Boileau and the Nature of Neo-Classicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 149–51.

<sup>84</sup> Johnson, 'Pope', *Lives*, iv. 71; see further Lewis, *Allegory*, 69.

Though more delightful, these ethereal beings are ultimately as superfluous to the poem's action as Boileau's personifications. They fail to prevent the rape of the lock, because Belinda has already surrendered inwardly to man: the guardian sylph perceives 'An Earthly Lover lurking at her heart' (iii. 144). Their ineffectuality was noted by Pope's hostile critic John Dennis: 'They do not in the least influence that Action; they neither prevent the Danger of *Belinda*, nor promote it, nor retard it, unless, perhaps, it may be said, for one Moment, which is ridiculous.'<sup>85</sup> But the failure of the sylphs is part of Pope's joke. It can also be explained by their psychological significance. The elemental spirits represent aspects of feminine psychology as understood by seventeenth-century medical thought. Thus Belinda, naturally one of the 'light Coquettes' associated with sylphs like the airy Ariel (i. 65), on losing her lock succumbs first to love-melancholy and the influence of the gnome Umbriel, then to the anger fanned by her fierce friend Thalestris, who is clearly one of the 'fery Termagants' destined to become salamanders (i. 59).<sup>86</sup> If the spirits represent female psychology, they cannot also influence female psychology. And thus, in their ineffectuality, they are also a reminder of human agency. If in the modern world people are free from the control of the gods, still less can they be controlled by elemental spirits. In being ultimately gratuitous, Pope's machinery is a parody and also a gentle criticism of Homer's divinities.

These mock-heroic poems supplement and correct the idealism of serious epic. Epic poems are supposed to concentrate on heroic deeds and to omit or idealize the domestic details of daily life. As we have seen, neoclassic critics were annoyed that Homer did not idealize enough, but showed his heroes cooking and feasting. Mock heroic compensates by giving prominence to basic physical needs. In doing so, it both parodies epic and tells truths that epic cannot accommodate. Boileau's prelates indulge themselves with ham, soup, and wine. Pope elaborately describes the ritual of preparing and drinking coffee. He also leaves no doubt about Belinda's sexual charms. As Maynard Mack says, 'eroticism suffuses the poem like a sea'.<sup>87</sup> The central issue of the poem is the preservation of her chastity, for which the stolen lock is a metonym. The displacement is most obvious at the end of Canto IV, when Belinda—in language that Dennis thought fit only for 'an errant *Suburbian*', or prostitute—complains (iv. 175–6):

<sup>85</sup> *Remarks on Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock* (1728), in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), ii. 322–52 (p. 337).

<sup>86</sup> See Alastair Fowler, 'The Paradoxical Machinery of *The Rape of the Lock*', in Colin Nicholson (ed.), *Alexander Pope: Essays for the Tercentenary* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 151–70, on the psychological implications of the Rosicrucian spirits (pp. 154–6); also for the subtle presence of the Homeric gods (p. 153) and an unexpected slant on the union of the tortoise and elephant (p. 161).

<sup>87</sup> Mack, *Alexander Pope*, 253.

Oh hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize  
Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these!<sup>88</sup>

As with another metonymic allusion to a 'frail *China Jar*' (ii. 106), the joke is at the expense of women's sexual desire, and the implied anti-feminism has been duly noted by many recent critics.<sup>89</sup> One might say that the poem places women in a double bind by enjoining them to be chaste yet warning that lifelong chastity means becoming a miserable old maid. At the same time, Pope is celebrating, as well as mocking, Belinda's erotic charm. He is not wholly ironic in portraying her as a goddess. Surrounded by sylphs at her dressing-table, she has been compared to Renaissance pictures of Venus attended by *putti*.<sup>90</sup>

But the issue can be viewed still more positively. By placing a woman at the centre of his poem, Pope is correcting the male bias of epic. In the *Aeneid*, especially, women are marginal. Dido is abandoned by Aeneas and commits suicide; his wife Creusa dies in the escape from Troy and appears only as a ghost; his prospective second wife, Lavinia, is shadowy; and the virgin warrior Camilla appears only briefly before being killed. Mock epic, as we shall see, restores the balance by foregrounding women, even if part of the purpose is to joke at their expense. In Voltaire's *La Pucelle*, as in Pope's *Rape*, the central problem is the preservation of the heroine's chastity. Voltaire tells us that the greatest miracle of Joan of Arc's career was that she managed to remain a virgin for a whole year. Wieland in *Oberon* moves the focus from a woman to a pair of lovers, who are ordered to remain chaste but very naturally break the rule imposed on them. As it becomes an autonomous form, mock epic becomes also a feminized counterpart to epic, and one which gives due weight to the unheroic reality of physical desires and needs.

## Travesty

Parody, of which travesty is one variety, differs from other forms of intertextuality by not simply referring to one or more previous texts but by demanding an ironic, normally humorous, distance from them.<sup>91</sup> It is not necessarily an attack

<sup>88</sup> Dennis, *Remarks*, 335. A further metonymic displacement is to Belinda's lapdog Shock. Not only is he a 'privileged voyeur' of his mistress's intimate moments (Mack, 253), but, as his name shows, he is extremely hairy (Fowler, 'The Paradoxical Machinery', 152). One might go further and think of the scandalous function ascribed to ladies' lapdogs by Diderot in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), part I, ch. 23: cf. Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660–1750* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 140–1.

<sup>89</sup> e.g. Nussbaum, ch. 8; Richard Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 107–22. For a milder reading, see Valerie Rumbold, *Women's Place in Pope's World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 67–82.

<sup>90</sup> Fowler, 'The Paradoxical Machinery', 164.

<sup>91</sup> See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 34. Hutcheon criticizes Genette for offering in *Palimpsestes* a definition which ignores humour and is too broad.

on the object parodied. While parody responds to weaknesses and flaws in its object, it also testifies to its object's status as a cultural institution. To parody Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, or for that matter *The Lord of the Rings* (as in the Harvard *Lampoon's Bored of the Rings*), is to show one's fascination with these texts. Parody is a quasi-creative extension of the text into another medium, like illustration. Although it depends on its original, it is not merely reactive. As Goethe pointed out, a parody can become the vehicle for original creation: the critic of a parody should always consult the prior text in order to see whether the parodist has perceived its weak spots, or whether, under the semblance of imitation, he has achieved something original (G xv. 297). This applies to the mock-epic poems which are the subject of this book.

The object of parody need not always be an individual work: it may be a genre. In Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style* (1947), the same anecdote is told in ninety-nine different ways, ranging from a sonnet to an official letter. The parody of a genre can itself help to found a new genre. The most famous example is Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, in which the parody of chivalric romance prompts the creative exploration of mundane reality.<sup>92</sup> The low world of inns, barbers, prostitutes, and convicts is not just a foil to Don Quixote's delusions, but a new territory waiting to be described in literature. It has been suggested that parodies tend to appear when the creative resources of a genre are approaching exhaustion.<sup>93</sup> Again, *Don Quixote* provides a compelling example: the death of chivalric romance marks the birth of the realist novel. Mock epic is another: the decline or stagnation of epic ushers in an extraordinary range of inventiveness and enthusiasm in the practice of mock epic.

Since parodies mostly have a short shelf-life, we easily forget how numerous they have been. For several centuries classic plays and popular successes were normally accompanied by parodies and travesties. Molière parodied Corneille and was himself parodied. Racine was obliged to sit through a parody of his *Bérénice* in which the heroine's name was rhymed with *pise*.<sup>94</sup> In eighteenth-century Paris at least 200 parodies were staged.<sup>95</sup> Voltaire's *Cédipe* was travestied by 'Dominique' (the pseudonym of Pierre-François Biancolelli), who transferred the action to a French village where, instead of the plague, all the sheep have scabies and the girls jaundice.<sup>96</sup> Dominique was also responsible for the eighteenth century's most popular dramatic parody, *Agnès de Chaillot*, which transforms Houdar de la Motte's tragedy *Inès de Castro* by making the king of Portugal into a bailiff,

<sup>92</sup> See Jürgen von Stackelberg, 'Vergil, Lalli, Scarron. Ein Ausschnitt aus der Geschichte der Parodie', *Arcadia*, 17 (1982), 225–44 (p. 230); Edwin Williamson, *The Half-way House of Fiction: 'Don Quixote' and Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>93</sup> Wido Hempel, 'Parodie, Travestie und Pastiche. Zur Geschichte von Wort und Sache', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 15 (1965), 150–76 (p. 157).

<sup>94</sup> Maskell, 'The Paradoxes of Epic', 288.

<sup>95</sup> Gustave Lanson, 'La Parodie dramatique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', in his *Hommes et livres: études morales et littéraires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lecène, Oudin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1895), i. 261–93 (p. 261).

<sup>96</sup> See *Cédipe suivi de Cédipe travesti*, ed. Isabelle Degauque (Montpellier: Editions Espaces, 2002).

changing his son Pedro from the victor over the Moors into the winner at a shooting contest, and Inès into the servant-girl Agnès.<sup>97</sup> Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* was travestied by Julius von Voss, who made Nathan a miser, the Templar a fortune-hunter, and Recha an affected bluestocking.<sup>98</sup> Dramatic parody flourished especially in the Viennese popular theatre, which turned its material into local terms: Gluck's famous opera was mocked in Josef Richter's *Die travestirte Alceste* (1800), Shakespeare in Ferdinand Kringsteiner's *Othello, der Mohr in Wien* (1806), Schiller's play about Joan of Arc in Franz Xaver Told's *Johanna Dalk* (1821—'Dalk' is Viennese for 'idiot'), and many others, while Johann Nestroy continued this tradition by travestyng not only Hebbel's *Judith* (as *Judith und Holofernes*, 1849) but also Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*.<sup>99</sup> In France, Victor Hugo's plays, such as *Hernani* (1830) and *Les Burgraves* (1843), were regularly parodied, and the parodies sometimes had a longer run in theatres than the original.<sup>100</sup> The Victorian theatre excelled in parody, from John Poole's *Hamlet Travestie* (1811) to William Yardley's *Very Little Hamlet* (1888). J. M. Barrie parodied Ibsen in *Ibsen's Ghost* (1891).<sup>101</sup> Readers of Theodor Fontane will remember that when the impoverished Poggenpuhls spend an evening at the theatre, they have the choice between Ernst von Wildenbruch's successful historical drama *Die Quitzows* and its parody, but decide that their aristocratic status obliges them to opt for the original.<sup>102</sup>

The terms 'parody', 'travesty', and 'burlesque' tend to overlap. Critics have often tried to draw sharp distinctions among them, as when A. W. Schlegel declares that parody treats a trivial subject in a lofty style whereas travesty, its opposite, treats an important subject in comic style.<sup>103</sup> Common usage, however, refuses to conform. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'travesty' was understood to mean, not the opposite of parody, but a specific kind of parody in which a dignified subject-matter was rendered in an undignified, low, vulgar, or even obscene style. As Boileau put it, travesty made Dido and Aeneas talk like a fishwife and a porter.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>97</sup> See Genette, 160.

<sup>98</sup> Julius von Voss, *Der travestirte Nathan der Weise. Posse in zwey Akten* (1804), ed. Leif Ludwig Albertsen (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985).

<sup>99</sup> See W. E. Yates, *Nestroy: Satire and Parody in Viennese Popular Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), chs. 2 and 5; Otto Rommel, *Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie* (Vienna: Schroll, 1952).

<sup>100</sup> Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo* (London: Picador, 1997), 152, 231.

<sup>101</sup> Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 196–7.

<sup>102</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Romane, Erzählungen, Gedichte*, ed. Walter Keitel, 6 vols. (Munich: Hanser, 1962), iv. 513.

<sup>103</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik I [1798–1803]*, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989), 645. This distinction is questioned by Wynfried Kriegleder, 'Aloys Blumauers *Travestierte Aeneis* und die Theorie des komischen Epos', in *Aloys Blumauer und seine Zeit*, ed. Eybl, Frimmel, and Kriegleder, 51–63 (p. 54), in a survey of the difficulties of fitting parody and travesty into eighteenth-century systems of poetics.

<sup>104</sup> Preface to *Le Lutrin*, quoted in *Épîtres*, 307.

The fashion for travesties began in late Renaissance Italy, perhaps because official reverence for the classics made the irreverent feel the need of a safety-valve. Although numerous parodies were written—Lorenzo de' Medici, for example, parodied Dante—the founder of classical travesty was Giambattista Lalli with his *Eneide travestita* (1634), retelling the story of the *Aeneid* in shortened form and in a humorous tone.<sup>105</sup> This taste spread to mid-seventeenth-century France, beginning with Paul Scarron's *Typhon ou la Gigantomachie* (1644), and thence to England, but, according to Boileau, who denounces travesties in *L'Art poétique*, the court, as the arbiter of good taste, soon found them facile and dull, and abandoned them to the backward provinces:

Mais de ce stile enfin la Cour desabusée,  
 Dédaigna de ces vers l'extravagance aisée;  
 Distingua le naïf du plat et du bouffon,  
 Et laissa la Province admirer le Typhon.<sup>106</sup>

But at last the Court, weary of this style, disdained the facile extravagance of these verses, distinguished simplicity from banality and buffoonery, and left it to the provinces to admire *Typhon*.

However, at least one travesty outlasted fashion and is constantly referred to by writers of mock epic, Scarron's *Virgile travesti* (1648–51). Its most immediately striking feature is its length. Although Scarron only got to the beginning of Book VIII of the *Aeneid*, his travesty runs to 20,916 lines, four times the length of the original. When Aeneas meets Venus in Book I, he declares himself uncertain about who she is in four lines of Latin (*Aen.* i. 326–9) but in twenty-four lines of Scarron's French (*VT* i. 1067–90). Epic concision is replaced with a leisurely, conversational tone. The metre is iambic octosyllabics, known as 'vers burlesques'. Unlike some of his imitators, Scarron does not rely solely on colloquial language but on a clash of the colloquial and the elevated, as when the Sibyl warns Aeneas of the difficulty of returning from the underworld (*VT* vi. 493–6):

Peu de mortels des Dieux chérís,  
 Bien morigénés et nourris,  
 Issus de divines braguettes,  
 En sont revenus bragues nettes.<sup>107</sup>

Few mortals cherished by the Gods, well brought up and nurtured, sprung from divine codpieces, have returned thence safe and sound.

Here the dignified first line clashes with the 'divine codpieces' and the colloquial and trivializing 'bragues nettes' (literally, with clean shoes, hence 'safe and

<sup>105</sup> On Lalli, see Stackelberg; on previous parodies, Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, 97.

<sup>106</sup> Boileau-Despréaux, *Épîtres*, 84.

<sup>107</sup> Paul Scarron, *Le Virgile travesti*, ed. Jean Serroy (Paris: Garnier, 1988).

sound'). Much use is made of absurd anachronism, a standby of travesty. Thus we are told of Juno (i. 253–6):

Elle entend et parle fort bien  
L'espagnol et l'italien;  
Le *Cid* du poète Corneille  
Elle le récite à merveille.

She understands and speaks Spanish and Italian very well, and as for *Le Cid* by the poet Corneille, she recites it superbly.

Venus, disguised as a huntress, carries a gun. Aeneas, exploring the coast of Africa, wants to know if the inhabitants are Christians or 'mahométans' (i. 1009–10). Heroes and gods are mocked: thus Aeneas learns from Charon that the souls of debtors must linger on the chilly bank of Styx for a hundred years, and is alarmed, because he borrows a lot and has many creditors.

Besides the general humorous degradation of its subject, there are two striking ways in which Scarron's travesty undermines the values of neoclassicism. One is its physicality. Neoclassicism progressively erases the corporeality of fictional characters. As Erich Auerbach pointed out, even the physical weakness shown by Don Diègue in Corneille's *Le Cid* (1637) would be unthinkable a generation later in Racine.<sup>108</sup> By contrast, Scarron foregrounds physicality, even down to disgusting details, as in his description of the Sibyl in her prophetic fury (vi. 230–48):

Lors on la vit toute changer,  
Et sa fureur, quoique divine,  
La fit de très mauvaise mine.  
On vit le fond de ses naseaux;  
Ses deux yeux, passablement beaux,  
Devinrent des yeux sans prunelle;  
Sa chevelure devint telle  
Que les pointes d'un hérisson,  
Et perdit son caparaçon;  
Sa face devint cacochyme,  
Et son teint de pâle minime.  
J'ai su, depuis deux ans en çà,  
Que dessous elle elle pissa.  
Sa bouche se couvrit d'écume,  
Son poumon, par ce divin rhume,  
Fit sa poitrine panteler,  
Et soupirs sa bouche exhaler,  
Qui tenaient du rot quelque chose;  
Mais sa fureur en était cause.

<sup>108</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 385.

Then she was seen to change completely, and her fury, though divine, made her look very poorly. You could see right down her nostrils; her two rather handsome eyes became eyes without pupils; her hair became like the prickles of a hedgehog, and lost its headdress; her face shrivelled and her complexion became deadly pale. I've been aware for a couple of years that she wetted herself. Her mouth was covered with foam, her lung, thanks to this divine cold, made her chest heave and her mouth issue sighs which were more like belches; but this was all because of her fury.

Not only does the Sibyl look grotesque, with her gaping nostrils and spiky hair, but she foams at the mouth, urinates, and belches. Virgil on the other hand describes her frenzy in four lines, specifying only that she changes her expression and colour, her hair comes undone, her bosom heaves, and she looks taller than a mortal (*Aen.* vi. 47–50).

Scarron's other assault on neoclassicism is his inclusion of metapoetic reflection. Neoclassical language aims at transparency. Its precision and economy are supposed to enable the reader to look *through* the words at the object described.<sup>109</sup> Scarron, however, not only foregrounds language by exploiting stylistic incongruity, but actually introduces himself as a writer with a parenthetical reflection on the difficulty of finding a rhyme for *perdre* (*VT* vi. 1172–3):

(Rime qui sait rimer en *erdre*,  
Je le laisse à plus fin que moi).

(Let anyone who can find a rhyme for *erdre*, I leave it to someone cleverer than I am.)

As we shall presently see, mock epic, especially in the hands of Wieland and Heine, discards the objectivity of serious epic and constantly reminds us of the presence of the poet.

The limitations of travesty become obvious from the work of Scarron's main English imitator, Charles Cotton (1630–87). Instead of exploiting the clash of styles, Cotton's *Scarronides or Virgil travestie* (1664–5) is throughout in rough colloquial language, seizing every occasion for vulgarity.<sup>110</sup> The opening announcement sets the tone: 'I *Sing the man* (read it who list, | A *Trojan*, true, as ever pist)' (i. 1–2). The rhymes are rough and ready, but not otherwise funny—'Conditions / Fish-ponds' (i. 283–4), 'bin bred / kindred' (i. 1109–10)—except when they disguise an obscenity: Aeolus, promising Juno to unleash a gale on the Trojans, says: 'I'll play these Rake-hells such a Hunts-up, | As were they

<sup>109</sup> See Nicholas Cronk, 'La Défense du dialogisme: vers une poétique du burlesque', in Isabelle Landy-Houillon and Maurice Menard (eds.), *Burlesque et formes parodiques dans la littérature et les arts* (Seattle and Tübingen: Biblio 17, 1987), 321–38 (esp. pp. 330–3).

<sup>110</sup> The first part of *Scarronides*, travestyng Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, appeared in 1664; the travesty of Book IV followed in 1665; a revised edition of both appeared in 1666. All quotations are from *Charles Cotton's Works, 1663–1665: Critical Editions of 'The Valiant Knight' and 'Scarronides'*, ed. A. I. Dust (New York and London: Garland, 1992), identified by line number. Dust's introduction provides a useful survey of English burlesque poetry before Cotton and a comparison of Cotton's travesty with Scarron's.

shee's would turn their —— up' (i. 145–6). Characters talk in homely proverbs and give blunt orders: 'budge, jogg on, bestirre your Toes' (i. 765). Familiar comparisons are used: the temple at Carthage is compared to St Pancras' Church in London; 'Pen-men-Maure's a cherry stone' compared to Mount Atlas (iv. 604). Royal characters are placed in a domestic setting. Dido is repeatedly found in her dairy. She carries the household keys at her waist, because she does not trust the servants. When she refused to marry Pygmalion she stole his savings, which, her husband's ghost informed her, were 'In an old Butter-pot i'th' Garding' (i. 696). When the Trojans land in Libya, the natives throw 'Cow-turds' at them (i. 980). The gods are abused and degraded: Juno is 'That cross-grain'd, peevish scolding Quean, | That scratching, catter-wawling Puss' (i. 28–9). Venus, far from being the maid for which Aeneas mistakes her, is one 'whose Bum | So oft had been God Mars his Drum' (i. 619–20). Cupid is a 'Shit-breech'd-elfe' (i. 1231). Aeolus makes the winds by farting. Mercury is a former rope-dancer, Iris the daughter of a dyer, hence her rainbow wings. Cotton is not only more scurrilous but also much more disgusting than Scarron. In Virgil, Aeneas' wife Creusa is lost in the escape from Troy, but Cotton is at pains to tell us that she was 'thurst [i.e. thrust] to death' by Greek soldiers (i. 1178).

By travestyng only Books I and IV of the *Aeneid*, Cotton puts the emphasis on the affair between Aeneas and Dido. Here he verges on the pornographic. Dido craves for Aeneas' 'weapon' (iv. 6), otherwise called 'white Pudden' (i. 1340). Venus, in conversation with Juno, is afraid that Aeneas is 'so big, (which rarely falls) | About his ——, and Genitalls' (iv. 279–80) that he may injure Dido, but Juno replies: 'if they once do come together, | He'll find that *Dido's* reaching leather' (iv. 285–6). Dido's death by hanging is described in gruesome detail, including how her urine seeps through the floor and alarms her servants in the room below. There is a lighter note, anticipating Dorothy Parker, in the preceding account of how Dido considers and rejects various methods of suicide (iv. 1673–80):

Poyson she thought would not be quick,  
 And which was worse, would make her sick.  
 That being therefore wav'd, she thought,  
 That neatly cutting her own throat,  
 Might serve to do her busineses for her,  
 But that she thought upon with horror,  
 Because 'twould hurt her; neither could,  
 She well endure to see her bloud.

As for drowning, being light, she might take too long to sink, and it would spoil her clothes. So she hangs herself—itsself a degrading form of death. By contrast, Virgil's Dido nobly falls on her sword (*Aen.* iv. 663–4), though Queen Amata of Latium, blaming herself for the war against the Trojan settlers, hangs herself in a state of insanity (*Aen.* xii. 602–3).

Cotton's obscenity is not unique, although Ulrich Broich calls his account of Dido's suicide 'the ultimate in vulgarity'.<sup>111</sup> There are travesties of Homer that take one's breath away by their coarseness.<sup>112</sup> But eighteenth-century taste rejected such crudity. Thus Voltaire rejects the burlesque style of Scarron for its 'plattes infamies' ('tedious scurrilities'), and praises Boileau's *Le Lutrin* because only its subject-matter is burlesque, while the style is 'agréable & fin, quelquefois même héroïque'—'pleasant and refined, sometimes even heroic'.<sup>113</sup> Earlier in the century Pierre Marivaux (1688–1763), best known for his comedies and his psychological novels, went one better than Scarron by producing a *Homère travesti* (1716). Marivaux did not base his work directly on Homer, but on the abridged version of the *Iliad* in alexandrines by Houdar de la Motte, which was itself a critical response to the prose translation by Anne Dacier. In the 'Querelle d'Homère', the second phase of the 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes', Dacier was a passionate partisan of the ancients, whereas both de la Motte and Marivaux—the latter with qualifications—considered Homer's heroes coarse, their morals brutal, and their gods ridiculous. De la Motte also condemned Homer's loquacity, by reducing his 16,000 lines to just over 4,000; Marivaux, with the expansiveness common in travesty, enlarges this abridgement to some 10,000.<sup>114</sup>

In his preface Marivaux explains the difference between his travesty and Scarron's. Scarron relies on 'cette expression polissonne, qu'il possédait au suprême degré' ('that filthy language of which he had a supreme command'), but his story is not funny in itself. 'J'ai tâché de divertir par une combinaison de pensées qui fût comique et facétieuse, et qui, sans le secours des termes, eût un fond plaisant, et fit une image réjouissante' ('I have tried to amuse by a combination of thoughts which should be comical and facetious, and, without the aid of vulgar expressions, should have a humorous basis, and make a delightful image').<sup>115</sup> The conversation is colloquial, and Marivaux exploits the scope for insult afforded by the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book I, or Thersites' railing in Book II, but it is rarely the language of fishwives. Thus Hector, irritated by his brother Paris' cowardice, says unfraternally, but not obscenely (iii. 89–90):

<sup>111</sup> Broich, *Studien zum komischen Epos*, 51. Broich quotes the full passage (pp. 50–1), but the quotation is omitted from the English translation of his book. On travesties of Virgil and Homer inspired by Cotton, see Bond, 140–1.

<sup>112</sup> See Howard Weinbrot, 'The Rape of the Lock and the Contexts of Warfare', in G. S. Rousseau and Pat Rogers (eds.), *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope Tercentenary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21–48. Although Weinbrot reprints most of this essay in *Britannia's Issue*, 219–25, he omits the more obscene quotations.

<sup>113</sup> Voltaire, 'Bouffon, burlesque', in *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, par des amateurs (III)*, OCV xxxix. 449.

<sup>114</sup> Robin Howells, 'Rewriting Homer in the "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes": Dacier, La Motte, Marivaux', *Romance Studies*, 17 (1990), 35–51 (pp. 41, 45).

<sup>115</sup> Pierre Marivaux, *Ceuvres de jeunesse*, ed. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 961. This edition contains only the first half of *L'Homère travesti*.

Que n'as-tu fini ta carrière  
En te noyant dans la rivière!

Why didn't you end your career by drowning yourself in the river!

The heroes' behaviour is often undignified: Nestor is accused of snuffling; Ulysses has hiccups; Greeks and Trojans make faces at each other; Briseis, taken from Achilles, has lost one stocking and complains that her foot is cold; Helen is found mending a petticoat, and Marivaux quotes sceptically Homer's version that she was weaving a tapestry. Scatology is occasional and mild, as when Agamemnon, getting out of bed, knocks over his chamber-pot and makes such a stink that his valet says: 'Atride a pissé dans son lit' ('Atrides has pissed in his bed', ii. 58). Anachronism is common: Greeks smoke tobacco, grind snuff, write their diaries, and fire guns; and 'Priam' is ingeniously rhymed with 'Siam', to which Priam is supposed to have sent one of his sons on a diplomatic mission (ii. 881–2). More subtly, there is satirical wit: Jupiter announces a meaningless decree in Agamemnon's favour—'il aura | Ilium, quand il le prendra' ('He shall have Ilium, when he has taken it', ii. 13–14); Agamemnon intends to repent of his misdeeds once he has committed enough to make penitence worthwhile (i. 327–38).

Marivaux departs from the objectivity expected of epic. The subjectivity of the characters is presented through a vast amount of direct speech, and the subjectivity of the author is conveyed by narratorial interventions. Marivaux addresses the reader, saying, for example, that he expects the reader is tired of Priam's interminable questions, but old men are generally inquisitive (iii. 569–74). Like Scarron, he also draws our attention to the act of writing, complaining, for example, that he cannot find a rhyme for 'caraffe'.<sup>116</sup> He comments on the coarse language of Homeric heroes, saying that it is at least honest, and preferable to the insincere politeness of present-day nobles (i. 697–706):

Sans façon alors les héros  
Se lâchaient de fort vilains mots.  
Nos grandes seigneurs ont un langage  
Nettoyé de tout brusque outrage;  
Mais si leur langage est plus pur,  
Leur cœur est plus fourbe, et moins sûr:  
Et tout bien compté, je préfère  
Les rustiques héros d'Homère;  
Car s'insultant d'un cœur ouvert,  
On sait ce qu'on gagne ou qu'on perd.

Heroes then thought nothing of uttering very vulgar words. Our great lords have a language cleansed of all coarse offensiveness, but if their language is purer, their hearts are more deceitful and less trustworthy; and, all things considered, I prefer Homer's rustic heroes, because when frank insults are exchanged, one knows what one is gaining and losing.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted in Howells, 48, from Book VIII.

In thus acknowledging the primitive simplicity of Homer's world, as Pope also does in his 'Preface', Marivaux faintly anticipates the revaluation of Homer, later in the eighteenth century, which would almost displace Virgil.

The restrictive aesthetics of Weimar Classicism, unsurprisingly, had little tolerance for travesty. In his essay on 'common' and 'low' materials in art, probably written in 1793, Schiller accepts vulgarity and baseness in art as sources of amusement, but only if the subject-matter is appropriate. Thus a drunken postilion or sailor can fairly make us laugh, but the drunken behaviour of an educated or upper-class person is merely reprehensible. Farce is therefore acceptable, because a tacit contract between author and reader stipulates that a farce shall present pure fiction, but if the poet attributes vulgarity to a person from whom we expect refinement, we are justly offended.<sup>117</sup> In 1787, however, Schiller was still tolerant enough to enjoy Aloys Blumauer's poem addressed to the chamber-pot ('Ode an den Leibstuhl'), which he described as 'ganz charmant' ('quite delightful').<sup>118</sup> Schiller's attitude had hardened by the time he reviewed Gottfried August Bürger's demotic poems in 1791. Here Schiller condemns Bürger's concessions to popular taste; he demands that the poet should elevate the taste of his readers, and should do so by idealizing his subject-matter and avoiding any suggestion of earthy realism.<sup>119</sup> It follows that travesty is unacceptable, because it subjects noble persons and ideals to degradation. Hence Schiller later censured Voltaire's *La Pucelle* for debasing the exalted figure of Joan of Arc, and he condemned the 'filthy wit' ('schmutzigen Witz') shown in Blumauer's travesty of the *Aeneid*.<sup>120</sup>

Goethe became even more rigid, though in his youth he had written such literary satires as *Götter, Helden und Wieland* (*Gods, Heroes, and Wieland*, 1774). He came to disapprove of all parody and travesty because it degraded its original: 'I have never concealed my deadly enmity to all parody and travesty, because this loathsome brood drags down the beautiful, noble, and great in order to annihilate it.'<sup>121</sup> A parody should be seen if possible as an independent work of art. Thus Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, according to Goethe, should not be seen as a parody of the *Iliad* but as a reworking of the same material in the mode of romantic drama.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, an owl with two mice in its claws was as worthy of

<sup>117</sup> 'Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst', in Schiller, v. 537–43 (esp. p. 539). On the conceptions of parody held by Schiller, Goethe, and Schopenhauer, see Sander L. Gilman, *Nietzschean Parody: An Introduction to Reading Nietzsche* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1976), 3–12.

<sup>118</sup> Letter to Körner, 5 Jan. 1787, quoted in Norbert Christian Wolf, "Der schmutzige Witz des Herrn Blumauer". Schiller und die Marginalisierung populärer Komik aus dem josephinischen Wien', in Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, Johann Sonnleitner, and Klaus Zeyringer (eds.), *Komik in der österreichischen Literatur* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1996), 56–87 (p. 61).

<sup>119</sup> 'Über Bürgers Gedichte' (1791), in Schiller, v. 970–85 (p. 979).

<sup>120</sup> See 'Das Mädchen von Orleans' (1802), in Schiller, i. 460; *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), in *ibid.* v. 694–780 (p. 739).

<sup>121</sup> Letter to Zelter, 26 June 1824, quoted in G xxii. 1425.

<sup>122</sup> 'Zum Kulklops des Euripides', G xxii. 680–3 (p. 682).

artistic representation as an eagle grasping two snakes; it was simply less dignified. This curious analogy erases the very notion of intertextuality, since an owl is not an imitation of an eagle, and suggests that Goethe had become uncomfortable with this concept.

A reduced interest in literary intertextuality itself spells the death of mock epic. For mock epic, like the mock heroic and travesty which feed into it, depends on constant allusion to previous literature. It is therefore incompatible with either of two developments in aesthetics: with the theory of aesthetic autonomy, and with a strong concept of mimesis. If the literary text is seen as self-contained and self-sufficient, then references to other texts can be, at most, of marginal significance; what matters in the text is its structure of internal relations. This is the central aesthetic doctrine of Weimar Classicism.<sup>123</sup> A work of art, including a literary work, is not primarily an imitation of the external world; apparent mimetic references are simply raw material which must be absorbed into the aesthetic structure of the work. If the work of art imitates anything, it may imitate a Neoplatonic ideal or 'Urbild' existing in the artist's soul. To become a work of art, however, it must emancipate itself from the artist, as from all contingent circumstances, and become, or rather appear, autonomous. It must have what Schiller called 'Freiheit in der Erscheinung', freedom in appearance.<sup>124</sup> Among many formulations, one of the clearest occurs in a letter to Schiller from his friend Körner: 'The work of art should exist through itself, like any other organic being, not through the soul that the artist breathes into it. Once he has given it life, it continues to exist, even when its creator is no longer alive; and this is the difference between an aggregate of elements, which have value individually as products of a higher spiritual life, and an organized whole, where the part and the whole are one another's means and end, as in the organized products of nature.'<sup>125</sup> The work of art should be seen, not as dependent on its creator or any other external source, but as self-contained, like a living creature. Just as the different parts of the body are mutually dependent and make up a single organism, so the different parts of the work of art are interrelated, composing a single system in which each element subserves the whole and the whole serves to sustain each element. And this aesthetic was to pass, by a long and complicated route, via Romantic and post-Romantic theories of the symbol, down to the Anglo-American New Criticism whose assumptions were neatly formulated by Cleanth Brooks in *The Well-Wrought Urn*. For Brooks, the poem is a closed, centripetal entity, a well-wrought urn sharply distinct from the world around it. It should be understood, not as 'a bouquet of intrinsically beautiful items', but as a self-contained pattern in which each of its component words and images finds

<sup>123</sup> See the introduction to J. M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>124</sup> *Kallias oder Briefe über die Schönheit* (1793), in Schiller, v. 400.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted in R. Hinton Thomas, *The Classical Ideal in German Literature, 1755–1805* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1939), 88–9.

a place: it is a 'structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations, and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes and meanings'.<sup>126</sup>

Mock epic is equally incompatible with aesthetic theories that emphasize mimesis. If the literary text is seen primarily in relation to the external world, which it imitates, copies, or reflects, then intertextual reference can only be of minor significance. Theories of mimesis that rely on metaphors of painting, drawing, sketching, mirroring, or photography play down the extent to which even the most conscientiously realist text is a structure of words which depend for their meaning on previously existing verbal structures.

Doctrines of aesthetic autonomy and mimetic realism are, of course, dated. Modernism problematized the relation of consciousness to the external world, in the spirit of Nietzsche's dictum: 'Perspectival seeing is the *only* kind of seeing there is, perspectival "knowing" the *only* kind of "knowing".'<sup>127</sup> Intertextuality made a spectacular return in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*. Whether it made possible the return of anything resembling mock epic will be discussed in the Epilogue; but the answer can be anticipated by saying that mock epic, as understood in this book, is a literary phenomenon tied to a specific period and dependent on specific conditions. One of these was the continued presence in the literary firmament of epic as a prestigious yet semi-fossilized genre which could be alluded to with confidence that such allusions would be understood. Another was the doctrine of style levels, which presupposed a hierarchy in literary language and also a hierarchy in the extra-literary social world. When these preconditions faded, mock epic faded out as well.

<sup>126</sup> Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Dobson, 1949), 178.

<sup>127</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 98.