Celestial Crusades and Wars in Heaven: the Biblical Epics of the Late 1500s

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of in the Department of Romance Languages

Chapel Hill
2008

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ii
Abstract

SILVIA GIOVANARDI BYER: Celestial Crusades and Wars in Heaven: the Biblical Epics of the Late 1500s.

(Under the Direction of Dino Cervigni)

This dissertation examines two examples of biblical epic literature: Antonino Alfano’s *Battaglia celeste* (1568) and Erasmus of Valvasone’s *Angeleida* (1590), situating their works and this genre within their ancient, medieval, and early modern context as primordial struggles between the forces of good and evil and the complex cultural reality of post-Tridentine culture. While these two biblical epics have drawn only scant attention, limited mostly to specialized literary circles, biblical epic in general bears out the influence of such classical masterpieces as Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*. At the same time, readers will undoubtedly discover these two biblical epic’s relationship to, and likely influence on, John Milton’s masterpiece *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore,
Angeleida and Battaglia celeste exemplify the biblical epic genre in their intent to educate and entertain. Likewise, both works develop the primordial and mythical battle between the archangel Michael and Lucifer to explore the timeless theme of conflict between good and evil, virtue and sin, while elucidating and reflecting the political and religious realities of the authors’ rapidly changing world in Italy’s post-Tridentine complicated historical time.
A Stefano, Leonardo ed Elisa
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** ............................................................................................................. 1

**Chapter One**

I. **BIBLICAL EPIC: HISTORY OF A GENRE** ................................................................. 5  
   Tasso’s Discorsi, and the Christian "Meraviglioso": For a Theory of Biblical Epic.....21  
   Sannazzaro’s *De partu Virginis* ............................................................... 23

**Chapter Two**

II. **BATTLES AND WARS IN HEAVEN** ................................................................. 26  
   Antonino Alfano: *Battaglia celeste tra Michele e Lucifero* ......................... 32  
      Structure and Content of the Poem ............................................................... 36  
      The Final Battle between Lucifer and Michael ........................................ 37  
      Lucifer, “L’Angel più bel” (BC. II:7,1) ......................................................... 50  
      “Prendi l’arme Michel! [...] Prendi l’arme per CHRISTO!” ........................ 55

**Chapter Three**

III. **VALVASONE’S ANGELEIDA** ............................................................................. 59  
   Erasmo of Valvasone: His Life and Works ................................................... 60  
      *Angeleida* ........................................................................................................ 65  
      The Fabula of the *Angeleida* ...................................................................... 68  
      Critical Analysis of the *Angeleida* ............................................................... 72  
      Valvasone’s Fabula in a Biblical Context .................................................... 86  
      Michael the Hero ............................................................................................ 93  
      The Character of Lucifer ............................................................................. 102
Introduction

As a genre, epic literature has historically served to convey important social and religious concepts to their audiences. The most famous epic poems, including the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* and the cycle of the *Chanson de Roland*, have reached across time to enlighten, entertain, and instruct readers of multiple generations. The lessons they impart have withstood the test of time, and the validity of their messages remains intact.

The biblical epic stands apart from these classics for a number of reasons. To begin with, agreement upon a clear definition of the genre has proven to be elusive. Francesca Gambino summarized what may well be the root of the difficulty when she wrote that defining the biblical epic is problematic because it is comprised of two terms that combine two powerful notions (7). From a deconstructionist perspective, the term biblical epic presents two distinct, but equally compelling images. The inclusion of "biblical" in the description of the genre clearly asserts the religious and spiritual content of this category of literature. It is a signal to the audience that the work will center on Christian themes.
The use of the word “epic” to describe the genre alerts the audience to expect the inclusion of mythological, larger-than-life characters and events. Beginning with the *Iliad*, epic literature has served the social and religious interests of civilizations through its artful incorporation of important social paradigms (valor, integrity, honesty, belief) within the context of entertaining, compelling stories.¹ In sum, biblical epic intertwines the classics with the religious aspect of the story.

In the late 1500’s, two major influences converged in Europe in a way that gave new life to the biblical epic genre. One event was religious, and the other was literary. The stability of social, political, religious, and economic norms was under attack during this time. The Moors had resumed their menacing posture against Europe and confrontations regularly occurred in the Mediterranean. Concurrently, leaders of the Roman Catholic Church were alarmed by the widening influence of the Protestant reformation. These tumultuous times were accompanied in the arts and literature by the humanistic revival of the classic works of Homer, Virgil, and others that had begun and developed in the previous two centuries.

The Church, threatened by the new Protestant doctrines, saw the need to educate the masses with enjoyable characterizations that used mythological elements to examine and reinforce doctrines that

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¹ For concept of epic refer to the *New Princeton Enciclopedia of Poetics*. 
supported Catholic beliefs. This strategy, applied in literary and visual art, had a strong impact on its audience, and thus led to the creation of the “awe” as Tasso described it in his Discorsi (Baldassarri 48). This effort to inspire “awe” is evident when reading these religious works, through personifications of giants, Medusas, and three-headed dogs that engaged in spiritual conflict among rival angels.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I lay the foundation for a thorough understanding of the topic through the analysis of several important biblical epics. The second and third chapters narrow my analysis to two influential epics: Battaglia celeste tra Michele e Lucifero (1568) by Antonino Alfano and the Angeleida (1590) by Erasmo of Valvasone.

These two works are important because, unlike other biblical epics that were devoted, primarily, to telling the stories of the lives of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or the saints, they address time before time. They tell the story of the battle of the rebel angels against the faithful angels, the subsequent fall of Lucifer, and finally the victory of the Archangel Michael.

Valvasone, author of the Angeleida, lived near Venice. Alfano wrote the Battaglia celeste while living in Palermo. Both cities were culturally, economically, and politically influential across the Mediterranean. The Angeleida was written to exalt the Republic of
Venice (also referred to as Serenissima) and the ability of the then Doge, despite the historical situation, to maintain peace. The celestial battle Valvasone creates mirrors the religious wars of the time including the last crusades between the Christians and the Saracens, personified in his works as faithful and rebel angels, respectively.

The Battaglia celeste was written before the battle of Lepanto (1572). Sicily was under the control of Spain during the time that Alfano wrote the Battaglia celeste, and the Spanish Inquisition was well underway. Although Alfano dedicated his work to the “Illustri Signori della Santa Inquisizione, "this acknowledgement (I assume) was likely a recognition of the need for political expediency. Like Valvasone, Alfano also personifies the Christians and Saracens as faithful and rebel angels, correspondingly.

The works of Valvasone and Alfano represent a literary tradition that creatively drew upon and applied the essential lessons of history, mythology, and the growth and clash of organized religions. The fact that their writings drew attention, and provided inspiration to other great writers, e.g., Milton’s Paradise Lost, for decades after they were published is testament to the valuable contribution they made to literature.
Chapter One

I. Biblical Epic: History of a Genre
The biblical epic is a difficult literary genre to define. The term is used to indicate texts whose content is inspired by the main scriptures and at the same time displays elements from the classical tradition. They thus emphasize the continuity between the classical and Christian worlds and accentuate the new “hermeneutic category” deriving from the “cultural synthesis” of the two worlds that took place at this time because of specific cultural and poetic developments. It is, in fact, as Gambino suggests, “from the free interacting of two different traditions” that this literary genre is shaped; thus “it is pointless to define it as ‘hybrid’ or ‘false’, we rather identify it as ‘new’” (37).

The biblical epic or “sacred epos” first evolved in a neo-Latin environment, when the need was felt to create a religious literature which was differentiated from the pagan tradition (5). It developed as a tentative method to propose a different kind of epic type with a new content, which at the same time was permeated by the elegance of antiquity. According to Martin, it then followed underground ways that led it, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to an extraordinary European distribution (6).

This work intends to discern some of the elements of the genre that unify traditions of different cultures, uncovering the red thread which permeates European poetry from the fourth to the sixteenth
centuries and that constitutes the third epic cycle of western literature, culminating in two of the Italian precursors of Milton.  

The sacred epic has deep roots in antiquity and has occasioned many theoretical controversies as discussed by Tasso in his *Discorsi*. It constitutes a link of a long chain which draws from the *Bible, The Great Code*, quoting Frye, made of different genres and of different forms of literary communication, and thus a very complex work of literature, developed over a vast time span, including countless volumes inspired by scriptural topics.

Biblical epic is arduous to define because since the Middle-Ages, it intertwines with different genres. The original subject of inspiration, the *Bible*, displays an inestimable variety of literary genres typical to poetry, such as hymns, lauds, elegies, and epics, without mentioning its prose with its legends, sagas, anecdotes, fables, chronicles, and histories. Gambino suggests: “Forse è stata in parte proprio l’imprecisione del termine ‘Bibelepik’ a comportare insicurezza nella definizione del genere” (13).

The “new genre” has a strong relationship with Latin and classical literature, as Martin points out, from which it imitates the rhetorical, linguistic and metric forms (10). It is also relevant to

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1 Gambino thus expands on this topic: “[...] attraverso la poesia europea dal IV al XVIII secolo corre come un filo rosso l’aspirazione, sempre tentata di nuovo, a trasferire in poesia la Bibbia. […] la quantità di opere e di forme pone quello biblico come il terzo ciclo epico della letteratura occidentale, insieme al ciclo troiano e a quello arturiano” (5).

2 For further consideration of paramount importance see the Introduction of Frey to *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*..
highlight Curtius’s opinion on Christian poetry. He incorporates in the tradition of the paraphrase, a remake of biblical text beginning, around 100 A.D. as scholastic practice and later on becoming a genre of its own (167).  

Furthermore Gambino comments: “Ad essere definita ‘epica biblica’ sono state in un primo momento le versioni in esametri di testi ispirati al Vecchio e Nuovo Testamento, che, oltre a dipendere per la tecnica di composizione da un esercizio tradizionalmente praticato nelle scuole di retorica, la più volte ricordata parafrasi, imitavano l’epica pagana e soprattutto Virgilio nella forma metrica e poetica” (13). Thus Christian literature assimilates pagan literature, along with the allegorical interpretation of the classics, allowing the restoration of the value of pagan poetry by putting it at the service of Christian literary tradition. There is an extensive production of biblical epics from the fourth century till the sixteenth. Gambino maintains that “the Early Middle Ages represents the period of higher diffusion of biblical poetry, both in Latin and vernacular languages” (20). An example is the Liber Evangeliorum by Otfridus, written between 863 and 871, a narration of Jesus’ life. Other works are the Helian: a versified epic of the New Testament in old Anglo-Saxon or other

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3 Curtius comments: “In the schools of rhetoric, around the 100 A.D., were introduced as a pedagogical exercise, paraphrases in prose of poetical compositions [...]. In the late Antiquity, Roman and Greek, as well as in the Byzantine Middle Ages, paraphrasing has its own focus. It has not been enough underlined, that a large portion of primitive Christian poetry was inspired by the antique paraphrases of rhetors” (167-68).
poems in Spanish and French literature, such as the *Passion de Clermont-Ferrand*, composed between 1188 and 1195, and the *Biblia rimada de Sevilla*, compiled between 1282 and 1372, to name a few. However, I intend to emphasize this work in Italian literature that was inspired by and carries on the sacred tradition. The founder of biblical epic was the Latin poet Juvencus, who wrote the *Evangeliorum libri IV*, a versified elaboration of the Scriptures composed around 330 A.D., in which he recreates the Gospel of Matthew, with the introduction of episodes from other Gospels. Essentially, his intent is to fuse Homeric epos with Vergil’s style, substituting pagan with Christian mythology and creating an epic with a new content which at the same time is permeated with classical elegance. This new poetic form is delineated in the preface to his lyric epic, in which the poet underlines the validity of his work in virtue of the sacredness of the subject and of the authenticity of the inspiration, attributable not to the Muse, but to the Holy Spirit.

Gambino suggests that “i prodotti più significativi di questa tradizione furono i poemi parafrastico-esegetici del V e VI sec.” (16). We can include in this realm the *Libelli de spiritualis historiae gestis* of the poet Avitus, in which the poet enumerates events of the Old Testament, narrates biblical events amongst which the creation, the

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4 For further reading, see Green’s *The Descent from Heaven. A study in Epic Continuity* (162-65).

5 These first Christian writers are echoed in Tasso’s invocation to the Muses, which opens the First Canto of *Gerusalemme liberata*. On this issue see Borsetto, *Muse cristiane vs. muse pagane* (199-240).
parting of the Red Sea, and composes a laud to chastity in honor of
his sister (Alfonsi 83). It is worth noting that his “paradise lost” uses
epic tones and the redemption of man is obfuscated “quasi a
suggerire uno stato di euforia, evasione e speranza sulle calamità
del futuro, frutto di trasgressione e peccato” (84).

Another main influential thinker of his times is Saint Basil, 6
who, with his Hexamaeron, effectively provided a new genre for the
literature of his day. 7 The Hexaemeraons are prose narratives or
poems on creation, inspired by the first chapter of the Genesis.
These poems had an enormous success toward the end of Christian
antiquity, and slowly dimmed at the beginning of the Middle Ages.
Despite the considerable number of these compositions along with
their notoriety during five centuries, they ended up in almost total
oblivion, where they were relegated until the Renaissance at which
time they reemerged to be passed along to us. This is “un example
typique d’un sujet monopolisé par une époque et méconnu par les
autres,” as Thibaut comments (13). Chronologically the production of
the Hexaemeraons stopped around the eighth century and their
geographic territory was the Greek world, with Byzantium as the
center, expanding towards Syria on one side and Spain on the other.
Migne identifies them into three groups: lost works, the unedited

6 Saint Basil, also called Basil the Great, and his brother Gregory of Nyssa are referred to as the
Cappadocian Fathers of the IV century.

7 Prose and poetry restricted to the commentary of expatiation on the cycle of terrestrial creation
during the span of six days. On this see Robbins.
manuscripts and the compositions made available to the public (*Patristique Grecque* 856). This third group is the most interesting one, continues Thibaut, not because it was the only one to transmit the genre, but also because, by itself, it was able to influence Renaissance poets. We can count around fifty compositions in its totality, the majority in Greek, in which we find the names of great antique Christian authors of the fourth century. Particularly interesting are the hexamaerons of Philo, known under the title of *De Allegoriis Legum* and the *De Principiis* and in *Genesim* by Origen. The Cappadocian school, developed after Origen or the Alexandrian school of thought (150-400 AD), is the most important because their works are mirrored in the works of Tasso (1544) and Du Bartas (1544), authors of *Le Sette Giornate* and *La Semaine*, respectively (15). The masterpiece of this group, as earlier mentioned, is the *Hexamaeron* written by Saint Basil (329-379 A.D.), translated from Greek to Latin numerous times while alive and imitated by his disciples and apprentices. The Italian Renaissance has discovered and recovered those masterpieces of antiquity, which remain the models of all times in literature as well as in figurative arts.

The first humanistic period’s intent was to look back towards classical literature; however, once it reached its peak, it began

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waning. As the Council of Trent\(^9\) (1545-1563) gave Italy the new and renovated Christian glow, the curiosity of the spirits did not stop from turning, with a lot of admiration, towards certain new literary discoveries of the Christian world. As previously mentioned, Saint Basil’s masterpiece had disappeared before the Middle Ages to reappear in its Greek edition of 1532 with a preface written by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Along with this edition, many other Hexaemerons were exhumed, like those of Juvenecus, Saint Ambrose, Avitus, Justinus and Origen. It is by comparing the dates and the titles of these new publications that we can understand the popularity and success that this literary novelty had along with the works of Sannazzaro, Tasso and Du Bartas during the sixteenth century.

Here I would like to contextualize historically the development of biblical epics. From the seventh century on, Western Europe enters a time of disorder mainly due to the slow filtering of the Arab Moors. The waning and then eclipse of this literary tradition has to be seen from a historical perspective. In the sixth century, Western Europe was beginning to find some kind of stability following the Germanic invasions and the Roman Catholic Church was consolidating its influence. The Eastern, Greek-speaking Empire, meanwhile, enjoyed something of a golden age, both politically and

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\(^9\) The nineteenth ecumenical council opened at Trent in 1545 and ended in Bologna in 1563. Its main purpose was the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Church in answer to the Protestant reformation.
economically which involved the reconquests (from its point of view) of Italy and North Africa, from the Goths and the Vandals respectively. However, the seventh century saw the Byzantines embroiled in a series of exhausting wars with the Persians. It then witnessed the devastating and irretrievable loss of two thirds – and by far the most economically valuable part – of its territories to the Muslim Arab invasions, including three of the five ancient Patriarchial seats, namely, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. The Arabs went on to invade the west, capturing Spain and Sicily and even threatening the Franks. The blow to the prestige of both the Greek language and the Christian Churches was immense. The Orthodox Church gradually lost Greek-speaking congregations in the east to Islam and the Arabic language, and began to seek converts among the non-Greek speaking peoples to the north and east. It is little surprise that Greek religious literature, including the biblical epic, went into decline. Relations between the European and the Muslim empires slowly normalized, until the arrival on the scene of a still more implacable foe in the 11th Century, the Turks. Already converts to Islam, they first set about conquering much of the Arab territories and then began new attempts to penetrate into the Christian European and Mediterranean worlds, attempts which were to last until the 18th Century. It is against this historical background that
much of the agonistic narrative of “War in Heaven” epics – the battles between the faithful and the infidel – must be read.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1095, in Clermont-Ferrant, Pope Urban II invited Christendom to form allegiances against the Turks: “If you let them act for a while longer, they will continue to arrive, oppressing the people of God. I therefore insist – actually it is not me but the Lord – to convince you as Heralds of Christ everyone, of any background, rich or poor, infantry of cavaliers to come and fight so that the Christians may sweep away from our land that evil ancestry. I tell you this to the present and I command it to the missing, but it is Christ who wants it.”\textsuperscript{11}

Along these lines, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (chosen by Dante to guide the pilgrim in his last portion of his supernatural journey), during the second crusade, wrote: “A soldier of Christ when he kills an evil man is not an assassin, but a destroyer of evil and is revered a vindicator of Christ.”\textsuperscript{12} This affirmation was an elaboration on Pope Urban II’s exhortation to his followers during the Council of

\textsuperscript{10} Pirenne comments: "Without Islam, the Frankish Empire would have probably never existed, and Charlemagne, without Muhammad, would be inconceivable." For further references see Hodges, Richard and David Whitehouse Mohammed, Charlemagne, and the Origins of Europe and the Influential Analysis of the Pirenne Thesis and the Role of Recent Archaeological Findings, a theory Edward Gibbon famously put forward in the 18th century.

\textsuperscript{11} For more information on the Crusades, consult the Catholic Encyclopedia’s “Origin of the Crusades.”

\textsuperscript{12} www.theorb.net/encyclop-religion/monastic/bernard.html.
Additional elements blend with the religious and spiritual topics analyzed above. During and after the period of the Crusades, sacred literature is highly influenced by new religious orders such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, and the Dominican, as Sapegno explains: “All’origine del misticismo duecentesco sta soprattutto san Francesco, con la sua gioiosa esaltazione contemplativa, meno basata sopra un processo speculativo e più direttamente ispirata alla Bibbia e ad una immediata semplice ricerca di Dio” (Le origini e il Duecento 628).

In the fourteenth century, the influence of Dante’s model is preponderant: Giovanni Quirini is the first to use the meter of the Divine Comedy to write a religious text, as Gambino comments (31). Antonio Pucci paraphrases the Gospels during Lent in “terzine” that mirror the production of sonnets.¹⁴

In the 1500s, with the full affirmation of humanism and the unconditional admiration of the classics, humanistic ideals began to influence religious literary production. Translations of classical texts

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¹³ But there’s a fundamental quantum shift that took place at the calling of the Crusades. Saint Augustine had hypothesized the concept of the ‘just war’ (bellum sacrum). In 1095, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban crossed the line from a ‘just war’ to ‘holy war’, or ‘bellum sacrum.’ The difference is profound. For instance, instead of having a secular authority, in a holy war a sacred authority confers the absolute assurance of eternal salvation. The second crucial distinction between ‘just war’ and ‘holy war’ is that in the latter you are fighting to kill the infidel instead of convert the infidel. In a ‘just war’, every warrior wants peace. In a ‘holy war’, every warrior wants victory (Caner 134).

¹⁴ In particular Pucci wrote 81 sonnets, 10 stanzas, one proemial ternary and two final lauds (Gambino 32).
were not infrequent; authors of this period filtered the scriptural topics through classicism and invested their best efforts to rewrite religious texts in the elegant Virgilian style, Haydn comments, considering the language of the Scriptures as undesirable (260). This approach to Christian motifs intertwined with the classical world brings to mind Erasmus of Rotterdam, who proudly affirms: “I was able to make philosophy a celebration of Christ” (Haydn 262), thus speaking along the principles of Saint Augustine, whose perspective was to put pagan science to serve faith.\(^{15}\)

The first example of religious poem as *imitatio* of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, as Rossi observes, is the *Antonias* (1437) by the humanist Maffeo Vegio (1407-58). It narrates the life of the holy abbot Anthony, who by divine exhortation set off to pay a visit to Saint Paul, found him on his deathbed and was finally acclaimed in Paradise with high honors. The ascetic element in Vegio does not eradicate the humanist. One goes along with the other. This poem, Martin suggests, opens the road to a line of texts dedicated to the blend of the medieval and classical and of the sacred and profane (20). The *Antonias* is Christian in its subject and still openly classical in its form, as Rossi implies: “[…] se in luogo delle Muse e di Apollo vi sono invocati ispiratori Cristo e Antonio, Virgilio ne è pur sempre il

\(^{15}\) “Humanists who lead this movement were for the most part, sincere Christians; Thomas Aquinas and others close to him accepted and underwrote the marriage between faith and reason, between philosophy and science, and religion […] the moment in which St. Thomas adopted Aristotelian philosophy and “baptized” it, reason became the most loyal companion to faith” (Haydn 187).
modello nell’intonazione, nei paragoni, nella dizione; e Dio, nell’Olimpo parla come Giove; Lucifero, rector Averni, come Plutone” (192).

The religious poem is not a genre apart from the others, but perfectly integrated in the cultural setting of its period, participating in the humanistic style with the attempts to restore a modern Latin literature (207). This is the reason the poems of Battista Spagnoli (1447-1516) were so widespread in Europe. With him the great classical-Christian epos begins. The poet ties classical mythology with forms of popular literature, giving life to a new literary production. With Spagnoli, continues Chiesa, the Renaissance of the modern times begins, proposing a new literature in which classical values marry Christian traditions (208). The Parthenices, published in 1481, is a collection of his hagiographies.  

16 Chiesa writes: “[...] e’ stato infatti il destino degli umanisti sacri italiani del Quattro e Cinquecento essere noti, più ancora che in Italia, in Europa, dove toccò loro di fare da maestri di Umanesimo: in Francia, Spagna, Germania e Inghilterra .I primi cultori dell’umanesimo furono uomini di chiesa, che cercavano nei nuovi studi un mezzo per far progredire i propri, uno strumento per intendere meglio Aristotele e la Bibbia” (Chiesa 207).

17 “Battista Spagnoli wrote 55.000 lines during his life, three times more than Dante Alighieri. His poems were of high quality, in Latin; he did not write only in verse, but also narrative works. He was one of the most cultured men of his time, a colleague and a friend of that group of wits that formed the basis of the Great Renaissance. He was a monk, too, an earnest Carmelite who was steadily on the quest for the good in his order and in the whole Church: that is why most of his poems deal with religious themes; that is why Erasmus von Rotterdam defined him as the Christian Virgil.” http://www.itis.mn.it/dodicisecoli/ing/spagnoli/index.htm.

18 In three books are the lives of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Catherine of AleXandria; in one book are collected the lives of the holy virgins Margaret, Agatha, Lucy, Apollonia, and Cecilia. In three books are the lives of Saint Dionysius Aeropagita and Saint Nicolas of Tolentino, in two books the one of Saint Biagius and that of Saint George in one book.
Parthenices has a repercussion on minor poets such as Alfonso of Calabria, author of Parthenias in 1499, whose topic is the virginity of Mary, as well as on major writers such as Sannazzaro (1458-1530), who in his De partu Virginis (1526), divided into three books, evokes the birth of Christ, celebrating the message of peace, justice and brotherhood of mankind. The first book is dedicated to the annunciation, the second to the visit of Mary to Elizabeth and to the birth of the child; while the third is dedicated to the acclamations of the shepherds to the holy child. With Sannazzaro’s De partu, the work begun by Spagnoli comes to a climax. ¹⁹

In the De partu the Christian element loses any anti-humanist characteristics and is in harmony with the pagan world. ²⁰ Sannazzaro continued to look at his poem as a moment of high synthesis, overcoming the dogmatic topic of the virgin birth that also constituted the poem’s supporting myth. The same is valid for the influence that Egidio of Viterbo had on Sannazzaro. ²¹

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¹⁹ Borsetto writes: "[…] il De partu Virginis del Sannazzaro e la Christias del Vida […] realizzati attraverso il concurso di una materia Cristiana classicamente ripronunciata, e di una classicità risemantizzata e modernamente reinventata in chiave di allegoria e di prisca theologia, secondo la lezione già fornita in tal senso, alla fine del Quattrocento, dai tre libri della Prima Partenice di Battista Spagnoli; si posero senza dubbio fra gli antesignani più prossimi dell’opera tassiana” (“Muse cristiane vs. muse pagane” 203).

²⁰ Zabughin comments: “Tutti i mezzi della smagliante tecnica poetica antica vengono messi a disposizione dell’arte Cristiana: ma non per ciò il poema diventa né mera esercitazione retorica su temi obbligati, né ibrida e meccanica fusione d’elementi disarmonici” (181).

²¹ This influence dates from Egidio’s visit to Naples in 1498-1501 and continues in the following years until Sannazzaro’s death in 1530 (Deramaix 57). Egidio da Viterbo was a convinced Ficinian. From his work emerges a continuous osmosis among theology, neoplatonism and orphism.
Egidio of Viterbo (1469?-1532) made himself the voice of the profound desire of religious reform (Demeraix 53). He dreamed of a more radical *renovatio* in which the Church was the foundation conceived as archetype of the Roman Empire – the Roman Empire being merely the precursor – which the Middle Ages inherited and which Egidio revived in the religious and literary world. Thus Catholic humanist authors of the 1500s onward at times envisioned themselves as the representatives of a new literary message with a religious content; their mission was to exalt the validity of the Christian doctrines against the incumbent threats of the Protestants on one side and the Saracens on the other, hence mirroring their historical times in their actuality (57). The Catholic humanistic canon therefore established for the sacred epic by Sannazzaro and Vida (1485-1566).²² left a mark on various levels in the elaboration of later works, all in vernacular, such as the *Gerusalemme liberata*. This poem in effect acquired its topic from the “istoria non gentile, ma cristiana” (Borsetto, *Muse Cristiane* 206).²³

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²² He wrote a considerable amount of Latin poetry, both secular and sacred, in classical style, particular the style of Virgil. Among his best-known works are the didactic poems in three books, *De arte poetica* partly inspired by Horace, and *Scacchia Ludus* translated into many languages over the centuries. Both poems were first published in 1527. His major work was the Latin epic poem *Christias*, in the style and much of the language of Vergil.

²³ See also Baldassarri, who affirms: “La soluzione tassescana del meraviglioso verosimile, nelle sue implicazioni sul versante del diabolico, chiaama dunque in causa, accanto alla tradizione romanzesca, una linea classica, ‘virgiliana’ che da Virgilio appunto e Claudiano passa attraverso il *De partu Virginis* del Sannazzaro [...] non ha prima della Gerusalemme altre attestazioni nella tradizione ‘volgare’” (“Inferno” e “Cielo” 42-43).
The second half of the 1500s saw the composition of the *Battaglia celeste tra Michele e Lucifero* by Antonino Alfano, a noble man of Palermo (1568), and the *Angeleida* by Erasmo of Valvasone (1590). Both poems evoke the celestial battle which springs from the envy and pride of the most beautiful of the angels and concludes in the fall from Paradise of Lucifer along with his rebel army, which in the following years became the subject of other poets such as Milton (1608-74) in his masterpiece *Paradise Lost* (1658-64).

In both authors the defense of the divine origin of the world has a clear ideological merit: it serves to defend their values based on the *Bible* against the attacks of a science which is rapidly developing and intends to demonstrate, poetically, the natural origin of terrestrial and celestial phenomena. Considered as great literary works, they are also essential components of the cultural climax that was forming in the second part of the sixth century, which ended up in the seventeenth century with the “Galilean revolution” (Borsetto, *Muse Cristiane* 149). It is an unconditioned glorification of biblical truth and a declaration of disapproval for an all-human science, as Borsetto states: “Si trattava di esalare la fede opponendola integralmente al sapere umano, di ribadire una ‘creazione’ del mondo, e non un’evoluzione di esso nel tempo da scoprire con il solo ausilio della ragione” (*Muse Cristiane* 148).

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24 We have not made much progress since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since we are still having heated debates about Theory of evolution vs. Intelligent Design.
Tasso’s Discorsi, and the Christian “Meraviglioso”: For a Theory of Biblical Epic

In the second half of the 1500s, Tasso participated in a debate on the epic. His theoretical work is considerable and was conceived to solve the poetic questions which rose during his literary production. Sozzi explains that it originated from a necessity for specific clarifications, and a personal reflection about the problems the historical moment mirrored, in function of his personal literary activity.26

The Discorsi dell’arte poetica (1587) and the Discorsi sul poema eroico (1594) are, as Baldassarri maintains, the only “ritratto completo” of the Renaissance “awe” (18). They define principles seen as universally valid and give a vision of the basic assumptions that characterize the epic genre, in order to describe the process and the stylistic-syntactic touches necessary to create “awe,” with the intent of bringing, mentions Scarpati, the experiences of vernacular

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25 For Tasso’s theory of the “meraviglioso verosimile,” see Discorsi sull’arte poetica e del poema eroico (6-8). Also on the Discorsi, for more in-depth studies, I refer to Baldassarri “Inferno” e “Cielo” and Giovanni Baffetti’s edition of the Dialoghi with the introduction by Ezio Raimondi.

26 Sozzi explains: “Nati dal discorso personale, per necessità di una chiarificazione interiore, come strategia e risoluzione dei problemi teoretici, largamente criticati dai letterati del suo tempo, che nel Tasso furono sperimentati e soffirono direttamente il dolore della produzione letteraria, e si adattarono alla soggettività del suo poetare. Essi costituiscono una mediazione tra la teoria e la poetica, tra l’abilità tecnica e la poesia” (La poetica del Tasso, in “Comitato per le celebrazioni di Torquato Tasso” 55).

27 In Dell’arte del dialogo, with notes of Baldassarri.
literature to the height and dignity of classical literature (17). The *Discorsi* was conceived by Tasso as a way to communicate moral and constructive ideals valid for the reader. Starting with the concept for which a pleasant form is the most suitable method to communicate an intellectual content, Tasso states that the “awe” is the gratifying vehicle, as long as it is “verisimilar” to the reader. Tasso thus stipulates that his theorization of the supernatural Christian is the only form of “wonder” appropriate to his contemporary epic:

Io dico che il poema eroico è una imitazione di azione illustre, grande e perfetta, fatta narrando con altissimo verso, affine di giovar dilettando, cioè affine che il diletto sia cagione ch’altri, leggendo più volentieri non escluda il giovamento. (62)

For the above reasons the *Discorsi* is also the first treatise that develops a theoretical analysis of the epic poem. As Baldassarri concludes: “La soluzione tassesca del meraviglioso verosimile, nelle sue implicazioni sul versante del diabolico, chiama dunque in causa accanto alla tradizione romanzesca, una linea […] che da Virgilio appunto e Claudiano passa attraverso il *De partu Virginis* del Sannazzaro e soprattutto la *Christias* del Vida” (43). The function of the structure of the “awe” in the organization of the narration, adds Martin, underlines a specific line that unifies the several attempts of the writers devoted to sacred epic in the 1500s (60). According to

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28 Scarpati explains: “[...] nella seconda metà del Cinquecento la riflessione sul fare letterario acquistò in Italia un’organicità e un’accelerazione che stanno all’origine della moderna consapevolezza dell’agire poetico” (3-4).
Baldassarri, in fact, “episodiche traduzioni entro i parametri del tempo e dello spazio (e dunque sul piano della storia) accomunano la metafisica guerra fra bene e male, tra ‘inferno’ e ‘cielo’” (27).

**Sannazzaro's *De partu Virginis***

The religious epic poem matures at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the verses of Sannazzaro, one of the major representatives of the literary genre; its hexameters, meditated and reworked for over twenty years, are firm and controlled (Zabughin 179). Although the poem is centered upon the nativity, Sannazzaro encircles it with a cluster of other Gospel stories: the annunciation, the visitation of Elizabeth, the adoration of the shepherds, brief glimpses of the presentation of the Temple, the massacre of the innocents, the crucifixion, the representation of hell, and so on. In addition, there are other scenes of the poet's invention: evocations of the shiny halls of Heaven, adorned with decorative angels; a descent to Limbo, where King David prophesies the advent of the Messiah; the personification of the Acheron River. All of this various material is fitted neatly, even precisely, into the three books which comprise the poem. The structure indeed is carefully crafted, for each of the books is in turn divided roughly into three sections, and the sections tend to respond to one another symmetrically. So, the descent of Gabriel to the Virgin in Book One, for example, is balanced by the descent of
the allegorized Laetitia in Book Three. Sannazzaro, a true humanist, is highly influenced by the Latin poetry of Vergil and Ovid. Scholars like Calisti have been able to point to specific passages of the *Aeneid* or Vergil’s *Eglogues* which might have inspired a given detail. For instance, after the Immaculate Conception, Fame leaves the house of the virgin, descending to the Avernus, notably similar to Virgil’s, where she announces the birth of the Saviour and thus creating turmoil.29 The *De partu* is the product of an age entranced with classical culture. It is difficult to exaggerate the fascination which antiquity exercised for several decades upon the educated Italian mind. Certainly no other country experienced any comparable humanistic awakening and in no other country is neo-Latin literature so integral to the cultural history of its time. There is scarcely a biblical proper noun in the whole work: “Neither Gabriel, nor Mary, nor Joseph, nor Jesus, not David, nor Elisabeth is named directly once, although all figures are in the action” (Green, *The Descent from Heaven* 153).

The proper nouns that appear are drawn from mythology: Tethys and Amphitrite, Cerberus and Pluto, the Muses, Apollo and

29 Calisti comments: “Nel *De partu Virginis*, dopo la concezione della Vergine, la fama scende con la solita rapidità nell’Averno, per annunziare la nascita del Redentore e vi porta lo scompiglio. Le reminiscenze virgiliane abbondano qui come altrove, anzi, il trovarci così bruscamente dinanzi a un oltretomba pagano, mentre ci aspetteremmo che il poeta avesse, almeno quest volta, messi da parte i classici, ci sconcerta un po’. Il contrasto fra l’episodio dell’Annunciazione, d’ispirazione cristiana, quantunque rivestito di colori classici, e la inaspettata descrizione dell’Averno, è stridente. Per quel che riguarda L’Averno si potrebbe giurare che il poeta non ha usata altra fonte che Virgilio e questa ?vale? per la forma e per il contenuto, giacchè il Tartaro sannazzariano è un luogo muto, triste, desolato, pieno di rumori e di ululati, come quello dell’Eneide” (64).
Proteus. This mythological machinery reaches its highest point when the feet of Christ, walking upon the waves and surrounded by Nereids, are kissed by a reverent Neptune. It is an irony typical of Rome in the early years of the Reformation period that the *De partu* was acclaimed by the then Pope Leo X as a “potential weapon” against the German heretics. But in fact the poem’s reception overseas was quite the opposite, as Green points out: “He could not have understood that in all its essential qualities, the poem was calculated to alienate them [the Protestant Reformers]: its studies on classicism would offend their anti-Humanism, its stylistic smoothness their anti-formalism, its emotional facility their stern integrity, its humanizing of God their Augustinian awe of Him” (160). Unaware of all these contradictions and anticipating his success through the words of Sannazzaro, Leo X had his high hopes even expressed in a letter composed by the talented Bembo. In it, it is stated that Sannazzaro’s *De partu* is considered to be the work of the Divine Providence and he is seen as the defender of the Roman Catholic Church: “Tu sei il devoto David che combatte con la sua fionda l’armato” (Toffanin 42-43).
Chapter Two

II. Battles and Wars in Heaven
The literary potential of “war in Heaven”, to use Revard’s expression, has ancient and distinguished lineage among poets and writers. The Bible provides some references to war in Heaven; however, they are not extensive, only in Revelation 12, 7-9 and in Isaia 14, 12-15 we find mention of Lucifer’s rebellion.

Outside the Bible the first references to the concept of Satan bringing battle to Heaven appear in hexameral poems of the early Christian period. ¹

Early Judeo-Christian convention proposed that Satan had been expelled from Heaven at the hands of the archangel Michael (Robbins 123). References to this celestial battle occur also in Dante’s Divine Comedy; however, detailed delineation of this war in Heaven, as referenced by Revard, does not occur until the Renaissance (130).²

¹ Prose restricted to the commentary of expatiation on the cycle of terrestrial creation during the span of six days with the seventh reserved for resting.

² In Dante’s Inferno VI, reference to Michael (representing Christ) recalls the rebellious angels and their fate, thus confirming also the association of Pluto with Lucifer. But Michael is also associated with the end of time when he will combat the Antichrist and, as Christ’s surrogate, see to the distribution of heavenly rewards at the Last Judgment. Thus, a number of patterns result: the association of Cerberus, Lucifer, and Pluto on the one hand, and on the other, Michael, DXV, and Christ; and also a series of opposing pairs—Veltro-lupa, Michael-Antichrist, Michael-Lucifer (and rebellious angels), Michael-Pluto, and Fortune-Pluto. Canto VII, then, points to a triangular relationship among Pluto, Fortune, and Michael in an upward moving hierarchy from Hell to Earth to Heaven. The antithetical relationship among the various figures has its universal counterpart in the struggle between the forces of good and evil. In sum, the specific and the general, the temporal and the eternal, come together in Inferno VII through the figures of Pluto, Michael, and Fortune in a way suggesting the larger design of Dante’s poem.
Robbins points out that already in Saint Augustine, the subject of fallen angels had become a proper subject for inclusion in these Latin poems and narrations (122). It was believed that the angels had been created during the span of the first six days, most likely along with the creation of light. They had fallen within this same span, probably when the darkness was separated from the light.³

It is important to recognize that references to Satan and the war that led to his expulsion from Heaven appear in the earliest poetry of the church. The aim of much Christian poetry was not to present history, but to praise God and to comment upon the mystery and magnitude of his powers, as Rossi observes (186). In Gregory the Great’s works, we read that the war in Heaven was Satan’s original war of rebellion. His work suggests that the archangel Michael expelled Satan from Heaven, thereby setting the stage for the final battle on earth, a battle which is yet to be resolved (76:1251).

Most medieval poets were content to merely allude to this war in Heaven in their paraphrasing of the scriptures with a pedagogical intent. In contrast, in those Renaissance poems and plays that

³ Augustine justifies the allegorical reading of Genesis in this way: “To me it does not seem incongruous with the working of God, if we understand that the angels were created when the first light was made, and that a separation was made between the holy and the unclean angels, when, as is said, -God divided the light from the darkness; and God called the day light Day and the darkness He called Night.- For He alone could make this discrimination, who was able also before they fell, to foreknow that they would fall, and that, being deprived of the light of truth, they would abide in the darkness of pride” (Augustine, City of God, bk. 11, chapter 19, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., 2:215).
address war in Heaven, we find very detailed passages. It is reasonable to propose that by virtue of the fact that so many Renaissance writers explored this theme, they developed a new literary tradition, some more didactic than others. Thus gradually heavenly “war” begins to have a prominent place in poems dealing with the creation. It is true that war receives only cursory treatment in Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas (1544–1590) La Sepmaine, and Tasso’s Sette Giornate del Mondo Creato, it is a key event in others, specifically Gasparo Murtola’s (sec. XVI – 1624) Della creatione del mondo (1608); Alonso de Acevedo’s (1550? – 1648) De la creación del mundo (1615); and Mollerus (1571) De creatione et angelorum lapsu carmen (1596). The subject treated by all these authors is threefold, i.e., the creation, the angelic revolt, and the first sin of Adam. The three subjects are skillfully intertwined and effectively produce the unique drama of the “paradise lost.” Mostly these works are divided in six or seven cantos corresponding to each of the days of creation, which is why they are given titles such as La Semaine, or Le sette giornate or Hexamaeron, as mentioned earlier. Along with these didactic poems we find others that are more dramatic or epic in nature. These dramas are also devoted to the subject of angelic warfare. The most well-known examples include Antonio Alfano’s Battaglia celeste tra Michele e Lucifero (1568); Erasmo di Valvasone’s Angeleida (1590); Il caso di Lucifero (1582) di Amico
Agnifilo and Giovandomenico Peri’s five-act celestial tragicomedy *La guerra angelica* (1612).⁴ We can infer, especially from their titles, that the principal subject of each of these poems is the downfall of Lucifer and/or Adam.

While a comparatively large proportion of the community of Italian poets embraced and cultivated the subject of the celestial battle, it is important to recognize that many European writers viewed the war in Heaven as an even more important topic for poetry. Notable examples include the English poets Sir William Alexander (1567 – 1640), *Doomesday* (1614) and Edmund Spencer’s *An Hymne of heavenly Love* (1596). The German writers Naogeorgus (Thomas Kirchmeyer Naogeorgus, Thomas, real name Kirchmair (nr. Straubing, c.1508-63, Wiesloch),) and Friedrich Taubman published epics on the war in Heaven, including Taubman’s (1565-1613) *Bellum Angelicum* (1587). I have already mentioned Du Bartas’s *La Semaine* (1578) and Acevedo’s with his *Creación del Mundo* (1615). Finally, the Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel (1587 - 1679) wrote a full-length drama, *Lucifer* (1654), and *Adam in Ballingschap* (1664) on the subject of the archangel’s defection and the ensuing war; translated from the Dutch by Watson Kirkconnell, (1895 - 1977) in *Celestial Cycle*.

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⁴ Most of these works were known by eminent critics of this historical time such as Provasi and Kirkconnell; however, unknown to them was *Il caso di Lucifero in ottava rima del signor Amico Cardinal Aquilano, abate di S. Giovanni di Collimento*. L’Aquila: Giorgio Dagano, 1582.
Culminating with a much greater emphasis and argumentative complexity in its totality, adds Borsetto, is Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which outshines all of the above poems (5). In this masterpiece of literature, Milton provides lengthy description of the celestial combat and the description, by Raphael, of the six days of creation. However, Milton emphasizes most of all the rebellion and the original sin of Eve and then Adam.

Thus it can be said that the poets and writers of the Renaissance did not avoid the subject of heavenly warfare. To the contrary, they deliberately nurtured and cultivated it. As aptly stated by Revard, “war becomes the business of Renaissance poets” (147).

Within most of these sacred epic works, we can define five different movements in the development of the poem: 5

1. The introduction of Lucifer and his followers.

2. God’s discovery of Lucifer’s plot and His release of the loyal army headed by Michael.

3. The clash of the opposing armies.

4. The single combat of Michael with Lucifer, and God’s intervention to affect Lucifer’s expulsion from Heaven.

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5 By contrast, Thibaut de Maisières sees a trilogy: the creation, the revolt of the angels, and Adam’s sin. He maintains these three subjects strictly linked to the literature inherent and unique to “paradise lost” (100).
5. The aftermath in Heaven and Hell along with the celebrations of the faithful and the lamentations of the defeated rebels.

**Antonino Alfano: Battaglia celeste tra Michele e Lucifero**

The authors mentioned thus far in this exploration of the tradition of the sacred poem in the Renaissance, choose the life of Christ and Mary as fundamental subject matter of their narration, elaborating, in different styles, the subject treated in the Gospels. Alfano, in full-blown Counter-Reformation, dominated by the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, chooses a different account as the theme for his work: a tale before the beginning of time, when celestial spheres had just been created and the earth was not yet inhabited.

Antonino Alfano, a nobleman from Palermo, was also called “Solingo” by his fellow poets, the members of the Academy of the Accesi in Palermo, which was founded in 1568 under Francisco Ferdinand D’Avalos, marquis of Pescara (41). He published in Palermo, by Mayda, his *Battaglia celeste tra Michele e Lucifero* in 1568. The theme of this poem is explained in the incipit, which calls

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6 As we read in Borsetto, the *Battaglia celeste* is a poem by this rather obscure Sicilian writer, who wrote, in addition this poem, also a collection of songs, published in Palermo and addressed to the viceroy of Sicily and marquis of Pescara as homage on the occasion of the naval battle of Lepanto against the Muslims, for which the viceroy of Sicily was preparing his troops (5).

7 In *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* I. 257. See also Mongitore in *Bibliotheca Sicula sive de scriptoribus siculiss*, vol II.
to mind Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*,\(^8\) in the use of nouns emphatically placed before the verb:

La pronta fede, e l’honorate prove,  
de l’Arcangel Michel, nel sommo regno;  
il fatto d’arme, (non più visto altrove)  
contra il Superbo, di quel loco indegno;  
l’inaudito flagel, le gratie nove,  
in guideron del’opre lor condegno  
dirò se ’l basso stil fia così eletto  
ch’aggiunger possa a l’alto e bel soggetto. (*BC*. I:1-8)

Alfano suggests he is writing to pay a tribute to the Lords of the Inquisition and ultimately to honor the “infinite” God to whom he has the biggest obligation for all He has done for mankind.\(^9\) Unlike Ariosto’s poem but like Milton’s, Alfano’s narration of warfare does not exalt man, but rather he glorifies God as we read in his *Dedicatoria*.

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\(^8\) “Le donne, i cavallier, l'armi, gli amori,/ le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto” (*OF* 1:1).

\(^9\) A extensive study on the analysis of the Index of forbidden books has been described by Gigliola Fragnito and commented by Amedeo Quondam who eloquently summarizes her findings: “Con un dato in più, propriamente distintivo: questi libri/stampe sono coinvolti nei processi attivati dal Concilio di Trento e dall’Inquisizione, cioè sonosottoposti a severe procedure di filtraggio e di censura, dirette e capillari, che coinvolgono l’intero circuito della loro produzione, dalla scrittura alla stampa, dalla distribuzione alla conservazione nelle biblioteche di privati e di istituzioni religiose. Da questo punto di vista, che definirei di storia dinamica delle biblioteche e della loro conservazione/distruzione, e che in quanto tale si proietta fino ai dati odierni del Censimento delle edizioni italiane del Cinquecento, è stata certamente decisiva la puntigliosa ricognizione nelle biblioteche religiose e monastiche avviata inapplicazione dell’Indice clementino del 1596 (quello che interviene anche sulle tipologie poetiche dei volgarizzamenti biblici e della tradizione spirituale): gli effetti prodotti dai sequestri e distruzioni di copie dei libri proibiti sono, per noi, oggi, incalcolabili, anche se occorre pur sempre tenere conto del fatto che le biblioteche religiose e monastiche non esauriscono certo, né allora né in seguito, la tanto più articolata e ricca, nella diatopia e nella diaconia, fenomenologia della biblioteca classicistica di Antico regime.” (*Note sulla poesia spirituale e religiosa* 141)
The chronological narration of the heavenly battle is interrupted several times. Time and again, the poet intervenes in first person to introduce previous and subsequent facts to the battle. This narrative digression is implemented to underline the consequences of Satan’s war upon mankind. In the first canto, to give an example, after having described the creation of man in the Garden of Eden, Alfano evokes the fall of Adam and Eve, the first procreators, deceived by the snake, an episode which comes right after the celestial battle, which in his epic will take place in the third canto.

In the second part of the second canto, the poet establishes an analogy between the historical events and the heavenly war. The poet also develops a symbology of the terrestrial and celestial monarchy with the ultimate goal of exalting the “prince” as Vicar of Christ. Alfano thus suspends the account of the fabula to digress on the contemporary situation and its ongoing conflicts. As Borsetto underlines, Alfano reveals the repercussions of violence that mala voluntas brings to the earth. By doing so, he projects future battles with the exemplary punishments of the “holy and just war” made by the bona voluntas of his contemporary heroes, sustained and guided by God (10).

The Apocalyptic scene evoked by Alfano shows the ambition of Francis I to contrast Charles V: “Ecco Francesco e il figlio re di
Franza, / perché contra Carlo Quin to armato / prendon senza ragion
l’ingiusta lanza / han l’Italia, e la Spagna concitato” (BC. II: 64 1-4).

Alfano warns the reader about the Protestant threat of Luther
as rebel:

Ecco d’ambizion carco il Lutero
che fa setta, fa legge, anzi fa peste;
la difende il German con viso fiero,
de la cui falsità si nudre, e veste:
arma contra la Chiesa, el santo Impero
del successor, di PIETRO, e vuol s’infeste,
ond’è cagion di perigosoi danni,
con la guerra, e co ’l mel ch’asconde inganni. (BC. II: 63).

He also mentions the wish of power of the Turc Soliman:

Ecco il medesmo Scita, ecco il serpente
de l’Asia fier, che sol da voglia ria
spinge il Barbaro Campo assai potente
di gente, arme e cavalli a l’Ungaria” (BC. II: 64 1-4)

and again:

Ecco di novo il Solimano assalta
voler di soggiogar, fame d’havere
i guerrer de la Bianca Croce, e Malta
e qui fa molti danni uccide, e fere.
Ma Dio che spesso i suoi soccorre e essalta
così barbare genti e così fiere
vuol che FILIPPO Re di Spagna tolga
e l’armata del Turco in fuga volga. (BC. II: 66)

These historical and metahistorical events are intertwined in
the *sacred fabula*, where God decides to send the emperor to save
Italy, Germany and Spain: “Ma Carlo Quinto, fido imperatore, / che
dar vuol a’ nemici degna pena, / fa un essercito grande di valore.”
He continues a few lines later: “E manda Don Garcia saggio onorato,/ quasi Re di Sicilia, e del mare,/ ch’in Malta sol co’il suo nome ha spaventato/ lo Scita barbar, sì che ’l fa levare” (BC. II: 67 1-4).

**Structure and Content of the Poem**

In the first of the three books that comprise this poem, Alfano describes the characters and events that precede and lead to the war. The narration begins in the heavenly quarters when God, in the presence of the Son, creates the universe, the sky, the angels, and the winged spirits. Among all of these, Lucifer stands out for his extraordinary majesty and beauty. To the newly shaped creatures, God presents the Son, who is divine, yet with human looks, and orders that he be adored in Heaven and venerated on earth:

Mostra il suo caro ed unico figliuolo
a quelle intelligenze rare intiere
(per cui nel ciel’ esso leggiadro stuolo
fu fatto, e gli elementi, e l’alte sfere)
cinto di vel terrestre, ed egli solo
preso del servo le fattezze vere,
bandisce poi che ’n ciel con molti onori
sia riverito, e ’n terra ognun l’adori. (BC. I: 108)

All the heavenly inhabitants agree with the divine decision except Lucifer, who cannot accept that the Son, with an “inferior” appearance, is to be destined to receive such high honors. The rebel leader, boiling over with wrath, hate, envy and pride, plots war. His
objective is to overpower the Father and the Son and crown himself the lord of the Heavens.

In the second book, Lucifer launches his attack. He summons a large number of angels and prepares to go to war, deaf to the voice of reason, who tries with no success to stop him from doing such a dreadful deed. God, realizing the gravity of the situation, also prepares to counterattack with the help of his faithful angels, headed by the Archangel Michael. The third book is dedicated to the description of the harsh battle, in which the faithful angels win and the rebels subsequently are expelled from Heaven and fall in the “loco indegno,” transformed into monsters.

The Final Battle between Lucifer and Michael

The Bible is not only the Great Code of modern times. It is also the text by means of which, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western Christianity defined itself through conflicts, such as those between Catholics and Protestants and between Christians and Moors. It is exactly from this scenario that Alfano draws his primary source to narrate the first war fought in Heaven between the rebel and faithful angels. In the first canto the narrator recounts the origin of the creation described through a linear series of events as illustrated in Genesis, in the Gospel of John, the Apocalypse, and elsewhere in the Bible.
The *Battaglia celeste* narrates the actions of a prideful Lucifer who, envious of the Son of God, grows afraid of losing his state of grace and hatches a plot to confront the Father. Alfano describes a mad battle, finally won by the immense force of the faithful multitude of angels guided by Michael, with the subsequent fall of Lucifer, now transformed into Satan, and his followers from the Heavens. All was already written in the eternal book: “Il Moto, è lieve Tempo, à noi prescritto, eravi in questo eterno libro scritto” (*BC*. I:7, 7-8). This passage offers a theological reference to Free Will, a theme of much importance in this work.\(^\text{10}\)

To create a heavenly battlefield, the poets of the sacred epic genre turned from the *Bible* to poems that had most persuasively and skillfully described human and superhuman warfare, as Revard suggests (148). Epics of Homer, Hesiod, and Virgil, along with the chivalric poems of Ariosto, Tasso and others, inspired Alfano, Valvasone, Murtola, Vondel, Du Bartas and Milton. Particularly valuable were the writings of Homer and Hesiod, whose epic works were becoming popular in the printed editions of the sixteenth century. Publishers in this period printed Latin and original Greek translations side-by-side.

\(^{10}\) The *De coelesti hierarchia* of pseudo-Dionigi, St. Augustine’s *De genesi ad litteram* (II 13-18, 23-32) and St. Thomas’ More *Summa* and *De malo* offer the theological content of the angelic confrontation rooted on the ability to wield Free Will.
In the *Iliad*, for example, the poets could find leaders assembling an army and setting it in motion against an enemy. A “superhuman warrior” – to use Revard’s expression – like Achilles or Hector could be used as a model for a warring Lucifer or Michael. However, it can be argued that Homer may not have been the primary and immediate source of inspiration. Imitators of Homer abound, from Virgil to Tasso, in his battle scenes in *Gerusalemme liberata* (150). Italian poets quite reasonably may have found it more accessible and easier to imitate Tasso’s version of a battle strategy than the writings of Homer or Virgil. For example, Alfano’s council incites the rebel angels to go to war against the High Lord:

L’arme prendiamo intrepidi e valenti  
e facciam guerra a quest’alto signore  
che non li val di noi, benché eccellenti  
fossemo, e virtù è in noi degna d’honore. (*BC*. II: 30 1-4)

Here he might be modeling this scene on the one in *Gerusalemme Liberata*:

Ma che rinovo i miei dolor parlando?  
Chi non l’ha già l’ingiurie nostre intese?  
Ed in parte si trovò, né quando,  
ch’egli cessasse da l’usate imprese?  
Non piú dèssi a l’antiche andar pensando  
pensar dobbiamo a le presenti offese  
Deh! Non vedete omai com’egli tenti  

Likewise, writers who describe Michael as a Greek god or hero may be thinking not of Homer’s description of Ares or Apollo but of
Tasso’s Michael (GL. VII: 80-82), who wields his lance and is protected by a diamond shield. Ultimately this picture of God in battle is Homeric, but the influence of Homer is indirect rather than directly conveyed. Thus the angels are described as valorous soldiers, ready to go to war, with technical talent of war experts and impeccably headed by their highest commander in chief (Revard 155).

The topos of the assembly of the armies elaborated in Alfano exudes with majesty and fright. In the Battaglia celeste we find a detailed description of many winged soldiers and their squadrons. Anticipating many poets, including Milton, Alfano purposefully singles out the captains/angels by giving them names and providing detailed character descriptors, thereby rendering poetically important elements in the tradition of angelology.11 This descriptive tendency contrasts with Valvasone’s Angeleida, in which only Michael the Archangel is a “named” character.

The squadrons, led by their captains, march in review before their lord with standards held high:

In tanto ogni Guerrier, valente e desto
sta pronto, e ogni insegna al Ciel si spiega.
Ma vuol pria ch’ogn’un passi in questa chiostra
davanti lor, Signor, con bella mostra. (BC. III: 26)

11 For further information of angelology see the Book of Enoch. Of particular interest are Davidson’s comments in his introduction on angels: “At first I thought that angels, named angels, were to be found only in the Bible. I soon learned that, on the contrary, the Bible was the last place to look for them. True, angels are mentioned frequently enough in both the Old and New Testaments, but they are not named, save in two or three instances. Virtually all the named angels in this compilation are culled from sources outside Scriptures. [...] The Koran names seven angels: Gabriel, Michael, Iblis chief jinn in Arabian mythology, counterpart of the Judean-Christian Satan” (ix).
Gabriel, one of the most prominent captains, is depicted as an extraordinary warrior covered by his “celata.” He guides his courageous soldiers, who are likewise protected by gleaming armor encrusted with fine gems:

Di lucidi arme, e di minuta maglia
schiera si mena, e di valor armata,
il gran nuntio Gabriel, che quanto ei vaglia
a gli occhi il mostra, sotto la celata.
E ricca d’arme, ha core di muraglia
e di valor, in Ciel molto lodata.
Fregiate ha ciascun l’arme d’assai belle
gemme, che resplendean più che le stelle. (BC. III:27)

Like a resplendent army, the majestic assembly of winged soldiers advances before God, accompanied by the rhythmic drums of war:

Vanno con tardi, e misurati passi
davanti al re, ch’in maiestade siede
gli scelti fanti, non con visi bassi;
co i tamburi accordando ogn’uno il piede. (BC. III: 28)

Raphael, exuding power and fearlessness, follows the troops, who mirror the same valiant and strong characteristics of their leader:

Con quel medesmo andar, segue la coda
di questa fanteria, Raffael degno
chi lodar vuol, finezza d’arme loda
di costui l’arme, il suo vigor, l’ingegno.
Dentro la fede, e fuor, bellezza annoda
questi arditi guerrier, d’honor sostegno.
Passan vivaci, e con ferocitade,
che nemica si mostra di viltade. (BC. III:29)
The sequence of the numerous glorious mili
tes continues with the description of Uriel, who in perfect
preparation for battle leads his company with its flapping ensigns:

Con bella mostra il folgore di guerra
Uriel viene, ed ordinanza molta.
Le vaghe insegne radeno la terra
spiegate all’aure, e maneggiate in volta.
Felice è il Ciel, che tal compagnia serra,
ove è valor, e destrezza raccolta,
Honor, virtude, e di battaglia ogn’arte
che spiegar, non le può, Parnaso in carte. (BC. III: 30)

Then Barchiel, outfitted with flawless, shiny armor, follows Uriel. Barchiel’s future is rich with promise, and his destiny is to defeat and overthrow his adversaries. He is fearless:

Compagnia nata al’honorate imprese,
di lieve cinta e lucida armatura
Barchiel coraggioso, a le contese,
seco si porta, fuor, d’ogni paura. (BC. III:32)

Sealtiel represents the rear guard, and he closes the gathering with his solemn figure, bearing brightly faceted precious stones. Like his contemporaries, he displays his indignation toward the rebellious fiends:

Con viso altiero e animoso sguardo,
che difender il Ciel giura, e promette
viene Sealtiel per retroguardo,
di valor cinto, e d’arme assai perfette.
Nessun di quei soldati è vile o tardo,
ch’in un le voglie lor sono ristrette
di far vendetta e di mostrarsi arditi
a lor, caro Signor, fidi, ed uniti. (BC. III: 33)
Alfano provides minute details, describing the precious and golden armors of the angelic armies. Their protective apparel is rich with precious stones, which are emblematic of their deep faith. Thus equipped, the troops are ready to fight the “infidi,” their power bolstered by ornately decorated armor:

Ecco ciascuno al’arme di gran pregi
corre, e ch’il petto s’arma, e chi le braccia.
Altri corazza d’honorati fregi
di gemme e d’oro, e lucente elmo allaccia,
E parte di quei visi arditi, egregi,
la spada cinge, e lo scudo s’imbraccia
ch’il dardo piglia, e chi sua lancia prende.
E chi a mestieri dela guerra attende.

L’arme, che i petti a questi arditi armaro
le braccia, i fianchi, e le persone rare
e una candida fede, pegno caro,
che ’l tempo non porrà giamai disfare.
E un’Amor, del qual tanto s’ornaro,
che più d’ogn’altro in Ciel ciascuno appare.
Queste le spade fur, con che fur vinti
gli infidi, e i fidi poi di gloria cinti. (BC. III: 22, 23)

With the exception of the description of Lucifer’s transformation into a monster, Alfano does not provide similarly rich detail for the rebel angels other than giving them a name:

Ha carico Asmodeo di quella schiera
che si nudrisce sol nel fango e ride
e Belzebub di più d’una bandiera
ch’invidia d’altrui ben lo rode, e uccide
gente ebra Beelfagor, conduce e austera
che nel’vin par, che fin, a gli occhi annide
vanno con Bealberic pien d’ira squadre
et Astarot con voglie pigre ed adre. (BC. II:36)
At this point in his *Battaglia*, Alfano depicts a Lucifer, “Duca empio e superbo,” who, assailed by fear, sends his ambassador Asmodeo, to speak to Michael. His objective is to explain the many reasons why they are protesting God’s decision to require the angels’ devotion to his Son. Lucifer also attempts to redirect Michael’s allegiance (“altre ragioni haria da persuaderti” *BC*. III:41,1) and to align with the rebel armies:

Come fu avanti al Prencipe honorato
l’ambasciador, del Duca empio, e superbo
il mio Signor, (disse egli) m’ha inviato
a te, che contra lui sei fatto acerbo.
Egli seco amicizia ha gia serbato
et io con lui con tutti gli altri serbo,
e serberassi sempre ferma e calda
da noi con fe, pur che tu vogli, salda.

S’egli l’arme ha gia preso e vuol battaglia
far contra Dio, che la battaglia in campo
ha posto, ̀è perché par ch’à Dio non caglia
di te e di lui, perché di rabbia avampo,
ma tu dovresti vestir, piastra e maglia
se brami al’onte e agli oltraggi scampo,
e difendere uniti (con gran cura)
l’eccelsa nostra angelica natura. (*BC*. III: 36-37)

For the rebels, the battle is fought for their honor. God has decreed that all angels will be subservient to the Son of God. The decree runs counter to the view of the rebels, who do not feel their spiritual “being” is less than the “being” of a human:

Quest’è sola cagion, solo per questo
caso Lucifer s’arma e non li pare
sopportar, che nel Ciel, con tutto il resto
egli habbia un huom di terra a venerare,
anzi la vita vuol perder, più presto
l’esser, lo stato (che son cose care),
ché dirsi mai ch’un Angelo non sia
giulior de l’uomo, o che suggetto sia. (BC. III:40)

Lucifer’s messenger, Asmodeo, appeals to Michael’s benevolence; he wants to avoid conflict, but Michael, fuming of “santa ira,” sees through, and after a few verbal exchanges with Lucifer in person, replies:

Sol per complir coi tuoi pensier, ribaldi
spedisci il messo e non per altro oggetto
ma si scontrar, co i miei, ch’erano caldi
in fe, che gl’interdissero l’effetto.
Questa partita dimmi come saldi
importuno, villan, cieco, imperfetto,
che trattando di farti novo Dio
con fraude persuadevi pensier mio. (BC. III:59)

God, like Zeus, resides in a wonderful palace, with tall towers adorned with rich sculptures. He sits on a sumptuous throne, from which he justly governs his court:

Il sommo Re, cui il ciel deve adorare
come fattura di sue larghe mani,
un secreto d’amor vuol palesare
a questi suoi celesti cortegiani:
come qua giù si vede che suol fare
signor terreno a gl’intimi e soprani,
o servi siano, o amici (per usanza)
che lor scopra un secreto d’importanza. (BC. II: 107)

Michael, in the first part of the second canto, tries to persuade his heavenly legions to go to war to save their honor:

Da voi vedete ben senza ch’i dica,
gli oltraggi che ne reca, i biasimi, e l’onte
colui, ch’in vesta misera, e mendica
assiso è in sedia, com humana fronte.
S'egli haveva cara, amava, e volea amica
nostra natura, haria le voglie pronte
a farle oltraggio? in dir che stia soggetta
a cosa, che da se vil è imperfetta? (BC. II:27)

Michael continues a few lines below, in a very personal and
democratic tone emphasizing the honor to be saved through their
faith: the only weapon they have:

A me par, se a voi par, che parer bene
devria a ciascun di voi quel che dir vi voglio:
Poi che d'honor si tratta, e d'alto bene
d’oltraggi, biasimi offese, e di cordoglio.
Sol’una (al creder mio) n’avanza spene.
e da legger omai resta un sol foglio:
l’arme è la speme, questa è la difesa,
per oviar così importuna offesa. (BC. II:29)

As Borsetto points out, of nine companies of angels, only part
of one company takes arms against the Heavens to fight. Some
angels remain neutral, and decide not to go to war (10).

Di questi novi chori un chor s’aduna:
parte di questo contra ’l Ciel congiura,
parte e’ neutrale, e non fa guerra alcuna. (BC. II:14, 1-3)

God exhorts Michael to take the sword and enter into combat:

“Prendi l’arme Michel”, and Michael, after arguing first with Asmodiel
and then Lucifer, appeals to God for strength and valor:

12 For more information on neutral angels see Borsetto (10). In Tomas’ More Summa, for
instance, only a minority of rebellious angels break away, we also see this in Dante’s Inferno III 38-39. In the BC, Alfano specifies that only a third of the angel rebels and turns against his brothers. However, we cannot find this distinction in Milton nor Valvasone. There is no mention of the neutral angels in the Bible except in a controversial passage of the Apocalypse (3 15-16) in which the angelus tepidus is mentioned.
Dammi questa vittoria la qual chieggio
hoggi Signor, da te che'l cor, ti diedi,
non indugiar o Dio, da l’alto seggio,
a d’armi aiuto (che'l bisogno vedi)
tra me comprendo fuor di dubbio, e veggio,
che senza te non vaglio, onde concedi,
ch’io possa hor, hor, con questa Gente armata
vincer, il suo nemico e la giornata. (BC. III: 64)

The start of the battle is signaled by a cacophony of trumpets,
thunder bolts, and flaming arrows. The rival troops of ferocious
demons are portrayed as dark, shady, proud and condescending:
“contra color, armati d’arme nere; / ombre rie di Satan, superbe e
fiere” (BC.III:69, 7-8).

Michael and Lucifer duel like two epic rivals in the same
manner as we read about Homer’s Achilles or Hector battling their
enemies:

Il general del Ciel MICHEL s'affronta,
col feroce Dragon, superbo et empio
et in giust’ira, et in audatia monta,
per far, di quel gran fallo strazio e scempio.
Ah traditor (dicea) con sangue, e onta
pagherai il fio, che devi in questo tempio;
et s’appressa à costui, che fuggia ratto,
e con valor, l’assale; e fere à un tratto. (BC. III:81)

Bolstered by strong weapons, and spirited by a strong desire
for victory (one side to conquer the celestial spheres, the other to
insure the divine domain in Heaven), both armies fight with great
valor. The end of the war is directly influenced by God’s intervention
and spiritual support. Toward the end, regardless of the fact that both
troops have equal power and will, the good angels prevail. The enemy is compelled to seek shelter:

Ma fanno insieme si grave pressura
i fidi, a questi infidi congiurati,
che son costretti à prendere, altro calle,
e voltar, à pressori, e piedi, e spalle. (BC. III: 76, 5-8)

The rebel angels lose their courage; they are terrorized by the power of the strong and faithful angels. Shivering, they run away, dodging arrows and blows:

Al premer, al urtar, di Guerrier, tanti,
al mostrar, di quei fieri arditi volti
son fatti quei nemici si tramànti
ch’in tutto di valor, son privi e sciolti. (BC. III: 77 1-4)

Strengthened by divine intervention, the holy and faithful troops avenge the offenders, inflicting punishment upon the disobedient troops until they flee:

Hor, qua hor, là scorrendo, mai non cessa
di far, vendetta; e di punir, quel male
l’esercito Divin, che spenta, e oppressa
ha si la Turba ria, che nulla vale. (BC. III: 93,1-4)

The disloyal troops are dispersed and now a fierce battle begins, one on one, between Lucifer and Michael. Alfano gives a detailed description of the action and the way the two adversaries deal with each other. The “corpo a corpo” fight ends with Lucifer’s defeat. This scene, even with its violence and chaos, conveys a
poetic image of the defeated, after the “horrid” losses life, honor and Paradise:

Come del mal fu à terra il primo seme
MICHEL li salta adorno e lo cavalca;
pose mano al pugnal lieto di speme,
mentre con man, con un ginocchio 'l calca.
Li da un colpo nel petto, e 'l cor, li preme,
e questi, che da l’esser, si diffalca,
con orrendo occhio, e spaventoso viso
lascia l’honor, la vita e ’l Paradiso. (BC. III: 85)

It is not simply, suggests Revard, “a little superior expertise in arms that wins the day for Michael” (244). It is God’s power.

The infernal kingdom becomes a reality at the end of the epic, when the rebel angels fall into the dark dungeon where Satan is the sovereign.\(^{13}\) Whereas Battaglia celeste lacks a description of Hell, the narration instead focuses on the Heavens, before the fall of Lucifer. At the end of the poem, with the vision of Heaven now rid of the “new monsters,” there is a description of the “first snake,” who quickly leaves, intent on his goal to “fabricate Hell”:

Poscia che fur, del mal gli Autori uccisi,
et luoghi abandonar, tanto honorati;
tosto le belle membra i grati visi
in nove brutte forme hanno cangiati (BC. III: 130,1-4)

Hor, ecco il Ciel, che d’ogni intorno scuote

\(^{13}\) The Hebrew meaning of the word Satan is “adversary.” In Numbers 22:22 the angel of the Lords stands against Balaam “for an adversary” (satan). In the Old Testament books (Job, Chronicles, Psalms, Zechariah) the term likewise designates an office; and the angel investing that office is not apostate or fallen. He becomes such starting in early New Testament times and writings, when he emerges as Satan (capital S), the prince of evil and enemy of God, and is characterized by such titles as “prince of this world” (John 16:11). Reading back into Genesis, medieval writers like Peter Lombard (1100-1160) saw Satan in the guise of the serpent tempting Eve” (Davidson 261).
i novi Mostri, dal suo seno eterno.
Fu primo il Serpe, che da l’alte Rote
fugge veloce a fabricar l’inferno.  \textit{(BC.III:131, 1-4)}

Amid the triumph of the faithful angels, an allegorical Victory
crowns Michael appointing him Prince and warrior laureate. In fact,
the entire infantry is crowned:

Con quella man, che coronato havea
Michel, corona gli altri Fanti rari.
Altri in oro, altri in gemme si godea
il capo adorno, e altri in Lauri chiari.
L’immortal Dea Michel con amo spingea
su ‘l carro, e dice con accenti cari:
Trionfa in questo Ciel Principe eletto,
che quel che pò di Noi t’el manda detto. \textit{(BC. III, 98)}

The end of the third canto concludes with the exhaltation of the
just war and the valor of the faithful angels that had been able to
guard the concepts of honor and loyalty.

**Lucifer, “L’Angelo più bel” \textit{(BC. II:7,1)}**

As the most beautiful of the angels, Alfano’s Lucifer is first
described in his original glory:

Sopra quegli honorati novi Regni
(Come piu bella, e piu eccellente luce)
Lucifero vi pone, e mostra segni
Che sopra ogn'Angel sia Prencipe, e Duce,
I piu chiusi a costui misteri, e Degni
(comme piu presso a lui) scuopre e adduce
Questi piu d’altri, è bello, et più sereno
Et è di Sapienza, e gratia pieno. \textit{(BC. I: 98)}

Alfano’s Lucifer wishes to sit in God’s seat and assume the
throne of the most high. This desire is no empty blasphemy; it is
tantamount to a challenge to war. However, besides “rationalizing Lucifer’s ambition,” comments Revard, many poets suggest a stronger motive for his challenge to war, namely his “loss of place,” or the now obvious unattainability of a throne now occupied by the Son of God.

It should be noted that Lucifer is first moved not because he desires a higher place, but because he feels the place he now occupies is dishonored (Kirkconnell 203). New honors given to the Son, the everlasting Word, made Lucifer feel he lacked sufficient admiration.\(^{14}\) Lucifer, angered to learn that he is to revere the only son, God incarnate, chooses to act upon pride that will ultimately result in his rebellion and subsequent banishment from Heaven, ending in the transformation into the prince of evil:

Mentre dal Padr e in Ciel si facea editto
e fatto carne il figlio ogn’un vedea,
e recava il pensier su gli occhi scritto,
E per lo Ciel silentio si facea;
Lucifer piu d’altri il cor trafitto,
di quel parlar, di quella spoglia hauea,
e d’ira & d’odio, e di superbia abbon da,
qual mar che per gran vento gonfia l’onda. (BC. I:131)

Non potea senza orgoglio, e senza affanni
di cor, veder quell’honorata spoglia.
Era tutto di frodi pieno e’nganni,
di perversa, malvaggia, e fiera voglia;
dona principio à suoi, e d’all’altrui danni
mentre s’attrista dentro l’alma, e addoglia.

\(^{14}\) Heywood’s Lucifer tells God he prevented the angels from bowing down before the Word incarnate and thus provoked war with God. He offers the following interpretation: “God from all eternity decreed, that his own Sonne, the everlasting Word / who all creatures Being doth afford, /by which they first were made) should Heav’n forsake, /and in his Mercy, humane Nature take” (Kirkconnell, Celestial Cycle 339).
Mentre pensa di far quel tanto ond’egli
sia à Dio nemico, e gli altri al male svegli. (BC. I: 132)

To Lucifer, it is intolerable that he, created first by the divine mind, should now be required to serve the Son of God. Lucifer's ire is further exacerbated by his disdain for the human nature manifested by the Son of God. He contrasts his own incorruptible and immortal essence, his beauty and sublime presence, with man's vile substance and low origin. Lucifer's high rank as the most splendid of the angels further supports his conviction that he should not bow before man as God requests:

Mostra il suo caro, et unico figliolo
A queste intelligenze, rare intiere,
(Per cui nel Ciel esso leggiadro stuolo
fu fatto, e gli elementi, e l’alte sfere)
Cinto di vel terrestre, et egli solo
preso del servo le fattezze vere
bandisce poi che' n Ciel, con molti honori
sia riverito, e'n Terra ogn'un l'adori. (BC. I: 108)

Lucifer's *mala voluntas* assumes control of his fate. Now, despite the fact that Lucifer possesses all the talents, he decides to plot against God. It is his final choice. In fact, the conflict between Heaven and Hell, between Lucifer and God, between the faithful angels and the rebel angels, is integrated within a specific teaching of Free Will, in order to show the action of divine justice against the perversion of evil.
As previously noted, Alfano lived in a time of significant conflict among competing interests. It can be argued that Alfano was motivated to support the teachings of the Catholic Church and used his skills as a writer to reach the laity, namely: to convey essential theological doctrines in a language and manner that were both attractive and instructional.

It is in this context that the war between Michael and Lucifer, a war waged before time against rebel angels, mirrors the conflicts that were familiar to Alfano and his contemporaries. These conflicts are supported by Christianity against internal and external enemies. As Borsetto summarizes, “l’universo cristiano di senso della pugna spiritualis articolato dalla scrittura essendo riportato all’idea del bellum iustum et necessarium che connota la ‘teologia della crociata’ dell’epoca, al nuovo malicidium da consumare contro eretici e infedeli” (2005, 6).

Alfano, in first person, narratives how the faults of mankind shape Lucifer’s prideful act:

L'Angel più bel che ne le sedie eccelse
si godea, e gli altri di beltade adorni
a l’ira hai persuaso, a stringer l’else,
onde la pace lor turbi, e i soggiorni.
Cerchi malvaggia in Ciel quel che Dio scelse
amico far nemico, e i lieti giorni
cangiarli in tristi, e darli sempre in Terra
ghiacci, flamme, sospir, lacrime, e guerra. (BC. II:7)
Alfano continues by describing horrible acts, hate and betrayal, and ruination of kingdoms and cities because of Lucifer’s abysmal act of haughtiness:

Quanti stupri per te quante rapine  
Si veggono quanti odij, e tradimenti,  
Quante di Regni, e di Cittá ruine,  
Quanti huomini per te sono dolenti,  
Le sacrosante cose alme, e divine  
Cui deveno honorar, l’humane genti;  
Son per te vilipese, e’l Cielo spreacci  
E sol te stesso nesciun altro prezzi. (BC. II: 93)

Lucifer’s rebellion has stirred many treacherous revolts; Alfano specifically brings to mind the mythical rising of the giants against Zeus as a close model:

Il centiman per te crudo Briareo  
colmo d’affanni ala porta di Dite  
fa le vigilie, perche audace feo  
ingiuria al Ciel, con le sue forze ardite.  
El superbo fratel empio Tifeo,  
che pronto il festi a’ncomenciar la lite;  
da celeste saetta fu percosso,  
et inarime [sic] essergli volta adosso (BC. II: 4)  

Thus Lucifer continues his horrid transformation into the Prince of Darkness. Generally, the image of Lucifer, as the most beautiful angel, does not influence the physical image of Satan. In fact, in very few cases his initial splendor is described or iconographed.

Similarly, Alfano’s depiction of battle projects various images of Lucifer that is supplanted by either a monster-like figure of "fiero

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15 “inarime” can be interpreted as “unarmed.”
Gigan te” (BC. III:58,1), a dragon that exudes raw power courage like Briareus or Tiphoeus; or is represented as a mortifer Basilisco (BC.II:13, 7), mythical winged creature that could kill with its gaze, or he is transformed into “an Idra [...] che tra le fere, è la più brutta fera” in contrast with the illustration of Michael associated to a lamb: “MICHEL di rosso asperso un bianco Agnello havea” (BC. III: 73,3-5).

While plotting against God, he is still Lucifer: “Lucifero comanda ch’ognun s’arme / Da poi che la risposta hebbe compresa” (BC.II:34,5-6). At the moment of defeat by Michael, he is depicted as a culpable snake (a universal image of the devil):

L’avvelenato Serpe in fretta scorre per quella gente sparsa e già perduta e con parole à se la cerca accorre... (BC. III:79 1-3)

As we saw earlier, the serpent in his contemporary meta-historical digression, Alfano compares the Shiites to the Serpent to characterize his “literary” crusade against Islam or heretics.

“Prendi l’arme Michael! [...] Prendi l’arme per CHRISTO!”

Michael is the true hero of the sacred epic. The first canto, octave 4, contains the invocation to a glorious Michael, protagonist of the battle and true source of inspiration. In his narrative digression of the first canto, Alfano jumps ahead to the end of the battle revealing to readers the resolution of the “fatto d’arme” of the work’s Incipit, namely, the triumph of good over evil. He appeals for insight (and
perhaps tries to find a reason to the historical turmoil he is witnessing); he hopes for a favor and intercession in order to find the right words to better describe the war initiated by the rebellious angels:

Gioioso Michel cui sacro e ergo
Questo picciolo ingegno, e queste rime:
Aspiratmi (che puoi) volgiti a tergo,
e dammi il tuo favor chiaro e sublime,
sendo al primo splendor, nell’aurago Albergo,
gradita stella, prima tra le prime;
don’io possa poi dir secco in terra
la chiara tua vittoria, e la tua gloria (BC. I: 4)

Alfano exalts Michael, the victorious hero of the Apocalypse (Rev. 12 7-9), as the new miles Christi of the church and the empire. He depicts his Michael as an equivalent of Tasso’s Rinaldo during the crusades. During Alfano’s time there is a need to establish a role model who fights against the Scythia dragon (“dragon di Scitía”) and, as Borsetto comments the “barbari” who were followers of Luther (2005, 7).

Michael’s character is further developed in the third canto, when God calls him to fight the evil enemy. God turns to Michael because he is strong, loyal and equipped for leading the battle:

Il Signor, de gli esserciti che stava,
nel suo bel Regno al’altra parte Australe.
e tutto quel vedea che si trattava

16 “And there was a great battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought, and his angels. And they prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven. And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world. And he was cast unto the earth: and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev. 12, 7-9).
dal suo nemico, contra se di male
chiama il forte Michel, che venerava
il verbo avvolto in quella spoglia frale,
et alzando la man del ben fautrice
con un sol dito segna e così dice. (BC. III: 8)

On multiple occasions, God, the Monarch, exhorts Michael, the
general, to take action:

Vedi quel disleal su l’Aquilone,
Caro MICHEL, con mille squadre intorno
di folli spiriti, che ciascun dispone
darmi l’assalto, e farmi si può scorro,
di me piu no li cal, ne di ragione:
ne men di questo luogo santo, adorno,
di pace, d’humiltà, d’Amor, di fede:
ove sol è il mio Imperio, e la mia sede. (BC. III:9)

and a few octaves later:

Prendi l’arme MICHEL, prendi hora tutta
questa nostra militia celeste:
e quella gente assali iniqua, e brutta,
che sol superba e vanagloria veste:
e faccisi che tosto sia destrutta,
e del mio Regno spenta quella peste
che queste loggie, e questi Campi ameni
ho fatto, per pacifici, e sereni. (BC. III:13)

and again:

Prendi MICHEL, avventuroso prendi
l’arme per CHRISTO (come far gia mostri)
e de gli altri seguaci i cori accendi:
perche contra’l nemico s’armi, e giostrì.
E per te il fallo, e l’offesa s’emendi
fatt’al Signor, è a te, ne suoi bei chiostri,
ch’io veggo apparechiar Sedie, e Corone
tesser, à i tuoi, nela Real Magione. (BC. III: 21).
It is obvious that the angelic forces resonate with the timbre of the Tridentine and Post-Tridentine time with the message emanating from the nineteenth Ecumenical Council. The faithful are exhorted to take arms and fight against the rebellious and the unbelievers. Lucifer’s deception is implicitly equated with Protestantism, while the misguided belief of the rebel angels is equated with the Scythies. The faithful angels become invested soldiers of God and, like real Christian armies, fight against the fanatic Protestants on one side and the Muslims on the other. They bring enormous force to defend the celestial quarters. On this regard Rovetta writes: “L’immagine dell’angelo in paramenti militari, che lotta contro il diavolo, rende facile la contaminatio con l’immagine del cavaliere epico” (24).
Chapter Three

III. Valvasone’s Angeleida
**Erasmo of Valvasone: His Life and Works**

Valvasone's works, especially the *Angeleida* (1590), were considered important during and after his lifetime because they reflect the major conflicts of his time, namely, the tensions between and among Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. As a faithful supporter of the Church, he tapped the energy inherent in the myth of the celestial crusades to give momentum and authenticity to his warnings to fellow Catholics about external forces that threatened the sanctity of the Church and contemporary society.

Valvasone was smitten by classical literature, the tone of which permeates his writings. He also applied the *gravitas* of history to portray his exultation of Christian values – the very values that were under siege during his time.

The development of a traditional biography related to Valvasone’s life is problematic because information about his life is incomplete.¹ We know that the Valvasone family originated from the family of the Counts of Cucagna. Around the end of the thirteenth century, the family split in two main parts: the Freschi and the Valvasone.

The Valvasone family assumed their name from the homonymous castle. The head of the family was Simon, who had two sons, Rizzardo and Odorico. Six generations after Rizzardo came

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¹ Most of the information is found in the publications of Liruti and Tiraboschi later on summarized in the publication by Colussi's in Circolo culturale Erasmo di Valvason.
Erasmo of Valvasone, son of Modesto. Born in 1523, Valvasone devoted his life to literary activities because he, unlike his predecessors, was disinclined to participate in public political affairs. Colussi suggests that part of Valvasone’s reason for rejecting an active political life lies in the limited realities of his social condition; he was a minor feudal lord and was prohibited from aspiring to a higher office (188).

Conversely, in the literary sphere, he could hope to obtain a distinguished position (99). Moreover, since his feud was between two much more prominent political authorities, the Austrian power and the Venetian Republic, he was marginally active and in some way constrained to a non-functional political role. During his youth he was an enthusiast of hunting, which made him physically fit, deduces Baiardi. Later on in his life, Valvasone laments his ailments from an incapacitating gout (91).

Despite his debilitating illness, he was nevertheless very active: he went to Venice in 1587 for the inauguration of the Academy of the Uranians. In 1592, Valvasone was invited to the

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2 The source of the biographical information is mainly obtained from the publication of the Circolo Culturale Erasmo di Valvasone.

3 As Valvasone mentions in his Dedicatoria of the Angeleida, his last work “sostenta una persona tutta podagrosa e cagionevole.”

4 The Academy of Uranians was a legacy of the Platonic Academy founded by Marsilio Ficino, one of the most notable humanist philosophers of Italian Renaissance, an astrologer, and a reviver of Neo-Platonism. He influenced key academic thinkers and writers of his day and was the first translator of Plato's complete literary production into Latin. His Platonic Academy in Florence attempted to revive Plato's school and influenced enormously the direction and tenor of the Italian
court of Mantua. He died a year later and the whereabouts of his tomb are uncertain (Colussi 92).

Valvasone experimented with many types of poetic and literary genres. As he comments in his Dedicatoria to the Angeleida: “Avendo tentato nella mia gioventù quasi tutte le maniere della poesia.” However, he arrived at this kind of sacred poetry through the composition of the Lacrime della Maddalena, first published in 1587, and followed by several editions during his life. He is well known for the poem Caccia, which exalts the hunting goddess Diana. Caccia was his last published work, and, interestingly, it is the poem which secured his stature among his peers. Valvasone was able to experiment with a variety of literary styles because he lived and worked under the flag of the Republic of Saint Mark. The republic’s independent attitude created an environment that was notoriously supportive of the arts. Because of this, Valvasone did not have to fight censorship, as did Tasso, argues Colussi (114).

There are four sonnets and two songs written by Valvasone that merit attention since they have connotations that likely led him to the creation of the Angeleida. The sonnets and songs also have historiographic importance because they were written about the wars against the Turks. The four sonnets and two songs are dedicated “Al...
Serenissimo don Giovanni d’Austria generale della Santa lega [...] per l’expeditione contra Turchi et per la vittoria ottenuta” and are found in the Rime.⁵

One of the poems in the Rime was written before and another after the victorious battle of Lepanto, as Colussi points out; the first one is very long, consisting of ten stanzas of fifteen verses each. In this work, the poet exhorts his hero to exterminate the Turks (89).

The second poem is comprised of eight stanzas each of twenty verses. It has some merit, because the poem was imitated; in fact it has a “certa somiglianza di concetto colla nota ode del Monti al signor di Motgol fier.” Valvasone describes the praise that Tiphys, the helmsman, earned for avoiding the threats of the sea and delivering the Greeks to their destination and for defeating the Turks (Colussi 95).

Other literary works by Valvasone worth noting include a translation of Statius’s Thebaid. It was published in 1570 in Venice. Recently it has been re-edited by Cesare Pavese, with comments. Valvasone chose to write it in rhyming octaves, for a total of three thousand stanzas, divided into twelve books. Despite the fact that it is a translation, he allows himself three digressions. In the first

⁵ *Rime*, published twenty years prior to *Angeleida*, is significant because in several instances we can read paraphrasing of his *Rime in Angeleida*. Borsetto adds: “l’*Angeleida* proietta in gran parte sull'intemporale scenario della *fabula* cristiana l'animazione mitologica delle *Rime*, rimuovendo l'attualità dell'impresa antiturca di cui erano intrise, nondimeno in più luoghi alludendovi per il ricorso all'identica, stratificata, memoria letteraria deputata a enunciare (2002, 181)
digression, in the first book, he dedicates the work to the princesses Lucretia and Eleanor d’Este.

The second digression is a long, encomiastic excursion about several important kings and princes—Maximilian and Philip of Austria, Cosimo de’ Medici, Guidobaldus from Urbino, and others. The third, and most singular digression, is about an imaginary assembly of the “Argie,” a group of women from Friuli, whose model of virtue he describes.

Valvasone purged Statius’s *Thebaid* of its defects, as Pavese asserts in his notes, in such a way that “quasi serpe che trapassi da stagione a stagione, nel passare da una lingua in un’altra ha in modo lasciata tutta quella rozzezza di che veniva incolpato, che se n’è rimasto tutto dolce, facile, piano, intelligibile, ed in ogni parte pieno di somma utilità e dilettazione” (243).

Valvasone was unquestionably a man of letters of the second half of the sixteenth century, but Baldassarri adds “non de’ migliori”: the exaggerated style, the emphatic tones, along with the pompousness and sonority of Lucan were alive in Valvasone (100).  

After being accepted in the Academy of Uranians in Venice, he takes part in one of the gatherings with his own translation of Sophocles’s

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6 As we know, Dante in his *De vulgari eloquentia* mentions Lucan, along with Ovid, Virgil, and Statius as one of the four *regulati poetae* (ii, vi, 7) and in the *Inferno* ranks him side by side with Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Virgil (IV, 88).
*Electra*, which was “applauditissima.” Valvasone’s version used free verse in heptameters and hendecasyllables.

**Angeleida**

Erasmo of Valvasone’s *Angeleida* (1590) opens with a Foreword to Lorenzo Massa, who was secretary of the Venetian Republic. His intention is not only to explain his literary project, but to also identify the underlying reasons for the literary tradition of looking to the Holy Scriptures as a compelling and meaningful source of inspiration.⁷

Valvasone, who read and admired Tasso’s work, unsurprisingly reflected the well-known writer’s ideas, and affirmed that poetry did originate from religion as a vehicle for introducing sacred topics. Because Valvasone was recognized by Tasso in one of his sonnets, we can deduce that Valvasone felt honored and had an immense admiration for the illustrious Tasso, which explains the reasons why Valvasone’s ideas on poetry mirrors Tasso’s. Also, he gives the example of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*, in which he “poetando attorno una storia religiosa, ci ha invitati ad una lettioni se non sacra almen pia” (*Dedicatoria* 2).

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⁷ On the significance of the topic chosen by the poet, Flamini affirms: “L’Angeleida è un poema sacro come le *Lagrime di San Pietro*, ma non fu scritto per espiare i peccati letterari dell’epoca precedente, tratta bensì del genere poetico letterario che sembrava all’autore il più nobile e dignitoso. Nuovo al soggetto: la battaglia tra Dio e Lucifero; sincero e vivo il sentimento che ha ispirato il Valvasone nella sua opera” (233).
Pious men, dedicated to divine worship, also devoted themselves to the creation and enjoyment of poetry in order to communicate the complex message of *sacra theologia*. Their intention was to educate the reader while providing a meaningful moment through the “awe” that defines the biblical epic genre:

[...] è stata opinione, e tutta via di molti grandi huomeni nelle lettere, che la poesia traggia la sua prima origine dalla sacra Theologia in questo modo: che volendo quei primi huomeni, i quali erano tutti dati al divin culto, honorar Dio, e da lui qualche gratia ottenere, immaginassero questo sorte di ragionamento molto lontana dal parlar della roza plebe per l'altezza delle parole, per la dolcezza dei numeri, e per la gratuitá dei misteri alla grandezza di Dio piú vicina e conforme: e anco perché la soavitá dell’armonia piú facilmente rompesse la ferocitá di quegli animi anchor senza leggi e gli allettasse all’ammirazione, e alla riverenza della divina maestá, e all’assenso dei sacrificii, che se le offerivano. (*Dedicatoria* 3)

The works of artists of this time were designed to counter what they saw as an increase in moral and social decay. The artists wanted to redirect the energy spent on singing about profane or audacious love, toward the restoration of poetry, as Valvasone aims, to its original principles. This desire to educate through meaningful and inspired poetry is the primary reason why Sannazzaro, Vida, Tasso and many others chose piety and religiosity as their central themes.

Valvasone observed that when a culture’s worship of a single God (monotheism) changed to a polytheistic belief, the culture’s poetry transforms to accommodate the form(s) and object(s) of poetic
expression. In this way, the culture becomes idolatric; the people inadvertently direct their adoration to the classical gods from mythology (Martin 34):

Ma perché per la irreparabile fragilità humana le sante istituzioni a lungo andare si vanno hora scemando, hora guastando, e bene spesso del tutto perdendo, avvenne poi, che essendo rivolta gran parte de gli houmeni alla idolatria, e cedendo alle suggestioni del demonio, quella prima semplicità poetica, credendosi pure di honorar Dio, fu torta a cantar amori, adulteri, stupri, e mille altre sceleritá di Giove, di Apollo, e di tutta quella confusa moltitudine de gli antichi Dei. (Dedicatoria 3)

Valvasone, like classical poets, seeks to anthropomorphize God. He emphasizes the similarities between angels and human beings to make his readers ponder the historical dynamic of his times. For instance, when Manzano asks: “perchè non si potrà agli dei falsi o bugiardi sostituire gli angeli? Perchè Michele di Mercurio non può prender la vice?” (Discorso 23).  

Poets agreed to the rules that were given for the epic and historical poem. What better topic for Valvasone than the war between God and Lucifer? This topic was new to his times—but it was not at all a new subject for classical poets who made use of their Gods to represent the battle between good and evil forces, as reflected in Valvasone’s observation: “sotto nome di giganti, che assalirono Giove l’un sovra l’altro i monti imponendo per farsi scala

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8 See Manzano’s Discorso sull’Angeleida.
This reference to the classical epics could indicate that Valvasone was inspired by writers like Hesiod, Ovid, and Claudian, who dealt with the war of the giants. However, there is no apparent similarity between Angeleida and the works of the aforementioned poets (Colussi 11). During Valvasone’s lifetime, poets who addressed religious topics faced prevailing prejudices against the representation of incorporeal beings, such as angels and God, in physical forms.

Valvasone considered the dilemma presented by anthropomorphizing God, discussing it with his peers. His resolution was, of course, to reject the conventions of the day, and he gave us his great biblical epic, the Angeleida.

The Fabula of the Angeleida

Valvasone’s Angeleida, published in 1590, carries on the threefold structure of Alfano’s Battaglia celeste. This structure is also seen in Sannazaro’s De partu.

Although the Battaglia celeste and the Angeleida describe the same heavenly conflict, each of the two authors addresses a different audience and each has a distinct intent. Despite their similarities in theme and their threefold structure, the writers give different content to each canto. In the Angeleida, the first canto presents the preliminary background; the second canto describes the battle; and
the third canto illustrates the beginning of the infernal city; the victory and triumph of the faithful angels.

Borsetto adds that Valvasone’s descriptions follow the “narratio obliqua” that was mastered by Sannazaro, Ariosto and Vida. Examples include the triumph in the third canto, the creation of the world “[terra]...effigiata nel manto di Dio” and God’s prophesy to Mother Nature in the first canto. This model, although oblique, is more elaborate and certainly distinct from the model adopted by Alfano (14).

A comprehensive analysis of the structure of *Angeleida* requires an understanding of the narrative flow of the *fabula*. Valvasone adopts the style of great poets like Ariosto, who was a master of the entrelacement, or intermittent narration, interrupting the first part of a scene to partially introduce a second one and move into a third one and so on.

An example of entrelacement is seen early in *Angeleida*. In the beginning, the world is perfect. A mild wind blows peacefully as the earth and angels are created. But this idyll is soon shattered by Lucifer’s rebellion against God (and to reappear later on). When Lucifer makes clear his desire to occupy God’s throne, the allegoric figure of Fame appears to warn the good and loyal angels and exhort against “lasciar serpere tanta nequizia in quei chiostri.” In response,
an angel sounds a trumpet, and the entire angelic flock flies up to the Heavens.

On learning of this conflict, Mother Nature, “la madre di tutte le cose,” shares her apprehension with God. After hearing her lamentation, the Almighty declares that all will happen according to his prescience. He foretells the fall of Adam, the universal flood, the dispersion of the Noachids, and finally the incarnation of the Word, the Son of God. Only when she understands God’s final intention does Mother Nature become content again.

The good angels arm themselves and divide into nine squadrons. Michael, their leader, calls them to combat and assigns each their duties. The armies of loyalist angels move to battle with the blessing of God. In contrast to their loyalist counterparts, the rebel angels take on a hideous appearance. They are accompanied to battle by monsters (“Menzogna, Spergiuri, Rancore, Furto, and Rapina”), who have escaped the underworld to join Lucifer’s army. The most hideous rebel is Lucifer, their commander, whose words incite them to war. God, to encourage his flock, promises he will fill the void left by the rebels. The two rival armies approach and begin the initial phase of the battle in which the rebel angels will be defeated. Before the final battle takes place between Michael and Lucifer, the two leaders engage in a verbal duel. In this duel, Lucifer
vainly attempts to support and encourage his army, and is defeated by Michael.

The rebels fall into the depth of the earth which had opened up to close them in. The rich, detailed description of the punishment of the fallen angels is intended to horrify the readers. Hell, guarded by the three-headed dog, Cerberus, is separated from earth by a swamp controlled by Charon, the transporter of souls, which clearly reminiscent of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (VI. 369) and obviously of Dante’s *Inferno*. Having suffered a decisive defeat, the fallen angels console themselves with the idea of seducing humankind.

In the meantime, the loyal angels’ rise to Heaven is described as a journey of splendor and perfection. Valvasone cleverly uses his description of these moments of joyous return to advance his admiration of his beloved Venice. For example, in Jupiter, the angels see the emblem of Pope Sixtus V and Venice, surrounded by Peace, Piety, and the Arts.

The seven women who belong to the procession assembled to celebrate victory, symbolize the three theological (faith, hope, charity) and the four cardinal (prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice) virtues. The victorious angels join the procession and together they go to God who receives them in his wonderful palace. Their approval of the palace includes admiration of the column on which “Fama” noted, with inscriptions, the victory of the angels, the fortitude of the martyrs, the wars
of Charlemagne, the crusade led by Godfrey of Boullion, the visit of Pope Alexander to Venice and the festive hosts of the senate. The victorious Michael places his trophy on the column, and the poem ends.

Critical Analysis of the Angeleida

There is a wide range of opinions regarding the importance and merit of the writings of Erasmo of Valvasone. On one end of the spectrum, critics offer only vague, poorly structured assessments. On the other end, his supporters cite Valvasone’s Angeleida as one of the best epics ever written.¹⁹

Some scholars, comments Colussi, “prediligono la Caccia e non si occupano dell’Angeleida.”¹⁰ Others laud the Angeleida and place Valvasone’s work within the highest level of poetic production. Perhaps this disparity is the result of the paucity of study concerning this artist’s literary works.

During the second part of the eighteenth century, one of Valvasone’s critics, Gaspare Gozzi, would often leave “la sua Venezia” to spend time in Friuli. It was during these trips that he conceived the idea, which never materialized, to publish the complete collection of Valvasone’s work (Colussi 87).

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⁹ See Manzano’s Discorso sull’Angeleida.

¹⁰ In contrast, as Colussi underlines, Valvasone started writing Caccia in his youth. Hunting was his passion and his hobby, and he kept his poem a secret only to be shared with his closest friends until he finally published it in 1591 (124).
Liruti, Manzano, Provasi and Tiraboschi were among the few who wrote formal criticism of Valvasone’s writings before the twentieth century. After their work, interest subsided until recently with studies by the Circolo italiano Erasmo di Valvason, Udine and at the University of Padua by Luciana Borsetto.

The first analysis of the *Angeleida* was published in 1595 by his friend, Scipione Manzano, who lived in the same region as Valvasone. Manzano’s *Discorso sopra l’Angeleida* has been criticized for being too subjective in its analysis of the *Angeleida*. This view is supported by Baiardi, who, as we read in Colussi, assigns only marginal value to the *Discorso*. It may be more useful to define Manzano’s work as a tribute to his friend. His criticism is based not on critical analysis and rigorous scrutiny, but on friendship (115). I concur with Baiardi when the latter states that Manzano’s analysis is too partial. This is especially apparent when Manzano elevates Valvasone above all other epic poets: “nemmeno il Tasso fa eccezione” (115). It should be noted, however, that Manzano does effectively link Valvasone to the epic poets of the Homeric tradition when he praises the title for its conciseness. The title is symbolic of a refined, and perhaps rather self-important, rhetoric of the time. According to Manzano, the title was precisely condensed in one word to emulate the highly regarded tradition of the great classical epic writers like Homer. Conversely, Valvasone’s contemporaries chose
periphrases for the titles of their works: *Battaglia celeste, Le sette giornate del mondo creato*, and *Il caso di Lucifero*. Through his use of some kind of minimalist rhetoric, Valvasone emphasizes the actions of the angels.

Manzano begins his *Discorso* with observations on the title of Valvasone’s *Angeleida*:

> Cominciarò dal titolo. Questo, che in scrittione chiamano i Latini è quel contesto di parole, o molte, o puoche, che siano, le quali si ponono nella fronte d’alcu libro [...]. Nel motto si ricerca brevità, e chiarezza, ne’ l titolo s’istesso, la chiarezza, accioche perfattamete dichiari l’intention dell’autore, e la brevità perche à un siffer d’occhi possi ognuno farsi di lei capace con somma lode dal Signor Erasmo, eleggendo egli il titolo d’una sola parola ad imitatione de’ buoni. (14)

The titles of literary works typically represent either the subject or the character(s) of the work. Manzano suggests that Valvasone very skillfully combines the two: *Angeleida* is both subject and object of the action:

> Poteva il Signor Erasmo appigliandosi un questa parte al particulare, comformare il titolo co’l principal personaggio del suo maraviglioso Poema, che è l’Arcangelo Michiele, ma accostandosi all’universale non però partendosi dal titolo personale, ha voluto intitolare il suo Poema *Angeleida*, cioè attion d’Angeli...(16)

By so doing, Manzano suggests, Valvasone is elevated to the sphere of the classical poets: “che si confronta coi Greci, è co i latini.” Furthermore, he believes that the number of syllables in the title is extremely important and can be seen as pivotal for embracing
the significance of the Platonist view: “e tra le più singolari lodi del
titolo è la breuità delle sillabe, è delle parole, è ciò benissimo
espresso nell’Angeleida, poiche non è formato questo titolo di più
d’una parola, nè di più sillabe, che di cinque numero tra ‘l minimo e’l
grande, che è il settenario è perciò perfetto [...] il numero quinario,
per il quale intesero i platonici l’anima, la quale [...] conduce alla
contemplazione” (17). Manzano’s observations are associated with
the neo-Platonist philosophy that saw a resurgence during this time.
Valvasone, in his Dedicatoria, writes that there is a long tradition
beginning with Greek and Latin in which the classics are read every
day, printed every day, and sold every day: “ogni di si leggono, ogni
di si stampano e si vendono” (10). Valvasone asks his readers to
accept him and to grant his wish to examine spiritual topics. Angels,
God and devils are abstract by their own nature, Valvasone asserts
in his opening text, and must be given physical qualities that help the
audience better understand their nature.

Valvasone was classically trained, and, accordingly, was
deeply influenced by the Neo-Platonic leanings of the prevailing
literary class of Venetian culture. We see this influence in his
commitment to creat compelling imageries to help his audience gain
a better understanding of the nature of the subject.

The artistry of poetry resides in the ability of the poet to
effectively create the idol, or better, the image that is the object of
human senses. Therefore the poet has to create by imitation of tangible things. Valvasone’s work corroborates the Platonic myth of the cave. In the *Republic*, Plato wrote, “he who sees with his eyes is blind,” and this idea is most famously captured in his allegory of the cave, and more explicitly in his description of the divided line. The allegory of the cave (*Republic* 7.514a) is a paradoxical analogy wherein Plato argues that the invisible world is the most intelligible ("noeton") and that the visible world ("(h)oraton") is the least knowable. The allegory of the cave (often said by scholars to represent Plato’s epistemology and metaphysics) is intimately connected to his political belief, that only people who have climbed out of the cave and cast their eyes on a vision of goodness are fit to rule. Plato claims that the enlightened men of society must be forced from their divine contemplations and compelled to run the city according to their lofty insights. Thus is born the idea of the "philosopher-king," the wise person who accepts the power thrust upon him by the people who are wise enough to choose a good master. This is the main thesis of Plato in the *Republic*, that the most wisdom the masses can muster is the wise choice of a ruler. Plato, through the words of Socrates, asserts that societies have a tripartite class structure corresponding to the appetite/spirit/reason structure of the individual soul. Productive (Workers) — the laborers, carpenters, plumbers, masons, merchants, farmers, ranchers, etc. —
correspond to the "appetite" part of the soul. Protective (Warriors or Auxiliaries) — those who are adventurous, strong and brave — form the armed forces. These correspond to the "spirit" part of the soul. Governing (Rulers or Guardians) — those who are intelligent, rational, self-controlled, in love with wisdom, well suited to make decisions for the community. These correspond to the "reason" part of the soul and are very few. Valvasone, for his part, believes that the poets too belong to this third class, those who through their intellect are freed from bondage and are able to see the light and life outside the cave.

His understanding is no longer constrained by the limitations imposed by the cave. Now free, he is compelled to describe life to the rest of the human species. Valvasone writes about the angels as images or allegories of the truth and goodness rather than their essence. By the same token, the devil and his followers represent Evil and Terror. The poets imitate the "antichi poeti della gentilità" who talked about their Gods, thus reducing them to the realm of the tangible. In epic poems of Christian tradition, there has to be an element of awe. This differs from the tradition of the classical epic poem. The Christian poet has to find the inspiration within the Christian supernatural world, as Biow observes: "[...] since the marvelous introduced into a poem must be verisimilar, this can be accomplished, Tasso claims, by attributing the presence of marvels
to a supernatural power capable of producing such effects, according to the shared beliefs of a presumably unified community of readers” (“Mirabile Dictu” 128).

These awe-inspiring ways of tangibly portraying the intangible signify the true ability of the poet. Manzano “diligently continues to explain the unique aspects of the Angeleida, which include unity of action, expert intertwining of plots, credibility of the fabula, and the dignity of the discourse” (Revard 35). It is the poet’s role to transfer the ethical-pedagogical message of the tale. This is how he captures the reader’s attention. The public pays attention only to what grabs them on the emotional level; they are fascinated by what is perceived as “true,” “close” and “possible.” If the poet fails to provide historical context, the reader rejects the story as false, discredits it and makes no emotional investment in it. This is why the poet is challenged to include historical context and build on it an interweaving of “verisimile.” By establishing “truth,” he convinces the reader that the story is valid and that the narration can occur:

Ma molto meglio è, a mio giudizio, che dall’istoria si prenda, perché, dovendo l’epico cercare in ogni parte il verisimile [...] ch’una azione illustre, quali sono quelle del poema eroico, non sia stata scritta e passata alla memoria de’ posteri con l’aiuto de’ alcuna istoria. I successi grandi non possono esser incogniti; e ove non siano ricevuti in escrittura. Da questo solo argomentano gli uomini la loro falsità; e falsi stimandoli, non consentono così facilmente d’essere mossi ad ira, or a terrore, or a pietà, or allegrati, or contristati, or sospesi or rapiti, e in somma non attendono con quella aspettazione e con quel diletto i successi delle cose, come farevvero se que’ medesimi successi, o in tutto o in parte, veri
stimassero. Per questo, dovendo il poeta con la sembianza della verità ingannare i lettori, [...] è necessitato di guadagnarsi nell’animo loro questa opinione di verità, il che facilmente con l’autorità della istoria li verrà fatto. (Tasso Discorsi 5)

As we read in Tasso’s Discorsi dell’arte poetica, the novelty of the tale is not found in the chosen material, but in “fabula verisimile” based on historical fact:

Si può dire che la novità del poema non consiste principalmente in questo, cioè che la materia sia finta e non più udita, ma consiste nella novità del nodo e dello scioglimento della favola. [...] Si che nuovo sarà quel poema in cui nova sarà la testura de i nodi, nove le soluzioni, novi gli episodii che per entro vi saranno trasposti, ancorchè la materia sia notissima e da altri trattata. (5)

Valvasone adheres to the tradition of the sacred/historical epic described by Tasso as pious poetry. He begins with the propositio of the subject dedicated to the peace maintained in Venice. He follows with the lamentatio, which condemns the struggles occurring throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. He continues with the invocatio to the Holy Spirit, who acts as Muse (Borsetto, Muse Cristiane Muse Pagane 202). The encomiastic tone to the Doge of Venice, a city portrayed as a joyful city, emblematic of peace and harmony, mirrors the peace and harmony that reigned at the beginning of times:

L’altra è, che trattando io la vittoria ottenuta da Michele contra Lucifero, per la quale il cielo rimase in perpetua pace, a nessun mi pareva che più per una certa somiglianza si convenisse che alla Repub. di Venezia, la quale in tutte le guerre che è stata astretta di pigliare ha avuto sempre per fine
non l’acquisto de gli altrui domini, ma la pace dei suoi soggetti, ed ora, essendo tutto il rimasò del mondo crollato dalle turbolenze e minaccie di Marte, sola quasi mantiene il suo felice stato in tranquillità ed in riposo, anzi, l’inscrizione della sua celeste inseagna altro non contiene che la pace. (*Dedicatoria* 20)

In the first canto, Valvasone contrasts the legend of the assault of Mt. Olympus with the “istoria vera” which he is about to reproduce in an allegoric and moralistic way. He laments the impending diminished status of a Europe suffering after a surge of wars. This stands in contrast to the peace resulting from the skilful administration of the “Serenissima”:

> Da l’uno a l’altro sol, sol tra noi lieta,  
> la bella Pace si dilata e stende;  
> la terra, l’aria, e ’l mar ride e s’acqueta,  
> e securò il pastor al grege attende;  
> qui la candida Fè, qui l’aurea Pieta,  
> qui la santa Giustizia albergo prende. (*A. I*:14 1-6)

Valvasone’s religious mission is to counter the immorality of the lewd tales of the literary tradition, which are in contraposition to moralistic “gestes.” As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, these events took place in the wake of the Council of Trent. The council exalted theological virtues and Christian heroes, in order to represent the ultimate success of those who believe in Christ and the “dignità dell’impero nel forte richiamo teologico alla crociata e all’apocalittico conflitto tra bene e male che la sotteneva” (Borsetto, “*Prendi l’arme Michel*” 289).
Valvasone drew inspiration from events that transpired during the 1500s. Europe and the Mediterranean were in tumult; the Turkish defeat at the battle of Lepanto became a significant point of pride for the Christian armies that were led by John of Austria, the illegitimate son of Charles V. Spain and England engaged in costly sea battles in their attempts to establish supremacy over the Atlantic. These conflicts ended with the catastrophic defeat of the Invincible Armada of Philip II. In the background, France was the battleground for competing religious factions:

Scorre per tutto l’oriente, armato
Di ferro e foco, il sanguinoso Marte,
Ogni cosa rivolta ed ogni Stato,
nè di sé lascia vota alcuna parte.
Gene l’occaso, e l’Oceano irato
Mille navi apparecchia, arbori e sarte,
onde, pien di furor, Tago e Tamigi
essercitin tra lor fieri litigi.

Oh, quale è da veder l’infausta imago
De la misera Francia, oh come offesa
Alto orgoglio la tien, che per lei vago
Movendo va più che civil contesa!
Le stesse Furie de l’inferno lago
Sonsene ucite, e la compagna han presa,
i tutto essendo pien d’ira e di foco,
loco non han le leggi in alcun loco. (A. I: 12-13)

Also Manzano believes verisimilarity is necessary to the epic poem, because poetry is imitation of nature. Specifically, it must accurately reflect the real world:

Io per me questa opinione non appovo, che parte alcuna debba nel poema ritrovarsi che verisimile non sia; e la ragione che mi muove a così credere è tale. La poesia non è in sua
natura altro che imitazione (e questo non si può richiamare in dubbio); e l’imitazione non può essere discompagnata dal verisimile, perché tanto significa imitare, quanto far simile; non può dunque parte alcuna di poesia esser separata dal verisimile; e insomma il verisimile non è una di quelle condizioni richieste nella poesia a maggior sua bellezza e ornamento, ma è propria e intrinseca dell’essenza sua e in ogni sua parte sovra ogn’altra cosa necessaria. (7)

The poet deals with history in a manner that is similarly applied by the historian. Tasso, however, asserts that while the historian narrates facts, the poet imitates them, maintaining them similar to the original purpose of the undertaking:

Ma non deve già la licenza de’ poeti stendersi tanto oltre ch’ardisca di mutare totalmente l’ultimo fine delle imprese ch’egli prende a trattare, o pur alcuni di quelli avvenimenti principali e più noti che già nella notizia del mondo sono ricevuti per veri. [...] Lassi il nostro epico il fine e l’origine dell’impresa, e alcune cose più illustri, nella lor verità o nulla o poco alterata; muti poi, se così gli pare, i mezzi e le circostanze, confonda i tempi e gli ordini dell’altri cose, e si dimostri in somma più tosto artificioso poeta che verace istorico. (88)

History considers things as they were; poetry tells facts as they should have been (Martin 55). History attempts to maintain the purity of events as they happened; conversely, poetry observes the universal, keeping to the main historical events: “[...] il vero, afferma Getto, è un semplice pretesto per attuare questo ideale poetico, un mezzo per acquistare fiducia dando un’illusione di serietà e di concretezza, [...] un veicolo di prestigio e dignità” (53).
This concept is also sustained by Kates: “[…] if a writer casts about for a historical subject offering “noble and illustrious events” from a postclassical period, neither so nearly contemporary as to be known in great detail to the living nor so remote as to demand customs that are foreign and therefore unlikely to delight, he almost inevitably comes to the matter of the romances, Arthur or Charlemagne, or to something equally grand from the same general time, i.e. the Crusades” (76-77).

Kates and Getto support Manzano’s assessment that Valvasone’s skill lies in the description of wonderful, astonishing, awe-inspiring scenes (90). Valvasone’s claims that the skills of poets exceed those of the painter are supported by his intricate weaving of angels, classical epic myths, and history. All these elements combine, under Valvasone’s skilled hand, to create art with dimensions not available to creators of figurative art.

Figurative art has a symbiotic relationship with poetry, a phenomenon known as ekphrasis. 11 When Manzano says that “la

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11 Ekphrasis denotes writing concerned with the visual arts, artistic objects, and/or highly visual scenes. Ekphrasis has its origins much earlier—as far back as the Classical era. The term is found in Aphthonius’s Progymnasmata, an early textbook on style. For example, Homer took great pains to describe the hero Achilles’s shield at the beginning of the Iliad. Furthermore, the end of the Romantic era did not signify the demise of ekphrasis. Although poetry about works of art is the most obvious form of ekphrasis, it need not be the only one as, again, ekphrasis can be about any visually powerful scene or subject. Since it is defined as representative of not only tangible pieces of art but also any expressly visual scene, ekphrasis can also be used to describe that which we see in our imagination. A consideration of Aristotle is helpful here; he wrote extensively on both the visual and the truth in conjunction with rhetoric—which he defined as “an ability in each case to see the available means of persuasion” (On Rhetoric 1.2.1). Some other statements from Aristotle also can illuminate this point: “Persuasion occurs through arguments when we show the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case” (1.2.6).—“Since few of the premises
pittura, la quale essendo stressimamente congiunta con la Poesia va ancor ella per gl’universali dimostrando la perfettion dell’imitator” (48). However, the written word goes beyond the painting: “[...] se il pittore, che è artefice se ben imitante, meno però perfetto imitatore del Poeta, il quale per convincersi usa colori & più marauigliosi, & con più vere imitationi và rassomigliando le nature de gl’Huomini, è de gl’Heroi può co le imagini adombrare e coprire molti segreti sotto quelli coloriti [...]”(49).

Moreover, poetry amplifies feelings of awe. The poet not only depicts the transmutation or alteration of natural subjects, as Kates maintained, he also introduces “new” species like Hydras, Centaurs, Briareus, Hippogryphs, and other creatures not found in nature. It is poetic license that allows the writer to alter the natural course of action or things. For instance, Manzano argues that Ariosto assigns to the pine tree physical attributes of the oak tree:

Ne stà si dur contro di Borea il Pino
Che renovate hà più di cento chiome,
Che quant’appar fuor de lo scoglio alpino
Tanto sotterra ha le radici (OF. XXI:16 3-6)

from which rhetorical syllogisms are formed are necessarily true [emphasis mine] [...] and since things that happen for the most part and are possible can only be reasoned on the basis of other such things, and necessary actions from necessities, it is evident that [the premises] from which enthymemes are spoken are sometimes necessarily true [only] for the most part” (1.2.14).—“[...] people do everything they do for seven causes: through chance, through nature, through compulsion, through habit, through reasoning, through anger, through longing” (1.10.7). As Aristotle points out in various places throughout On Rhetoric, we tend to believe what is reasonably possible and what is effectively argued. Aristotle points out that those who appear truthful are more likely to persuade than those who do not—actual truth is not at issue here, only that which is perceived (or seen).
What Ariosto describes does not accurately reflect the physical nature of the pine tree, whose shallow-growing roots lie close to the surface of soil. In this instance, the author changes the nature of the tree, and thereby “falsifica la realtà”. Manzano condemns falsification through application of poetic constructs if those constructs do not contribute to the creation of “awe.” Introduction of awe in poetic narration requires avoidance of “inverosimile”; it requires, according to Manzano, the selection of the supernatural aspects of the subject to better reflect the expectations of his time (22).

Aristotle’s *Poetica* confirms the validity of this approach, continues Manzano, “che nelle Tragedie si deve evitare la maraviglia, che è più lecito all’Epopée” (53). The “maraviglia” gives momentum to two distinct styles: universal and specific. Universal style stems from the perfection of poetic disposition and the balanced harmonies of the parts with the whole. Specific style derives from a defined or understood tale created through alteration or falsification of reality.

When well written, the specific style evokes awe in the reader (Colussi 89). Awe can be a central element in the generation of pleasurable reading that “in questo, come in ogni altro componimento poetico, as Colussi affirms, deve essere considerato come il mezzo più legittimo di raggiungere il giovamento morale, scopo ultimo di ogni poesia” (90). The poem is “dilettevole” when it includes awe,
almost involving a sense of taste, gusto, in accordance with Tasso’s *Discorsi*.

**Valvasone’s *Fabula* in a Biblical Context**

The first Canto of the *Angeleida* seeks to establish the same peace and beauty found in the *Bible’s* Book of Genesis. The narration opens with an evocation of the peacefulness of the universe before Lucifer’s rebellion. Prior to Lucifer's disruption of Heaven’s harmony, Valvasone writes, peace reigned throughout God’s kingdom. No warring winds raged, only gentle Zephyr blew on earth. Seas were calm; Hell had yet to be created. In short, all was in perfect order. In this perfect order of the heavenly universe, before Lucifer’s rebellion, all is in unison with God’s will. As Borsetto comments, the fabula unwraps “declinando in chiave cristiana il mito pagano dell’età aurea,” continuing with the image of a “mondo ancor fanciullo e bello” (83).

Borsetto makes a specific reference to the technique of the “ut pictura poësis e dell’ekphrasis” used by Valvasone (33). The use of this technique reinforces similarities with the poetry of Claudianus, Vida and Sannazzaro, whose works form the foundations of the descriptions of the divine banner (84):

Contento il foco del supremo giro
non era mai per dimostrarsi altrove,
là ‘ve l’empie comete ardono, e ‘l diro
Valvasone follows descriptions of this beautiful and joyous state by observing the irony that Lucifer, the worthiest of all angels, will become the ultimate destroyer – turning brother against brother in civil war. The tragedy of Lucifer's rebellion is thus gravely felt by the poet, who obviously seeks to influence the reader:

Home for the angels is the “cristallino smalto”: an idyllic state soon to be disrupted by Lucifer’s rebellion against God for “ne la bellezza sua [è] rivolto il guardo.” Lucifer conspires to disrupt this perfect place and assume God’s throne, an action that is observed by a watchful Fame (“ancella accorta”), who warns the angels about Lucifer’s efforts to gain superiority and rebel. She exhorts the loyal Seraphim not to “lasciar serpere tanta nequizia in quei chiostri” (A. I: 324).

In the meantime, Mother Nature — “la madre de le cose / alma Natura” — watches this turmoil and concludes that war in Heaven will
extend its horrific consequences to earth: the “informe universal fattura.” She expresses her anguish to God:

— Misera – disse —, ohimé da queste spade, che crollano ora il ciel di moto orrendo, pregnante donna, e di mia verde etade nel primo fior, che tristo augurio prendo! È corsa ogni mia gioia, ogni beltade ch’io mi sperava, or spenta esser comprendo: ché se né franco è il ciel d’ira e di guerre qual posa crederò ch’abbian le terre? (A. I: 46)

It is worthwhile to recall that many important aspects of the world Valvasone knew – a world in which Catholicism was the preeminent religion and Venice was central in commerce and art – was experiencing unsettling challenges from previously unknown entities.

Valvasone and his contemporaries were concerned that Martin Luther’s theology would strip the Church of its central role. To illustrate his concerns in a manner that would be easily understood by readers, Valvasone used his talent as a writer to warn against shifts away from the established, understood locus of power. His strategy was to develop, as characters in his poetry, God and Mother Nature who engaged in dialogue that focuses readers’ attention on the differences between free will and predestination. Development of the dichotomy between the two helped characterize the social/religious environment of Valvasone’s day. It also defined the
threat and alerted readers to the catastrophic consequences that mankind would suffer.\(^\text{12}\)

Valvasone chose a “natural” setting to heighten the stark contrasts inherent to the visceral character, and potential outcome, of the conflict between good and evil. Mother Nature represents purity, innocence, and the innate goodness of a mankind yet to be corrupted. In contrast, God assumes (temporarily) the role of antagonist, applying his omniscience to ensure that the full measure of catastrophic consequence are voiced and understood.

In this scene, Mother Nature personifies a Mankind that is easily influenced by the “new.” Weak, fearful, and uncertain of which course to choose, she laments her status. In contrast, God is all-knowing. He suffers no fears or uncertainties. He offers sanctuary to those who accept salvation through the sacrifice of his Son. The Son of God represents salvation to those who repent and choose righteousness and goodness.

Mother Nature is terrified by God’s prophesy and contemplates a denial, or reversal, of her role, from a Christian goddess of fertility to one incapable of giving life. With fear and despair, she cries out: “Meglio è rimaner sterile, ch’empire di sì rei parti il travagliato mondo” (A. I. 48, 5). Valvasone uses this passage to explore the

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\(^{12}\) God is omniscient and omnipotent; free will is the way to salvation. In *De libero arbitrio*, Erasmus of Rotterdam elucidates mankind’s choice between good and evil. If we choose evil, we are still given a last chance to repent, and, through the sacrifice of Christ the Son, we will be saved.
problematic nature of Free Will. By challenging his readers to engage
in a critical examination of Free Will, Valvasone drives his objective
of establishing the value of Catholic beliefs over those of Protestants
and mitigating the damage created by Martin Luther’s view of
Christianity. The dialogue between God and Mother Nature can be
viewed as a representation of the discourse between the Catholic
Church and those who would challenge the Church.

God’s depiction of the future of Mankind frightens Mother
Nature. In response to her “cry for help,” God warns against of
consequences that Free Will will bring to mankind: 13

A l’angel cittadin del ciel creato
per farlo di maggior grado non fue
per nostro alto decreto aver negato
scioltre ed in suo poter le voglie sue.
Ecco, e lo stesso arbitrio anco fia dato
a l’uom futuro perchè in questi due,
che porteran di noi l’effigie in mostra,
a essercitar s’ha la giustizia nostra. (A. I: 50)

Valvasone continues the dialogue between Mother Nature and
God with a multiplicity of dire predictions, beginning with a
description of Adam’s temptation by the “angelo altier” and the
ensuing fall from grace. God also provides a look at the catastrophic
effects of the great flood, and the survival of the small Judeo-
Christian family of Noah. Their survival, God notes, was in vain

13 Valvasone’s times are reflected in the great conflict of the second decade of the 1500s: the
heated topic between Erasmus of Rotterdam’s De libero arbitrio and Luther’s reply with De servo
arbitrio.
because mankind will be subject to the “peccato d’orgoglio, ancora continuerà nella macchinazione degli errori e il suo ardimento di nuovo tornerà a provocare l’ira e la punizione divina con opere malvage” (Borsetto, 2005 114).

Valvasone’s God continues the fabula with the confusion of the Tower of Babel and the dispersion of nations like “Armeni, Persi,/ Greci, Frigi, Latin, Arabi e Sciti,/ e fiano in genti e nazion dispersi” (A. I: 64, 1-3). Valvasone goes beyond the dispersion of mankind and hints at the peregrination and movement towards the Western Indies in the late 1400s: “Tanto oltre alcuni andran per l’acque immense / a fabricar le lor patrie remote / [...] E miracol parrà che navi estense [...] per lo largo Oceano abbiano ardire / quasi in un altro mondo irle a scoprire” (A. I: 65).

This is how the man of the future will be after the fall. He will always seek his “paradise lost,” looking for the land where he can feel safe. Valvasone tells the reader that man will never feel safe because there will always be the threat of an imminent war.14 These voyages all indirectly evoke trips at this specific point in time for the Republic of Venice. This important European power was witnessing the erosion of its dominance over the established European and Asian territories in the face of the economic and political opportunities offered to the Atlantic maritime states by the new world,

14 This is his reflection on human condition: the perennial presence of violence in the individual life and in the collective one throughout history.
which presented the allure of future discoveries tempered by an equal measure of uncertainty.\textsuperscript{15} The suggestion of the diseased deeds of mankind after the fall, reminder of the act of supremacy, leads to the knowledge that Mother Nature will not be able to carry out what she had naïvely anticipated, since her reality is entangled with the existence of mankind.

At the conclusion of the dialogue between God and Mother Nature, Valvasone speaks of the incarnation of his Son as the liberator:

\begin{quote}
Nacquer ambe ad un parto, e non distende l'una dall'altra mai lunghi i vestigi:
ciascuna per la sua causa contende,
eloquente del par, senza litigi.
Tempo verrà che la Pietade emende el futuro supplicio, onde t'affligi,
ed apra al seme uman largo camino,
onde possa nel ciel farsi divino.

Tempo verrà (dentro il tuo cor riponi questo fermo voler del nostro petto)
che l'eterna Pietà se stessa doni
al mondo errante, e vesta umano aspetto.
E per far che Giustizia a lui perdoni,
unisca due nature in un soggetto,
che la divina ancor sia seco unita,
e farassi una età d'oro gradita.(A. I: 77-78)
\end{quote}

This is an extremely crucial passage because it denotes the fulcrum of Catholic belief, namely: God sent His Son to offer redemption to mankind subject to sin, failure, and betrayal. In so

\textsuperscript{15} Venice was at the beginning of her decline, and the discovery of the New World was a real threat. Venice began to slowly withdraw from the important chessboard of the Mediterranean Sea when attention shifted to the Atlantic Ocean and beyond. Quoting Borsetto: “[..] nell'intemporalità del discorso divino insinua una visione negativa della modernità” (2005, 33).
doing, He granted mankind choice, namely free will, along with the
ability to repent and thereby re-establish communion with God. How-
ever Valvasone, unlike Milton, does not go in much detail in
crafting the character and the development of the role of the Son in
his epic work.¹⁶

In fact, after listening to God’s assurances about the coming of
his Son, Mother Nature becomes more composed and serene.
Valvasone’s “Natura serenò le belle gote” (A. I: 80-3): Nature seems
a bit quick in calming down after her initial confusion.

**Michael the Hero**

This analysis of *Angeleida* has shown how Valvasone
described creation as an idyllic state that falls into ruin after the
conflict between good and evil. The ruination Valvasone describes
mirrors the social, economic, and religious upheavals of his day.
Beyond pure artistic value, Valvasone wrote to educate and
enlighten.

In addition to the social and religious institutions and interests
he felt compelled to protect, Valvasone drew inspiration from the
*Bible* and other important literature, including the works of Dante
Alighieri, Torquato Tasso, and Marco Girolamo Vida.

¹⁶ This omission is odd, given the importance of the role of the Son of God in the theology of the
Catholic Church. It almost seems that Valvasone assumes that his reader already knows the
precepts of the Catholic faith and does not see the need to stress them.
As illustrated earlier in this dissertation, Valvasone’s *Angeleida* depicts God as omniscient. In *Angeleida*, God uses the announcement of Lucifer’s revolt as an opportunity to foretell events to come.

Valvasone used dialogues between Nature and God to explain the different roles of God’s allies: Justice demands that the polluted be destroyed. In contrast, Mercy pleads that man and his world be spared. To resolve this conflict, God declares that man shall find grace through the Son; however, Lucifer shall not:

Ma né, figlia, però turbar la fronte,
sí che non serbi di letizia segno:
che, se Giustizia ognior, per punir l’onte
che ci si fanno, invoca il nostro sdegno,
Pietade ancor da l’altra parte ha pronte
le lagrime e le preci, ed è ritegno
a la giusta vendetta, e può non meno
che la stessa Giustizia in questo seno. (A. I:76)

The debate between Justice and Mercy is a recurrent theme in Renaissance literature, and Valvasone’s deliberate depiction of God’s careful reflection when he speaks about the conflict and announces the future rebellion of Lucifer, is illustrative of that theme. For example, after his declaration, God sends his “diletto stuolo” (“flock” of angels) headed by Michael to fight, bolstered by the promise that they will win great honor and glory in this enterprise.

Valvasone goes in great detail about the character of the armies that engage in the celestial battle. The rebels are
characterized by pride, anger and spite in contrast to Michael's army, the loyalists who are moved by humility, valor and faith: "Da un lato humiltà, valor, e fede / Et da l’altro superbia, ira e despitto (A. II: 83). The loyal angels match the intensity of the rebels as they gather in defense of God and Heaven. In the Angeleida, the loyal angels are saddened by the fact that they must fight their brothers, the angels who have chosen to support Lucifer.

The tragic nature of the conflict is deeply entrenched within the minds of the opposing angels. Their states of mind are reflected in the phrasal structure (Borsetto uses sintagma) developed by Valvasone; the “avidamente” of Lucifer’s followers describes their desire for action. This contrasts with the “pietosa mente” of Michael’s army. The use of the adjective “pious” also described and epitomized Tasso’s “pietoso Buglion,” the earthly paladin and “analogon di Michele,” in the Gerusalemme Liberata (GL. III: 74 1-2) (Borsetto 139):

Da tanto ardir, da così pronte voglie, 
ben certa il lor gran duce omai presente 
la futura vittoria, e pur non scioglie 
d’altri pensier ancor l’avidamente;(A. I: 108 1-4)

Ma che bisogno n’ha celeste gente, 
ch’opra senza intervallo e mai non erra? 
Imaginamol noi quale un possente, 
un valoroso eroe sovra la terra 
che mova campo con pietosa mente 
per la fé, per le leggi a giusta guerra: 
ché quel che l’angel fa tosto tra’ suoi 
è per tempo e per gradi esempio a noi. (A. I: 110)
Michael is charged with leading the angelic battalion. Valvasone causes his readers to reflect upon the Church’s position in the post-tridentine time with an exemplary role for the angels to mankind when he writes: “ché quel che l’angel fa tosto tra’ suoi / è per tempo e per gradi esempio a noi” (A. I: 110 6-8).

Reluctant, but buoyed by the strength of their faith, the loyal angels assemble around Michael, their leader. He carries, as a symbol of their cause, the holy cross, and after he devotes himself to being God’s paladin, his brothers-in-arms echo his words of submission to God, in a chorus of praise to the Almighty: “Tu facesti, diceano, tu mantieni/ Signor, il mondo” (A. I:127). 17

As previously mentioned, Valvasone uses the literary technique of “narratione obliqua.” A suitable example occurs where he introduces the war in the long prelude of the first Canto, giving a detailed account of the angelic multitudes, whereas the actual battle takes place in the second Canto. Here Valvasone provides a description of Michael which is strikingly similar to Vida’s Christias (2005 33).

Ed egli, eccelso di persona, egregio di gesti, ed autorevol di sembiante, con la possente destra una asta vibra, la manca ha ne lo scudo aurata libra. (A. I: 90 4-8)

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17 The symbolism of the cross is an archetypal image of salvation throughout the epic. The allegorical cross is the lucky standard, “insegna fortunate,” under which Lucifer will be destroyed and as in the second canto will be referred to the Southern Cross (A. II: 101).
Michael is ready for battle, and in order to organize his team, he offers an eloquent song (A. I: 92-105) to God, a true *lectio* on Christian theology and militaristic strategies. Michael’s discourse, as Borsetto underlines, is, after having “stigmatizzato negativamente l’assunto teologico della rivolta angelica,” an exhortation to take arms and fight. He is hoping that the personification of perversity (“nequizia”) shall not bring everyone in infamy by keeping quiet (118):

O frati, ed è tra noi chi lo sconosca,  
mentre più brama ardito, empio presume?  
Qual folta nebbia d’ignoranza offosca  
de la nostra natura il vivo lume?  
Qual invidia malor il dolce attosca,  
che in noi si stilla da perpetuo fiume?  
Grande nequizia ben, ma già non faccia  
l’infamia universal, quando si taccia! (A. I:94:)

Michael, on an emotional level, continues with the perpetual contrast between good and evil, configured in the future centuries:

Contrastin l’arme a l’arme, e sian diverse  
tutte de l’opre e del voler le tempre,  
col ferro e foco sian le man converse  
in cielo e in terra a novi oltraggi sempre;  
la nemistà, che stada offi s’aperse  
a’ nostri cor, nessuna età contempre,  
ma, quanto ci daran le forze, duri  
perpetua a’ secoli futuri. (A. I:96)

He is defending God’s creation and magnanimity: “perch’ei da l’amor suo noi mai non sciolga, / di nostra schiatta il tralignante seme  
/ di nostra propria man quinci si tolga” (A. I: 95 2-8). In this song to
God, it transpires that Michael is astounded, he has difficulty comprehending the reasons for Lucifer's rebellion and seeks to understand his betrayal of God, without whom they would not exist: “Dianzi, nulla eravamo,” God, “amor immenso.”

In Michael's eyes, God's omniscience is reflected in his decision to create the angels in His image, bestowing on them the highest positions of privilege in the Heavens, and granting them pure intellect: “e diecci il sommo ciel, né corpi oscuri, / ma Dei n'ha fatti, od intelletti puri” (A. I: 93 6-8). Michael continues his invitation by invoking Justice and Faith, and he promises his armies that they will gloriously prevail:

Che dirò de la gloria? O quanta pompa,
o che trionfo conduremo in Cielo!
o frati, o frati omai nulla interrompa
lenta dimora il vostro innato zelo (A. I: 99 1-4)

Michael continues in his exhortation embracing his appointed leading role, and his song confers a militaristic tone:

né, che quella crudel schiera i' non rompa
in voi mai nasca di temenza gelo:
sarà facil l'impresa, e quando sia
difficil anco, ella è devuta e pia. (A. I: 99 5-8)

He is the Champion of Heaven and describes the battle as if he knows that his army will be victorious.\(^\text{18}\) The “forma conativa” of Michael's address, as Borsetto emphasizes, assumes the role of the

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\(^{18}\) Already mentioned in the dialog between God and Mother Nature in A. I: 74 5-8.
perpetual contrast between good and evil, configured in time and outside of time (eternity), reminiscent of Revelation 12: 7-12 (132).

Like the successful leader that he is, Michael, the “condottier prestante,” at the end of his “exhortation” motivates his troops onward to victory: 19

Il primo incontro, il più feroce orgoglio
con che a ferir verrà l’ostil masnada,
tutto in me solo a sostener mi toglio:
qui si rintuzzi e qui si spezzi e cada;
esser al corso loro intoppo e scoglio
mi vanto a vostro schermo, e quanto bada
l’empio a por meco al paragon la mano,
tanto s’indugia a la vittoria in vano.(A. I: 105)

The furor and ardor of the angelic sentiment is in contraposition with the typical image of the angelic ideal. All the power and the energy come about in the Angeleida; the angels become real soldiers preparing for a fierce battle. The energy is rendered here with a striking simile between the angels and horses anticipating a hunting expedition:

Quai feroci destrieri anzi le mosse,
ch’ad or ad or stanno aspettando il corso:
zampa altri, altri anitrisce, altri le scosse
chiome si spande per lo mobil dorso;
brace son gli occhi, e nuvolose e rosse
fiamme spiran le nari: il duro morso
sona tra’denti, e li ritiene a pena
che non s’aventin ne l’aperta arena. (A. I:107)

19 For one poet-theologian of the twelfth century Rupert of Deutz, this meant adopting in his prose epic, De victoria Verbi Dei, a view that he had denied in his conservative theological treatise on Revelation. He interprets Michael not as the archangel, but as the Son. He describes how the Son, the Verbum Dei, defeated Satan in battle, wielding his sword of righteousness and testifying against satanic evil. The warfare is to a large degree metaphoric in Rupert’s work underlines Revard (133).
The preceding stanza resonates with Dantesque images of the color red in the “occhi di bragia” (*Inferno* III: 109), as Borsetto points out: in “rosse fiamme spiran dalle nari” and “brace son gli occhi” (137).

Renaissance poets, including Valvasone and Alfano, present Michael as a hero of faith and the defender of, and surrogate for, God. It is notable in poems like *Angeleida* and the *Battaglia celeste* that Michael is closer to the Father than any other angel. Standing by the throne of God in intimate dialogue with the Almighty, his joyous faith contrasts with Lucifer’s betrayal. In *Angeleida*, God addresses him directly, appointing him not only commander of the celestial armies, but supreme warrior commissioned specially to seek out Lucifer in combat.

In reply to God’s commands, Michael proclaims how glorious it is to go to battle under God’s ensign and promises to seek vengeance for God:

Ben tentò quel fellon ch’a te s’aguaglia
far di questi ancor de la nemica setta,
ma chi fisa in te gli occhi non abbaglia
menzogna di gran don ch’altri prometta;
essi meco s’armar a pia battaglia
e vengon pronti a far di te vendetta,
e la faran, ch’esser non puon perdenti
in te sperando, in te restando intenti. (*A. I*: 122)
Now that the rebel army is near defeat, Valvasone has Michael duel with Lucifer, before the final and physical duel, which will determine who is victorious.

Like the heroes of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, Michael prepares for battle by praying for victory. His prayer is presented in a two-stanza speech in which he bitterly denounces Lucifer as a traitor and orders him to leave Heaven, taking with him every form of terror and anger. His prayer concludes with a prediction of Lucifer's fall and he declares Lucifer unworthy of a heavenly dwelling. Here in Heaven, says Michael, dwell those who wish to serve God:

E gridò: —Traditor, mostrò diverso,  
 fatti di cento capi il petto onusto;  
 fa che le cento man, per ogni verso,  
 diventin mille al tuo talento ingiusto:  
 di quante sceleragini cosperso  
 hai d'ognintorno l'infelice busto,  
 di tanti busti ti raddoppia e gira  
 teco ogni forma di spavento e d'ira.

Tu sei giunto all'occaso e questa spada  
 nel tuo giusto supplicio oggi s'affina,  
 perché ne l'alba tua vinto cada,  
 non degno più della magion divina:  
 questo albergo è di Dio, questa contrada  
 e di popul, ch'a lui serve e s'inchina;  
 vattene tu co'tuoi seguaci rei,  
 che fattura esser sua non ti credei. (A.II:119-120)

For Valvasone, as well as for Alfano and other Renaissance poets who write of war in Heaven, Lucifer is primarily a kind of “pagan general or prince” (Revard 213). To give Lucifer proper
cemetery for the battle, many poets create scenes before the war in which he can demonstrate his aristocratic qualities.

It is striking how Valvasone gives Lucifer the opportunity of making a major figurative battle speech, before he actually engages in arms. This follows an epic convention which permits Lucifer a “very impressive heroic flourish” (Revard 221). Lucifer does not speak meanly or despicably to his fellow rebels; he is their general, and as such is portrayed. Michael hurls his lance at Lucifer, piercing his golden shield.

The Character of Lucifer

Angeleida's opening description of perfection stands in stark contrast to what the world becomes after Lucifer succeeds in his promise to destroy it all and turn brother against brother in a civil war:

Oh, quale è da veder l’infausta imago
de la misera Francia, oh come offesa
alto orgoglio la tien, che per lei vago
movendo va più che civil contesa!
Le stesse Furie da l'inferno lago
sunsene uscite e la campagna han presa,
et tutto essendo pien d'ira e di foco,
loco non han le leggi in alcun loco.20 (A. I:13)

20 This refers to the situation in France, which was in a state of civil war after the Huguenots massacre in 1572. Except for the Republic of Venice, the rest of Europe was an entanglement of wars: France, England, the Ottoman Empire—the whole scene created by Valvasone is despondent.
Lucifer is not alone in his efforts to foment rebellion; in fact, Valvasone provides him with his personal agent, Megera, to second his plans.\textsuperscript{21} She acts both as a lieutenant for Lucifer and as the keeper of a kind of collective conscience for the rebel angels. Just prior to the battle, Lucifer's quarters turn into a miniature hell, into which the angels of canto I, clothed and adorned with precious stones and metals, transform into a hideous assembly of satyrs, hydras, harpies, gorgons, and other monsters.

Megera, who, like Medusa, has hair of snakes, “serpentin capello il bosco folto” (A. II:49-43), rises to the occasion. She is, as Valvasone tells us, the most cruel and unhappy of the monsters of Acheron:

\begin{verbatim}
Fuor tutti i cieli e la materia tutta
sovr\' ogni altra opra eccelsa e pellegrina,
la creatura angelica costrutta
la parte tien ch\'a Dio pi\' s\'avicina;
ed una Donna sconoscente e brutta,
che de l\'eterno ben parte e declina,
tra quel popol felice entra e \'l seduce
a ribellar dal sempiterno Duce. (A. I:118)
\end{verbatim}

Lucifer assigns Megera the responsibility of calling and inciting his rebels to battle: “diede a Megera il temerario assunto / di trar le

\textsuperscript{21} She is an ingrate woman, incapable of discernment and knowledge other than the fact that she is also hideous, which translated in the Neo-platonic system of Valvasone where beauty is goodness; she is therefore evil and wicked. Borsetto comments: “La Donna, pur provenendo dal bene eterno, da esso si allontana, e piegandosi verso il male, si insinua fra la moltitudine felice degli angeli e la seduce, inducendola a ribellarisi a colui che perpetuamente la guida” (142).
schiere al bellicos punto” (A. II:47, 7-8). Valvasone introduces Megera in the first Canto as “orrida e bieca”: a repugnant sight, whose breath “spira” (A. I: 119) a murky stench reminiscent of Dante’s “palude che ’l grand puzzo spira” (Inf. 9: 31).

Then in the second canto she exhorts the fighters to extend battle beyond Heaven by taking it to earth for final resolution:

Saprò sedur gli uomini frali, 
mentir sembiante e seminare errori, 
che possan far in fin i bruti eguali 
a Dio nel modo de’ celesti onori; 
[...] 
Saprò falsar scritture e torcer sensi, 
e menzogne ammantar che sembrin vero (A. II:55, 1-4-56, 1-2)

Megera reasons that, although they may lose the heavens, they gain supremacy over humans by perverting mankind: “noi le terre averem, s’egli avrà il cielo, / fia nostro il sodo e suo l’astratto e ’l velo” (A. II: 60 7-8). She attributes to herself the creation of the “dei falsi e bugiardi” in a way that the world will believe. Her purpose is to systematically “falsar scritture.” This is specifically a direct reminder of the underlying purpose of Valvasone’s commitment to warn the Post-Tridentine reader of the Protestant threat.

Poets like Valvasone model their Lucifer on Tasso’s imperial devil. Renaissance, deduces Revard, allowed “its pagan kings and its Satans” to be impressive figures who speak with persuasive logic (213). Nevertheless, Valvasone, in his description of Lucifer, lacks

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22 In Alfano, Megera was born with Lucifer: “Teco peste mortal nacque Megera” (BC. II: 5 1).
Milton’s literary talent. For example, maintains Kirkconnell (81), he (Valvasone) has simply heaped up attributes of dreadfulness, and the result is a “Baroque absurdity,” maintains Kirkconnell (81). In his transformation to Satan, his seven heads are cruelly crowned; and the gold is not splendid, but as dark as his demeanor. From his rump, sprouts a wagging, brutal taurine tail, which sweeps away a third of the angelic flock.

Sovra esso il nero e smisurato busto sette teste il crudel corona d’auro, ma l’auro splende d’un color adusto, quale il volto miriam del fosco Mauro,23 gli cade poi dal deretan del fusto in fin al suolo gran coda di tauro, che ’l terzo dietro strascinando tragge de’ lumi ond’ardere le celesti piagge. (A. II: 30)

(Above his black and boundless trunk there shone, on seven heads, a cruel crown of gold, and yet its hue seemed scorched, its brightness gone, and like the Moor’s dark visage to behold; as for his back’s broad base, there hung thereon a great bull’s tail, in length a thousand fold, that drew a third part, trailing on the ground, of all the stars that had in Heaven been found.)24

These octaves resonate almost entirely with Revelation 12 in the monstrous transformation of Lucifer who loses his brilliancy; the darkness mirrors the Moorish looks, thus portraying the perception Valvasone’s contemporaries had of the Turks; Lucifer is responsible for the loss of one third of the angelic flock to evil:

23 From “Mauritania,” comments Borsetto: “Nell’Occidente medievale Maometto venne a lungo considerato un eretico (in questi termini Dante Alighieri lo cita nella Divina Commedia assieme ad Ali ibn Abi Tàlib), colpevole di aver creato un gravissimo scisma, disconoscendolo come fondatore di una nuova religione. Nella Basilica di San Petronio a Bologna, in un celebre affresco, Maometto è raffigurato all’inferno, con il ventre aperto (Felice Tocco. L’eresia nel medioevo 1884, 166).

24 Translation by Kirkconnell, in ottava rima, as in the original.
And there appeared another wonder in Heaven; 
and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads 
and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. (Rev. 12:3)

And his tail drew the third part of the stars of Heaven and did cast them to the earth. (Rev. 12: 4)

The number seven returns emblematically doubled, in the fourteen eyes, dense with hatred, which contribute, as the seven putrid mouths and the marked cheeks, to create a dark and dim environment:

Da sette specchi de le bocche spira lezzo crudel, che densa bava attosca: vibran quattordici occhi orribil ira dal fiero ciglio che lo sguardo imbosca; per le livide guance erra e s’aggira un sdegnoso sembiante, una aria fosca, ch’alberga in mezzo la Mestizia e gli empie di serpantino crin l’orride tempie. (A. II: 31)

The “Torbido tiranno” of the impious troops gives orders from his regal throne before which all the “tartaric things” bow:

Così disse egli, e torbido tiranno col ruginoso scettro in man, si pose in fiera maestà nel regal scanno, che tutte inchinan le tartaree cose. (A. III: 17 1-4)

As we also see in Alfano, even before the “fall,” during the horrible war initiated because of his pride, Lucifer overshadows everyone. His stature, best described as gigantic, rises like the tallest mountain above surrounding peaks:

Tra questi, e quelli empio gigante ed alto, con cento braccia il crudel duce sorge;
coperto il petto di ferrigno smalto,  
cinquanta scudi a sua difesa porge;  
arme cinquanta aventa al fiero assalto,  
e in lui solo un gran misto si scorge  
di tutto il reo, di tutto il truce, e solo  
mostro è de’ mostri del suo vario stuolo.

Qual sovra gli altri Alpestro monte stassi  
col dorso pien di variati orrori:  
alte quercie, antri cavi, acuti massi,  
aspri torrenti ed agghiaccianti umori,  
torti sentieri, diroccati passi,  
ombre, spaventi e faticosi errori,  
feroci belve, e dove sali e scendi,  
silenzio rotto da muggiti orrendi. (A. II: 28-29)

The devil is represented as Briareus who rebelled against  
Zeus. Borsetto emphasizes the analogy of Valvasone’s description of  
the metamorphosed Satan with the representation of Virgil’s Atlantes,  
also evoked in Tasso’s Satan of the Gerusalemme Liberata (165).

The idea of losing paradise saddens Lucifer, but it does not  
diminish his desire to rule. In fact, he declares that he will  
immediately establish a new reign in the underworld, to compete with  
the heavenly one. He wants to give dignity to the darkness:

Perduto abbiamo, o già celesti genti,  
nobili e belle, or basso vulgo oscuro;  
perduto abbiam le vaghe stelle ardentì  
che nostra Patria da principio furo:  
ora qui ci convien non esser lenti  
a fondar novo regno, ampio e securì  
perdemmo il ciel, faccia or lo sdegno nostro  
tremendo a par del ciel l’infernal chiostro

Di poter racquistar l’alte contrade  
ove noscemmo ogni speranza è frale;  
che se ‘l varco a l’in giù lubrico cade,  
mille intoppi ha tra via sempre chi sale;
ma ben trar queste basse in degnitate
intender deve il nostro studio e 'l vale:
rivece onor da le persone il loco,
ma ne dà il loco a le persone poco. (A. III: 9-10)

However, the moment he begins to speak, his dreadfulness of his message is masked by the gracious sound of his voice. When Lucifer speaks, we hear the words of a noble general. He presents himself to his audience as a contradictory mixture of monster and hero: simultaneously a terrible adversary and a valiant leader.

The symmetry of the tragic dialogue between Michael and Lucifer is perfectly mirrored by what Girard identifies as “stichomythia,” in which the two protagonists address one another in alternating lines. Nevertheless, whether the confrontation is physical or verbal, the suspense remains the same. The opposing armies “match blow for blow,” and they seem so evenly coordinated that is impossible for them to predict the outcome of the battle (Girard 44).

Lucifer and Michael are champions of their respective armies, and as the two factions begin the battle, the physical struggle mirrors the verbal duel between the leaders. Tragedy now assumes its proper function as a verbal extension of physical combat, or more precisely, the act of violence is a consequence of the verbal duel.

25 This form is practiced in drama or poetry, in which alternating lines are given to alternating characters, voices, or entities. Stichomythia is particularly suitable to fragment of dramatic dialogue where two characters are in violent dispute. The rhythmic intensity of the alternating lines combined with quick, biting ripostes in the dialogue can be quite powerful.
We can speculate that the angels, on either side, do not yet know how the battle will end; they cannot predict who will emerge victorious. However, both armies are hopeful, a state of consciousness that makes them appear equal, thereby further intensifying their verbal duels. Both factions are angels, and dwellers in and contenders for the skies.

Valvasone’s Lucifer is dichotomized: light/darkness, word/anti-word. This metamorphosis is in net contrast to Dante’s Satan, who carries no reminder of his former angelic form. In biblical terms Christ is considered the Word, Logos, or Verbum and the number one enemy of Christ is the “dragon who would devour the child as soon as it was born” (Rev. 12:4). Angeleida’s Lucifer, despite the transformation to a monstrous being, remains noble in spirit. He is eloquent when talking with his followers and his arch-rival, Michael. In contrast, Dante’s Satan is speechless, as Cervigni points out in his analysis of a “different” Satan. Dante’s Satan, the Satan who has long lost his Paradise, has been defeated and has been ruling hell in his monstrous form and his mind/soul/entity transformed from angel to beast. Thus Cervigni characterizes Satan as the Anti-word: “Lucifer, the arch-fiend or Anti-Christ, is, therefore, the Anti-word par excellence. All the encounters with the infernal guardians rest on a system of verbal signs and allusions, verbal presence and absence, words and silence” (The Rhetoric of Words, Names, and Silence 1).
Valvasone’s Lucifer, like an epic hero, speaks passionately and persuasively; he retains hope and has not yet lost his Paradise. He still has *maggior speranza* to win the battle, which is why, so encouragingly, he addresses his “gagliardo stuolo” (A. II:34):

> Imaginate per l’età future  
> qual sarà questo mondo, allor che tutte  
> piene avrà le sue debite misure,  
> e fian tutte le forme in lui costrutte;  
> e del gran regno il gran desir v’indure  
> l’alme, e v’alletti a così degne lutte;  
> mirate quanto sorge, e quanto avanza  
> il gran constrastò la maggior speranza. (A. II: 36)

Satan’s hope is still great. He hopes to win and rule over all, not only the Heavens, but also the earth and the seas, with the intention of driving everything into ruin: “e turbar questo e quell’altro emispero / sarà nostro potere, e con tempeste / far le campagne sconsolate e meste” (A. II: 37, 6-8). He pledges to the fallen angels that they will obtain honor and reward in the coming fight. The end of their struggle is the conquest not only of Heaven, but also of earth. He also assures his troops that they will win crowns and kingdoms upon earth; they will conquer sea and land, and the sun and the moon. All mankind will come to worship them. Lucifer exhorts them to take up their arms and not to yield. Their enemy, he muses, is “soft” and unprepared, too indifferent to be equal, too weak, and willing merely to continue to serve God and pray for his favors. He brags about how they will conquer all:
Non conosce se stessa e non si stima la schiera opposta a noi quanto ella vale; troppo pregia ella Dio, troppo il sublìma, a cui per poco potria farsi eguale; ma s’ella è a vezza di servir un prima, né di sua dolce libertà le cale, qual prova mai si può sperar che faccia quando ne vegga armati a faccia a faccia?26(A. II:44)

Hence, hope is what makes Lucifer deliberate, hope gives him “the voice of the heroic sentiment” (Revard 232).27 After Lucifer is defeated, he loses hope along with the possibility of verbal communication, namely, the word. Thus, the characterization of Lucifer is an illustration of the paradox of angelic nature, which is mutable in contrast to the immutability of God. Revard comments upon the irony of Lucifer’s striving after the glory of God, only to fall away ingloriously from the splendor he once possessed, to complete darkness (132). Valvasone’s Lucifer becomes enthusiastic when he speaks of glory. He too has pleaded the cause of lost honor and place, and he now presents his angels with the grim necessity of war.

Lucifer’s entry into battle is “like the north wind challenging Notus in anger,” to quote Revard (180). The wind simile, so frequently used by Renaissance poets in their delineations of angelic warfare, has a long history. Similarly, continues Revard, the structure of Valvasone’s assault of rebels upon loyal soldiers is found in book

26 See note 77. We can draw from here that all sorts of battles are attributed to Satan, with his devilish weaponry of fire and sulphur along with the idea of duel.

27 Hope is also one of the Theological Virtues with Faith and Charity: all of them are obviously perverted and thus parodied in Satan.
13 of the *Iliad*, where the attack of Trojans upon Achaeans is like “an attack of winds stirred up by Zeus’s thunderbolt” (*Iliad*, 13. 795-800).

**The Celestial Battle and Victory**

The outcome of the celestial battle establishes the dominant influence for mankind, namely, God. The Supreme Being, representing goodness, peace and eternal life, prevails over Lucifer, who represents evil, corruption and despair. The battle takes place after the positioning of the rival legions, the assembly of arms and the metamorphosis of the rebel angels. The sounds of the battle horns, either sinister and raucous or splendid and inspiring, resonate throughout. The primordial battle takes place in the Heavens on the first day of the angelic creation. The *Bible* provides little reference to the battle between Michael and Lucifer; it is addressed only in Revelation 12: 3-9. Although theologians “resist a connection between the apocalyptic war in Revelation 12 with the original war; poets do not” (Revard 134).

To poets, Revelation 12 becomes the authoritative description of Lucifer’s first armed rebellion in Heaven. However, from the early Christian period, scholars speculated that the war in Heaven, as described in Revelation 12, might provide information about the nature of Lucifer’s defiance of God. Following these views, Gregory the Great went so far as to connect the war in Heaven of verses 7-9
with Lucifer’s original war of rebellion, the war in which Michael expelled him from Heaven, and with the final battle on earth in which he is yet to be overcome. 28

War, earthly or celestial, is the ultimate vehicle for rebellion, whether that rebellion is carried out against a king or a god, namely, the mythological revolt of the Titans against Zeus. Because this Greek myth was understood by early Christian fathers as the first or primary account of celestial war, it was viewed by them as corroboration of the rebellion carried out by Lucifer and his companies of rebel angels, who were expelled from Heaven through a war. Over time, theologians began to connect the war between the Titans and Zeus to the Christian war of expulsion. The interpretations of Revelation were influential:

 [...] and there was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in Heaven. And the great dragon was cast out of that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceived the whole world: he was cast out into the earth and his angels were cast out with him. (12: 7-9)

In the first part of the war we find reference to the use of gunpowder, described in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (9.91) as a satanic invention. 29 Valvasone also argues that the cannon was a

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29 As the *Furioso* XI. 26: 1-4, condemns the honorless occupation of the fire arms by Orlando.
device invented by Satan for the conduct of war in Heaven. He describes the cannon in careful detail, treating it as a realistic implement of war and recounting how it is loaded with powder and then discharged:

Di salnitro e di zolfo oscura polve
chiude altri in ferro cavo e poi la tocca
dietro col foco e in foco la risolve
onde fragoso tuon subito scocca
scocca e lampeggia ed una palla volve
al cui scontro ogni duro arde e trabocca:
crudel saetta, ch’imitar s’attenta
l’arme, che’l sommo Dio dal cielo aventa. (A. II: 20)

The combined effect of the din and dust created by sulfurous fumes of the explosive compounds, deafening noise, and belching fire of the cannons is compared to the earth-shaking ferocity of God’s thunderbolt. This typical description of the epic battle effectively connects the hellish nature of Lucifer with the brutality of war. Valvasone has invented the episode of the cannon not merely to show the devilishness of the schemes Satan and his company can hatch, but to portray also Satan’s use of the cannon to demonstrate the inadequacy – similarly described by Milton – as well as the perversity of the “weaponry” of war.

The Renaissance celestial epic clearly equips its loyal angels with shining armor, swords and shields to glorify their achievement in

30 Dobbins suggests that Valvasone and Milton use gunpowder in this sequence of the war in Heaven as a direct influence of the common belief in the Renaissance that Rev. 9:17-18 prophesied the use of gunpowder by the Turkish army. He cites the Protestant theologian Thomas Brightman as one of the leading proponents of this view (39-45).
arms. This is purposefully done because most of the epics include a display of arms. Michael and his angelic army achieve victory by the sword. In Valvasone’s poem, after Michael wounds Lucifer, Michael’s army joins to rout the rebel angels. Raising their weapons and praising God, they strike the fleeing soldiers, under the watchful and approving eye of God, who hurls thunderbolts at the fleeing troops.

The second part of the battle provides many similarities with a typical epic battle in which armies are lined up in opposition to each other. Valvasone tells us how the loyal angels fight with fresh spirits and secure hearts, invulnerable to pain or wound. In contrast, the rebels are weary. When wounded, they writhe in pain. As the battle continues, they become, contrary to Lucifer’s hopes, weaker and weaker:

Ma se ben da principio o parve o forse fu del certame egual l’impeto duro, mentre da tutti i lati si concorse con forze fresche ed animo secco, tosto l’egualità sparve e si scorso gran disvantaggio tra lo stuol impuro, poi che la miglior parte, in tanta offesa d’arme, pur sempre offende e resta illesa. (A.II:86)

Ultimately, the angelic troops prevail, not because of their skillful use of weaponry, but through the strength of their faith, which is more powerful than any armament. This is, ultimately, Valvasone’s message, namely, the strength and honor of our beliefs will carry us to victory: believe and we will win.
Sides are drawn and good and evil are ready for battle. The allegorical description of the partition of the squadrons and distribution of the troops reflects and underlines Catholic theology on angelic hierarchies with the division into three groups: superior, intermediate and inferior.

Tripartisce l’essercito e roccoglie da nove schiere in tre tutta la gente: fa tre duci maggiori, ed ogni duca vuol che tre schiere e tre duci conduca. (A.I:108 5-8)

As we read earlier, Valvasone in his narratio obliqua, describes the angelic army arranged in nine squadrons:

Nove duci e nove ordini di schiere stan per entrar nel bellico campo, l’immensa luce il ciel lucido fere e reflessa arde in un continuo vampo. Esce fuor tutte l’altré alme guerriere con tutto il capo, e con più chiaro lampo d’oro e di penne, onde lontan si scerna, il general de la milizia eterna. (A. I: 88)

The reinvigorated angels now transform from passive into active participants, and like classical heroes, their earthly counterparts, they take up arms to enter battle. Protected by armor (cuirasses, breastplates, helmets and shields), they hurl darts and

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31 The battle takes place in the second canto; however, Valvasone begins in the first canto to prepare his troops to war example of Narratio obliqua.

fire at the rebel angels. Through this physical depiction, Valvasone delivers “awe” to his audience by depicting angels, typically associated with the calm of paradise, adroitly applying chivalric armaments to strike and defeat their enemy. They are doing what their fellow human heroes in previous epics had also effortlessly done, reminiscent of the invulnerability of Achilles.\footnote{The loyal angels suffer no physical pain, whereas the rebel angels during battle get weaker and weaker.}

Valvasone goes to great effort to create a detailed depiction of the opening of the war because he wants to present a convincing “physical” battle. Arrows, darts and lances fill the air; angels struggle against one another: “che le faci e le pietre e le saette / che per l’alto venian stridendo a volo/ (A. II: 73, 3-4) or [...] e con larga ombra di volanti dardi” (A. II: 74, 7) and again:

\begin{verbatim}
L’altere insegne e tremolanti al vento
De l’eterno seren stendosni in alto,
[vestonsi l’arme le beate genti
splendide d’oro e di fregiato smalto,
e s’affrettan l’un l’altro impazienti
a la dimora del vicino assalto,
Né però s’arman tutti ad una guisa,
né tutti adorna la medesma assisa.

Altri al tergo si cinge, altri a le piante
l’ale, e l’ale tra lor sono diverse:
altre verdi, altre azzurre, altre han sembriante
d’oro, ed altre d’argento, altre son perse,
altre di stelle rilucenti, quante
pura notte ebbe mai, veggonsi asperse,
sembra il pavon, quando egli stende
sua rota e contra il sol mille occhi accende. (A. I: 82-83)
\end{verbatim}
Così ed in terra suol mandare avanti
buon duce quei c’han più lieve armatura,
che con veloce corse con volanti
arme comincin la contesa dura; (A. II: 80 1-4)

The “rain of weapons” is one of the most conventional
descriptions in the classical epic battle. We only need to look at
Gerusalemme Liberata to find a similar representation to the ones
Valvasone describes in the Angeleida (GL XI: 48).

Although poets indulge in conventional battle description, they
do not lose sight of the fact that Heaven is an anomalous location for
fierce battle. Valvasone describes the clashing armies comparing
them to the colliding of Alpine mountains or the clash of furious
winds, Aquilo and Notus. In fact, beginning with Homer, similes
depicting the violent nature of earthquakes, fires, volcanic eruptions,
or hurricanes were used to evoke the violence of contending armies:

Come de l’aria per l’aperto regno
quando con Aquilon Noto contende
e, con egual possanza ed egual sdegno,
l’un quinci e l’altro quindi e s’alza e tende,
ceder non può, ma con ugual ritegno
sospeso pende il mar, la nebbia pende,
e di cui fia la palma in dubbio resta
la terra e ’l ciel e la crudel tempesta. (A. II: 84)

The rebel angels now join combat. However, once the battle
starts, they undergo a physical transformation, to contrast the
brightness and purity of spirit of the loyal armies. Valvasone no
longer identifies them as angels and not yet as devils; they are
described as birds of an odd species: “palustri augelli.” They struggle against the loyal angels, “elmo a elmo premendo scudo a scudo,” mirroring the image that their leader projected in his struggle “a faccia a faccia.” The damage to the rebellious army is immediate.34 The “negro stuolo” is unable to keep pace with the fight and consequently falls. They lose power and their celestial armors fall, leaving them naked; their spirits are dim, bare and left unprotected: “cadono incise l’armature a terra / e ne lasciano lo spirto inerme e nudo” (A. II: 855-6).

In Angeleida, the loyal angels’ spiritual supremacy is illustrated symbolically. In the last attack, as they assemble in front of the rebels, their ranks are arranged in a cross formation which represents their faith, loyalty and virtue: 35

Aveva Michel la sua battaglia stesa e stesa a’ lati e l’una e l’altra torma: in guisa tal che tutto il campo presa d’una gran croce avea verace forma; e comunque attendeva a l’alta impresa,

34 So it seems, Valvasone will soon digress further on the development of the battle. It does not end so easily, first the armies fight and then after the first round of battle, Michael and Lucifer start a duel.

35 The angelic armies in cross formation attacked the rebel angels and crushed them as described earlier. This is a direct historical connotation that Valvasone was most likely aware, in regard to the Christian victory of the Battle of Lepanto against the Turks. According to the chronicles of the time, when the opposing fleet got close to each other, the Christians raised their flags, John of Austria raised an ensign with the cross and a cross was placed on every galley (Beeching 189). By so doing they claim the Moorish opponents surrendered, thus leading to an outstanding victory of the Christian galleys. The crusades were never referred to as such by their participants. The original crusaders were known by various terms, including fideles Sancti or milites Christi. They saw themselves as undertaking an iter, a journey, or a peregrinatio, a pilgrimage, though pilgrims were usually forbidden from carrying arms. Like pilgrims, each crusader swore a vow, to be fulfilled on successfully reaching Jerusalem, and they were granted a cloth cross to be sewn into their clothes. This “taking of the cross,” the crux, eventually became associated with the entire journey; the word “crusade” developed from this.
non uscia mai de la prescritta norma;
comunque si movea, tarda o veloce
la fronte, il tergo, i fianchi erano croce. (A. II: 98)

Assembled in the cross formation, God’s loyal angels strike the rebels, crushing them with the symbol that obliterates their previously held dreams of rule. The loyalists achieve victory by winning several single routs. The climax of the war is the duel between Michael and Lucifer, which is closely patterned after the traditional duels of epic literature.³⁶ However, in this case Valvasone’s Lucifer – transformed into a one hundred-armed monster — bears little resemblance to the traditional epic adversary.³⁷

The angelic crusaders will emerge victorious in the name of the cross and all that is represented by the cross. The sign of the cross is so powerful that it causes rival armies to lose hope and surrender. In this way, by losing hope, they also lose the battle:

Questo ordine d’armar, questa sembianza
de l’angelico essercito fu quella
che fé romper al fine ogni speranza
de la turba al grand Dio fatta ribella:
cominciari fin allor l’empia arroganza

³⁶ The duel is a distinguished and honorable manner to fight the enemy. During the Renaissance the duel was took place only among peers. If a gentleman was insulted by a man of a lower class, he could not solve the situation in a duel. We can then assume that Michael still considers Lucifer one of his peers. Also very interesting, specifically because it mentions devilish connotations, in the following statement: “From the middle of the fifteenth century dueling over questions of honor increased so greatly, especially in the Romanic countries, that the Council of Trent was obliged to enact the severest penalties against it. It decreed that “the detestable custom of dueling which the Devil had originated, in order to bring about at the same time the ruin of the soul and the violent death of the body, shall be entirely uprooted from Christian soil” (Sess. XXIV, De reform, c. xix).

³⁷ This calls to mind the war portrayed in Book XII of the *Aeneid* where Turnus, the anti-hero, is an individualist who follows his own will to the point of excess; he is opposed in spirit to Aeneas, who is dutiful and self-sacrificing.
perder e tremolar solo a vedella:
fu l'or tutto l'ardir fin da quel punto
da un presagio timor da' cori emunto. (A. II: 103)

Michael ascends in full spiritual eminence at the final moments of the battle. At the end of his speech, Michael raises his sword and brings it down upon Lucifer, slicing through his wing and arm and into his body. His blood is spilled; Lucifer is defeated:

Tra questo dir, la gran spada che splende
più che folgor non fa quando balena,
per l'ampio spazio de le membra orrende,
senza far posa mai, d'intorno mena;
e quella ove percote, affrappa e fende
l'ale e le braccia, e 'l nero corpo svena,
che versa poi da l'alte sue ferute
di sangue in vece spiritual virtute (A. II:121) 38

Hence, Michael has overcome the resistance of Lucifer’s legions.

The third, and final, canto of the Angeleida is dedicated to the joy of victory of good over evil as well as an exaltation dedicated to the Republic of Venice. After the “guerre guerreggiate” representing the locus horridus with the primordial battle between good and evil and the description of hell, Valvasone draws a striking contrast with the allegorical representation of the Venetian Republic, namely, the locus amoenus (Borsetto 36).

The third canto closes the cycle that Valvasone began in his propositio. In this passage, presented at the beginning of the

38 A reminder of the power conferred by God upon Michael, he also, like Jupiter, has a thunderbolt as a weapon.
Angeleida, Valvasone celebrates, in solemn, militaristic voice, the spiritual victory of the good angels over the bad angels. The image of victorious angels described by Valvasone is one of military glory. Valvasone begins his Angeleida with an encomium to the "splendid isolation" of Venice. He describes the politics of peace which characterized the policies of the Doge Pasquale Cicogna. In this way, he elevates the Doge to a mythical status that, once established, continues through the Angeleida. As we read in Valvasone’s initial homage to Venice: “Benigni, eccelsi Padri eccelso onore / d’Europa tutta e de la fè di Cristo” (A. I: 8, 1-2).  

To enable his readers to better understand the structure, pomp and grandiosity of the celebrations of the victory in Heaven, Valvasone describes a scene that would be known to his readers. He interweaves the achievements of the Doge — namely, peace and prosperity — with the victories achieved for God by Michael:

Sovra un splendido carro alto ed ornato
di vesta militar il duce altero
sen giva al Campidoglio, e dietro armato
il campo avea del suo felice impero;
la plebe desiosa e ‘l gran senato
gli venia incontra, e sotto ardea il sentiero
di nova pompa, e risonava intorno
la città tutta e ’l festeggiante giorno. (A.III:72)

Venice is portrayed as an allegorical figure. In her analysis, Borsetto comments: “[…] si erge l’emblema della città eretta simbolo

39 Also we read in the Dedicatoria to the Angeleida: “Padri della veneziana Repub.”
del mondo futuro: una regina circondata da un nobile collegio la rappresenta, le si accompagnano la pace, la giustizia, la pietà, le arti, custodes libertatis, le ricchezze, l’alto sapere" (119).

Seguiva poscia, nel secondo pregio,
la bella effigie d’una gran Reina,
ch’intorno aveva d’erroi nobil collegio
in una gran Città su la marina:
teneano innanzi al suo cospetto egregio
la terra a largo, e ’l mar la faccia china:
e sovra l’alme Grazie apriano il seno,
e n’empian di piacer l’aer ameno.

[...]

Compagna eterna seco era la Pace,
e v’era la Pietà, v’erano l’Arti:
e facean l’Arti, senza alcuna pace,
sonar de la Città tutte le parti:
né la Pietà posava, né la Pace.
ma ben mille v’avean ministri sparti,
che vegghiando facean col lor negozio
un diletto commune, un commun ozio. 40

La cara Libertà stava in sublime seggio, e da tutti i termini del sole
vi concorrean mille ricchezze opime,
e potevasi aver quanto si vuole:
sedeva alto saper infra le prime lodi, e v’avea mille famose scole:
e v’era tutto al fin quel che beato
può far sovra le terre un regio Stato (A. III: 49-53)

In the aftermath of the battle, Michael assumes the two central roles of general and spiritual leader. What we read in the last stanzas

40 Borsetto comments on the allegory of perpetual Peace that accompanies the representation of Venice: "[...] sul piano stilistico incidendo non poco sulle strutture dell’enfasi che reggono l’elogio alla regina dell’Adriatico, variato sul piano teorico per l’alternarsi del sovrasenso allegorico di cui si fa portatore con quello comune, il lemma ‘pace’ ricorre litanicamente in sede di rima nei primi quattro versi della stanzza. Una vera e propria disseminazione di analoghe simmetrie lessicali volte a sottolineare la concordia si ha con la ricorrenza del polyptoton [...] nei primi quattro versi e del chiasmo sintattico (“diletto commune” e ‘commun ozio”) nel verso di chiusura (235).
of the *Angeleida* is reminiscent of the Roman triumph, observes Revard. Trumpets sound, palm fronds are waved by adoring crowds, and the loyal angels march in victory like well-drilled soldiers (245). Earthly comparisons abound, though raised to heavenly superlatives. The pomp in Heaven is compared with that of France and Rome, and Michael, welcomed as the greatest of heroes, surpasses earthly generals who reward their soldiers with gold and silver: “His martial prowess is unabashedly praised, with his courage, daring and skill” (Revard 246). Again, we see Michael, splendid in his armor with sword raised. As the angels sing his praises, Michael delivers a victory speech in which he exults in his conquest of the archfiend.

The stanza with which Valvasone ends his epic celebrates the essential military victory of Michael:

> Eccelso eroe, campion
> invitto & santo de l’impero divin,
> per cui pigliasti l’alta contesa,
> e’l reo Dragon cacciasti de
> l’auree stelle debellato, & franto (A. All’archangelo Michele)

**Valvasone and Milton’s *Paradise lost*: A Lost Influence?**

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* was published 76 years after the publication of *Angeleida*. In essence, both of these important literary works are about the battle between good and evil. It is reasonable to assume that Valvasone’s *Angeleida* had a role in influencing Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. 
This influence was first suggested by Polidori who published a second edition of *Angeleida* (1842). His criticism sought to limit the link between the two writers to mere artistic influence and put an end to allegations that Milton plagiarized *Angeleida*: 41

Questo poema, quantunque molto pregevole in varie parti, egli è pur vero che in altre è assai trasandato, e l’edizione che è la sola che comparisse mai alla pubblica luce, è molto scorretta, ed in alcune parti assai oscura, onde si potrebbe credere che, sebbene impressa nel 1590, tempo in cui l’autore era ancor vivente, ella fosse fatta lungi dagli occhi suoi, o che mentre si stampava, per qualunque se ne fosse la causa, ci facesse dei cambiamenti in fretta e furia, onde tra le parti accuratamente scritte ed a bel’agio corrette, e quelle che ci sembrano dettate senza che Multa dies et multa litura coercuit, atque prae sectumdecis non castigavit ad unguem, ci è gran differenza. (III)

After Polidori, several major literary critics have expressed a range of opinions on the influence of *Angeleida* within the context of Renaissance literature. Polidori is adamant that Milton did not copy from Valvasone.

However, Revard states that “we may be fairly sure that Milton had read poems like Valvasone’s *Angeleida*, with its strong depiction of Michael as the hero of the war in Heaven. Milton’s own Michael [...] and his Son show signs of having been influenced by such portraits” (153).

41 William Lauder asserted that Milton was one of the worst plagiarists; that he took entire poems and claimed them as his own. In order to prove this theory, Lauder brought forth many different Latin poems by several Scottish, Dutch, and German writers whose subject was similar to Milton’s. However, along the way, Lauder falsified those poems, adding some verses and taking some from the translations to corroborate his hypothesis. Also Dr. Warton, a Milton scholar, mentioned that he noticed that Milton copied from a poem entitled *Angeleida*, whereas Polidori maintains that Milton imitated and embellished it (XVI).
In *The Celestial Cycle*, Kirkconnell makes a strong case for Milton’s “having known Valvasone’s *Angeleida*” (80-87). Moreover, in the *The Precursors of Milton*, Thibaut concurs with Kirkconnell’s assertion that *Angeleida* influenced Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He refers to the parallels between the two works, but does not provide detailed analysis (77).

War among angels was a topic of interest to many Renaissance artists, from poets to painters to sculptors. With this wealth of available work, it is reasonable to assert that external influence on Milton’s *Paradise Lost* was not the product of one poet; rather, it was through a collective tradition. In support of this supposition, Polidori suggests that when any artist sits down to write a poem, he or she draws from an ocean of ideas and possibilities. Given the environment in which Renaissance writers worked, and assuming that artists study the works of other artists, it is reasonable to declare that it is practically impossible to be original in all aspects of the development of a story that has been the subject of so many works (18).

Moreover, a poet, after having read works of other poets, would accumulate a base of memories that would offer a vast number of creative constructs. *Paradise Lost* represents the highest point of achievement within the “celestial cycle.” Milton attained what his predecessors failed to achieve. He certainly read and studied their
works and, through his diligence and genius, surpassed them. However, without them, *Paradise Lost* would not be the brilliant artistry it is.

Valvasone is one of the writers from whom Milton derived inspiration, along with Vondel (1587–1679), Tasso, Du Bartas (1544 –1590) and Andreini (1578–1622). Milton’s journey to Florence, Rome, Naples, and Venice included meetings with the intelligentsia of the day, including writers, composers, men of doctrine, philosophers, philologists, and scientists. For example, Milton was captivated by discovering the works of Tasso which he discovered in Naples, and later, during his “grand tour” he was given a warm reception in Rome. Throughout his journey of Italy he collected valuable literary works which he shipped to England (Thibaut 122).  

Polidori draws a parallel between Homer’s epic work and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He claims that we do not know, for a fact, whether or not Homer’s masterpieces were influenced by previous epic works. We do know, however, that there were other epic writers before him, including the mythical Linus, Amphion and Orpheus. For example, it could be asserted that some parts of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* were inspired by other literary works. Like Homer, Milton distanced himself from external sources through his skillful use of a much more

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42 Thibaut affirms: “Cette caisse précieuse, qui résume l’action de l’Italie sur lui, on voudrait, aujourd’hui, en connaître le contenu [...] Les livres qu’elle contenait, garnirent, sans doute, en Angleterre, quelques rayons de sa bibliothèque et ne furent pas sans importance pour l’italianisme de ses œuvres ultérieures; ils restèrent, en tout cas, le plus précieux souvenir de son voyage littéraire au pays du Tasse” (123).
refined and elegant language and a much more complex intellectual reflection on the presence of evil and good in the world. Similarly Blessington validates Polidori’s analysis: “Milton’s poem is about the destruction of paradise and about the death of all men, as Homer’s is about the destruction that resulted from the wrath of Achilles. The reference to the *Iliad* shows that Milton and Homer saw similar results from heroic hybris” (51).

In this same vein, Milton was influenced by the *Bible*, which is arguably the spring from which all Christian literature flows. Like Revard, Polidori says that Milton “aveva davanti agli occhi della mente vari e numerosi poemi sul medesimo soggetto del Paradiso perduto, ed avendo egli una molto retentiva memoria, e dettando l’epica sua composizione nella sua cecitá, non è da maravigliarsi se gli veniva fatto talora, forse senza accorgersen pure, d’imitare or questo ed or quello[...]” (VIII). Therefore the fact that Milton wrote his masterpiece drawing from his superbe memory of other works, was not exactly considered imitation of the “propriété littéraire”. We need to understand that there was a different literary approach to literary ownership in the sixteenth century than there is today. Thibaut maintains: “Le public d’ailleurs s’en occupait peu; passionné pour l’érudition, il ne cherchait pas l’origine des documents produits” (43). The principles of the sixteenth century are different from ours, and thus we should not bring an absolute judgment, as Thibaut
continues: “la plus grande part de l’Art est contenue dans l’imitation” (44). The fact of being deliberately “imitated” by a fellow poet was flattering, and it was considered a point of pride if another author would use the same expressions, the same language, or evoke the same images that one poet formerly created. Furthermore, Polidori writes that those who examine Valvasone’s Angeleida and make a comparison with Paradise Lost, will find it difficult – if not impossible – to assert that Milton had only the Angeleida in mind. Therefore he cannot be accused of plagiarism, as we read in Revard’s analysis. There are only two critics who have denied the dependency of Paradise Lost on Angeleida: Scolari and Allodoli; but on the evidence which follows here, this appears most unlikely.43 There are several examples of similarities already found in Angeleida, Battaglia celeste, Gerusalemme Liberata and Paradise Lost.

In their prologues, the above-mentioned poets address the need for Divine inspiration in order to relate a topic that they supposedly could not know. They share battle scenes that bear the red thread – to use Revard’s expression – that characterize an epic poem, sacred or not. The invention of the cannon is attributed to Satan, not only in Valvasone, as we saw earlier, but also in Milton.

43 Allodoli affirms that the resemblance of the terminology and the metaphors directly derive from Biblical verses. However, except for a few lines in Revelation 12, exegetes still have not found a significant inspiration in the Old Testament at all. Scolari wanted to refute Polidori, who saw the origin of the battle using artillery in Milton in the use of Valvasone’s celestial cannons.
The new armament, built during the night, is used in the second day of battle. As a fenced squadron inside which the deceit is concealed:

[...] with heavy pace the foe
Approaching gross and huge; in follow cube
Training his devilish enginry, impaled
On every side with shadowing squadrons deep,
To hide the fraud (PL. VI: 551)

Alfano’s and Valvasone’s Michael bear similarities to Tasso’s Rinaldo, but there are not direct correspondence with Milton’s Michael. In Paradise Lost the angels begin to fight, with Michael and Gabriel serving as co-leaders for Heaven’s army. The battle lasts two days, when God sends the Son to end the war and deliver Satan and his rebel angels to Hell. Conversely in Angeleida as well as in the Battaglia celeste, Michael is the hero, and the only angel who determines the positive ending of the battle which lasted two days and kept the reader in suspense throughout. He orders the celestial squadrons to form into a massive cross, the most striking symbol of Christianity. Maintaining an intact squadron, and moving to battle with the certainty of their beliefs, the faithful crusader/angels are able to defeat the enemy:

Ma che le diede al fin l’ultima scossa?
Havea Michel la sua battaglia stesa,
Et stesa a’ lati e l’una, e l’altra torma
In guisa tal, che tutto il campo presa
D’una gran croce havea verace forma:
comunque si movea tarda, o veloce,
la fronte, il tergo, i fianchi, erano croce.(A. II: 97)
Surprisingly, there is a striking similarity with the earthly battle of Tasso’s *Liberata*, in which the angels are aligned with the Crusaders and the devils side by side with the Moors.

The motivation of the battle fought for several days is also found in *Paradise Lost*, which also embraces the idea of the cross, the symbol of the Messiah. He rides on the wings of the angels, accompanied by a multitude of saints who follow him on magnificent chariots:

He on the wings of Cherubs rode sublime  
On the crystalline sky, in sapphire throned  
Illustrious far and wide, but his own  
First seen; them unexpected joy surprised,  
When the great ensign of Messiah blazed  
Aloft by angels borne, his sign in heav’n. (*PL. VI: 768*)

We can conclude here with a few passages, following Thibaut, where the most striking similarities are found. The first few lines of *Angeleida* from the invocation to the Holy Spirit have similarities with *Paradise Lost*:

*Spirto, che terza sei persona in Dio  
e di te tutto nodri e tutto n’empi* (A. I:2, 1-2)  

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer  
before all Temples th’upright heart and pure (PL. I:36)

The descriptions of the infernal valley are not dissimilar:

*Nove volte, con onde oscure e bige,  
[...] torce il profondo letto, e grave e pigra  
onde chi scende, al giorno unqua non migra:* (A. III: 3)

with
Nine times the space that measures day and night
to mortal men, he with his horrid crew,
[...]No light, but rather darkness visible (PL. I:50)

and

tutto l’assedìa e lo circonda Stige,( A. III. 3)

Escap’t the Stigian Pool, though long detained (PL. III:13)

Satan’s use of artillery in Valvasone apparently influenced

Milton:

[...] sulphurous and nitrous foam
ty they found, they mingl’d, and with the subtle Art.
concocted and adusted they reduc’d
to blackest grain, and into store convey’d
Part hidd’n veins digg’d up on Mineral and Stone,
whereof to found thir engines and thir balls
of missive ruin [...] (PL. VI:512-519)

Di salnitro e di zolfo oscura polve
chiude altri in ferro cavo, e poi la tocca
dietro col foco e in foco la risolve
onder fragoso tuon subito scocca
scocca e lampeggia ed una palla volve
al cui scontro ogni duro arde e trabocca:(A. II:20)

The personification of Mother Nature, who is fearful of what the
future holds, does not want to continue and would rather abort, while

God makes prophecies predicting man’s sinfulness:

All th’ unaccomplisht works of Nature’s hand,
abortive, monstrous, or unkindly mixt,
dissolv’d on earth, fleet hither, and in vain
till final dissolution wander here. (PL. III: 455-58)

and
Ché s'io posso sperar tanto martire,
meglio è, Signor, che in questo sen fecondo
quei vivi semi omai tu non inspire
c'hanno a formar di sì gran mole il pondo,
meglio rimanere sterile, ch'empire
di sì rei parti il travagliato mondo.(A. II: 48)

Lucifer in Milton is capable of more than lament. He swiftly rallies and tells his angels to summon up courage and hope for better fortune on earth. Similarly, in Angeleida we have a Lucifer who, though defeated, is not without resources and is eagerly looking forward to recouping his fortunes on earth. Turning his attention to the human seed that will in future inhabit this kingdom, he proposes to shift his focus on an alteration of human society. Valvasone’s attitude toward his Lucifer is dualistic. On one hand, he shows us a resilient leader who, speaking nobly to his soldiers, resembles the Satan of Book I of Paradise Lost. He is a leader who, as in Heaven, still speaks of honor and glory and who is intent on consoling his allies for their loss as we read in A. III: 9. On the other hand, while permitting him to voice heroic sentiments, Valvasone reminds his readers that Lucifer is less than heroic in appearance and intent. He describes the former prince of Heaven now as a monster who bellows forth words from his seven mouths. Addressing Lucifer directly, he condemns as base his heroic ambitions and assures him that he will gain nothing for his reward but damnation, eternal pain and fire. Nonetheless, in his portrayal of Lucifer, Valvasone is far
lesser to Milton, remarks Kirkconnell, in sublimity. The image of the devil is a blend of Homer’s Briareus, Virgil’s “Fama” and the beast in the Book of Revelation. 44

In outer appearance, Lucifer is a monster, a horrible dragon with one hundred arms, seven heads and seven mouths. His physical configuration is emblematic. The numbers that indicate totality are similar and yet different from the symbol of the trinity expressed in Dante’s Inferno, 34; Lucifer is transformed and with him is the “third of the fallen stars,” namely, his angels. 45 To study the “grotesque of the Italian’s portrayal is to realize more fully the imaginative achievement of Milton in picturing Satan as not less than ‘Arch Angel ruin’d’” (88). Many have noted how some of Milton’s best writing is produced when describing his Lucifer, most famously, of course, the poet William Blake, who greatly admired and indeed illustrated Paradise Lost:

The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet, and of the Devil’s party without knowing it (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 9)

44 Fama, in this instance, is the personification of the horrid “voices” and of rumors which go from mouth to mouth, they dilate and are deformed in calumnies. For instance, Fama goes into action when Queen Dido, who in the past was unappreciative when neighbor kings proposed in marriage, however she fell for Aeneas. Virgil represents this divinity as a winged animal, which has a hidden eye underneath its plumage and spies on everything and everyone with a sharp and malevolent tongue (Aeneid 4, 173).

45 “Oh quanto parve a me gran maraviglia / quand’io vidi tre facce a la sua testa! / L’una dinanzi, e quella era vermiglia / l’altr’eran due, che s’aggiunghieno a questa / s’ovvresso ’l mezzo di ciascuna spalla, / e sé giugneno al loco de la cresta: / e la destra parea tra bianca e gialla; / la sinistra a vedere era tal, quali / vegnon di là onde’l Nilo s’avvalla” (Dante’s Inferno 34, 37-45).
In Valvasone, the hero is defined by his commitment to the Christian values of love, forgiveness, and redemption. In contrast, unlike the larger-than-life heroes of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, the apparent hero of *Paradise Lost* is the personification of evil and is, at best, repugnant to Western culture. William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley supported this perspective; both believed Satan to be the hero of *Paradise Lost*, because the character who presents the heroic capacities of an Achilles or Homer is Satan, whom Milton elevates with "epic matter and motivations, epic genre conventions, and constant allusions to specific passages in famous heroic poems" (Lewalski, *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* 55).

These sentiments are not unlike those voiced by the narrator of *Paradise Lost* who, commenting on Satan's resolutions, remarks as follows:

Evils to others and enraged might see  
how all this malice serv'd but to bring forth  
Infinite goodness grace and mercy shewn  
on man but him seduc't but on himself  
treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd. (PL. I 217-220)

The narrator of *Paradise Lost*, unlike Valvasone, is not dismissing Lucifer from the scene: he is preparing for action to come, action that will include a display of the futility of Satan’s plotting in Heaven. He is at the beginning, not the end, of his narration.
Another similarity we find in the two epic works is the trumpet before the final judgment:

He ended, and the Son gave signal high
To the bright Minister that watchd, hee blew
His Trumpet, heard in Oreb since perhaps
When God descended, and perhaps once more
To sound at general Doom. (PL. XI 70-76)

and

a la rocca di Dio, ch’avanza tanto
l’alto ciel quanto il ciel quest’umil parte,
poggiano fè sentir l’aurea trombetta,
che ne l’ultimo giorno anco s’aspetta. (A. I:34 6-8)

and again:

By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav’n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine. (PL. III: 132-136)

vs.:

che, se Giustizia ognior, per punir l’onte
che ci si fanno, invoca il nostro sdegno,
Pietade ancor da l’altra parte ha pronte
le lagrime e le preci, ed è ritegno
a la giusta vendetta, e può non meno (A. I:76 3-7)

In brief, one can certainly concur with Foffano, who affirms: “ [...] che il poeta inglese lesse senza dubbio l’Angeleida – se prima o dopo aver ideato il suo capolavoro, nessuno potrebbe dirlo – ma gliene rimasero impressi nella memoria” (127).
Conclusion

Beginning with the *Iliad*, writers of epic literature have created some of the world’s most engrossing dramas while simultaneously addressing important concepts that were fundamental to establishing order within their societies. The vitality of epic literature is apparent, as evidenced by its ability to reach audiences as effectively today as when they were written centuries ago.

In comparison, the biblical epic uses the scale, drama, and impact of this larger-than-life genre to introduce and reinforce the importance of key religious principles. One of the most effective and compelling uses of this vehicle are the stories of the celestial crusades so elegantly described in Alfano's *Battaglia celeste* (1568) and Valvasone's *Angeleida* (1590).

Social and religious turmoil in Europe gave new life to the biblical epic genre. Societal, political, religious, and economic norms were under attack. War threatened from the East. Martin Luther's dramatic challenge to the Roman Catholic Church challenged the foundation of Rome’s far-reaching influence. These tumultuous times
were accompanied by revival of the classic works of Homer, Virgil, and others.

The Church responded to the stirrings of Protestant Reform by encouraging artists to promulgate the fundamental doctrines that best characterized the beliefs and teachings of Catholicism. This strategy, applied in literary and visual arts, led audiences to the logical expectation of “awe.” Indeed, the celestial crusades represent the primordial battle between good and evil, as characterized by the religious and social wars that pervaded Europe and the Mediterranean.

The heroism of the archangel Michael was an inspiring example of the valorous Christian who had to face new challenges. In opposition, Lucifer was the arch-enemy “par excellence”: an entity who inspired fear and, more importantly, represented a path that should be avoided.

The works analyzed in this dissertation were written as public affirmations of the beliefs of the poets who used their talents to support their faith.

With the obvious exceptions of the contributions of a few scholars (Gambino, Martin, Revard and Borsetto), there is a relative lack of criticism about these celestial crusades. However, rather than presenting a hindrance to the development of well-grounded
analysis, the dearth of criticism gave me the freedom to formulate a more complete development of this genre.


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