INTRODUCTION

> Rarely did I enter into his studio that I did not notice a few new books on the side table, others piled high upon the stools, and on the floor, his beloved Tasso – all worn out and poorly bound from daily use. The painter would beseech whomsoever happened to stop by while he was painting to read aloud entire scenes, hearing again and again the laments and reversals of Clorinda, Armida, and Tancred, all the while imprinting these noble ideas on his mind. Sometimes he would make us begin again the just completed reading. Speculating and reflecting on these passages, he knew how to extract from them thoughts, never before imagined by anyone else, which, no less than delighting, instructed even the most learned among us.[1]

Carlo Cesare Malvasia, the biographer of Bolognese painters, here refers to the studio of Francesco Albani. But one suspects that he could just as readily be describing Nicolas Poussin, whose copy of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* must have been similarly battered from affectionate overuse.[2] While generally considered the greatest French painter of the seventeenth century, Poussin (1594–1665) spent nearly his entire career in Rome, where he absorbed its artistic and literary heritage. Along with the self-evident inspiration of antiquity and Raphael, Tasso's renowned epic stimulated Poussin's pictorial muse and his singular commitment to narrative painting. Torquato Tasso (1544–95) was the foremost poet of the Late Renaissance. In Poussin's time, Tasso's epic of the first Crusades was unquestionably esteemed the greatest artistic achievement of the previous generation. It was upheld as the embodiment of Neo-Aristotelian poetics and immediately became the paragon of ambitious poetry in the Tuscan tongue and a worthy rival of the ancient epics. Its themes and characters infiltrated the visual and musical arts. At times these seemed to hold equal fascination for writers, painters, and composers as the entire classical inheritance.[3]

Poussin's engagement with Tasso involved a crucial dimension that set him apart from those painters who simply supplied the vogue for pictures of Tancred

and Erminia, Rinaldo and Armida. Tasso's poem and, even more significantly, the literary principles that determined its form and structure were fundamental to Poussin's theory of art, his poetics of painting. It has long been established that several of Poussin's *Osservazioni sopra la pittura* and other theoretical pronouncements derive more or less verbatim from Tasso's *Discorsi* on poetic theory.[4] In other instances the ideas of the painter and poet correspond, even if Tasso was not the primary source. Many of Tasso's precepts, after all, derive from Aristotle's *Poetics*, which had a pervasive influence on literary and artistic theory. If some of the notions that Poussin borrowed from Tasso are conventional, then it is all the more intriguing that the artist turned precisely and repeatedly to this source. Poussin's art theory is decidedly Tassian in inspiration and outlook. Yet, remarkably, how this theoretical knowledge conditioned Poussin's pictorial response to Tasso's verse, or how it might have influenced his general conception of narrative painting, has not been thoroughly examined. Given his endorsement of Tasso's poetics, Poussin was better equipped than any other painter to understand the ideology and structure of the *Gerusalemme liberata*, and to apply such ideas to thinking about his own art.

Even prior to the initial publication of the *Gerusalemme* in 1581, and much more intensely thereafter, a vast critical and theoretical apparatus fortified the epic like a ring of defensive ramparts. Tasso's poetic treatises, the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1587) and *Discorsi del poema eroico* (1595), read as justifications for the structure and purpose of the poem.[5] Tasso's correspondence with the Roman clerics and friends he had asked to critique the epic before publication leave no doubt of the degree to which the Aristotelian ideas of the *Discorsi* shaped its form and content. These *lettere poetiche* were published along with the initial *Discorsi* soon after the early editions of the epic.[6] Concurrently, the partisans of an alternative poetic, the modern Italian romance exemplified in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), enlisted Tasso and his adherents in repeated, and often vituperative, critical polemics over the relative merits of the two greatest cinquecento poets.[7] While the principal skirmishes had subsided by 1600, the critical tenets at the center of the controversy shaped the poetic theory of Poussin's own time. No single figure was more essential to the development of seicento poetry than Giambattista Marino (1575–1625). The court poet to Maria de Medici, Queen of France, he befriended the young Poussin in Paris and encouraged the painter to follow him to Rome in 1624. The appearance of Marino's epic *L'Adone* (1623) and its similarly polemical critical reception revived the critical issues at the heart of the *Gerusalemme*. This occurred precisely at the time when Poussin painted most of his images after Tasso. The exposure to Tasso and Marino endowed Poussin with an enhanced poetic sensibility, which he cultivated in his increasingly self-conscious approach to pictorial narrative. This sensibility surfaces, aptly enough, in the works that illustrate scenes from Tasso, but also in pivotal pictures of the 1630s through which Poussin evolved toward his classical idiom: *Echo and Narcissus*, the *Realm of Flora*, the *Plague of Ashdod*, the *Rape of the Sabines*, and the *Israelites Gathering Manna*.

Poussin executed at least eight distinct compositions, as paintings or highly evolved drawings, that feature subjects from the *Gerusalemme liberata* – as many as any painter not specifically commissioned to produce a series after the poem, or to illustrate an edition of it. Poussin adheres to his contemporaries' predilection for representing the amorous interludes of Tasso's epic instead of its principal action recounting the siege of Jerusalem during the First Crusade. Only one early drawing, the *Victory of Goffredo of Boullion* at Windsor, illustrates a martial subject (Fig. 9). The panoramic battle scene centers on the final triumph of the supreme Christian commander. Otherwise Poussin concentrates on the loves of Rinaldo and Armida, Tancred and Erminia. The versions of *Rinaldo and Armida* in Moscow and Dulwich present a nearly identical instant when the pagan sorceress approaches the slumbering Christian knight (Fig. 27, Plate III). She had intended to slay her adversary but, instead, suddenly falls hopelessly in love, mesmerized by the beauty of his somnolent features. The next scene, the *Abduction of Rinaldo* in Berlin, depicts Armida about to transport her still unconscious lover, bound in floral chains and borne by *putti*, to her luxuriant hideaway in the Fortunate Isles (Plate IV). To here the setting shifts in the *Companions of Rinaldo* at the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 12). The knights Carlo and Ubaldo, dispatched by Goffredo to retrieve Rinaldo from the clutches of Armida, confront the horrific serpent that guards the path to her enchanted palace and garden. Two drawings in the Louvre, one an intense and highly dramatic *mise-en-scène*, present the successful outcome of their mission (Figs. 17, 18). In these studies for an *Abandonment of Armida*, the sorceress, who has fainted in grief, lies on the shore as the knights whisk her paramour, and their champion, onto an awaiting boat. Paintings in Saint Petersburg and Birmingham dramatize the desperate love of the Saracen princess Erminia for the wounded crusader Tancred (Plate V, Fig. 15,). In both, Erminia heroically wields Tancred's sword and severs her golden tresses to serve as improvised bandages to bind the wounds of her beloved, while the more profound ones of her heart remain untended.[8]

By Poussin's time, artists had visualized the *Gerusalemme liberata* for two generations. Apart from the prints by Bernardo Castello and Antonio Tempesta that illustrated many early editions of the epic, several important pictorial series were produced in Poussin's immediate milieu. Among the young Norman painter's earliest exposures to ambitious painting was Ambroise Dubois's *Tancred and Clorinda* cycle at Fontainebleau.[9] Simon Vouet designed a monumental series on Rinaldo and Armida after his return to Paris in 1627. These were then reproduced as lavish tapestries, and purchased by the Barberini in Rome in the 1630s.[10] During this same period, the eternal city witnessed not only the creation of the majority of Poussin's Tasso pictures, but an important French commission of a *Gerusalemme* cycle distributed among his younger colleagues François Perrier, Charles Errard, Pierre LeMaire, Pierre Mignard, and Giacinto Gimignani.[11] Futhermore, the most prominent of Poussin's predecessors and contemporaries, such as Annibale

Carracci, Domenichino, Guercino, Lanfranco, and, of course, Albani, painted individual love scenes from the epic.[12]

Tasso imagery thus saturated Poussin's artistic milieu, but two factors distinguish his response to the poet, his works, and ideas. First, Poussin approaches Tasso through the lens of Marino and his poetic contemporaries. When Poussin painted, we must remember, Tasso's works had already burgeoned into a larger legacy of imitation, adaptation, and critical commentary – not to mention pictorial interpretation. Poussin's response to Tasso's narrative and imagery finds a structural analogue in the practice of Marino and his followers, who refashioned the same material from the *Gerusalemme* and further developed its highly figurative poetic language. Poussin's paintings are thus part of the broader reaction to Tasso that defined seicento poetics. Second, Poussin's exposure to Tasso's poem, its poetic legacy in Marino, and its contested poetic principles all came to be forged in the crucible of his own theory of painting. He applied the lessons of Tasso to devise and implement narrative structures that transpose textual imagery into pictorial form and syntax, culminating in the history paintings of the 1630s and the *Israelites Gathering Manna*. The encounter of Poussin and Tasso involves not merely a single artist and the poet he illustrates, but a full range of literary principles and pictorial strategies that together constitute a poetics of painting, which this study aims to reconstruct.

The first chapter examines Poussin's statements on art theory that either paraphrase Tasso's *Discorsi* or reflect his poetics. Tasso's precepts on the election of subject matter, ideal imitation, poetic delight, verisimilitude, and the relationship of poetic invention and history herald Poussin's understanding of these concepts in his formal theorizing, in composing his works, and in their critical evaluation. Of all of the poetic ideas that Poussin gleaned from Tasso, none was more fundamental to his art than the poet's definition of *novità*. As the second chapter details, Poussin applied Tasso's concept to contemporary disputes on artistic originality, which, in turn, illuminates the painter's proclivity to reconceive his own artistic inventions. This context enables us to evaluate Poussin's response to the established conventions for illustrating the *Gerusalemme*. The third chapter focuses on the *Rinaldo and Armida* pictures and the *Echo and Narcissus*: themes, significantly, that Tasso metaphorically linked. This occasions an analysis of how Poussin's paintings incorporate the poetic veneer of a literary text, its tropes, conceits, and figurative language. These pictures thus embody the poetic process, exemplified in Marino and his followers, that mines and refashions the poetic imagery of canonical literary texts, especially Ovid and Tasso. In particular, Ottavio Tronsarelli's opera *libretti* on Narcissus and Rinaldo parallel Poussin's paintings in transfiguring poetic texts to accommodate spectatorship. Each painting embodies the optical dynamics of Narcissism, through the visual network of the composition, its address of the beholder, and the desire for painting this instills.

Chapter 4 explores the critical reception of the *Gerusalemme liberata* in terms of Tasso's capacity as a "painter." In the polemics over the epic's superiority to

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, theoretical agendas were frequently stated through analogies to the visual arts. Critics, including Galileo, censured the self-conscious artifice of Tasso's poetic language as defective painting, marred by disruptive coloring. Just as obscure were the philosophical ideas Tasso espoused, such as the causal link between sleep and death. The Saint Petersburg *Tancred and Erminia*, in its bold coloring and compositional focus on a dormant body, responds to the most contested aspects of Tasso's legacy. Chapter 5 also investigates the literary context of Poussin's colorism, but through the lens of Marino's *Adone*, and its contentious reception. Supporters and critics alike compared the poem's sensuous subject matter, ingenious conceits, and compendious structure to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The poet's staunchest follower, Antonio Bruni, claimed that exuberant coloring, which characterized Poussin's Titianesque works of this period, is the painterly corollary of Marino's Ovidian revival. Furthermore, the *Realm of Flora*, an ensemble of Ovidian characters who morph into flowers, consolidates topoi from Bruni's own Marinist poetry, which likewise presents a "Monarchia dei Fiori."

The sixth chapter addresses the emerging priority of narrative unity in Poussin's history paintings of the 1630s. Now Raphael emerges as the primary inspiration. It is through his example that Poussin arrived at a disposition of narrative action in painting that accords with Tasso's requirements of the poetic fable, or plot. In works such as the *Plague at Ashdod* and the *Rape of the Sabines*, Poussin reconciles a unified theatrical space with figure groups that stage the unfolding narrative around a climactic action. In the *Israelites Gathering Manna*, the plot analogy becomes strikingly literal, as the groups across the foreground enact the complete story of the miracle, which Poussin urged his viewers "to read." The diachronic unity of the plot supercedes the perceptual synchrony of the pictorial field. In the famous discourse on the painting before the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in 1667, Poussin's expositors affirmed that the poetic structure of integrating subsidiary episodes to the principal action and its *peripeteia*, or dramatic reversal, justified the temporal and spatial rupture. I suggest that Poussin arrived at this radical solution through the advocacy of anachronism and episodic structure in earlier Roman artistic discourse, the critical stature of his prototype in Raphael, and the articulation of the *peripeteia* in the *Gerusalemme* itself.

The conclusion returns to the Tasso pictures, and considers how they embody the notions of plot unity, episode, and *peripeteia*, fundamental both to the design and reception of the *Manna*, and to the structure of the *Gerusalemme*. Tasso composed a moral and political allegory to integrate the amorous pagan episodes with the principal historical action of the epic. While most of Poussin's Tasso pictures depict such episodes, the artist, following Tasso's imagery, utilizes the semiotics of compositional structure, setting, and the alignment of the figures' gazes to situate each scene within the overall ideological structure and reversal of the epic narrative.

Ever since the *conférences* of the Académie Royale, Poussin's images have been upheld as lucid translations of literary sources.[13] They have remained the embodiment of *ut pictura poesis* in modern scholarship, especially in the fundamental research of Rensselaer Lee and Anthony Blunt.[14] Studies by Charles Dempsey, Elizabeth Cropper, Marc Fumaroli, Anthony Colantuono, Sebastian Schütze, and Philip Sohm have charted the impact of seventeenth-century poetic and rhetorical theory on Poussin's artistic practice. Concurrently, the analyses of Louis Marin and Oskar Bätschmann have theorized the semiotic structure of Poussin's paintings, whereas Sheila McTighe and Todd Olson have further probed how such structures encode political, even libertine, ideologies.[15] This book develops these two avenues of inquiry. It concentrates on the reconstruction of specific historical links between Poussin's art and literary culture. It also introduces contemporary poetic texts, many previously unknown, as paradigms for the narrative mechanisms of his works. These are presented not primarily as sources, but as a means to anchor recent critical investigations of the narrative structure and poetic resonance of Poussin's works to a historical literary context. Richard Verdi's essay on the *Tancred and Erminia* paintings and studies by Giovanni Careri and Henry Keazor have offered much insight on Poussin's visualization of Tasso. Françoise Graziani, Olivier Bonfait, and Emanuelle Hénin have shown the pertinence of Tasso's poetics to the artistic thought of Poussin and artists in his milieu.[16] Yet an understanding of Poussin's response to Tasso must encompass a larger analysis of the artist's development of narrative painting, and the poetics that shaped the creation and reception of his works.

No scholars have been as dedicated to examining Poussin's paintings in their contemporary literary culture as Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey.[17] They organize their analysis of Poussin's paintings through the series of "friendships" that dominated the artist's career, including both his patrons and intellectual companions, such as Marino and Michel de Montaigne. In particular, Cropper and Dempsey compare Poussin's gently moralizing and supremely rational paintings to Montaigne's *Essais*. Poussin often manipulates a subject in order to convey larger ideas about the aims of painting, its expressive and representational capacities, and the very nature of the beholder's response. Composition and reception are a mutually edifying exchange, animated by reason and good judgment.

Like Poussin's occasional quotation of Montaigne in his letters, his paintings after the *Gerusalemme liberata* and his excerpts from Tasso's *Discorsi* form merely the documentary armature of a more profound interaction. Whereas the *Essais* emerge, in Cropper and Dempsey's analysis, as a model for Poussin's social and intellectual use of painting, Tasso's epic, the greatest literary work of the time, parallels his artistic aims. The *Gerusalemme* was not simply a poem on the Crusades, but a self-conscious attempt to forge the ideal poem, adhering to the principles of Aristotle and the precedent of Homer and Virgil. Neither are Poussin's paintings simply illustrations of classical and biblical stories. Rather, each work cultivates

a pictorial idiom, based on the examples of antiquity and the Renaissance, to convey such stories with utmost poetic insight and supreme unity and order of form. Poussin's connection to Tasso rests not only on these parallels but, crucially, on how the poet's theoretical ideas supported the realization of these artistic goals.

ONE:
"*UT PICTURA POETICA*": POUSSIN AND THE POETICS OF TASSO

I. Poussin's "Treatise" on Painting and Tasso's *Discorsi*

In a letter to his friend and patron Paul Fréart de Chantelou, dated 29 August, 1650, Poussin reveals his intent to compose a treatise on painting. He had already gathered some "avertissements" on the subject, but opted not to divulge them at the time out of deference and gratitude to Chantelou's brother, Roland Fréart de Chambray, whose learned discourse on ancient and modern architecture had just appeared. Its preface had touted Poussin as the "le Raphaël de nostre siècle." Poussin thus felt that he could not, in modesty, acknowledge such praise by writing Chambray directly, nor expound his own ideas on painting to one whose learning was "trop savant" in this matter. Nonetheless, he promises that the refinement of his theoretical ideas would be a future undertaking.[1] Much to the dismay of his supporters, Poussin's treatise never materialized despite widespread rumors of its existence. His brother-in-law and assistant, Jean Dughet, explained that the weariness of age had impeded Poussin, and that death eventually halted the noble endeavor.[2] In all likelihood, the "avertissements" did, at least partially, "voir le jour," as transformed posthumously into the *Osservazioni di Nicolò Pussino sopra la pittura* that Giovanni Pietro Bellori appended to his biography of the artist.[3] Furthermore, Poussin, in one of his last letters, finally indulged Chambray's desire for some kernel of his pictorial wisdom. This time he was obliged by the author's even more fulsome paean in the *Idée de la perfection de la peinture* (1662). Poussin responded with his concise, cryptic "Définition" of painting that supplements the *Osservazioni* as vestiges of a more ambitious, but unrealized, theoretical enterprise.[4]

Anthony Blunt long ago revealed that the *Osservazioni* are by and large comprised of Poussin's reading notes from a range of artistic and literary treatises. The same is true of most of the maxims conveyed to Chambray and the various critical ideas expressed elsewhere in his correspondence, including the famous letter on the Modes. The texts Poussin consulted, including Tasso's *Discorsi*, have been identified and the degree to which he simply paraphrased and often copied

their contents has been established.[5] The exposé of the true origins of these documents, however, in no way diminishes their importance for understanding Poussin's theoretical sympathies, and how he may have critically applied them to his painting. André Félibien, Poussin's most thorough biographer and apologist, recognized this when he parsed the letter to Chambray in order to interpret various works according to its statements.[6]

Some debate exists on the notational versus literary status of the *Osservazioni*. If, on the one hand, we acknowledge the reliance on transcription and paraphrase, they seem to be raw extractions from the consulted texts. Yet this was hardly a mindless or insignificant act, as Colantuono has recently emphasized. The selection of the texts was in itself an intellectual exercise. Appropriations, even of lengthy passages, occurred frequently in treatises of the time.[7] Furthermore, the *Osservazioni* are ordered under headings to streamline their didactic value, presumably by Poussin, but Bellori's editorial intervention cannot be ruled out. When introducing Poussin's observations, Bellori states that they were compiled "al modo di Leonardo da Vinci." Poussin, of course, was well versed in Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*, since Cassiano dal Pozzo had commissioned illustrations from the artist for the initial publication of the treatise, based on manuscripts in the Barberini library.[8] He doubtless viewed Leonardo as the prototype for his own theoretical project. Rather than rote copying, some of the *Osservazioni* weave together material from several sources and feature an ingenious realignment of poetic principles to the art of painting. Their distilled eloquence, Colantuono has argued, resembles the pithy axioms of Leonardo's treatise. Far from being haphazard notes, they represent finished fragments of Poussin's unrealized treatise. Colantuono is surely right to recognize that Poussin's compiling and editing of earlier texts constitutes in itself a central, and hitherto underappreciated, aspect of his theoretical enterprise.[9]

The most striking thing about this process is the extent to which Poussin relied on Tasso as a primary source to articulate his poetics of painting. Indeed, Tasso's *Discorsi* are the most frequently pillaged of all the textual sources for the *Osservazioni*. They also yielded some of the basic theoretical tenets of the "Définition" for Chambray, and other notions endorsed throughout the letters.[10] Poussin doubtless would have consulted a great number of texts, art theoretical, literary, and technical, if he had brought the treatise to fruition. Yet whatever the exact degree of progress achieved in this project, the fragments indicate that Poussin turned first and foremost, and repeatedly, to Tasso. This is remarkable. Why would a painter, envisioning a theoretical *summa* of his profession, so extensively consult, let alone paraphrase, treatises on poetics? Published tracts on painting by contemporary painters like Pietro da Cortona, who was assisted by the Jesuit Gian Domenico Ottonelli, and Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy, who composed the highly literary Latin verse epistle *De Arte Graphica* as a pendant to Horace's *Ars poetica,* rehearse some of the basic *ut pictura poesis* topoi. Yet neither text exhibits anything like the general reliance on poetic theory we see in the

Osservazioni and Poussin's other writings, not to mention his particular adherence to Tasso.[11]

Perhaps the motive for this extraordinary situation is not only what Tasso proposes, because his precepts draw, after all, upon a vast reservoir of humanistic and Aristotelian theory, but also the fact that these are promulgated by the author of the *Gerusalemme liberata* in implicit defense of it. Poussin's gravitation toward Tasso's poetics when he was articulating his own theory of art can thus be seen as a logical consequence of his prior and continuing pictorial engagement with Tasso's poem. If, as seems likely, the *Osservazioni* date from around 1650, this was precisely the period in which Poussin returned to themes from Tasso in his work after a long hiatus. The designs for a painting of the *Abandonment of Armida*, which, like the treatise, remained unrealized, mark a renewed interest in the *Gerusalemme liberata* and coincide with Poussin's mature reflection on Tasso's poetics.[12]

There is ample evidence that even in the late 1620s–30s, the period from which most of the Tasso pictures date, Poussin was equipped to glean Tasso's poetics in conjunction with his reading of the *Gerusalemme liberata*. As early as Poussin's first years in Rome, Giulio Mancini found the young painter's literary inclinations so exceptional as to merit special note. His erudition facilitated the translation of any fable, history, or poem with his brush.[13] All of the biographers stress the extent and depth of Poussin's reading when meditating upon a subject to paint. This includes not only Félibien and Bellori, who knew the mature master, but Joachim Sandrart, a friend of the young artist. He recounts that whenever Poussin developed an idea for a subject, he would diligently study the texts that pertained to it, and immediately jot down compositional sketches.[14] The transposition from text to image was a kinetic act of poetic fury.

Perhaps the most important evidence of the young Poussin's scholarly inclination was his association with Cassiano dal Pozzo. The secretary to Cardinal Francesco Barberini was the most significant patron of Poussin's early years. Cassiano's promotion of early modern scientific inquiry, his participation in the Accademia dei Lincei, and his maintenance of a vast network of correspondence with intellectuals throughout and beyond Italy are well known. His *Museo cartaceo*, the first systematic attempt to record graphically all vestiges of the ancient world, not only works of art, marked an important step in the foundation of modern archaeology.[15] Poussin himself acknowledged that he had been a "pupil of his house and museum."[16] Félibien records that Cassiano dal Pozzo advised the young Poussin to consult the best authors when conceiving a subject, urging him to utilize his library.[17] Félibien pinpoints one aspect of Cassiano's protean intellectual pursuits that has been relatively neglected: his literary interests. His correspondents included many of the leading literary figures of the age. He was in a position to mediate Poussin's access to their works and ideas.[18]

Cassiano doubtless offered the same type of encouragement to Pietro Testa, the painter and etcher who was associated with Poussin and produced drawings for the *Museo cartaceo*. Testa's relationship to Poussin and Cassiano is of particular