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Ariosto's Ironic Allegory

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# A R<sup>I</sup>O<sup>S</sup>T<sup>O</sup>'S I<sup>R</sup>O<sup>N</sup>I<sup>C</sup> A<sup>L</sup>L<sup>E</sup>G<sup>O</sup>R<sup>I</sup> BY WILLIAM J. KENNEDY

Not denying that Ariosto is an occasionally allegorical poet, no modern critic has yet adequately analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated Ariosto's occasional allegory; indeed until recently there has been a tendency to dismiss Ariosto's allegory completely, or at best to overlook it.<sup>1</sup> But there are in the *Orlando Furioso* several notable allegorical episodes: foremost the Alcina episode (Cantos 6, 7, 8, 10, and 15); the allegory of Time and the Poets in Astolfo's trip to the moon (Cantos 33 and 34); and the allegory of *Lo Sdegno* (Canto 42); there are in addition several brief episodes that involve allegorical personifications such as the Archangel Michele's search for *Silenzio* and *Discordia* (14.75-79); the routing of Rodomonte by *Discordia*, *Superbia*, and *Gelosia* (18.26-37); and Michele's second search for *Discordia* (27.37-40). The usual interpretation of these not inconsiderable portions of the poem is that Ariosto has spoofed and deflated conventional allegorical materials for comic, ironic effect. This interpretation carries some truth, but it needs modification because Ariosto—however ironic in his allegories—is not necessarily spoofing or deflating anything. Instead Ariosto is using irony as an important vehicle for his allegory.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Greene points to the problem in *The Descent From Heaven* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 104-143, a book to which I am gratefully in debt for the best general discussion in English of Ariosto. Earlier views on Ariosto's allegory prevail in the reductionist reading of Pio Rajna, *Le fonti dell'Orlando Furioso*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1900), pp. 146 ff.; in the romantic anti-allegorical reading of Attilio Momigliano, *Saggio su l'Orlando Furioso* (Bari: Laterza, 1928), pp. 20-42; in the historicist reading of Giuseppe Toffanin who focuses on the poet's comic absurdities at the expense of his allegory in *Il Cinquecento*, 5th ed. (Milan: Vallardi, 1954), p. 194; and in the modernist reading of Raffaello Ramat who finds Ariosto's ironies serious, problematic, and bordering on the tragic in *Per la storia dello stile rinascimentale* (Messina: G. d'Anna, 1953), pp. 19 ff. English and American critics draw attention to Ariosto's allegory mostly by analogy to Spenser's transformations of Ariosto in *The Faerie Queene*. See Susannah Jane McMurphy, "Spenser's Use of Ariosto for Allegory," *University of Washington Publications in Language and Literature* II, *passim*; Graham Hough, *A Preface to "The Faerie Queene"* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 38-47, 118-121; Veselin Kostić, "Ariosto and Spenser," *English Miscellany*, 8 (1966), 69-174; and Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of "The Faerie Queene"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 147-174.

Elsewhere I have tried to suggest some links between the concepts of irony and allegory in the late Middle Ages by analyzing the attempts of medieval interpreters to read the ironies of classical authors as allegory.<sup>2</sup> These attempts originally proceeded from a semantic link between *ironia* and *allegoria* common in rhetorical theory since Quintilian, who defined *ironia* as a trope in which some words are put for others and *allegoria* as a trope which presents one thing in words and another in sense; both are forms of what Isidore of Seville later called *alieniloquium*, other-speech, since each says one thing yet means another.<sup>3</sup> But the link between irony and allegory is a substantive one as well. Major creative writers such as Guillaume de Lorris, Dante, and (later) Spenser enforced such a substantive link by structuring ironic narratives whose problematic ambivalence attains a focus in allegory and whose allegory grows in depth and richness through irony. The Renaissance developed this substantive link between irony and allegory. On one hand the revamping of classical rhetoric and poetics confirmed the classification of irony and allegory as species of the same trope. Minturno, for example, describes them together as kinds of metaphor, while Tasso links irony to allegory when he speaks of the components of *enigma* and *meraviglia* with their attendant ironies in regard to allegory.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand the historical breakdown of allegory was giving rise at the same time to the ironization of allegorical conventions by authors no longer confident enough of their vitality to handle them in a straightforward manner. Boiardo's unsustained

<sup>2</sup> See my "Irony, *Allegoresis*, and Allegory in Virgil, Ovid, and Dante," in *Arcadia*, 7 (1972), 115-134. For some theoretical consideration of substantive links between irony and allegory see Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 173-209, and also D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Quintilian's definitions are in *De Institutione oratoria*, ed. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1921). Irony is a trope "ut illic verba sint verbis diversa" (IX.ii.46), whereas in allegory "aut aliud verbis aliud sensu ostendit aut etiam interim contrarium" (VIII.vi.44). Isidore's definition of *alieniloquium* which encompasses both allegory and irony is that in allegory "aliud enim sonat et aliud intelligitur," while irony, a species of allegory, is "sententia per pronuntiationem contrarium habens intellectum." *Etymologiae* (Venice, 1483), I.36.viii.

<sup>4</sup> Minturno, *L'arte poetica* (Venice, 1594), p. 138. Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi del poema eroico*, in *Prose*, ed. Ettore Mazzali, *La letteratura italiana* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1959), pp. 487-732, especially p. 673. See also my article "The Problem of Allegory in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*," *Italian Quarterly*, 15-16 (1972), 27-51.

allegorical touches in the *Orlando Innamorato*—Rinaldo's adventures at the Pallazzo Gioioso and the Rocca Crudele in I.viii-ix and Orlando's liberation of the lovers from Morgana's kingdom in II.viii-ix—are one example; Tasso's self-conscious allegorical episodes in the *Rinaldo*—the Tempio de la Beltà (3.32), the Albergo de la Cortesia (7.77), the Isola del Piacer (10.33), the Valle del Dolore (10.52)—are another. But Ariosto's allegorical episodes in the *Orlando Furioso* are a different matter. They are ironic not because they are unsustained or self-conscious, but because their irony is an integral function of their allegory. Their irony implements the allegory and modifies it, so that in effect the irony becomes the allegory. In what follows I would like to suggest some links between the ironic and allegorical modes in Ariosto by analyzing the structure of their operation in the Alcina episode.

Chiefly three ironic strategies control the allegory of the episode. The first is literary allusiveness. The episode abounds in allusions to the Earthly Paradise tradition; to Homer (Circe) and Ovid (the motif of metamorphosis); to the bleeding and speaking bush motif from Virgil's Polydorus episode and Dante's Canto of the Suicides; and to Boccaccio, Petrarch, Poliziano, Boiardo, and a host of other writers.<sup>5</sup> Taken by itself the action of the episode can mean one thing; seen in the context of a literary tradition it can mean—ironically—something else. Ariosto thus achieves ironic allegory by employing allusion so as to modify and complicate the meaning of his allegory. The second ironic strategy is the narrator's shifting point of view, his manipulations of the distance between himself and his characters on the one hand, and between himself and his audience on the other.<sup>6</sup> Initially the narrator's point of view coincides with that of Astolfo who tells how Alcina seduced and abandoned him, transforming him into a myrtle bush. Then it squares off with that of Ruggiero who meets and falls prey to Alcina. Eventually it shifts to Bradamante, Ruggiero's beloved who knows the destiny that awaits

<sup>5</sup> A. Bartlett Giamatti, in *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), a book to which I am deeply indebted, offers an excellent reading of the Alcina episode, pp. 137-164, focusing on Ariosto's usage of convention and literary tradition.

<sup>6</sup> One of the most probing and subtle statements on the rhetorical strategies of narrative authors, and an article to which I am gratefully indebted, is Lowry Nelson, Jr., "The Fictive Reader and Literary Self-Reflexiveness," in *The Disciplines of Criticism*, ed. Peter Demetz et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 173-192.

him and the need for his recovery. But even at the end indecisions and reversals in the narrator's point of view accompany the fortunes of the hero and the allegorical contours of the episode. The third ironic strategy is an iterative self-reflexiveness by which the dramatic action doubles back on itself, analogically mirrors its own image, and echoes its own themes. Through ironic repetition of key words and phrases the narrator modifies and clarifies what he said earlier, puts it in a new light, and shifts his audience's perspective on its meaning. In this way the allegory emerges gradually, developing at each turn of word or phrase so that it is ironically unpredictable and resists easy classification.

In turn the allegory of the episode unfolds within a sequence of three separate motifs: the Astolfo motif involving Astolfo's transformation into a myrtle bush and his warning to Ruggiero against the enchantress (6.17–6.56); the Ruggiero motif involving the latter's "fall" to the temptress (6.57–S.32); and the Logistilla motif involving the hero's renunciation of Alcina and his recovery (7.33 ff.). Around these three motifs the narrator, their chief connecting link, weaves a seamless web of literary allusion, personal commentary, and dramatic reduplication. He does not necessarily develop these three ironic strategies separately or in pure states, but he employs them together and with mutual reinforcement. Still, at one time or another, each of these strategies functions with greater or lesser ironic and allegorical effect than either of its peers. Throughout the Astolfo motif it is literary allusiveness which dominates.

The motif of Astolfo's transformation into a myrtle bush derives much of its ironic force from literary illusions to Homer, Virgil, Dante, Boccaccio, and Boiardo, among others.<sup>7</sup> But unlike Virgil's Polydorus episode and Dante's Pier della Vigne canto on which it is chiefly based, Ariosto's portrayal of Astolfo's plight entails no tortured agony or painful bloodshed, partly because the circumstance is played for fun, or at least enacted with a broad smile on

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the Circe episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, Book X; the Polydorus episode in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book III; and the Pier della Vigne canto in Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XIII, there are the Idalagos episode in Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*, Book V; the Diana episode in Federico Frezzi's *Il Quadrivregio*, Liv.40 ff.; and the Alcina and Ruggiero episodes in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, 2.13.54 ff. and 3.7.18 ff. which I discuss below. See Charles Speroni, "The Motif of the Bleeding and Speaking Trees of Dante's Suicides," *Italian Quarterly*, 9 (1965), 44-45.

the narrator's face. Much of the torment in Virgil and Dante derived from the fact that the encounter wounded Aeneas and Dante's pilgrim in no less than the bushes themselves. In each instance the heroes seem stunned and then aroused by fear to a heightened awareness of the unusual situation. Ruggiero, however, is hardly moved the core of his being. His initial reaction amounts only to flustered incomprehension; he is *stupefatto* (6.29), but he soon regains his innate sense of *cortesia* (6.32) which prompts him to alleviate the myrtle's irritation. The myrtle, in fact, appeals to Ruggiero's *cortesia* and *pietà* to extricate the animal from the bush: "Se tu sei cortese e pio, / come dimostri alla presenza bella" (28).<sup>8</sup> Epitomizing what Ariosto has drawn from Virgil's Polydorus episode and from Dante's Pier della Vigne canto, the conditional clause also reinforces the difference: Virgil's *pietas* stood for an unvarying commitment reflecting the hero's will to act in accord with the will of Fate; Dante's *pietà* betokened his compassion for the sinner as a human being flowing from his reverence for all that God has created.<sup>9</sup> Ariosto's *pietà*, however, is synonymous with nothing more than a very practical, albeit very moral, *cortesia*.<sup>10</sup>

As for Astolfo, the poor fellow suffers only from *dispetto* (31), a momentary scorn, a short-lived malice that ceases when Ruggiero causes the fabulous hippogriff to stop tugging at the myrtle bush. It is ironic, that he should commend his tormentor for having a *presenza bella* (28). Earlier it was Alcina's beautiful presence that inspired his confidence and led to his imprisonment in a myrtle. His commendation of Ruggiero, therefore, though a matter of courtesy, is as much a matter of naïveté and a measure of his folly. The allegorical power of the episode, grounded in what Ruggiero soon learns about Astolfo's *contrappasso*, is therefore mediated by the partly fantastic, partly romantic, and always very comic and ironic action that ensues.

Ruggiero, for his part, accepts the myrtle's plea without reflection,

<sup>8</sup> Quotations from Ariosto are from *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Santorre Debenedetti (Bari: Laterza, 1928).

<sup>9</sup> See Virgil's "pias manus," *Aeneid* 3.42 and Dante's "spirto di pietate," "la tua man più pia," and "tante pietà m'accora," *Inferno* 13.36,38, and 84. Cesare Segre's philological study of Ariosto's debt to Dante is illuminating in *Esperienze ariostesche* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1966), 51-83.

<sup>10</sup> "Cortese e pio" is in fact a conventional formula that recurs throughout the poem. See Anna Maria Carini, "L'iterazione aggettivale nell'*Orlando Furioso*," *Convivium*, 31 (1963), 19-34.

without suspicion, without skepticism, and in so doing he exposes himself to the danger of being deceived for the second time in his brief career. It is debatable how persistently Ariosto means to refer us to Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* of which his own poem is a thoroughly independent continuation, but close to the end of the *Innamorato* Ruggiero had fallen prey to a deception practiced by a fairy involving a "human being" (actually the fairy herself) who had been transformed into vegetal matter. Before Ruggiero's eyes "la falsa dama con dolce parlare" sprang to life out of a laurel tree consubstantial with herself and lured him away from the field of action to the *Fonte del Riso* (*Orlando Innamorato* III.vii.18). Ironically Ruggiero's response then to the false enchantress resembles his response now to the transformed Astolfo. In Boiardo the young knight, "pien di cortesia," promised not to leave the damsel until he has brought her to safety; the irony is that she has used his ingenuousness to lead him astray. The narrator remarks:

Né vi doveti già meravigliare  
se còlto fu Rugiero a questo ponto,  
ché il saggio e il paccio è da le dame gionto.  
[OI III.vii.21]<sup>11</sup>

In Ariosto Ruggiero's reply to Astolfo, "ch'io farò con parole e con effetto, / ch'avrai giusta cagion di me lodarte" (31), is full of the same courtesy, the same attentiveness, the same artless spontaneity; he expresses faith in Astolfo (just as the latter did in him) without being sure who he is because the ingenuous youth really knows no better. And in doing this Ruggiero demonstrates that he is a young man who has not learned very well the lesson of deceit.

In stanza 32 Astolfo begins to narrate his tale (from 33 to 53), and the way in which he begins shows that he too is not a very much different character from his comic prototype in Boiardo. Again the *Orlando Innamorato* provides a suitable yardsick to measure Ariosto's character. And yet in Astolfo's monologue despite the careful recounting of events in Boiardo (Ariosto's stanzas 32-42 are a free reworking of ones in *OI* II.xiii.54-66) the emphasis falls in different places. In stanzas 39 and 40 of the *Furioso*, for example, Astolfo's report of Alcina's speech corresponds to the original speech in stanzas 61 and 62 of the *Innamorato*. On the one hand Boiardo's

<sup>11</sup> Quotations from Boiardo are from *Orlando Innamorato*, ed. Aldo Scaglione, 2 vols. (Turin: UTET, 1963).



Alcina appeals to the knights on the basis of tendering the marvelous, the extraordinary, the yet-unseen. She directs attention to the fact that she wonderfully catches fish without a net (*OI* II.xiii.61) and she offers to show many another “gran meraviglia,” including an exotic siren, to those who wish to look at one (*mirare*, *OI* II.xiii.62). On the other hand Ariosto’s Alcina, as Astolfo recalls her, conducts herself with more subtlety and *sprezzatura*. She will provide security (“far oggi meco i vostri alloggiamenti,” 39) and pleasing variety (“di tutti i pesci sorti differenti,” 39) and she will show an exotic siren to those who wish, simply, to see one (*vedere*, 40). With its ironic implication of viewing something with less attentiveness than Boiardo’s *mirare*, Ariosto’s *vedere* points directly to the allegorical crux of the episode, for in the garden of Alcina one does not have to look intently at exotic sirens to be deceived by them; one has only to notice them to be snared.

The allegorical quality of the tale is Ariosto’s own invention, and it evolves from an opposition between vice and virtue on the isle exemplified by Alcina and her wicked twin sister Morgana the Fay on the one hand and their virtuous step-sister Logistilla on the other. According to Astolfo (in sequential material no longer drawn from Boiardo) Logistilla is continually besieged by the pair of vicious ladies: “Contra lei queste due son congiurate” (44). But the contest between vice and virtue on the island is not so clear-cut as these political oppositions seem to suggest. Within Astolfo himself there is, or has been, another contest, an internal one whose outcome has resulted in the extravagant *contrappasso* that he now suffers, his transformation into a myrtle bush. With a shift in the direction of his monologue, the allegory of Astolfo’s *contrappasso* begins to take precedence over the background allegory of virtue and vice.

Astolfo’s explanation for his *contrappasso*, however, complicates rather than clarifies whatever allegory there is. On the surface it appears to offer pat and causally defensible reasons for his transformation, but internally it balances irony against irony to an indefinable and elusive point. He says that he was inflamed with love for Alcina on account of “il veder lei sí bella, e sí cortese” (46). *Veder*, of course, repeats the promise of Alcina to let him see many a pleasant sight in her garden (39 and 40) and brings her seductive plot to fulfillment. And yet not only does her visual beauty move him, but also her quality of being *cortese*. *Cortese* is the final em-



phatic word in stanza 46 and it echoes back ironically to stanzas 28 and 32 where Ruggiero was commended for being “cortese e pio.” The irony also implies a standard of comparison between Ruggiero and Alcina and a suggestion of the reason why Ruggiero will later “fall” to Alcina. In Ruggiero, *cortesia* allows no separation of the good from the beautiful. With Alcina, whose goodness is another matter, the ethics and aesthetics of *cortesia* are disjoined. She is beautiful and charming to look at, but morally and essentially she is something else. Evidently her courtesy cannot be welcomed at face value. Allegorically her *cortesia* is false, and Astolfo has learned a lesson at great expense. The meaning of the episode has taken a new ironic turn.

At the beginning of Stanza 47 Astolfo presents the wistful notion that nowhere in the world is Absolute Beauty to be found. He has learned that the distribution of beauty is relative and is apportioned “a chi più et a chi meno e a nessun molto” (47). Thus Astolfo starts upon his most explicit confession of guilt. He had been too willing, he says, to neglect his greater responsibility of defending God and country in order to enjoy the contemplation of Alcina’s fair visage:

né di Francia né d’altro mi rimembra:  
stavomi sempre a contemplar quel volto.  
[47]

Actually Astolfo had indicated this weakness earlier in the final couplet of Stanza 40 when he lamented his willingness to embark on the adventure with Alcina:

Io che sempre fui troppo (e me n’increce)  
volonteroso, andai sopra quel pesce.  
[40]

His wilful eclipse of conscience and duty, his abandonment to one pursuit, the limitation that he has imposed on his own high ambitions account for his missing the mark (allegorically) in Alcina’s garden. Through a key echo in its rhyming words, the final couplet of Stanza 47 now reinforces this moral theme:

ogni pensiero, ogni mio bel disegno  
in lei finia, né passava oltre il segno.  
[47]

Astolfo's "bel disegno," which reaches its final limit in Alcina, echoes Alcina's *disegno* to seduce Astolfo nine stanzas earlier: "e pensò con astuzia, e con ingegno / tormi ai compagni; e riuscì il disegno" (38), a *disegno* which has had unqualified success. Now in Stanza 47 Astolfo is forced to admit that his *disegno* coincides exactly with the *disegno* of the fairy enchantress and that it also coincides with the plan or limitations that she has imposed on his powers.

At the same time *segno* echoes from the narrator's phrase used at the beginning of the episode to describe Ruggiero's passage beyond "il segno che prescritto / avea già a'naviganti Ercole invito" (17). If *segno* then invited a comparison between Ruggiero and Hercules, it now invites a comparison between Ruggiero and Astolfo. The latter is narrating the story of how he had come to make his choice at the crossroads (a Herculean choice in comically reduced terms) just as he is about to warn Ruggiero that he must soon come to make a choice of his own.<sup>12</sup> But the dynamics of Astolfo's "choice at the crossroads" work deeper into the allegorical fabric of the episode. Blaming his own voluntary will for his mistake, Astolfo assumes full responsibility for his past action.

Seen in this light the next five stanzas of Astolfo's speech (47 to 51) vibrate with irony as the speaker regards his own *contrappasso* and the same fate that surely awaits the man he is speaking to. The stanzas function as a prelude to the ensuing allegorical motif of Ruggiero's confrontation with Alcina. In Stanza 47 Astolfo admits that he had wilfully eclipsed his memory of France and greater responsibilities in deference to his mistress: "né di Francia né d'altro mi rimembra" (47). Then in Stanza 49 he is distressed by being able to remember, painfully, his mistress' avowals of her love for him, "perché l'avuto ben vo rimembrando" (49). The reversal of his position is most keenly in mind; memory plays tricks on Astolfo that he is not fain to admit. All that he confesses is that he had found it easy to ignore the past when the present was enjoyable, but he now finds it difficult to forget when the present is painful. He leaves Ruggiero to draw his own conclusions.

Then, as though to protect himself from an excess of self-disclosure, Astolfo tells of the reversal in his affair with Alcina by constant negative assertion ("amare, e disamare," "Non era stato

<sup>12</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1930).

oltre a duo mesi in regno,” “ e da la grazia sua m'ebbe disgiunto ” (50). Both reversal and negative assertion attain their climax with Alcina's *sdegno* in 50. *Sdegno* here is not the coolness of temper which expels heated passion (as later in the allegory of *Lo Sdegno* in Canto XLII), but rather an extension of Alcina's passionate and pernicious nature which is wont to “ amare, e disamare a un punto ” (50). Alcina's negative side is further illustrated by her schemes to mask “ la vita lasciva ” (51), schemes which fully explain why men are transformed into plants and animals on her isle:

E perché essi non vadano pel mondo  
 di lei narrando la vita lasciva,  
 chi qua, chi là, per lo terren fecondo  
 li muta, altri in abete, altri in oliva . . .  
 [51]

Repeating *fecondo* (51.3), the adjective used earlier (24) by the narrator to characterize the setting, Astolfo affords a new perspective on the significance of the action. It is now perfectly clear that the garden is *fecondo* because it is the preserve of Alcina's captives. All the tame animals and variegated plant life that charmed Ruggiero when he arrived are revealed to be ironic reductions of human life. Like Astolfo these are men who, for choosing to limit their delight to Alcina, have descended the hierarchical scale of being so that they now vegetate on Alcina's isle.

The coda of Astolfo's speech is Stanzas 52 and 53 is brief and perfunctory but no less oblique, and its final irony comes when Astolfo forecasts Ruggiero's relationship with Alcina. Perhaps because he is convinced that Ruggiero *will* succumb, he uses unambiguous future tense verbs to state the possibility:

avrai d'Alcina scettro e signoria  
 e sarai lieto sopra ogni mortale.  
 [52]

And yet Astolfo retreats steadily from every attempt to harden his prediction into formulas. Through the fog of a double negative (“ che non vadi improvviso,” 53) he asserts that it would be better for Ruggiero to know some of Alcina's false ways. Then in conclusion he compromises Ruggiero's optimism with a fatuous analogy (qualified by a well-placed, if arch, *forse*) and a final statement mediated by another *forse*:

che forse, come è differente il viso,  
 è differente anco l'ingegno e l'arte.  
 Tu saprai forse riparare al danno,  
 quel che saputo mill'altri non hanno.  
 [53]

Thus, just as Astolfo controls the response of his immediate audience by proffering to Ruggiero the carrot of his wisdom and experience, so the narrator has controlled the reader's response by suggesting through allusion and the concrete dramatic context his characters' folly, their naiveté, their fatuousness. A hint of Virgil here, an echo from Dante there, broad references to Boiardo elsewhere are enough to set the tone, while the full, rich literary allusiveness enjoins the reader to piece out the ironic allegorical meaning. The allusion to Virgil's Polydorus episode heightens the moral relief of Ruggiero's character. Like *pius* Aeneas, Ruggiero is *pio* and also *cortese*, and like his predecessor he must learn to achieve self-discipline in the journey towards his ultimate destiny, the foundation of the D'Este dynasty.<sup>13</sup> The allusion to Dante's Pier della Vigne canto serves to heighten the moral relief of Astolfo's allegorical *contrappasso*, though the latter unfolds in comically reduced terms. Like Dante's sinners, Astolfo has wasted his human energies on affairs beneath his dignity, and like them he is served with a punishment that fits the crime, though unlike them he suffers no permanent damnation. Finally the allusions to Boiardo help to situate both Ruggiero and Astolfo in the context of their earlier characterizations and they show how really little these two young men have learned about themselves and the world they live in. Liberating the Astolfo motif with a generous dose of comic magnanimity, these allusions confer on the allegory a full richness of oblique and problematic irony.

The first word of stanza 54 in Canto VI shifts the focus abruptly from Astolfo to Ruggiero: "Ruggier, che conosciuto avea per fama / ch'Astolfo alla sua donna cugin era" (54). The reference to Ruggiero's *donna*, reinforced a few lines later by the hero's oath "e per amor di quella che tanto ama" (54), heightens the obvious irony of Ruggiero's self-confidence as he stands on the point of being

<sup>13</sup> Franco Pool looks at the allegory of the episode through the lens of Ariosto's debt to his patrons in *Interpretazione dell'Orlando Furioso* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), p. 36.

entrapped by Alcina and hauled off to her false delights. But in several other ironic ways the hero's leavetaking from Astolfo is hardly auspicious. First, despite his promise Ruggiero fails to help the plant-man in any meaningful way: "gli avria fatto servizio: ma aiutarlo / in altro non potea, ch'in confortarlo" (54). Moreover he is unsure of what course of action to take even for himself. He asks the quickest way to Logistilla's palace (55) but his intentions remain unclear: in order to aid Logistilla in her struggle against Alcina? to avail himself of her spiritual nourishment? to visit her out of mere curiosity? True he leaves Astolfo "dotto et instrutto" (56), and he acts carefully lest the hippogriff carry him off against his will, but he hesitates for a moment whether to follow Astolfo's good advice or to risk flying the winged horse. Even when he decides to approach Logistilla the hard way, "per forza," he qualifies his own confidence with an admission of ironic uncertainty, "s'io non fallo" (58). He is a model of indeterminateness, and the irony would be simply humorous if the narrator did not know beforehand that "vano era il discorso" (58).

As it is, however, the narrator is already using the irony to manipulate our response so that we come to share Ruggiero's own point of view. The narrator himself, moreover, never a particularly reliable guide to the action, begins to diminish his own usual distance from the hero.<sup>14</sup> He implies for example that he, no less than Ruggiero, would be taken in by the seeming gold and glitter of Alcina's palace—"e par che la sua altezza al ciel s'aggiunga, / e d'oro sia da l'alta cima a terra" (59). True, the narrator retains enough objectivity from the hero to admit that others may take the illusive appearances for false alchemy: "Alcun dal mio parer qui si dilunga / e dice ch'ell'è alchimia" (59). But he nonetheless concludes with a wilful assent to his own opinion that the walls are true gold: "e forse ch'erra; / et anco forse meglio di me intende: / a me par oro, poi che si risplende" (59). The narrator's wilfulness, his newly acquired posture of naiveté and guillibility, mark a radical departure from his usual detachment, but a deliberate purposiveness lurks in his irony. For the next few episodes the narrator himself will play the ironic role of a sensitive onlooker whose own moods are dic-

<sup>14</sup>Robert M. Durling in one of the most incisive modern studies of Ariosto focuses on the persona of the narrator in his *Figure of the Poet in the Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 175 ff., another book to which I gratefully acknowledge my debt.

tated by and compatible with what is happening, and in the end his moral judgment fully aware of all the ironic alternatives in the situation will be all the more secure. The audience will follow along to find itself first hoodwinked no less than Ruggiero in his serio-comic seduction, then close enough to the hero to understand his plight, and finally aware enough to respond to the latter with a sophisticated moral consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

In Stanza 60 Ruggiero meets a crowd of monster-men who oppose his passage. The "iniqua frotta" is variously composed and conventionally representative of several vices.<sup>16</sup> In shape some appear with heads of apes (flattery) or of cats (pretense); others with bodies of satyrs (lust) or of centaurs (violence). For transport some ride horses without bits (unrestraint), others asses (sloth), or centaurs (violence), or ostriches (cowardice), or eagles and cranes (pride). There are males, females, and homosexuals. Their activities are militaristic and include drinking (debauchery), blowing horns (boasting), and carrying the tools of robbers (theft). Their captain is a splendid figure of idleness with the earmarks of sloth and gluttony, and the first of their number to attack Ruggiero is a dog-faced creature (slander) who bays at the hero. But the irony of the allegory is not in the monsters' action; it is in the hero's reaction. Overwhelmed by their sheer number, Ruggiero fights with his sword and refuses to use the one weapon which would give him a clear advantage over them, the enchanted shield of Atlante (3.67-78; 4.22-25). Laudable on the surface, Ruggiero's wish to succeed by *virtude* (which he equates with the sword) rather than by *frodo* (which he equates with the enchanted shield) (67) confirms this for he fails to admit that the enemy itself might be practicing fraud against him. Believing that he can trustfully apply his own high standards to everyone else, Ruggiero refuses to compromise his own integrity in a world that has no integrity.

Ruggiero's naiveté and the narrator's approval of his *virtude*

<sup>15</sup> Answering older critics like Giuseppe Raniolo, in *Lo spirito e l'arte dell'Orlando Furioso* (Milan: Vallardi, 1929), who felt that Ariosto's sympathy for his hero was full of malicious irony, Giorgio Di Blasi brilliantly studies Ariosto's sympathetic nuances in "L'Ariosto e le passioni," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 129 (1952), 318-362, and 130 (1953), 178-203, and concludes that the author's ironies are full of moral purposiveness. Di Blasi's article is one of the most worthwhile modern studies on Ariosto available.

<sup>16</sup> See the detailed interpretations in Rajna, pp. 146 ff., and also in footnotes to the edition by Remo Ceserani (Turin: UTET, 1966).

modify the double action that ensues: Ruggiero's fall and the narrator's share in his fall. Two young ladies who, the narrator says in another nod to the prevailing illusion, seem to embody *Beltà* and *Leggiadria* (69), fend off the monster-men. Embarrassed by their easy conquest over his assailants, Ruggiero does not stop to consider whether their charm, like the fabulous unicorn on which they ride, is only an illusion. The unicorn, ambiguous as a conventional symbol for both chastity on the one hand and the attraction and dangers of sensuality on the other, epitomizes the allurements of the temptation,<sup>17</sup> confirms the moral ambivalence of the narrator. For when the ladies lead the hero back to Alcina's portal, the narrator sides with Ruggiero in accepting the allusion that the walls are pure gold (71). Inside the gates the narrator attempts a moral objectivity when he comments that the maidens sporting there would be fairer if they were more lady-like (72), but the irony of the allegory is that even the narrator cannot be objective. He, no less than the hero, is seduced. To him Alcina's garden is *paradiso* (72). Amore was born there (73), and, with ironic insistence on the verb *par*, "con serena e lieta fronte / par ch'ognor rida il grazioso aprile" (74). By now every shred of the narrator's reliability is gone and we no longer have any reliable standard against which to measure the progress of the allegory.

Before meeting the first test in the garden, Ruggiero is separated from his hippogriff and presented with an ordinary chestnut-brown horse in exchange (76). There is to be no escape for him from Alcina, and yet the maidens say that the road to Alcina's palace is *libero* (79)—or at least it would be *libero* if it were not blocked by a virago named Erifilla who habitually mars the delight of the garden. Ruggiero's compliance with the ladies' request to put down Erifilla is both a sign of his fall under their power—and under the power of their mistress Alcina—and another assertion of the problematic irony of the allegory. In Stanza 80 Ruggiero promises to aid the ladies against Erifilla because he is a knight dedicated to the service of others. Ironically the very source of his virtue, his capacity to respect the integrity of others, makes him now averse to the niggardliness of Erifilla, as well as later sympathetic to the attractiveness of Alcina.<sup>18</sup> But no matter what his present victory

<sup>17</sup> See O. Shepherd, *The Lore of the Unicorn* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1930).

<sup>18</sup> The chief Renaissance commentators seized upon this portion of the poem



over Erifilla means in terms of his later surrender to Alcina, for the moment Ruggiero performs well against the hag.

At this point, however, there is a break in the narrative, functioning as a reminder of the structural logic of the allegory. The new canto (VII) begins with one of Arisoto's customary addresses to the reader, but it is an address which locates the allegory in a new perspective. There is obvious irony on the surface in the narrator's distinction between the members of his audience who will consider the fiction a mere tall tale and those wiser members who will know how to interpret the fiction as allegory. (Obviously every member of the audience esteems himself in the latter category.) But there is another more subtle irony just beneath the surface, for the narrator in his *persona* has already revealed his own inability to come to terms with the truth of his fiction, by drawing himself into the fiction, by expressing wide-eyed wonder at the fabulous action, and by repeatedly mistaking the appearance of things for their reality. Expecting us to understand what he does not, the narrator succeeds in manipulating our response to the action through his unconventional use of commonplaces, for he allerts us to the problem that truth is never simple or one-sided, either in life or in literature, and especially in good allegory.

The visual description of Erifilla follows in all its centrifugal variety as substantial proof that we should not reduce the *visibilia* of the hag to one single iconological meaning. Her meaning is a compound of conventional meanings suggested by her rich vestments (greed for wealth, status, power), the wolf on which she rides *senza freno* (both rapine and concupiscence as well as lawless unrestraint in everything), her dominant sandy-yellow colors (wastefulness, unnatural sterility), her clerical-style surcoat with its directly stated satiric significance ("ch'i vescovi e i prelati usano in corte," 7.4),

for extensive moral explication: Fornari (1549-50), Ruscelli (1556), Porcacchi (1568), and Toscanella (1574), as well as their imitators and echoers, Horologio (1563), Valvassori (1567), and Bonomone (1584). Fornari and Ruscelli offer the most interesting—and divergent—interpretations. Fornari sees Erifilla as a temptation to infidelity violating the bond of true love: "Onde ne nasce il disturbo hor di questo, hor di quel uincolo coniugale." *La spositione di M. Simon Fornari da Rheggio sopra l'Orlando Furioso*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1549-50), II.93-94. Ruscelli sees her as an obstacle or test on the road to true love: "Per la battaglia di Ruggiero con Erifilla, auanti che arriui al Castello d'Alcina, si ricorda, che non si possono ottenere i piaceri amorosi senza trauaglio." *Orlando Furioso . . . con le annotazioni, gli auuertimenti, & le dichiarazioni di Girolamo Ruscelli* (Venice, 1560), p. 62.

and the insignia of a toad on her shield (avarice).<sup>19</sup> In addition the meaning of Erifilla is enriched by all the reflexes of the dramatic action. Ruggiero, unhorsing Erifilla and preparing to chop off her head, suddenly changes his mind. The Beautiful Ladies deter him from the final blow, an ironic action which suggests the appropriateness and (from their point of view) even the desirability of Erifilla's presence in the garden. That presence introduces a tension within the garden that helps to make Alcina seem even more attractive, at the same time that it testifies to the difficulty of accepting Alcina on her own terms. For as the barrier before Ruggiero's approach to Alcina, Erifilla embodies the wholly ignoble poverty of spirit, the niggardliness and self-absorption that must be overcome before a man can engage in any meaningful relationship with another. Once such a barrier has been cleared, the way can be open for an experience as precious as it is pleasurable.

In view of Erifilla's presence, then, as well as of the difficult road "malagevole et aspretta" (8) which she anticipates, Alcina becomes an attractive goal, epitomized in the celebrated description of her (11-15). Her highly refined sensuality remains alien to Erifilla's brutishness, and the claims of her charms remain with Ruggiero all the time. Ruggiero in turn complicates what the narrator concludes about him, "né meraviglia è se Ruggiero n'è preso" (16), by wilfully deciding that Astolfo has given him bad advice, and that Alcina has justly punished him "per li suoi portamenti" (17). Only Ruggiero's failure to consider the consequences of Alcina's evidently unbridled power confirms his naiveté: even if Astolfo has deserved his punishment, isn't Alcina's show of magic force overwhelming? After all, Ruggiero himself had refused to surpass his opponents with a show of his own magic force, the enchanted shield.

<sup>19</sup> The tendency of modern editors to footnote the meaning of Erifilla as "avarice" needs some explanation. Fornari was the first to suggest that Erifilla "stands for" avarice by reasoning that in a young man's catalogue of sinful desires lust for gold is the logical complement to carnal lust; since Alcina will "stand for" carnal lust, Erifilla must stand for lust for gold, especially the gold with which a lover buys his mistress' favors. "Intendendo noi assolutamente per Erifilla, l'auaritia, e per Ruggiero un giouene amante, diremo che'l giouanetto usando magnificenze e liberalitadi per instigatione e commandamento d'amore," II.102. By Toscanella the interpretation of Erifilla as avarice as opposed to sensuality is generally accepted. "Erifilla significa l'auaritia; perche chi ama i danari, riesce auaro; et il suo nome suona, amatrice di danari" [the latter by analogy to the classical myth of Eriphyle], *Bellezze del Furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto*, ed. Orazio Toscanella (Venice, 1574), p. 2.

No matter, though. The narrator controls our response by veiling the hero's naiveté with ironic indiscretions of his own. He implies that Alcina has come to dominate Ruggiero's affections entirely so that the latter forgets his love for Bradamante, and when the narrator says that Alcina has washed the hero of the wound, *ferita* (18), of every previous love, he gives the conventional Petrarchan metaphor for love an ironic twist from which it never quite recovers, so that Bradamante becomes the sickness and Alcina the cure.

The denouement of the motif of Ruggiero's temptation and fall is full of irony as both the narrator and the hero fail to recover the moral objectivity that they've lost. From one point of view the narrator sees an ironic literary parody of the Dido-Aeneas banquet (19) as well as an ironic historical parallel to the Antony-Cleopatra affair (20) whose import he purposively refrains from sharpening lest it spoil the idyllic moment; from another point of view Ruggiero steadily retreats from the real world into his own self-absorbed private world, a retreat indicated by his reaction to the sounds which he thinks signal Alcina's coming to his bed (24). The evidence against Ruggiero's self-absorption is all the more powerful for having been withheld by the naive narrator. Thus when the latter caps the reappearance of Alcina in the bedroom by calling the hero "il successor d'Astolfo" (27) it seems certain that Ruggiero's fate is sealed.

The curtain closes on the motif of Ruggiero's temptation and fall with the visit of the *fata* to his bed (28), her definitive victory over him (29-30), and their ensuing days spent in idle amorous pastimes (31-32). For the time being, however, the author reserves his final ironic manipulation of our response to the allegory for a more detached, more reflective, more objective moment. Meanwhile he launches into the next motif which deals with Ruggiero's recovery and his journey to Logistilla. His recovery begins with the narrator's abrupt, and ironic, shift first to Charlemagne's war effort back home and then to Bradamante's valiant search for her missing lover (33). The focus centers on Bradamante and, after her meeting with Melissa, on their speculations about Ruggiero's fall. There in one simile, compact and ironic, the narrator indicates both the significance of Ruggiero's moral eclipse and the direction that the allegory of his moral recovery will take.

The simile operates through a contrast between "il fior de li begli anni suoi" and "quel odor, che sol riman di noi / poscia che 'l resto

fragile è defunto" (41). The *fior* that Ruggiero is losing in his dalliance with Alcina—his youth, his energy, his vitality—is precious, but nothing by comparison with the *odor* that he is sacrificing. *Odor* implies a wealth of intangible things: Ruggiero's fame and posterity, perhaps, but also everything that survives the death of the fragile flesh. Melissa, in order to cure him (there is a pun on *cura* in the sense of "cure" and in the sense of the "care" that she has for him) will drag him along the *via alpestre e dura*, deadly to the flower, of course, but leading towards the *virtù* that insures the sweetness of the *odor* (42). One irony already implicit in the simile is that the attainment of his *virtù* will entail much more than an arduous separation from Alcina; as it turns out in fact the separation will be relatively painless. What is really at stake is Ruggiero's life on the one hand and his destiny on the other. The larger irony is that only the shortening of Ruggiero's life will implement his noble destiny. Ruggiero will die a hero and enjoy eternal fame—but die he must. Atlante, his protector, is very aware of the problem and has devised the affair with Alcina in order to take the hero away from the field of love and war where one day he foresees he will meet premature death (43). The reason for Ruggiero's fall to Alcina is now perfectly clear, and also the difference between his fall and that of Astolfo. The latter's was freely motivated whereas Ruggiero's had been predestined by Atlante.

Thus in a single splendid moment Ariosto ironically reverses the trajectory of the allegory. Astolfo's advice now counts for nothing because it simply doesn't pertain to Ruggiero. Thanks to Atlante's plan Alcina will never turn against him (44). Ruggiero in turn is guilty of no immoral choice and need suffer no moral consequences—at least no *contrappasso* like Astolfo's. On the other hand, thanks to Melissa's influence, Ruggiero remains free to accept or reject Alcina as well as his destiny: in either case he will not be transformed into a bush as Astolfo was. The real issue is whether Ruggiero should remain where he is and safeguard his life, or whether he should return to the field of action, distinguish himself, and lose his life. In view of this issue Alcina represents neither carnal delectation simply nor unrestrained sensuality totally, but rather an alternative, and a wholly attractive one, to Ruggiero's destiny. In the long run the hero's destiny, however harsh, will be more pleasing than dalliance with Alcina, but Ariosto does not for that reason judge the latter badly—he shows it to be simply more limited. And

Ruggiero himself, under the guidance of Melissa, will come to share in that judgment.

Several factors manage to complicate the logic and continuity of the Logistilla allegory. The first factor involves Ariosto's continual shifts in perspective and point of view, along with his echoes, revisions, and recapitulations of earlier motifs. The narrator's description of Ruggiero's silks, bracelets, earrings, curled hair, and perfumes (54-55) recalls not so much a man who has lost his soul as one who has lost his virility. The reference to the hero's "già virile / braccio" summons Melissa's recent promise to restore him to his "vera virtù" (42) just as the "più suavi odor" in his hair recall the *fior-odor* simile concerning his destiny. Next Melissa, disguised as Atlante, directly evokes and qualifies the *fior-odor* simile when she chides Ruggiero for the wasted *frutto* that he has reaped in Alcina's garden (56). Her speech, structured on Mercury's to Aeneas in *Aeneid IV*, tensely wrought with rhetorical ironies, focuses on the hero's personal fame (57-59), the flowering—*fiorir* (62)—of his posterity (60-63), and the truth that Alcina is really a foul witch (64). With the shock of recognition following Melissa's further report that Bradamante has sent her (68-69) comes the simile of a boy who discovers hidden fruit that has grown "putrido e guasto, e non come fu posto" (71). The simile, which surely refers to Ruggiero's seeing Alcina in a new light, confirms the analogy that Melissa has made to the hero's wasted *frutto* (56) and signals the turn of Ruggiero's mind to the fruit of his own destiny, his posterity, and his fame. Only the latter rewards, crowned by the promise of the d'Este family, make the harder course a little easier to follow.

Another major factor which complicates the logic and continuity of the Logistilla motif is a series of interruptions in the narrative at crucial moments (7.80; 8.19; and 10.68). After Ruggiero steals out of Alcina's palace the first interruption occurs in the form of a division between two cantos, with the narrator's customary address to the audience initiating the new canto. This particular address distracts attention from the allegory at hand by reverting to the motif of Alcina's sorcery and linking it to the arts of cosmetic deception practiced by ladies (and by gentlemen!) in their everyday conquest of the opposite sex (8.1-2). Ariosto scores his point with pungent wit, but its principal effect is only to make the emphasis on Ruggiero's acceptance of his destiny recede further into the

background.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile new shifts in perspective and a heightened stress on the atmosphere of a dream world help to complicate the allegory. Pursued by a servant on horseback who attacks him with an eagle and a dog, Ruggiero finally decides to unveil Atlante's magic shield in order to dazzle his opponent without harming him (11). The action is ironic for two reasons. First, Ruggiero's decision to unveil the shield shows how much he has matured since his battle with the monsters when he declined to use the shield as the power of *frodo* rather than *virtude* (6.67). Second, his refusal to use the shield against an unarmed man constitutes an ironic reminder of the very honorable code which encouraged him to defeat Erifilla and which brought him to Alcina in the first place. A further irony, hinted at only implicitly, however, is that Ruggiero unveils the shield perhaps not because he wishes to defeat his opponent but because Alcina is fast approaching and he must move on. One has the impression that the hero cares not so much to triumph over vice as merely to escape from it. Meanwhile Melissa has invaded Alcina's empty palace and has transformed her victims—including Astolfo—back to their original shapes (14-18).

The second interruption in the narrative occurs now, and it is significant because the narrator does not resume the thread of his episode for more than two cantos. He leaves Ruggiero (coily pleading "né ch'io vi occupi sempre in una cosa") at 8.21 after the latter has journeyed the long and weary high road, "aspra, solinga, inospita e selvaggia," to Logistilla and has arrived at a no-man's land, a beach between sea and mountain, "arsiccia, nuda, sterile e deserta" (19). The hero, weary as the verse, has collapsed in exhaustion by 10.35, his armour blazing with heat as before, *come già*, referring to 6.24 when he first began to weaken his defences by loosening his armor. At this point there appear new temptations which put his determination to the test, in the form of three ladies reposing in the shade who offer him a cup of sparkling wine (39).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Porcacchi's interpretation of the meaning of these three ladies shows the

<sup>20</sup> Involved here is Ariosto's characteristic art of *entrelacement* amply commented upon by Nino Cappellani in *La sintassi narrativa dell'Ariosto* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1952) and by Lanfranco Caretti in *Ariosto e Tasso* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961). For fruitful suggestions toward a structuralist reading of the poem which goes intelligently beyond the above cited works, see Eduardo Saccone, "Cloridano e Medoro," *MLN*, 83 (1968), 67-99, a study with important implications for future readings of the poem, indispensable on the subject of *entrelacement*.

Ruggiero declines, “ non entrò in ballo ” (39), but, as in his battle with the servant on horseback (8.10), one has the impression that he is not resisting the temptation so much as he is trying to move on because Alcina is approaching: “ perché d’ogni tardar che fatto avesse, / tempo di giunger dato avria ad Alcina ” (39). Ruggiero still has a lot to learn. He would enjoy the ladies very much if only he had the time to linger with them. But in the long run their reckless accusation of his un-chivalry and their vile threats (41) teach him that they are not what they seem to the mere eye.

Ruggiero wins respite from the ladies through the marvelous intervention of an old ferryman who promises countless joys with Logistilla (45-47). Meanwhile Alcina’s naval forces have sailed up beside the ferryboat ready for attack, and once again Ruggiero shows how much he needs to learn about dealing with evil. The ferryman urges him to unveil the magic shield as the hero stands idle wondering what to do. (49) Ruggiero apparently delays, for in the next stanza the ferryman himself takes the shield and exposes it. The hero’s reluctance results in another timely rescue from the outside, this time by four ladies who welcome Ruggiero onto the beach and whose names designate the cardinal virtues that they exercise: “ la valorosa Andronica [fortitude] e la saggia / Fronesia [prudence] e l’onestissima Dicilla [justice] / e Sofrosina casta [chastity] ” (52), the last especially resplendent and powerful in order to defeat the unchaste Alcina. The sea battle with Alcina’s forces follows, though there is no mention that Ruggiero participates personally in it. The action is confused and confusing, for at stanza 57 Ruggiero steps from the boat and turns his back to the sea. There has been no final encounter, no decisive conquest, no conclusive triumph over his fall. Meanwhile Alcina goes to a serio-comic defeat insured by an excess of gravity in the narrator’s final comparison of her to Dido and Cleopatra, along with his ironic reminder that since she is immortal she cannot enjoy the luxury of a fatally broken heart; her privileged immortality only prolongs her sorrow (56).

When Ruggiero reaches “ piú sicura arena ” (57) the adjective quoted echoes and climaxes the earlier use of *sicuro* (10.40,47) in

extent to which Renaissance commentators went in fabricating allegories where there are none. “ La prima rappresenta le lusinghe del mondo, l’altra gli inganni, & la terza le ingiurie, che dal volgo son fatte, & dette contra chi vuol passare la vita contemplatiua.” *Orlando Furioso . . . con nuove allegorie e annotationi di M. Thomaso Porcacchi* (Venice, 1603), p. 172.



more doubtful situations. Logistilla's palace, a marvel of lucidity with its mirror-like walls that reflect its beholder's inner nature, embodies the security that the benign enchantress provides, and just as true moral security is something more than accidental or unsought for, so the effect of the building is due not just to its constituent materials but to the human skill and planning, *l'artificio adorno* (60), that shaped them. In addition to the palace there are hanging gardens where all varieties of flowers enjoy perpetual life: "ma quivi era perpetua la verdura" (63) where the verb *era* contrasts sharply with the use of *parer* in the narrator's earlier description of Alcina's springtime garden ("par ch'ognor rida il grazioso aprile," 6.74 sqq.). But as with the palace, so with the garden; its effect owes not to nature but to Logistilla's *studio e cura* (63), to careful, deliberate working and moulding. One's education in virtue must be no less careful and deliberate.

Still, the joys of Logistilla's garden satisfy rather quickly: they are clearly no more than the means to an end, not the end itself as the false joys of Alcina's garden were. Thus after only a couple of days Ruggiero and Astolfo plead through Melissa for permission to return to France, and Logistilla promises to let them go in two more days (65-66). Meanwhile she teaches Ruggiero how to put the bit on the hippogriff and how to guide the flying animal through the air. The final irony of the episode is that Logistilla accomplishes her task so quickly, so efficiently, with none of the extensive *studio e cura* that went into the design of her palace and gardens. If the taming of the hippogriff were to suggest allegorically the taming of one's sensual nature through reason and will (as Ariosto's Renaissance commentators and even some of his modern readers infer), then surely Ariosto would have overplayed his hand lavishly with a vacuous symbolism at the very end of his allegory.<sup>22</sup> As it is, however, the taming of the hippogriff signifies nothing more than the end of Atlante's control over Ruggiero through the hippogriff and the beginning of Ruggiero's freedom to elect his own destiny. Ariosto turns a potentially vacuous conventional symbolism (Logistilla represents "reason," the hippogriff represents "sensual nature") back on itself for a finally pungent ironic effect and

<sup>22</sup> See the interpretation by Toscanella. The Hippogriff, "preso per l'appetito naturale, et sfrenato," brings Ruggiero to Alcina's Isle where he commits sin. Logistilla, on the other hand, "si prende per la prudenza, che per la diritta uia della ragione guida l'huomo fuori de gli errore del mondo." *Bellezze*, p. 3.

thereby deflates both the convention and the symbolism. His art manipulates our response just one more time so that we are left with a fine awareness that Logistilla and the hippogriff are only fictions vouchsafed to fictional characters like Ruggiero and Astolfo for speedy deliverance. In the real world virtue is at once an easier and a more difficult matter, and if we are looking for a representation of that virtue in Ariosto we will find it not at the perfunctory conclusion of the Logistilla allegory, but rather earlier in the action itself and throughout its entire development. The function of the arbitrary and ironic conclusion then is to turn us back conversely to the episode in its entirety for whatever "moral lesson" the allegory may contain.

The allegory in fact has ironically come full circle. The motif of Ruggiero's freedom to elect his own destiny reverts to the theme of Astolfo's *contrappasso* on Alcina's isle, a punishment reflecting or resulting from the latter's freedom to elect his own destiny. Perhaps there is an echo here of Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man in which man's extensible powers of choice and self-determination confer on him the power to choose his own place on the hierarchical scale of being, to live as an animal or vegetable or to rise to the condition of the angels. In either case whether the allegory is an ironic one celebrating the broader implications of man's dignity or whether it is an ironic one dramatizing the concrete implications of Ruggiero's choice, destiny, and self-recognition, it is certainly not a cut-and-dried didactic allegory teaching the lessons of temptation and fall, virtue and vice, sensuality and chastity, or lust and temperance (as readers of a later Tasso or Spenser might surmise from the latter's adaptations of the Alcina allegory).<sup>23</sup> The key to understanding the allegory does not lie in a chart of symbolic equivalents or in a reductionist reading that attempts to fix the meaning of characters, actions and concrete entities. Rather the key lies in a reading of the poetry attentive to all its nuances, to its ironic twists and turns implemented through a rich and versatile use of literary allusiveness, through meaningful iterative repetitions, and above all through the consciousness of a supremely gifted narrator controlling his very complex narration.

Ariosto, then, in his Alcina episode has found excellent symbols

<sup>23</sup> In the *Gerusalemme Liberata* see the Enchanted Wood episode (Canto 13) and the journey to Armida's garden (Cantos 14, 15, 16). In *The Faerie Queene* see the Fradubio episode (I.ii) and Acrasia's Bower of Bliss (II.xii).

to express allegorically his moral, ironic, and very serious vision of the world. The world that he sees, with its ups and downs, its comedies and tragedies, its simplicities and subtleties, proves to be devious but delightful, bewildering but exhilarating, errant but affirmative. The symbols—the beauty of the garden, the ugliness of the monster-men, the beauty of the ladies on the unicorn, the ugliness of Erifilla, the beauty of Alcina, and finally and most ironically the ugliness of Alcina—are fashioned so that they come to mean—ironically—much more than they initially seem to mean. Ariosto presents them to us as clear and distinct conventional symbols, and then he proceeds to blur the outlines so that allegorical meaning emerges obliquely and problematically. The allegory does not amount to a lesson in sin and renunciation; it rather points to the attractiveness of the “vice” itself and to the precious experience that the young man undergoes by being exposed to it. The poet refuses to make his narrative an allegory of “right and wrong.” His allegory is not a mode of salvation or damnation for the hero, but rather a mode of dramatizing the claims of both that are on him all the time.

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