"Ch'io nol lasci ne la penna": Ariosto's Discourses of Desire

While *Orlando furioso* has never lost its place as the quintessential literary text of the *Rinascimento*, its understanding has naturally been subject to the vicissitudes of time and taste. The modernist conception, established by De Sanctis and Croce, of Ariosto as the poet of *discordia concors* — the supreme achiever of stylistic harmony and narrative inventiveness — has been slow to fade. But lately it has been qualified by glimpses of the text's dark underside: personal and historical defeat shadowing the glow of Ferrarese courtly culture, a knowing silence blunting the ceaseless babble of play. While these interrogations of the Ariostan text as the epitome of High Renaissance aesthetic humanism have not gone unanswered, there is now a growing sense that its real affinities are with the postmodernist productions of Barthes and Borges, masters of the labyrinth of writing.[1]

Central to this trend is the function of narrative in the poem. Traditional arguments for the poet's humanism have focused on the magisterial detachment of Ariosto's narrator. Adapting the posturings of medieval romance narrative, the latter develops an elaborate rhetoric, partly imitative and partly parodic, that conveys the humanist writer's total control of his poetic "world." But Ariosto's, or his persona's, command of his textual universe has been undermined by readings of the narrative situation variously stressing the text's ultimate lack of referentiality or the absence of a final escape from its labyrinth. One important aspect of this debate is the role the "divine analogy" assigns to the reader. Paradoxically, the same critical tradition that celebrates mastery of one's textual universe as a humanist triumph of form over matter also tends to view the reader constructed by the text as less the victim than the beneficiary of its narrator's machinations. Even his efforts to frustrate the reader's desire for closure have been attributed to a positive strategy of inducing in him or her a state akin to that of the text's heroes, thereby assimilating diegesis to mimesis through the mediation of the Narrator.[2]

A possible escape from this dilemma is implied in Michel de Certeau's conceit of cultural appropriation as a contest between an officious readerly mapmaker and a resistant writerly tourist (119 and 165–76).[3] Within a broader dichotomy of theory/practice — or, from the perspective of agency, strategy/tactic — Certeau cites certain traditional or authoritative discourses generated by institutions of power and imposed by them on presumptively passive recipients. Resisting these master discourses are the habits or "practices" by which the recipients realize, enact, and deflect them, in the

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process making them their own. According to this analogy, whereas a "map" is an official and abstract god's-eye account of a cultural space, a "tour" is a pragmatic act of enunciation through which the potentiality of the map is actualized, but also individualized, by its appropriating or "poaching" inhabitant.

Certeau's postmodernist conception of practice implies a strong intentional gap, if not invariable hostility, between the perpetrators of theory — the mapmakers of various kinds of modern discourse — and their resistant practitioners. But in the dawning Gutenberg era this contestation may be more subtle, less inevitably hostile, than its postmodern avatars. Barry Lydgate (351f.) has observed that a crucial moment in the evolution of reading occurs when a generalized historical tradition of *auctoritates* passed down from generation to generation in memory and manuscript is replaced by the new technology whose textual stability puts a premium on internal coherence. In the old episteme an impersonal or suprapersonal authority resides in tradition itself, a residue of "truth" implicit in the accumulation of data from text to text, whose very differences seem to confirm that transcendent core of meaning. As Evelyn B. Tripple has put it, at this juncture "the authority of the subject to speak has yet to be invented; the writer is not self-authorized but authorized by others, by plural, external, potentially competing guarantors of the text" (57). On the contrary, Lydgate notes, in the Gutenberg era authority rests on "social covenants" that tacitly acknowledge the "participatory nature of literary performance." To extrapolate from Lydgate's hypothesis, if the tradition-oriented scribal text is "authoritative," the author-oriented printed one may be termed "authorial," the distinction lying in the source of the writer's authority. The disappearance of the communally passive "audience" of scribal reading necessitates the author's finding a way to engage his reader in the construction of his text. The difference between the scribal and printed-dispersed modes of communication rests largely on the reader's willing acceptance of textual responsibility.

Given the early modern writer's need to create the fit audience for a more contingent, originary text, a slightly different trope for the textual encounter seems in order. Instead of Certeau's mapmaker and tourist-poacher, the writer and reader may more appropriately be figured as fellow-travellers rerouting the traditional readerly discourse and, like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, seeking together new itineraries through seemingly familiar terrain. Under this hypothesis we may expect to find an implied reader whose freedom to interpret the text is sponsored by the implied author.[4] As Eugenio Donato argues, a pure narrative text like the *Furioso* eschews projecting an "I" outside of the narrative, but instead "redoubles itself . . . by reintegrating and staging both the authorial voice and the reader within the narrative itself" ("The Shape of Fiction" 818).[5] In the pages that follow, I will try to show how Ariosto uses various specu-

lar or theatrical devices, including the mimetic insertion into his text of embedded stories, to construct the reader as a writerly sidekick engaged in reading as a creative "practice."

i.

Ariosto situates his narrative comfortably (if playfully) within the conventions of medieval chivalric romance. Although he alerts us at once to the fact that *this* narrative is a *written* text ("opera d'inchiostro," 1.3), the dominant convention is that of the informal, even cheeky, teller of tales addressing a courtly audience.[6] Ariosto's most notorious addition to this convention is his narrator's self-characterization as a lover, which allows him to express empathy with the frustrated lover-heroes of the poem: e.g., Rinaldo (2.1), Grifone (16.1–3), and especially Orlando (24.3, 30.4, 35.1). The primary receiver of this discourse is of course his patron, Ippolito d'Este. Favorite secondary targets of direct address are the court "Donne," who are usually addressed in the *esordi*, typically with a complex irony (22.1–3, 28.1–3, 38.1–4). In addition, from time to time the diegesis foregrounds the narrative situation by lightly implying a conventional cadre of courtly auditors who signal their desires as consumers (1.45), chastize the Narrator for his blindnesses (24.3), or are solicited to concede his authority (23.112).

Inseparable from speaker and addressee is the *nature* of the discourse. Insistently oral, its typical diegetic act is that of telling (*dire*), or even *not* telling, whether the Narrator informs his audience of what he has withheld before (7.66), reserves some information for later (8.90, 18.25), or explains that he has spared the listener extraneous detail (28.102). The text's telling is often explicitly a re-telling or recounting (*ricontar* 9.85, *racontar* 14.63, and passim) or, *contare* easily morphing into *cantare*, a singing. But the normal textual mode is speech (*parlare*), speaking being what texts — at least narrative texts — do, or ironically don't do: "di lui non parla più l'istoria mia" (29.7). And it is this *parlare* conceived as a Dantean labyrinth that the Narrator must pick his way through — "Ma d'un parlar ne altro, ove sono ito / si lunghi, dal camin ch'io faceva ora?" he muses (17.80) — while hastening to assure us "[n]on . . . aver smaritto."

The notion of a path of speech foregrounds the predominant spatial metaphor of Ariostan discourse. Next to telling, the most recurrent narrative act in the poem is that of hunting or tracking. In this discursive pattern the Narrator hovers between passively following textual leads and more aggressively leading his audience along his own chosen path. Especially early in the poem, he will typically follow (*seguire*) where the story seems to be leading him ("seguendo l'istoria," 5.4), his sudden shifts implicitly dictated by the characters or action: "Ma seguitiamo Angelica che fugge" (1.32). Even the end of a canto will not deter him from pursuing his quarry when he resumes (2.76). The conceit of "finding" an aban-

doned character or narrative strand is slightly more directive, as when the Narrator sets out to "(ri)trovar" Rinaldo in Scotland (8.21) or Astolfo on the Armenian road (22.4). Slightly more purposeful is the gesture of "turning" or "returning" to one quarry, often coupled with the act of "leaving" another: e.g., "Lasciànlo [Ruggiero] andar . . . e torniamo a Rinaldo" (4.50). In a courtly variant of this pose he invites the listener, hand figuratively on his elbow, to accompany him to Holland for Olimpia's wedding (9.93).

Closely linked to the act of turning-digressing-returning is that of deferring. This gesture evokes the romance tendency to frustrate the reader's desire for closure. But it also lies at the core of the discussion of narrative control, as deferring the resolution of a plot motif usually implies the wilful assertion of textual authority. Thus the Narrator's choice to "differire" reporting Dalinda's words at the end of canto 4 underscores his intervention in the *istoria*, as does his announcement that "io differirò l'istoria mia / in altro tempo" because "troppo è lungo ormai . . . il canto" (10.115). At the height of Orlando's passion — and the dead center of the poem — where the hero is most constrained by events and his own unruly emotions, the Narrator closes the twenty-third canto with one of his most elaborate *congedi*:

> Ma son giunto a quel segno il qual s'io passo
> vi potria la mia storia esser molesta;
> ed io la vo' più tosto diferire . . . (23.136)[7]

Here the preexisting status of the material is acknowledged by the passing reference to the trace (*segno*) of another mind or hand. But the "story" remains firmly within the Narrator's control, to defer or not as may please his listener.

These posturings by the Narrator hinge largely on his orientation to the romance tradition, toward which he often professes abject docility. The labyrinthine narrative path is that of romance "error," and his imprisonment in it is sometimes associated with the eponymous "Turpino," the conventional source of the Carolingian oral epic. In canto 13 the Narrator first invokes Turpin's authority in breaking off his narrative; in canto 28, in including the story of Giocondo and Fiametta despite its slandering women. Other precursors figure more complexly. Being both nameless and subject to error, they introduce the possibility of revision and invention. Thus the Narrator attributes details regarding Gabrina and Odorico to an unnamed "autor" whose authority he implicitly privileges even over Turpin's (24.44). Finally, the example of Boiardo himself authorizes the Ariostan persona's own inventive freedom. In encountering a reified oral tradition symbolized by an infallible "Turpino" whom a singer-teller can only slavishly repeat, a *writer* like Boiardo offers his reader wings on which he can soar above the imprisoning oral text.

At this juncture tropes of oral narration give way to those of writing. The occasions in the poem when Ariosto's narrator characterizes himself as a writer are few. But in the full context of both *récit* and *discours* — i.e., with respect to both the content of his narrative and his relation to his reader — they confirm the implications of authority already noted. More important, they point to a solution of the problem with which this study is concerned: namely, Ariosto's accommodating his own reader. If the oral-aural and spatial characterizations of the Narrator as teller-singer and hunter-tracker evoke his own, and imply his reader's, Orlando-like imprisonment within the maddening resonances of oral textuality, the rare but potent allusions to his *métier* as a writer suggest an avenue of escape. In the postmodern period, improvisatory discourse can figure as an antidote to a hegemonic textuality; on the threshold of the modern era, it is paradoxically *writing* that offers both an appropriation of, and a liberation from, a dominant orality. The writer becomes a tourist in the mapped domain of oral narrative, a poacher on the royal preserve of tradition; and the reader is implicitly a fellow refugee from its constraints.

The *Furioso*'s discourse of writing is rarely direct and usually implies the related activity of reading. It is fairly late in the poem that a *congedo* substitutes a scribal metaphor, the full page, for the usual oral one: "da tutti i lati ho pieno il foglio" (33.128). And even here the act of writing is metonymically displaced, in this case to its product. In an earlier passage the Narrator is deflected from his account of the Siege of Paris by Astolfo, who "priega ch'io nol lasci ne la penna" (15.9). The potent trope recalls the magician's former imprisonment in Alcina's myrtle, as well as intimating his special association with the magical power of writing.[8] Even on those rarest of occasions when the Narrator explicitly refers to himself as writing, as when he recounts Astolfo's liberation of Atlante's castle, the naming of the act is in the privative mode — "ed altre cose che di scriver *lasso*" (22.23; my emphasis) — though again the scripted is metonymically displaced to the "imago" the magus finds under a heavy stone and to the "libro" of Logistilla, whose instructions he follows.[9]

Perhaps the most revealing allusion to the act of writing links it explicitly to the central issue of gender in Ariosto's poem. In the *esordio* to canto 29 the Narrator, echoing 1.3, pledges himself "con penna ed inchiostro" to correct Rodomonte's slanders against women (29.2).[10] Noteworthy here is the association between writing and a resistance to one aspect of the oral tradition, its misogyny. Not only is this one of the few occasions in the poem where the Narrator speaks of himself as a writer, but the pretense of undoing Rodomonte's slanders of women clearly implies a further dismantling of the misogynist strain in traditional romance. Hence it is as a *writer* that the Narrator transcends his pretended constraints as an objective reporter to record whatever traditional discourse has sent down. As opposed to, say, Castiglione's premise that writing exists to preserve the

historic truth of discourse, Ariosto implies that it contains the godlike power to purvey a truth that *negates* traditional discourse.

This inference of a link between writing and revisionism leads us to the related issue of the narrating writer as a model reader. Before he can "correct" the errors of the chivalric romance, the Narrator must first read and interpret them. In addition, there are several instances of *characters* in the narrative functioning as readers that obliquely admonish Ariosto's own reader, for they generally exemplify bad reading. In canto 36, for example, Marfisa gets into a potentially fatal fight with her brother Ruggiero because, as the Narrator ironically opines, he "non pose mente alla scrittura" on the marble tomb beside them (36.42). The worst reader in the poem, however, is Orlando, whose repeated misreadings of Angelica's erotic idyl with Medoro "scritto" on the trees as witnesses to the event (23.111) seal his doom, at least till Astolfo cures him. As Donato has oberved ("Per selve" 51–53), at this juncture Orlando enters the realm of "literature," embarking on a hermeneutic struggle that ends in madness. Trapped as a reader by the scriptural truth of Angelica's falsity, Orlando tries valiantly to read against the grain of her *scrittura*; ironically his own readerly erudition defeats him, for Medoro's script is in Arabic, of which Orlando is a perfect scholar (110). His learning binds him to the truth of the text; like the enmyrtled Astolfo, he is penned in another's writing. The paradigmatic relation of tree and pen with respect to Astolfo ("left" in both) is here reiterated syntagmatically in the words inscribed *on* trees by Medoro. As the text's frequent connections between Orlando and the Narrator — or, to be more precise, between Orlando/Astolfo and the Narrator — make clear, the latter's potential fate is prefigured in that of his hero(es).

ii.

In his encounters with his implied audience Ariosto reveals the full range of writerly possibilities inherent in his narrative stance. Whereas most of his personages are inherited and thus subject him to a preexisting authority, their *disposition* in his own narrative opens up a space of invention and points the way to a more active and creative form of reading. In his negotiations with his audience — which at a crucial juncture become negotiations with a *reader* and potential *writer* — the poet solicits this more active mode of reading through a variety of extradiegetical postures.

On the whole, the Narrator maintains his distance from the events he records, displaying a variety of postures. As the conventional reporter, he identifies with his personages according to their own dispositions as heroes or villains. With the "good guys," especially Orlando (9.1–2 and 23.95), he may casually confirm or even endorse their often erroneous beliefs. From the others — e.g., Pinabello (2.54), Rodomonte (29.18), Gabrina (20.141), and Marganorre (37.106) — he distances himself with predictable

if not parodic conventionality. Often, the Narrator goes out of his way to foreground his detachment, wringing his hands helplessly at the fates of Isabella (24.85) or Ruggiero (45.21) or apostrophizing Isabella (29.26f.), Bradamante (45.80), and Orlando (19.31f.) directly, though still apparently powerless to help them. With regard to Angelica his attitude changes as he gradually distances himself from Orlando's infatuation. So grieved by her falling into the clutches of the lecherous Hermit that he must change the subject (8.62–8), when she later escapes Orlando's clutches by vanishing before his (and our) eyes, he curses the magical ring and its giver for permitting her to survive (29.73f.). The outer limits of his ability to control events are signalled by his acknowledging God as the god of the poem (17.1–5, 41.100).

Only on rare occasions does the Narrator abandon this pose of spectatorial helplessness and imply a deeper knowledge or control of his personages. Early on, he takes it upon himself to tell us the *true* meanings of Bradamante's and Brunello's words as they verbally duel over the ring (4.9). It is but a short step from interpreter to reviser. His disavowal of Rodomonte's misogyny prompts him to pledge "penna e[d] . . . inchiostro" to its refutation (29.1–2), and he opts to rewrite on the spot Maligigi's list of Italian heroes, supplementing his interpretation of the prophetic figures on Merlin's fountain with candidates of his own (26.53). Completing the evolution of his attitude toward Angelica, at the end of his account of her affair with Medoro he cavalierly leaves her to a "miglior plectro"; registering his disillusionment with a Bartlebeian "di seguir più questa non mi cale" (30.16–17), he in effect erases her from his text.[11]

By and large, Ariosto's narrator occupies the authorial middle ground. The most extreme, godlike stance is actually fairly rare in the *Furioso*. It is implied mainly in his occasional moralizing meditations—most famously, on errant "giudicio uman" (1.7) — and in various *esordi*: on mankind's tendency to war with the female of the species (5.1–3), the impossibility of concealing one's crimes (6.1), and, increasingly in later cantos, various historical vicissitudes in the Italian wars (14.1–9, 40.1–4, 42.1–5). More frequent are the flattering gestures towards his patrons typified by the elaborate praise of Ippolito's clemency at the siege of Padua (36.1–3), of Alfonso's victory at Ravenna (14.1–9), or of Estensi *cortesia* in general (41.1–3). Between these poles of lordly superiority and abject submission, the Narrator typically engages his listener in a variety of negotiations that foreground the act of (re)constructing a story by producing, and implicitly by receiving, a narrative. The fundamental stance is that of simply registering an intentionality. Thus he will frequently telegraph his punches by hinting at the sequel, a commonplace in the various *seguire*s and *differire*s at the ends of cantos (i.a., 3.77, 4.72, 6.81, 9.93). A slyer variation is to hint at the intentions of a *character*, which has the effect of counterposing the constraining effect of the plot as a given with the Narrator's own freedom

to convey or withhold information. Thus early in the text he discloses Angelica's intention to deceive and abandon Sacripante (1.48) as well as Pinabello's grim plans for Bradamante (2.66ff.). The effect increases exponentially when the intention revealed is God's, as when at the height of Orlando's slaughtering of peasants the Narrator proclaims His plan to "porlo a guardia di sua santa fede" (24.10).

The consciousness of narrative freedom becomes more prominent in addresses to the listener that tease her with sequels of events deliberately withheld. Sometimes this information has simply not come down to the Narrator: e.g., Orlando's heroic deeds after he returns to St. Malo or those of the female warriors, Bradamante and Marfisa (37.24). At other times the facts are not clear and so cannot be told, leaving it to each reader's "giudicio" to invent them (14.63). More often he knows but simply refuses to say — either without giving an excuse, out of fear of disbelief, or because he wishes to talk about another character first. The last motive can easily become a pretext for a blatant display of narrative gamesmanship as when, distracted first by Rinaldo and then by Guidone, the Narrator remembers that he has forgotten to tell us about Bradamante but then ignores her further and turns to Agramante (32.1–3).

Beyond these fairly transparent gestures of narrative control are other, subtler ones aimed at soliciting the active participation of the reader. As we have seen, the Narrator may on occasion either urge his own experiential authority, usually as a lover, or he may construct his audience as interrogators of the story, whose needs potentially drive it: viz., "Se mi domanda alcun, io dirò" (1.45). Frequently he implies either the listener's flagging attention or the attentive energy required to keep track of the constantly shifting narrative. This teasing of the audience often turns on the Narrator's selectivity in giving or withholding information. Thus he draws attention to the fact that he has hitherto suppressed Melissa's name (7.66) and obliquely apologizes for omitting the blissful reunion of Olimpia and Bireno (9.85) and for ignoring Angelica so long that the listener might have trouble recognizing her (19.17). After Rodomonte has plunged Turnus-like into the Seine, our curiosity is piqued by the sudden appearance of one who, it seems, "l'odio estingue e l'ira tarda," only to be told we will have to wait to learn the newcomer's name because the Narrator has something else to tell us first (18.25). The most notorious of these teases comes when Bradamante is abandoned to the confusions of Atlante's castle. Here the Narrator consoles his audience by promising to rescue her and her lover, once again appropriating the virtues of his magician-hero, for it is really Astolfo who will do so. This bold intervention segues easily into the poem's most extended trope — in fact, a double trope — for the Narrator's relation to his audience: he is like both a chef or *maître d'* titilating the diner's palate and a weaver completing a great tapestry (81).[12]

Interestingly, when Ariosto's narrator genders his audience as female, the resulting revisionary model of reading also implies a model for writing. In what is by far the longest of the poem's *esordi*, in the opening octaves of canto 37, the Narrator's lengthy defense of women peaks with his listing their champions in print and culminates in his inviting them to write their own praises, thereby bruiting the story suppressed by the envy of other "scrittori" (23). While the Narrator modestly excludes himself from the number of those who have thus corrected the historical and literary record, he demonstrates this inventive freedom both in his relation to his characters and readers and in the full model of reading as potential poaching which he himself constructs in the internal narratives that lace his text. It is in the latter that the poet maps the liberating potential of narrative discourse as a reading-writing of his poem.

iii.

Ariosto most convincingly instructs, and constructs, his reader in his metanarratives. By "metanarrative" I mean a "narrative of the second degree" wherein "the act of narrating which produces the second narrative is an event recounted in the first one."[13] Critical discussion of Ariostan metanarrative has suffered from overattention to its mimetic function. Because women are at the center of most occurrences, many commentators take the erotic life to be definitive of the mode. C.P. Brand, for example, singles out for attention the episodes of Dalinda, Olimpia, and Isabella, in which a "suffering female" delivers a "lengthy narrative" conveying a "picture of events very largely as seen by herself" and invariably followed by a male protagonist's reaction (134). This suggests a kind of paradigm of the Ariostan metanarrative in which a lady in distress deflects a hero from the pursuit of his historic goal as a warrior by telling her story. Such exclusive attention to metanarrative's intratextual mimesis encourages an oversimplification or distortion of its substance. While the erotic content is important, it is by no means its only, or even dominant, thrust. Only five of the major examples are narrated by women; and the most notable action resulting from one of these, the story of Marganorre, is performed not by a male protagonist but by a female warrior, Marfisa; while the fifth, Lidia's, notably has no consequences at all. Moreover, even Brand's three exemplary tales are perhaps more interesting for their differences than for the common feature he privileges. Certainly all three motivate heroic interventions. But where Orlando's efforts are taken on behalf of the metanarrators, Olimpia and Isabella, the chief beneficiary of Rinaldo's heroics in Ginevra's story is not Dalinda, whose resolution comes long after her recital and whose fate is mixed at best, but Ginevra herself. Indeed, of Brand's three "suffering females" only the one — or more precisely one of the two — rescued by Rinaldo enjoys a "happy" ending, though Olimpia is ultimately given a second chance at married bliss with Oberto.[14]

If the functional differences among these stories are substantial, even more diverse are their qualities as erotic discourse. In an interesting essay on Cervantes and Ariosto, Marina Scordilis Brownlee draws on René Girard's theory of desire and the novel to make the point that Cervantes's shift from the circular, timeless narrative of romance to a linear one anticipating the novel is paralleled by another, from a "discourse of desire" to a more self-reflexive "discourse about desire" (230). This shift, I believe, is present in the *Furioso* as well. What distinguishes Dalinda's tale from those of Olimpia and Isabella, for example, is that it is a sustained discourse about desire, *Dalinda's* desire for Polinesso and *our* ultimately frustrated desire for a certain kind of story. Throughout, the tale is framed as a moral exemplum, told retrospectively by love's victim as she recalls her former innocence and gullibility. Its meaning is summed up in her peroration: "Ve' come Amor ben chi lui segue, tratta!" (5.74). Love (and men) "reward" women's love harshly, but Dalinda also stresses her own blindness and her willingness to do Polinesso's bidding (11–16). These comments underscore her present wisdom as a narrator as opposed to her innocence and ignorance at the time of the narrated events (e.g., ott. 46.8, 49.1). Occasionally, these reflections on her former self recall those of the text's master discourse about desire, the Narrator's in his "mad" *esordi*, as for example in her self-characterization as "divisa e sevra" from her true self (26). This connection is reenforced at the end of her metanarrative, when the Narrator binds her story to his own with his favorite path-of-narrative motif: "Così narrò Dalinda al paladino / seguendo tuttavolta il lor camino" (74).

This example suggests ways in which the "suffering female" stories are linked with other types of metanarrative. In contrast to Dalinda's tale, for example, Olimpia's is at best a discourse about desire *manqué*. As a digression from the unfolding of the hero's *fabula*, on which it throws light by displacing his own interdicted quest for a "loved object" (Dalla Palma, "Dal secondo al terzo" 95), it remains a discourse *of* the teller's own desire, narrated in unreflective ignorance. In contrast to Dalinda, Olimpia's ignorance of her error mirrors Orlando's of the impossibility of his own desire. If the function of Olimpia's metanarrative as a "syntagm" or metonymy of Orlando's *fabula* prevents it from becoming a discourse about desire, the same is not always true of "paradigmatic" metanarratives that mirror a theme of the main plot.[15] As we will see, one of these, the story of Lidia, epitomizes the discourse about desire, even if the desire in her case is a desire for revenge.

In this context, two other metanarratives may serve to bring us back to my argument. Astolfo's story of Alcina, told to Ruggiero in canto 6, is a discourse about desire that reverses Olimpia's inability to speak her belated self-knowledge. Although he is male, Astolfo's intersection with Ruggiero emphatically foregrounds the episode's syntagmatic or immediate-

ly mimetic aspect. Likewise, the Host's story to Rinaldo in canto 43 of the magical *vaso* that detects female unchastity resembles that of Olimpia as a discourse of desire *manqué.* The difference, of course, is that the Host's own retrospective angle on his wife's infidelity is closely tied to Rinaldo's wise decision not to undergo the test himself. As I will argue below, this metanarrative turns out to be a parable of reading, part of a nexus of similar stories late in the poem that stage the receiver as representative of Ariosto's own reader.

iv.

At first blush, the narrative transactions displayed in Ariosto's metanarratives fall into a fairly simple pattern. In the first part of the poem, stories of a lady's distress typically told by women spur Rinaldo or Orlando into frenetic activity. With the exception of Lidia and Marganorre, all of the metanarratives told by women to men, including Brand's three main "suffering female" examples, occur in the first half of the poem; conversely four of the six that fall in the second half are told by men to other men.[16] But this pattern is complicated as soon as we consider the *quality* of the transaction. Dalla Palma's argument that certain of the poem's novelle either intersect with or reflect the erotic motives of their male receivers is, I think, persuasive. But even in these early metanarratives Ariosto's focus is at least as much on the narratee's reaction *as a receiver* as it is on his action as a warrior. Moreover, throughout the poem the embedded tale is almost always solicited by a formal "proposition."[17] Indeed, the invitation to speak often stresses the hero's own desire. For example, Rinaldo's eagerness to know the cause of Dalinda's distress is registered twice when he first meets her (4.71, 72), as is Orlando's request to hear Isabella's story (12.93, 13.2). At the heart of the *Furioso*'s metanarratives, then, lurks a desire of narrative — i.e., desire as the "motor of narration" — as well as a narrative of desire (Brooks 55).

This emphasis is established by the first instance in the poem, Pinabello's tale to Bradamante. Here, of course, the allegedly typical narrative situation is inverted. A minor *male* character, an arch-villain and family enemy, recites to the poem's main *female* warrior-hero how his lady love has been snatched by Atlante astride the hippogriff and how Ruggiero and Gradasso have battled him in vain. Despite the gender role reversal, the story bears out some of the critical tenets already discussed. For example, it betrays a clear syntagmatic dimension. Pinabello's self-characterization as a love-driven hero — "presi la via che mi mostrava Amore" (2.40) — echoes the effective introduction of Bradamante seeking her lover a few octaves earlier (33). The story functions proleptically, in that Bradamante will eventually find Ruggiero imprisoned, like Pinabello's Lady, in Atlante's castle and Pinabello will reveal hostile designs on her. In addition, like the typical "suffering female" metanar-

ratives, this one has the effect of motivating its hearer to heroic intervention, though in this instance she is herself female and the action deliberately ill-advised. Whether the episode's happy issue — eventually Bradamante escapes Pinabello's trap and hears Merlin's prophecy — cancels out her credulity is debatable; but at the very least it does underscore the function of desire in receiving another's story. Bradamante may be viewed as the first of a number of principals in the *Furioso* who are also, for good or for ill, exemplary "readers."

In short, Bradamante is first given a substantial presence in the poem as a hearer of stories. Her reception of Pinabello's tale prompts the first real action she performs. Interestingly, her motive in soliciting the story is the universal desire for "news" or, punningly, for a story: "Questo disir, ch'a tutti sta nel core, / de' fatti altrui sempre cercar novella" (36). This initial emphasis on the disinterested desire simply to hear another's story is not otiose, for it gives the poet an excuse to associate Pinabello with himself and Bradamante with his reader. Ariosto uses the villain to introduce two patently self-referential *meraviglie*: the hippogriff and Atlante's magical shield.[18] As a consequence, the line is blurred between the story's intradiegetic reception by Bradamante and its extradiegetic one by Ariosto's listener. *All* narratives target a desire to hear, learn, believe, and even vicariously act. This inaugural metanarrative figures the reader's own desire to be deceived by Ariosto, as well as foregrounding the slipperiness of the truth-claims of any story. The responsion between Pinabello's "evil" intention to deceive Bradamante and Ariosto's presumably benevolent one to deceive us is underscored by the heroine's immediate reaction to the metanarrative. First she makes Pinabello repeat the story over and over and only then proposes that they return to Atlante's "stanza" (60). It is true that this response shows how a specific desire — *her* desire to learn about her lover's plight — shapes our reception, but the desire to find Ruggiero does not motivate Bradamante to help Pinabello; that is a function of the metonymic parallel between their stories.

This mélange of narrative motives is brought out by several of the extradiegetic features of the episode. One is the Narrator's orientation to the story. At the outset he limits himself largely to Bradamante's point of view, shifting to Pinabello's perspective only after his decision to deceive Bradamante (67–70, 72). This shift occurs in a curious passage recounting how Pinabello's plot comes to him only after the "fantasia" of revenge arising from his "nativo otio" of her family has caused him to lose his way, till "ritrovossi in una selva oscura" (68). Coming so early in the poem and adumbrating many later quotations and allusions, the Dantean echo links Pinabello and the Narrator even further while alerting us to the dangers of "fantasia." Unusually, the Narrator twice foregrounds the credibility/credulity motif central to Ariostan narrative. Near the end of his story (54), Pinabello insists that his fantastic tale is an eye-witness account. That such

a "meraviglia" may have the effect of truth is borne out later, when he successfully fabricates a story about a captive damsel to get the "mal cauta" Bradamante into the cave (72–74).

The second such feature is the insertion of a meta-metanarrative or third-level *récit*. Pinabello relates how a Dwarf has told him that two warriors were about to battle Atlante, leading him to tell them the same story he has just told Bradamante (46f.). As with all such *mises en abîme*, the addition of another narrative level shocks the reader into recognizing the parallels between his own situation and Bradamante's and his analogous desire to believe. It also casts a retrospective doubt over Pinabello's initial story. Once his injurious device is undertaken and he begins to embellish his original metanarrative with more and more fantastic accretions, we find ourselves wondering if *any* of his story is "true."[19] Ariosto's relation to Boccaccio is far more problematic than his relation to Dante, whose presence in this metanarrative will be repeated importantly in subsequent ones, notably Lidia's. But by beginning his series of embedded narratives with so blatant an example of the storyteller-as-liar, Ariosto too may be advertising his own narrative as a Galeotto.[20] In any case, the reception of Pinabello's seductive stories underscores the importance of the reader in Ariosto's metanarratives.

For the most part, it is the metanarratives in the second half of the *Furioso* that stress narrative desire. To be sure, all of these are mimetically concerned with female sexual desire, the final two and the Landlord's tale to Rodomonte specifically with the inconstancy of women. But in these tales the focus shifts decisively from mimesis to diegesis, from the representation of desire in the stories themselves to that in their reception. Metanarrative functions as specular performances of the reader's desire.

The one seeming anomaly in these stories is Lidia's confession to Astolfo in Hell. In one sense it is a throwback to the stories in the first half: the narrator is a woman, the hearer a male warrior, and the ostensible purpose cautionary. But as the ultimate discourse about desire, told in a Dantean inferno where it is too late to repent, from the perspective of the receiver it shares the disinterestedness of the four stories that framed it in the 1516 edition. Along with the situation, Ariosto appropriates from Dante its central theme of fame. Lidia tells a story about having a story. Like her precursors, especially in the *Inferno*, her "gran desir" is to have her story known (34.10). Even intradiegetically, in her calculations as to how far she can push her revenge against Alcestes she reveals an uncharacteristic concern with her good name: she wants her lover's death (40) but also wants to preserve her reputation (42). As a result, when the narrative arrives at his death, instead of the expected jubilation we find the Dantean fade to her eternal "present": "Per pena ch'al fallir mio . . . così avrò in eterno" (43). Unlike her earlier counterparts in the poem — whether primarily narrating victims like Dalinda, Olimpia, and Isabella or narrated victimiz-

ers like Alcina and Gabrina — Lidia is wholly exemplary. She exists in order to tell her story.[21]

Most reflective of the position of the reader is the story of Fiordespina that Ricciardetto tells to Ruggiero in canto 25. On the surface, it epitomizes the *Furioso*'s narrative of desire; indeed, Donato sees it as providing the clinching evidence for the proposition that in the poem "sexuality . . . is subordinated to desire" ("Per selve" 40). Its subtext is clearly the androgynous sexuality of Bradamante-Ricciardetto. Just as the narrative must produce a male version of this figure, so its larger consequence in the *fabula* of Ruggiero is to adumbrate the Amazonian warrior's ultimate reduction to her dynastic role of wife and mother. Hence, virtually alone among the poem's metanarratives it is a tale of unalloyed erotic bliss, an "istoria bella" (25.26) in which Love's tyranny generates sexual pleasure. The obstacles to love that dominate the other metanarratives, normally motivating an action by the listener that eventually overcomes them, is here folded into the story as its central motif; for once, the narrator tells a tale in which *he* has prevailed as Love's knight. Hence the tale of Fiordespina contrasts with the stories of unresolved erotic intrigue in the first half of the poem as well as the later ones dealing with the unfaithfulness of women.

Nevertheless, Fiordespina's tale strongly suggests that in the *Furioso* the narrative of desire functions as an alibi for the desire of narrative, ultimately the reader's. As its specularity implies, this is a story told to satisfy the hearer's desire. Central to this function is the meta-metanarrative told by Ricciardetto to Fiordespina before the consummation of their love (58–65). Nested within Ricciardetto's account to Ruggiero of how he won the love of his sister's lover is his explanation to Fiordespina, while he is in bed disguised as Bradamante, of how "she" has rescued a naked maiden from a troll's fishing line and been rewarded with a sex-change. Shared equally with Fiordespina, Ruggiero, and Ariosto's reader, the tale is a powerful self-reflexive display of the sheer joy of storytelling.

Though patently "untrue," the meta-metanarrative displays the role that desire plays in conditioning the reception of a story, however farfetched it may be. This function is symbolized by the phallus-motif in the two stories, which a Lacanian reading might see as denoting a desire beyond the sexual. The "proof" of the nymph-and-troll story is its effect: "Bradamante" is now gendered male and can thus fulfill Fiordespina's desire. Here Truth is presented as the secret beneath Ricciardetto-Bradamante's gown (56), which Fiordespina literally grasps in confirmation of his narrative (67). Conspicuously missing from his earlier description of Fiordespina in bed with the real Bradamante, where the love-struck girl "mette la mano, / e ritrova pur sempre il sogno vano" (43), the phallic signifier is the type of the desired thing that has now been found, confirming the truth of discourse and thus conducing to

delight (65–67). Hence, like his story *of* Fiordespina, Ricciardetto's relayed story *to* her serves a multiple purpose. Besides supplying the gap in discourse, it mirrors the framing narrative as a story geared to the hearer's desire. In the inset story Ricciardetto asks the captive only for what Fiordespina herself desires (63), a male partner. In conferring the phallus, the fictive nymph mimes the magical power of a fabulist making the story come out "right." Like the one Ricciardetto is telling to Ruggiero, or the Narrator to us, *all* fiction ultimately represents the listener's desire.

v.

Far from being an anomaly, the story of Fiordespina anticipates the three major metanarratives that occur late in the poem. Delivered to two of its principal personages, the stories told by the Landlord, the Knight, and the Boatman round off Ariosto's meditation on the reception of stories. As he, or his love-crazed narrator, nears the end of his journey, his embedded stories more and more blatantly portray desirable and undesirable attitudes on the part of his own reader.

The Landlord's story to Rodomonte in canto 28 is tailored to its receiver's desire. The metanarrator tells how the Lombard king Astolfo and a Roman knight Iocondo, having been deceived by their wives, try to get even by embarking on a career of seduction. Tired of the effort this takes, they settle into a ménage à trois with a beautiful Spanish innkeeper's daughter, who betrays them both with a servant in her father's employ. In a mood of bitter misogyny, Rodomonte solicits this "esempio" (27.140) as passionately as Ruggiero does Ricciardetto's "bella istoria." Only this time both the mimesis and the diegesis strongly foreground the motif of reading. Like the Fiordespina episode, this tale may be defined as a narrative *about* narrative and its reception. And once again, though not a confessional narrative like Ricciardetto's — that function will be repeated in the closely related story the Host tells Rinaldo — we have here another male-male story told to a more-than-willing listener. Like Ruggiero, Rodomonte is a major figure in the poem whose own *fabula* is not materially altered by the metanarrative. Instead, again like Ricciardetto's tale, it exists merely to mirror a moment in the hearer's story, in this case Rodomonte's disillusionment following Doralice's "betrayal" of him to Mandricardo (27.104–07) and his misogynistic reading of that choice. Even more than Ricciardetto, who is introduced by the story he tells but will henceforth be a minor player in the main action of the poem, the Landlord is an ad hoc invention whose only function is to tell this story.

Most significant is the way the episode foregrounds the element of interpretation. If the story of Fiordespina shows how the desire of narrative conditions its reception, the Landlord's tale stresses its potential for misreading. This occurs on several levels. What corresponds to the meta-metanarrative in Ricciardo's tale is the Landlord's reading of his

own story as a rationale for misogyny, a reading shared of course by Rodomonte. This reading is in sharp contrast not only to that of a second interpreter, the old man who questions the truth of the story (79–84), but even *within* the story by the two male protagonists themselves, whose imprisoning delusion in the end dissolves in a self-critical laughter that allows them to return to their wives.[22] Paradoxically, in failing to appropriate the protagonists' change of heart, the Landlord, and *a fortiori* Rodomonte, also fail to see how the story mirrors their own narrative situation. As a narrator, the Landlord identifies so intensely with Giocondo and Astolfo that he misses the blatant narcissism of the King (4–6) or the subtler one of Giocondo that makes his loss of beauty the appropriate price of his disillusionment (27). Still less does he perceive the mimetic relation *between* the two protagonists, in which the king is cured of his jealousy when he sees Giocondo's spoilt beauty (30, 32–39), and Giocondo of his depression when he discovers the queen's infidelity (66ff.).[23] Finally, Ariosto's narrative persona figures as a kind of counterinterpreter, both in his initial tongue-in-cheek exhortation to the ladies to skip the episode (1–3) and in his concluding criticism of Rodomonte for rejecting the old man's reading (84).

These various intra- and extradiegetic interpretations of the tale remind us how great a role the reader plays in the construction of narrative meaning. Ariosto's intention here is underscored by the final instance of metadiegesis: i.e., his breaking the narrative frame by invoking an extratextual social and literary reality. I am thinking of the several references to Francesco Valerio, a Venetian friend of the poet who is here named as the source of the Landlord's tale.[24] And not only of this tale. In introducing the story, the Landlord attributes his misogyny exclusively to the many stories Valerio used to tell him (27.138). Improbably, we are asked to believe that the Landlord, in a bizarre negative inversion of mimetic desire, has been converted to misogyny solely by stories.[25] Through the medium of an internal struggle over the story's meaning, Ariosto regales his reader with a paradigm of the corruptive potential of fiction, a potential underlined afterwards when the old man warns that Valerio may have spoken "per ira, e non per quel che sente" (28.78). By inviting his own circle of readers to both judge and share the war of interpretation with the protagonists in the mimesis and the teller and receiver in the diegesis, Ariosto broadens our awareness of the desire for narrative to include our own implication in reading as a constitutive act. By foregrounding the importance of this desire in the Fiordespina and Landlord metanarratives, he also prepares us to see those of the Host and the Boatman as paradigms of "good" reading.

The Host's story of Melissa and the Boatman's of Anselmo and Argìa, both told to Rinaldo in canto 43, confirm Ariosto's use of metanarrative to

figure narrative desire and the relationship between writer and reader. As is underscored by their proximity — they are the only metanarratives told in the same canto — the two tales bear an obvious resemblance. Their common thematic concern is again the vulnerability and faithlessness of women: Both the Host's wife and Argìa surrender their chastity to the temptation of wealth. But a deeper connection links these metanarratives, their reception *as stories* by Rinaldo as an ideal "reader."

Rinaldo's resistance to fictional corruption is a syntagm of his release from infatuation with Angelica. Still sharing the madness of Orlando and others when his story is resumed (42.35–37), through the intervention of his magician-cousin, Malagigi, Rinaldo cures himself of his love-disease. He is once more seeking to redeem his honor in battle with his pagan adversaries, when he is entertained at Ferrara and subsequently rowed down the Po toward Mantua. Hence the *vaso* with which the knight tempts him is related both metonymically to the seductive story he tells about it and metaphorically to the fountain of erotic madness that had initially infected him. These objects are true *pharmakoi* in the etymological sense of poison/medicine. In the case of the goblet, it is Rinaldo's wise refusal to profit by its alleged virtue and learn if his wife is chaste that signals his return to total sanity. The latter is confirmed by his reception of his host's story, another invitation to scapegoat women for men's infatuations. As a result of his proven immunity to the seductions of narrative, the Boatman grants him a reprise of the Host's narrative of desire that explicitly rewards his disinterested desire of narrative.

From the outset, the Host's relatively brief story, like the Landlord's much longer one, is framed as a Galeotto, but this time a Galeotto *manqué*. Whereas Valerio's misogynistic tales have corrupted the Landlord, Rinaldo is only confirmed in his sensible attitude by the Host's rehearsal. The latter's "fall," on the other hand, takes place *within* his story not as a result of hearing it. Egged on by the lustful Melissa, the narrator, disguised as her hitherto rejected lover, tempts her with a bribe. When she capitulates, he indignantly reveals himself to her, only to have her depart, in mixed shame and anger, to live happily ever after with her lover. Rinaldo's reaction to this story inverts that of Rodomonte to the Landlord's. As in his refusal of the goblet test, which occurs *before* the telling of the metanarrative and indeed becomes its main motive (10), Rinaldo's immunity to the story's seductions is foregrounded throughout. The real reversal in the narrative situation centers on the motives for narration. Unlike the Landlord with Rodomonte, both before and after his recitation the Host constructs Rinaldo as his own moral antithesis. As he begins his tale, he states that had he known Rinaldo ten years earlier he would have sought his counsel before drinking from the goblet (10). Throughout his narrative, he blames himself for his present unhappiness. Of all the *Furioso*'s "discourses about desire," this one alone is told by a *man* in a mood of deep

regret for his own misogyny. The specular spell that has bound teller and listener in the preceding metanarrative encounters has been broken.

Emphatically, the exchange turns on the Host's function as a narrator. At the end of his story, he confesses that since losing his wife his sole "conforto" has been inducing other men to repeat his error in drinking from the goblet (43, 44). Rinaldo has now deprived him of that last consolation. The thwarted narcissism of this exchange recalls both the intra- and extradiegetic narcissism of the Landlord's story.[26] It is probably not coincidental that the Host, like Astolfo and Giocondo, once prided himself on his physical beauty (12). The suppressed specularity of the narrative encounter between the Landlord and Rodomonte, represented intradiegetically by the relation of Anselmo and Giocondo, here becomes an explicit part of the liberation from the shared burden of narrative desire. Rinaldo's immunity to the fantasmatic aspect of stories — a state of receptivity in which desire is sublimated into narrative and the desire of/for narrative *generates* the narrative of desire — exorcizes the motif of the story as Galeotto adumbrated by the allusion to Valerio in the Landlord's tale.[27]

This thematization of the narrative transaction becomes even more transparent in the Boatman's reprise. Unlike the Host's tale, here both teller and hearer are portrayed as disinterested consumers of fiction. His invulnerability to its seductions already established, whereas the Host's *récit* was forced on him, Rinaldo actively solicits the Boatman's. This solicitation is purely literary: The story has never crossed the Alps, and Rinaldo is eager to hear it (71). Moreover, in offering to tell it, the Boatman explicitly endorses Rinaldo's reception of the Host's tale (69), even going so far as to criticize the latter for not recalling it when faced with his own moral decision (70). This prelude to the narration extends the reverse-Galeotto motif by implying that, rightly received, a story can have a salutary effect. Not only is the Host thus certified as another "bad" reader in failing to benefit by a well-known story that anticipates his own experience, but Rinaldo's resistance to that story earns him a similar one as a reprise. This offer confirms his status as Ariosto's ideal reader. The exorcized narcissism of the Landlord's and Host's narratives of desire is replaced by Rinaldo's disinterested desire of narrative.

The connoisseurship underscored in the buildup to the story is borne out by its telling and reception. The Boatman's tale contains all the salacious motives that might unsettle less detached transactors. A judge, Anselmo, who has discovered that through the lure of riches his virtuous wife has yielded to a lover and then allows himself to be sodomized by an ugly Ethiopian for money, is ultimately reconciled to Argìa by their mutual fragility. This gem of a tale is a narrative tour de force. Ironically enough given his lowly status, in telling it the Boatman is granted the full panoply of narrative skills and power normally reserved to Ariosto's primary narrator. His tactful approach to Rinaldo in offering him the story is matched

by his detached-ironic presentation in its narration. The most Ariostan of all the poem's metanarrators, he is sceptical about Argìa's amorousness, disapproving of Anselmo's suspicions (73), yet sympathetic with his grief at her predicted fall (89). He uses most of Ariosto's standard narrative ploys. He is privy to his characters' feelings, checks his own tendency to wander (134), cuts short his account (94), and apostrophizes melodramatically (140). Skillfully exploiting the story's relation to that of his master, he lets Argìa articulate its moral (141), effectively ending his recital without additional comment (143). As the Boatman exhibits this mastery, the Narrator withdraws, leaving it to Rinaldo to guide our reaction to the story by alternately laughing, blushing at Anselmo's sin, and praising Argìa for turning the table on him by confronting him *in flagrante.* This mixed reception is the strongest indication in the poem of how a story should be read. As opposed to the Landlord's corruptive misreading of Valerio's story and the Host's belatedly repentent reading of his own, Rinaldo's reception of this tale sorts out its risible, shameful, and praiseworthy features, performing the appropriate response to each.

Seizing on his male reader's greatest vulnerability, Ariosto uses this final set of stories about wayward women to put the finishing touches on his portrayal of reading. By the end of the series, the tension gathered around misogyny has been resolved in a new and harmonious representation of the relationship between the purveyor and consumer of stories. The "accord" that Argìa effects by curing Anselmo of his misogyny (143) mirrors that established between the Boatman and Rinaldo and, by extension, between Ariosto and his reader. The "magic" that allows her to stage her husband's cure, like that by which Malagigi effects Rinaldo's, epitomizes Ariosto's narrative art. Purified by these stories of the wayward desires that prompt our misreadings, like Rinaldo we become disinterested collaborators in the production of textual meaning. Far from a sublime prestidigitator fine-tuning the machinery of fiction to trap his hapless readers, by the end of the *Furioso* Ariosto has endowed them with constructive powers equal to his own. He does this by figuring himself as an *accompagnatore* amiably picking his way cheek-by-jowl with his reader along the path of text.

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NOTES

[1] Among the interrogators are Moretti, Saccone, and Barucco; the answerers include Ceserani and Donato.

[2]The account established by Durling, "Divine Analogy," expanded in *The Figure of the Poet,* and refined upon most recently by Tognoli, has been challenged, among others, by Chiampi and Donato. On Ariosto's construction of his reader, see Brand, Kennedy, and Javitch, "*Cantus interruptus.*" For the subsequent rejection of this strategy see Javitch, "Narrative Discontinuity." Parker identifies the Ariostan plot with the deferral and ultimate gratification of the reader's desire for closure (16–53).

[3]Here, and elsewhere in this article, I use the terms "writerly" and "readerly" in their respective Barthesian senses of texts that are "possible to write" and those "no longer possible to write" — i.e., open and closed texts. See Barthes 4.

[4]For the implied author and reader, see Booth 72–76 and passim, and Iser 274–94.

[5]Elsewhere, Donato argues that the *Furioso* implicitly rejects the Derridean "book" as a discourse making claims to Truth, an incarnation of the *logos* ("Per selve e boscherecci labirinti" 57).

[6]Throughout this discussion, the definitive third edition of 1532 ("C") will be the basis of my remarks. For details on Ariosto's "hands-on" involvement in that edition, down to making changes even during press-runs, see Fahy.

[7]Henderson points out that in the 1516 ("A") edition the mid-point of the poem falls not between cantos 23 and 24 but between cantos 20 and 21 (= 22/23 in "C") (232n3).

[8]For the myrtle as a "vegetable . . . metaphor for writing" and a "figure of allegory itself" (159), and Astolfo and Ruggiero as representing the text and its reader respectively, see Ascoli 157–60; elsewhere, Ascoli views Astolfo, like Ariosto, as "caught inside the alien surface of his own tree-text" (240f.).

[9]Logistilla's name of course connotes simply the *logos,* the (in the first instance spoken) word or reason and antidote to the delusory madness induced by her sister Alcina and especially by love. But the association of her powers, and by derivation of Astolfo's, in the poem with the *written* word are undeniable.

[10]The phrase echoes Petrarch's Canzone 23; see Vickers for a now classic reading of this poem with several other ramifications for the *Furioso.*

[11]In a Lacanian departure from the usual view, Shemek sees in Angelica's choosing Medoro her self-affirmation as an "autonomous, desiring subject." For a more recent study, also influenced by Lacan, of Angelica as "a narcissistic, indifferent woman" (274n), see Finucci 107–44.

[12]On the tapestry motif, see Perez and Clorinda Donato.

[13]Genette 228. According to Genette, the events narrated in a second-level narrative are "metadiegetic" to those in the first. Thus, *x*'s writing of his fictive memoirs is a first-level or "extradiegetic" (literary) act. Events told in the memoirs (including *y*'s act of narrating) are inside the first narrative or *diegetic/intradiegetic.* Metanarrative is somewhat different from what Giuseppe Dalla Palma calls *novelle* or *diversioni*: "autonomous narrative components" within the main text that may not involve internal narratives at all ("Dal secondo al terzo 'Furioso'" 95; cf. *Le strutture narrative*).

[14]On the importance of Olimpia's narrative in determining the different tonalities of the "two Olimpias," the one a "confession," the other a "description," see Gilardino 439–43.

[15]Dalla Palma's examples include the story of Astolfo-Iocondo-Fiametta, mirroring the rabid jealousy of Rodomonte, and that of Norandino-Lucina in canto 17, inserted amid the tangled deceptions of Orrigile and Martano (97).

[16]Lidia's quintessential discourse about desire is a special case; its placement in the middle of (originally) four male metanarratives concerning female desire will be discussed below.

[17]Sramek analyzes the relations of metanarrative to primary narrative in terms of the motivation of characters: viz., encounter, discovery, perception, solution, and proposition. In these terms most of Ariosto's metanarratives, and all of the major ones, combine "proposition" with "encounter," where a main character meets a new character, who becomes a metanarrator (28). Only those of Olimpia, Gabrina, and the Goblet are not solicited, though Orlando signals his willingness to receive Olimpia's story by quickly acceding to the old man's request that he come to the mysterious lady's aid (9.19f.).

[18]See Wise for a recent version of the argument that the Hippogriff is Ariosto's "symbol for the imagination" (37) and that the "transforming imagination" of the magician Astolfo represents the "metamorphic power of the poet" (40).

[19]In fact we don't get confirmation of his basic account till he and his sweetheart are reconciled following the collapse of Atlante's castle, after which she is forced by Marfia to surrender her clothes to Gabrina (20.111f.). Later still Ruggiero and Bradamante learn that Pinabello's lady's humiliation has led to her imposing the new custom of stripping passing knights of their horses and their ladies of their clothes (22.49–56).

[20]Almansi discusses the importance of the first story in Boccaccio's appropriation of Dante in the *Decameron.* For the possibility that in the *Furioso* "fraud may speak truths" (255), see Ascoli 264–304 and 376–93.

[21]The element of sheer narrativity makes her tale is a fitting prelude to the St. John allegory on writing in canto 35. In this context, it is not surprising that Astolfo, who as the narrator of the Alcina story structurally plays a role similar to Lidia's here, is now sublimely indifferent to her story. His lack of affective response emphasizes that his role is simply to hear, or rather to stand in for those readers who are privileged to hear Lydia's tale. He has nothing to learn from her story, while *our* knowledge is part of an extended essay on *letterarietà* that runs from the Prester John episode through Lidia to St. John on the power and limits of writing.

[22]Barucco (235f.) views this laughter as the liberating Nietzschean "rire . . . cognitif" that signals an acceptance of cosmic meaninglessness allowing one to overcome despair.

[23]On the narcissism of the Landlord's tale, see Finucci 287n; on Rodomonte's in general, ibid. 180–86. For a Freudian study of Ariostan romance, particularly in its fetishization of armor, as a form of "mimetic narcissism" (87), see Bellamy 84–129.

[24]Valerio, a Venetian patrician and priest whose real name was probably Valier, was the "ultimate reviser" of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* (Ghinassi). He was also a friend and patron of Pietro Aretino, in whose comedy, *La cortegiana,* he appears and who may have played a part in the tragic events leading to his being hanged at S. Marco in 1542. See Labalme, and Cairns 31–47.

[25]Girard defines "mimetic desire" as a triangular situation in which "the image of another desire has to be there in order to generate in the beholder a desire that duplicates the suggested image" (196).

[26]Shapiro reads these three narratives of "perpetual motion" as expressions of "the narcissism of the culture of Ferrara" and their reduction of narrative to "*representation* pure and simple" (172–77).

[27]For a very different, more sceptical reading of the episode as proof of Rinaldo's continuing complacency as self-delusion, see Wiggins 33–36.

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