

Rinaldo's Return to Ferrara

Ariosto, the Prophecy and its Reversal

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ABSTRACT: Rinaldo's journey down the Po River in Canto XLIII of the *Orlando Furioso* encompasses a return to Ferrara that is a comeback also for readers, who at that point have already been taught about the city's future glory by St. John (XXXV). The knight's visit to the site where Ferrara will rise gives Ariosto the opportunity to repeat his prophetic encomium. However, such a repetition does not strengthen the eulogistic discourse, but rather undermines its necessary teleology. This paper examines the narrative techniques that Ariosto adopts to create the possibility of a double reading of the prediction – forward and backward at the same time – thus relativizing the ideological stability of his poem.

KEYWORDS: prophecy; encomium; future; St. John; reversal; teleology; Ferrara; point of view; truth; reader

SCHLAGWÖRTER: Prophezeiung; Lobrede; Zukunft; Hl. Johannes; Umkehrung; Teleologie; Ferrara; Perspektive; Wahrheit; Leser

I've always been careful never to predict anything that had not already happened. (Marshall McLuhan)

1.

Blessed were those ages, one should say recalling Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, when the *Orlando Furioso* could be read as a wonderful tapestry almost completely detached from history, a literary masterpiece not directly engaged with its own sixteenth-century context and thus increasingly distant from any contradiction of modernity. Croce's label of *armonia*, along with the portrait of Ariosto penned by De Sanctis – who famously wrote that the poet had been in a daze, “sordo al richiamo della realtà e della storia”¹ –, represented for long time a sort of cornerstone on which to build every interpretation of

¹ Giuseppe Sangirardi, *Ludovico Ariosto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2006), 28. On De Sanctis's reading of the *Furioso* and his interpretation of Ariosto's figure, see now Christian Rivoletti, *Ariosto e l'ironia della finzione: la ricezione letteraria e figurativa dell'Orlando Furioso in Francia, Germania e Italia* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2014), 323–34.

the *Furioso*, whose magnificent web of episodes and stories was invariably seen as a poetic universe entirely unaffected by tragedy. Ariosto's technique of composition was deemed a means through which narratives could be developed without arriving to the point of torture²: in other words, the *entrelacement* appeared to be the literary device that allows that "perpetua catarsi armonica"³ which resolves with aesthetic sublimation every conflict and contrast among the single threads.

Although the idea of a deep correlation between form and ideology has proved to be methodologically speaking correct and to some extent successful, in the last decades critics have notoriously revised this non-problematic depiction of the narrative structure of the *Furioso*. Looking carefully at the way in which stories intersect, various scholars have pointed out how interactions among quests and adventures are at different levels frustrating for both characters and readers⁴. Such interpretations have substantially darkened the ideological landscape of the *Orlando Furioso*, providing an image of the text as "ambiguous by nature", for which "interpretation is very much open the judgment of an individual reader"⁵. To put it simply, Croce's *armonia* has at this point become "Ariosto's bitter harmony"⁶. Thanks to this critical

² Benedetto Croce, *Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille*, seconda edizione riveduta e con un'appendice (Bari: Laterza, 1929), 57 (Croce follows closely De Sanctis here).

³ Croce, *Ariosto*, 57.

⁴ On the innovative use of the mechanism of quests and adventures, see Riccardo Bruscaagli, "Ventura' e 'inchiesta' fra Boiardo e Ariosto," in *Stagioni della civiltà estense*, ed. Riccardo Bruscaagli (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1983), 87–126; for a reading of the intersections among quests partially inspired by the Girardian theory of "mimetic desire", see Sergio Zatti, *Il 'Furioso' fra epos e romanzo* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1990), 9–37, 39–68, 69–89, 113–25; for the intentional frustration of readers' expectations, see Daniel Javitch, "'Cantus Interruptus' in the 'Orlando Furioso,'" *MLN* 95, no. 1 (1980): 66–80. As a side note, it is worth remembering that sixteenth-century readers already felt this sense of frustration: see Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: the Canonization of 'Orlando Furioso'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 86–105.

⁵ Albert Russell Ascoli, "Ariosto and the 'Fier Pastor': Form and History in 'Orlando Furioso,'" *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2001): 487–522, cit. 510. This article is now readable in Albert Russell Ascoli, *A Local Habitation and a Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 205–42.

⁶ Albert Russell Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). Several critics have proposed the idea that the *Furioso* adopts a sort of deconstructive strategy, which recurrently offers readers conflicting truths and viewpoints without suggesting or permitting any univocal solution. Despite the differences in their arguments, I group and list here those that have been most important for my article and for my understanding of the *Furioso*: Klaus W. Hempfer, "Deonstruktion sinnkostitutiver Systeme in Ariosts 'Orlando Furioso,'" in *Ritterepik der Renaissance*, ed.

turn, the *Furioso*, despite the perfection of its composition, has progressively revealed ideological rifts and epistemological inconsistencies, taking on the aspect of a “poema della contraddizione”⁷ able to reflect – if only by “eluding or even forgetting”⁸ – “la crisi del Rinascimento”⁹. This essay will build on such readings of the text in order to show how even episodes that seem quite clear can, if analyzed independently, assume a different meaning when one looks at them in connection with the other “fila” of “la gran tela” that the poet weaves¹⁰.

Critics have already highlighted the strategic function played by the “verbal and thematic repetitions” that Ariosto inserts between all the “interlaced elements” of the poem’s structure¹¹. In line with this idea, I will focus particularly on Rinaldo’s journey along the Po River and Astolfo’s voyage to the moon, trying to read the former in light of some interpretive tools provided by the latter. Although these two sequences are extremely well known – the lunar episode is arguably the most famous among those narrated in the *Furioso*¹² – a juxtaposed analysis of them enables us to reconsider some aspects

by Klaus W. Hempfer (Stuttgart-Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989), 277–98; Klaus W. Hempfer, *Diskrepante Lektüren: die Orlando Furioso-Rezeption im Cinquecento: historische Rezeption-forschung als Heuristik der Interpretation* (Stuttgart und Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987); Marco Praloran, “Tempo e azione nell’*Orlando Furioso*” (Firenze: Olschki, 1999), esp. 54–5; Eduardo Saccone, “Il ‘soggetto’ del *Furioso*,” in *Il ‘soggetto’ del ‘Furioso’ e altri saggi tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 1974), 201–47, esp. 224. On the notion of *armonia*, see now Giuseppe Sangirardi, “Armonia,” in *Lessico critico dell’*Orlando furioso**, ed. by Annalisa Izzo (Roma: Carocci, 2016), 21–39.

⁷ Giulio Ferroni, *Ariosto* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2009), 178–215.

⁸ Ascoli, “Fier Pastor,” 487. For other critics, the relationship between the *Furioso* and its time needs to be thought “in termini di reazione poetica alle violenze della storia”: see Stefano Jossa, “Tempo e tempi dell’*Orlando furioso*,” in *Festina lente: il tempo della scrittura nella letteratura del Cinquecento*, ed. by Chiara Cassiani and Maria Cristina Figorilli, introduction by Nuccio Ordine (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014), 165–81, cit. 166.

⁹ Giorgio Padoan, “Il ‘Furioso’ e la crisi del Rinascimento,” in *Ariosto 1974 in America*, ed. by Aldo Scaglione (Ravenna: Longo, 1976), 1–29.

¹⁰ The image comes from *OF XIII*, 81. From now on, I quote the text from the following edition: Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. by Remo Ceserani and Sergio Zatti (Torino: Utet, 1997).

¹¹ Ascoli, “Fier Pastor,” 491. On this aspect see also Daniel Javitch, “The Poetics of ‘Variatio’ in ‘Orlando Furioso,’” *Modern Language Quarterly* 66 (2005): 1–19.

¹² Selecting from a wider bibliography: Ascoli, *Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony*; James Chiampi, “Between Voice and Writing: Ariosto’s Irony According to St. John,” *Italica* 60 (1983): 340–50; José Guidi, “Imagination, maîtresse de vérité: l’épisode lunaire du ‘Roland Furieux,’” in *Espaces réels et espaces imaginaires dans le ‘Roland Furieux’*, ed. by Alexandre Doroszlaï et al. (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1991), 47–85; Carlo Ossola, “Métaphore et inventaire de la folie dans

that have been deemed negligible features. For instance, Alexandre Doroszlaï, who has fruitfully and repeatedly approached the *Furioso* from a cartographic angle, has overlooked Rinaldo's "parcours italien", briefly remarking in a footnote that "il apparaît évident que, pour une fois, l'Arioste n'avait nul besoin de documentation cartographique: il connaissait la route pour l'avoir pratiquée"¹³. Nonetheless, the familiarity of the setting conceals a defamiliarizing perspective through which places – and above all Ferrara – are observed: because of this trait, the encomiastic discourse that Ariosto develops throughout that phase turns out to be far less stable than it seems at a first glance. As will be noted by the end of this article, the controversial system that the text employs to celebrate Ariosto's patrons suggests a somewhat implicit shift from Virgil's manner of dynastic poetry to Ovid's: that is, from the idea of an *imperium sine fine* to an endless process of transformation that prevents any achievement from becoming definitive. More specifically, the strategy makes it impossible to separate the dynastic prophecy from its reversal, the enduring from the ephemeral – the future glory of Ferrara from its constitutive precariousness.

2.

In order to explain what kind of relation between the moon and the earth St. John's words sketch, scholars have frequently employed, though in a variety of slightly different meanings, the metaphor of the mirror. Even if

la littérature italienne du XVI^e siècle," in *Folie et déraison à la Renaissance* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1976), 171–96; David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 81–92; Mario Santoro, "La sequenza lunare nel 'Furioso': una società allo specchio," in *Lanello di Angelica: nuovi saggi ariosteschi* (Napoli: Federico and Ardia, 1983), 105–32; Gennaro Savarese, "Lo spazio dell'«impostura»: il 'Furioso' e la Luna," in *Il Furioso e la cultura del Rinascimento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1984), 71–89; Cesare Segre, "Da uno specchio all'altro: la luna e la terra nell'«Orlando Furioso»," in *Fuori dal mondo: i modelli nella follia e nelle immagini dell'aldilà* (Torino: Einaudi, 1990), 103–14; Zatti, *Il 'Furioso'*, 127–71; Simona Volterrani, "Il poema come specchio: l'«Orlando furioso»," *Italian Culture* 11, no. 1 (1993): 149–60.

¹³ Alexandre Doroszlaï, *Ptolomée et l'hippogriffe: la géographie de l'Arioste soumise à l'épreuve des cartes* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998), 166. See also Massimo Rossi, "La geografia del 'Furioso'. Sul sapere geo-cartografico alla corte estense," in *Lucrezia Borgia: storia e mito*, ed. by Michele Bordin and Paolo Trovato (Firenze: Olschki, 2006), 97–138, esp. 130–5, and, for a useful shift from geography to landscape, Eleonora Stoppino, "Paesaggio," in *Lessico critico dell'«Orlando furioso»*, 321–39.

the passage that accounts for such a metaphorization¹⁴ opens a sequence thematically connected with patronage and its implications, it has been observed that “modern Ariosto criticism no longer dwells on the notion that this [episode] is a cynical jab at stingy patrons; instead it focuses on the relevance of these stanzas to Ariosto’s concern throughout the *Furioso* with the relation of literature to reality”¹⁵. Over the last thirty years the situation has not changed; rather, the epistemological aspect of the lunar episode has been even more emphasized, and the problem of truth regarding what poets write when they write about their patrons has been reframed as a more general question that pertains to reality and representation¹⁶. This process of abstraction – likely made easier by the aforementioned metaphorization – seems totally justified not only in light of the theoretical issue at stake, but also for the position that Astolfo’s voyage occupies in the text. Indeed, although we should resist the temptation of “picking up one” – that is, any – “of Ariosto’s ironically and precariously situated images and using it for a straightforward, totalizing, description of the poem”¹⁷, the moon can nevertheless be considered a “vantage point”¹⁸ from which to look at the *Furioso*. As ironic (or self-ironic) as it may be, St. John’s demystification of encomiastic discourses acts as a revelation that is directed, in that moment, only to Astolfo, and to

¹⁴ Ariosto himself depicts the moon as a mirror by writing that it seems to Astolfo and St. John “come un acciar che non ha macchia alcuna” (*OF XXXIV*, 70, 4). As some critics have observed, the 1516 and 1521 editions were both even more explicit in suggesting this similarity, for the line just quoted was followed respectively by the indication that the moon “parea di vetro in altra parte” or it was “altrove come vetro” (*OF XXXI*, 70, 5): see Savarese, “Lo spazio dell’*impostura*,” 78. See also the recent critical edition of the first *Furioso*: Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso secondo la princeps del 1516*, ed. by Marco Dorigatti with the collaboration of Gerarda Stimato (Firenze: Olschki, 2006) and the analysis of the variants by Alberto Casadei, *La strategia delle varianti: le correzioni storiche del terzo ‘Furioso’* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1988), and *Il percorso del ‘Furioso’: ricerche intorno alle redazioni del 1516 e del 1521* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993). While steel (and glass, at least in 1516 edition) evokes the physical side of the metaphor, the functional aspect that scholars have stressed mainly relies on these well-known lines: “Tu déi saper che non si muove fronda | là giù che segno qui non se ne faccia. | Ogni effetto convien che corrisponda | in terra e in ciel, ma con diversa faccia” (*OF XXXV*, 18, 1–4).

¹⁵ Peter DeSa Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto’s Tapestry: Character and Design in the ‘Orlando Furioso’* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 156.

¹⁶ It has been recently suggested, for example, that irony too – a *vexata quaestio* of Ariosto scholarship – finds a center “nel suo intimo legame con la dimensione della finzione poetica, nel gioco consapevole tra la finzione e ciò che non è finzione, ovvero la realtà”: see Rivoletti, *Ariosto e l’ironia della finzione*, XIV.

¹⁷ Ascoli, *Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony*, 297.

¹⁸ Eric MacPhail, “Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment,” *MLN* 116, no. 1 (2001): 30–53, cit. 45.

the reader along with him; any other character apart from Astolfo is kept in the dark about the principle according to which, in order to know the truth of the history beneath the lies of poets' stories, one needs to reverse "tutta l'istoria al contrario". Readers thus gain a privileged perspective over that of the characters regarding the evaluation of eulogies inside the poem, particularly those that come *after* the lunar sequence, given the fact that St. John's speech makes what follows – up to the very end of the *Furioso* – "irreparably contingent"¹⁹. The creation of a difference between an internal and an external point of view – characters and readers do not have the same level of knowledge – will have crucial consequences for making Ariosto's discourse twofold, that is, readable in more than one sense at a time; still, this is a semi-disguised duplicity, since in the *Furioso* "what is made explicit is culturally normative or positive", while "culturally and negatives outcomes" – such as "attacks on patrons" – are on the contrary "left implicit" and "can only be deduced by an active interpretation of ostentatious formal features"²⁰. We will see soon an application of this co-presence of contradictory narratives within the same text; for the moment, we shall summarize what has been discussed so far about the lunar perspective by reaffirming the importance of including also the encomiastic context of St. John's claim in its application to other episodes of the poem. Although it probably would be an exaggeration to derive a coherent poetics²¹ from the Evangelist's discourse, since it is primarily a discourse on eulogistic poetry, his words do provide readers with an interpretive clue on top of the characters' own understanding for encomiastic sections. In this sense, we might say that, unlike the narrator – who ironically pretends to jump back to the earth being tired of his lunar tour-de-force²² – we never leave the moon completely: if the *Furioso's* space lies between the "precisione 'cartografica'" and the "eversione meravigliosa,

¹⁹ Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 49.

²⁰ Ascoli, "Fier Pastor," 510. For interesting remarks on the notion of point of view in the *Furioso* see also Annalisa Izzo, "Racconti," in *Lessico critico dell'Orlando furioso*, 367–85, with additional bibliography by the same author.

²¹ For an effort in this direction, pursued through a comparison between Ariosto's lunar episode and Dante's encounter with Cacciaguida (esp. *Par.*, XVII 37–142), see Massimo Scalabrini, "Il cigno senz'ali: l'idea di Dante nell'Orlando Furioso," *Schede umanistiche* n.s., no. 2 (1994): 67–78.

²² "Resti con lo scrittore de l'evangelo | Astolfo ormai, ch'io voglio far un salto, | quanto sia in terra a venir fin dal cielo; | ch'io non posso più star su l'ali in alto" (*OF XXXV*, 31, 1–4).

limitata tuttavia [...] al viaggio ultraterreno di Astolfo”²³, the two poles are nevertheless constantly in dialogue, for the latter becomes part of the perspective from which the reader looks at the former. As we will see in the next paragraph, even when the text takes on a chorographic way of describing its space, the moon comes back to haunt the reader's perception in the guise of a privileged (but unhappy) epistemological frame.

3.

In an insightful article mentioned above, Eric MacPhail has shown that, even though “the narrator exercises his own prophetic powers by promising his work a long and illustrious posterity”, Ariosto's “political prophecies cannot evade the uncertainties of the historical present”²⁴. Like any other epic text set in the past dealing with the necessity of praising patrons who would come after the time of its story, the *Furioso* needs a teleological structure suitable to display its empirical *hic et nunc* as a culminating moment, anticipated from the *illic et tunc* of the narrated events. Still, patrons cannot simply find their place in a linear history that flows beyond them, for this would undermine the necessity of their own arrival: if anything, this endless movement corresponds precisely to what good poets can tackle by rescuing patrons from oblivion, as St. John teaches us.

We could say that good poetry – good for its patrons, of course – consists in a suspension of linearity. In order to achieve this alteration of the temporal flux, Ariosto mainly employs two devices that partially overlap and cooperate in preserving Ferrara and the Este from the action of time: namely, the myth of the Golden Age and what has been called “historical deixis”, that is the technique “whereby the poet speaks not only in his own person but also in his own time and place”²⁵. In the case of the former, linearity is replaced by circularity; in the case of the latter, the *now* and the *then* become the end-points of an oriented segment where the *illic et tunc* is the origin and the *hic et nunc* is the end. The outcome of both these alternatives consists in protecting the future from its own infinite openness by forcing it to coincide either with the return of a mythical age or with the mere fulfillment of an easily pre-

²³ Alberto Casadei, “Nuove prospettive su Ariosto e sul ‘Furioso,’” *Italianistica* 37, no. 3 (2008): 167–92, cit. 188.

²⁴ MacPhail, “Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment,” 31. On this topic, see also Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the ‘Orlando Furioso’* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 116–48.

²⁵ MacPhail, “Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment,” 37.

dictable scenario, for the future foretold *in* the text is nothing more than the present of the text itself.

Unsurprisingly, in all the instances in which the myth of the Golden Age²⁶ enters the text, it appears as a return, as testified by the use of verbs such as *ritornare*, *tornare*, *riporre*²⁷. One might therefore suppose that this coming-as-comeback is still in place when the poet somewhat indirectly evokes the Golden Age at the beginning of canto *OF XXXV* by describing Astolfo who, when looking at the mass of skeins, is struck by “un vello che più che d’oro fino | splendor pareva” (*OF XXXV*, 3) and asks St John who that threads belongs to. The Evangelist’s answer makes explicit the link between the golden skein and the golden age in which Ippolito d’Este, the man who the skein stands for, will be living. The praise of Ippolito accompanies the celebration of his time²⁸ and particularly of his city, which St. John’s discourse inscribes into a teleological frame that leads from the “umil e piccolo borgo” to “la più adorna | di tutte le città d’Italia” (*OF XXXV*, 6), thus enacting what might be called “the transition from seeing time as the antagonist of human aspirations to seeing history as a plan”²⁹. It can be said that this is a moment of exceptional felicity for the prophetic system displayed by the text, since the return of the Golden Age and the God-guaranteed prophecy³⁰ about Ferrara culminate in “an historical fact, however embellished”³¹. In other words, the necessity of considering Ferrara as the endpoint of an oriented segment in order to preserve the city itself from the linearity of history seems to be fully consistent

²⁶ On the myth of Golden Age, see Juan Carlos D’Amico, “Le mythe de l’âge d’or et le mécanisme de la prophétie dans le ‘Roland Furieux’,” in *Récit et Identité collective* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1999), 180–93, and Albert Russell Ascoli, “Proemi,” in *Lessico critico dell’Orlando furioso*, 341–65, esp. 358–9.

²⁷ “Quindi terran lo scettro i signori giusti, | che, come il savio Augusto e Numa fenno, | sotto il benigno e buon governo loro | *ritorneran* la prima età de l’oro” (*OF III*, 18); “Alfonso è quel che col saper accoppia | si la bontà, ch’al secolo futuro | la gente crederà che sia dal cielo | *tornata* Astrea dove può il caldo e il gelo” (*OF III*, 51); “Astrea veggio per lui *riposta* in seggio, | anzi di morta ritornata viva; | e le virtù che cacciò il mondo, quando | lei cacciò ancora, uscir per lui di bando” (*OF XV*, 25). It shall be noted that in the last case the subject of the prophecy is Charles V.

²⁸ “E come di splendore e di beltade | quel vello non avea simile o pare, | così saria la fortunate etade | che dovea uscirne al mondo singulare” (*OF XXXV*, 5).

²⁹ Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 7.

³⁰ “Tanta esaltazione e così presta, | non fortuita o d’avventura casca; | ma l’ha ordinata il ciel, perché sia questa | degna in che l’uom di ch’io ti parlo, nasca” (*OF XXXV*, 7).

³¹ MacPhail, “Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment,” 44.

with the structure of the episode, at least before “Saint John’s recommendation that the statements of poets be read in reverse”³². Reading retroactively the whole sequence after being provided with such an interpretive tool is unquestionably correct; still, the suggestion to read in a back-to-front manner becomes even more crucial in case of repetition. Indeed, it might be said that the act of putting before readers’ eyes a repetition is an explicit invitation – especially in a system that envisions the need of re-reading to reach truth – to reconsider the first reading in light of the second one.

The Ferrarese section of Rinaldo’s journey down the River Po has in itself the form of a return. As Ronald Martinez has pointed out, it is a complex form of homecoming “conducted both intratextually and metatextually” that involves a homecoming not only for the knight but also for the poet, for whom it takes the aspect of “a return to the sources of patronage, literary inspiration, local history, and Ferrarese civic pride”³³. Moreover, it is a literal return³⁴, since Rinaldo himself refers to an “altra fiata che fe’ questa via” (*OF XLIII, 57*) in traveling through what would be part of the Estense domains. Finally, and even more importantly, Rinaldo’s journey to Ferrara is a form of return for readers too, for the text offers us a new prophecy about the future of the city, quoting unambiguously from the prediction of St. John that we heard, alongside Astolfo, on the moon. Remembering his first trip to Ferrara, Rinaldo gives instructions to be awakened in the vicinity of the city whose glorious future Malagigi had then predicted to him:

– O città bene avventurosa (disse),
 di cui già Malagigi, il mio cugino,
 contemplando le stelle erranti fisse,
 e costringendo alcun spirto indovino,
 nei secoli futuri mi predisse
 (già ch’io faceva con questo camino)
 ch’ancor la gloria tua salirà tanto,
 ch’avrai di tutta Italia il pregio e ’l vanto. (*OF XLIII, 55*)

This stanza not only contains in a nutshell further praise of Ferrara, but also reveals Rinaldo’s own psychological frame of mind as he approaches the city. On the basis of Malagigi’s prediction the knight seeks the city he knows the

³² Ronald L. Martinez, “Two Odysseys: Rinaldo’s Po Journey and the Poet’s Homecoming in ‘Orlando furioso,’” in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. by Valeria Finucci (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 17–55, cit. 29.

³³ Martinez, “Two Odysseys,” 34.

³⁴ Martinez, “Two Odysseys,” 34–5.

landscape, unfolding before his eyes, will offer in seven hundred years. The four stanzas (*OF XLIII, 56–9*) added in the 1532 edition of the *Furioso* focus particularly on the Belvedere island and the so-called Herculean Addition, a fortification of the city laid out by Biagio Rossetti for Ercole I d'Este – but completed under Alfonso I, as stated in the text – that substantially transformed the urban space of Ferrara³⁵. Rinaldo's reading-for-the-future is so emphasized that inevitably it raises doubts about its own reliability:

Così venia Rinaldo ricordando
 quel che già il suo cugin detto gli avea,
 de le future cose divinando,
 che spesso conferir seco solea.
 E tuttavia l'umil città mirando:
 – Come esser può ch'ancor (seco dicea)
 debban così fiorir queste paludi
 de tutti i liberali e degni studi?

E crescer abbia di sì piccol borgo
 ampla cittade e di sì gran bellezza?
 e ciò ch'intorno è tutto stagno e gorgo,
 sien lieti e pieni campi di ricchezza?
 Città, sin ora a riverire assorgo
 l'amor, la cortesia, la gentilezza
 de' tuoi signori, e gli onorati pregi
 dei cavallier, dei cittadini egregi.

Lineffabil bontà del Redentore,
 De' tuoi principi il senno e la iustizia,
 sempre con pace, sempre con amore
 ti tenga in abbondanzia et in letizia;
 e ti difenda contra ogni furore
 de' tuoi nimici, e scuopra lor malizia:
 del tuo contento ogni vicino arrabbi,
 più tosto che tu invidia ad alcuno abbi.

(*OF XLIII, 60–2*)

As has already been anticipated, the new celebration of Ferrara openly quotes St. John's prediction through both lexical and rhyme repetitions: “umil città” (*OF XLIII, 60, 5*) and “piccolo borgo” (*OF XLIII, 61, 1*) recall “umil [...] e piccol borgo” (*OF XXXV, 6, 4*); “queste paludi” (*OF XLIII, 60, 7*) and “ciò ch'intorno è tutto stagno e gorgo” (*OF XLIII, 61, 3*) quote “dietro gli soggiorna | d'alta

³⁵ On the Herculean Addition see Thomas Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara: Ercole d'Este (1471–1505) and the Invention of a Ducal Capital* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

palude un nebuloso gorgo" (*OF XXXV*, 6, 4), "degni studi" (*OF XLIII*, 60, 8) and "cittadini egregi" (*OF XLIII*, 61, 8) are reminiscent of "bei studi e [...] costumi egregi" (*OF XXXV*, 6, 8); and two stanzas of the prophecies (*OF XXXV*, 6, and *OF XLIII*, 61) share one of their alternate rhymes and their closing double rhyme, (respectively: *borgo: gorgo: scorgo, regi: egregi*; and *borgo: gorgo: assorgo, pregi: egregi*).

The mechanism of repetitions seems to put the reader in a position similar to Rinaldo's, thus confirming what Michael Sherberg has suggested by arguing that "Rinaldo parallels the reader outside the poem, and his responses suggest ways in which the extradiegetic reader should approach experience"³⁶. However, the perspectives of the extradiegetic reader and Rinaldo coincide only partially. Let us put aside for a moment the empirical difference between the time of narrated events and that of reading, which at least corresponds with the year of publication of the poem. The major discrepancy between the character's perspective and the reader's interpretive angle consists in the different experiences that shape their two distinct viewpoints after the first prophecy (whose sources are St. John for the reader and Malagigi for Rinaldo) and before this second prediction. Unlike Rinaldo, the reader is aware that in order to obtain the truth – at least about the praises of patrons – one needs to read in reverse; for his part, the knight is at the center of a strategy through which the poem seems to recognize "the dangers of knowing too much"³⁷ and, in the case of Rinaldo's well-known refusal to drink from the chalice, even equate "wilful ignorance [...] with the prelapsarian bliss of the Garden of Eden"³⁸. It is certainly true that neither the need for demystification that Astolfo and the reader learn from St. John nor the acceptance of the mystification³⁹ that Rinaldo's refusal seems to endorse can

³⁶ Michael Sherberg, *Rinaldo: Character and Intertext in Ariosto and Tasso* (Saratoga, California: Anna Libri, 1993), 47.

³⁷ Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 327. Ascoli refers in this case to two previous articles: Mario Santoro, "La prova del 'nappo' e la cognizione ariostesca del reale," in *Lanella di Angelica* (Napoli: Federico and Ardia, 1983), 133–51, and Elissa B. Weaver, "Lettura dell'intreccio dell'Orlando furioso: il caso delle tre pazzie d'amore," *Strumenti critici* 11, no. 3 (1977): 384–406.

³⁸ Jo Ann Cavallo, *The World Beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 240. For this peculiar parallel see also Giulio Ferroni, "L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia," in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale 'Ludovico Ariosto'* (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1975), 73–92, esp. 90.

³⁹ In this second case, the morale would correspond to the idea, beautifully summarized by Bartlett Giamatti with reference to the whole poem, that "the final illusion is to think life would be at all bearable without illusions": see Angelo Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise*

claim a totalizing validity in the epistemological system of the text: after all, each of these two interpretive devices applies first and foremost to specific cases – the former to the praise of patrons, the latter to the faithfulness of wives – not to mention the fact that both the principles are provisional or even contradicted by opposite examples⁴⁰. Still, the impossibility to rely on any given interpretive tool in order to reach the truth should not lead us to dismiss the non-coincidence between the readers' perspective and Rinaldo's, and particularly the superior knowledge, however paradoxical, that at this point readers have assumed as opposed to the character, who seems to play the role of the reader inside the text. Indeed, only readers are provided with both the interpretive options mentioned above: therefore, it is only from the reader's viewpoint that one can envisage a conflict between two divergent manners of answering the questions Rinaldo asks himself while looking at the "umil città".

Once this textualized aspect of the difference has been mapped out, it is possible to return to the problem of what is at stake when one reads the text in the time in which the prophecy about Ferrara has been fulfilled. In this light, the easiest way to respond to Rinaldo's questions probably consists in considering them to be rhetorical: from the perspective of something that has already come true, one knows that the rise of Ferrara from "piccol borgo" to "ampla cittade" is – that is, *was* – possible. Such an interpretation results in an emphasis on an outcome that, in Rinaldo's words, follows the questions themselves, thus turning the prophecy into a wish. This option certainly weakens the strength of the prediction, but it does not undermine the validity of the prophecy at its core: although Rinaldo's "isolationist comment depicts even one's closest neighbours as latent enemies"⁴¹, we can detect in it a key for the age of felicity to last. On the contrary, one might deem the knight's questions not only as an expression of wonder, but rather as a non-rhetorical⁴² way of questioning the possibility of Malagigi's prophecy. If the answer is relatively easy in a pure extratextual, *ex post* dimension, it appears far more

and the Renaissance Epic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 164. Taking into account the position occupied by the episode within the first two editions, when it was much closer to the end of the poem, critics have often seen in Rinaldo's refusal "la *summa* della saggezza umana dell'Ariosto", as stated by Franco Pool, *Interpretazione dell'Orlando furioso* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1968), 222.

⁴⁰ Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 305 and 326–7.

⁴¹ Cavallo, *The World Beyond Europe*, 251.

⁴² On this possibility of reading a rhetorical question in a non-rhetorical way, see Paul de Man, "Semiotics and Rhetoric," in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 3–19, esp. 9–10.

complicated within the system of a text suggesting – only to its reader – the need to read in reverse.

Returning to the geometrical representation of the structure of prophecy, we might say that Rinaldo's questions act as a clue for the reader to reverse the oriented segment of the teleology and to consider the *hic et nunc* of Ferrara as the origin and the *illic et nunc* of the “umil città” as the end. Due to this reversal, the process of history shows not only Ferrara's rise from humble origins to the peak of its greatness, but also the spectral possibility of going in the opposite direction⁴³. As stated earlier, the epistemological privilege granted to readers – Rinaldo's has only his forward point of view – does not entail that the text should be read primarily as covertly adumbrating the end or at least the transience of Ferrara, for this would mean to turn (improperly) St. John's principle into a universally valid paradigm for interpretation. Rather, the *Furioso* articulates two perspectives that lead to opposite and yet legitimate readings of the same portion of text: adapting to the poem Merleau-Ponty's words, we could say that “nous n'avons pas à les rassembler dans une synthèse”, since “elles sont deux aspects de la réversibilité qui est vérité ultime”⁴⁴; that is, as maintained by Ascoli, within the *Furioso* “not only truth is *in crisis*, but truth is a crisis”⁴⁵.

However, we should resist the temptation of abstracting from the encomiastic discourse in which the double reading we have highlighted finds its main objective. Indeed, before offering a radically skeptical perspective on truth, the complex structure designed by Ariosto is a way to dialogue with predecessors such as Virgil and Ovid, and particularly to reenact their capability of dealing with the theme of transience while apparently celebrating everlasting glory. In an essay dedicated to the effects caused by the plurality of voices and narrative instances in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Alessandro Barchiesi has shown how Ovid, writing for an audience aware that Augustus is over sev-

⁴³ It might be even possible to interpret Ariosto's choice to present Ferrara as a “piccol borgo” at the time of the supposed visit by Rinaldo as an intentional rewriting of history. In his “Osservationi”, Alberto Lavezuola pointed out that Ferrara must have been already a “città di qualche considerazione”, a fact that led him to wonder why Ariosto had decided to emphasize the small dimension of the city: “non so come per la picciolezza di essa convenevolmente per bocca di Rinaldo la potesse il Poeta chiamar Borgo, havendo campo larghissimo di lodarla come terra fino allora popolosa e grande”. See Alberto Lavezuola, “Osservationi sopra il Furioso,” in *Orlando Furioso* di M. Ludovico Ariosto (Venezia: Francesco de Franceschi, 1584).

⁴⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, texte établi par Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 201.

⁴⁵ Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 326.

enty, “reminds us that a new transformation” – namely Augustus’ death and his subsequent deification – “is inevitable, and it too will have to be faced”⁴⁶. Throughout his demonstration, Barchiesi focuses briefly on Anchises’ vision in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas’ father “paves the way” for the development of Rome by foretelling the names that lands without names will have in the future:

hi tibi Nomentum et Gabios urbemque Fidenam,
 hi Collatinas imponent montibus arces,
 Pometios Castrumque Inui Bolamque Coramque.
*Haec tum nomina erunt, nunc sunt sine nomine terrae*⁴⁷.

Still, as pointed out by Barchiesi, “in the readers’ own time these cities yet to be named will be *nothing but* names and ancient ruins”. Therefore, “the line of development that Anchises announces is shadowed by the spectre of impermanence”⁴⁸. If what we have been observing about the *Furioso* is correct, we can say that Ariosto is able to keep this shadow within his prophetic gaze even though he speaks of a city that, unlike Gabii or Fidenae for readers contemporary to Virgil, is at the peak of its greatness. Precariousness thus affects the object of Ariosto’s prophecy in an even more radical manner, suggesting that Ferrara itself is exposed to the action of time, to another turn of the wheel⁴⁹. Such a result is not achieved through a mere contrast between the time of the story and the time of reading, as in the case of Virgil; rather, the effect of immersing the object of the prophecy into the very same temporal flux from which it has to be protected involves, as we have seen, Ariosto’s narrative techniques. In line with recent scholarship⁵⁰ but also, albeit implicitly, with several sixteenth-century commentators, one should look at these features not only to discover the reasons for formal resemblances between the *Furioso* and the *Metamorphoses*, but more importantly to understand how Ariosto relativizes the ideology that necessarily informs his poem.

⁴⁶ Alessandro Barchiesi, “Voices and Narrative ‘Instances’ in the ‘Metamorphoses’,” in *Speaking Volumes: Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and Other Latin Poets*, ed. by Matt Fox and Simone Marchesi (London: Duckworth, 2001), 49–78, cit. 78.

⁴⁷ *Aen.*, VI, 773–6, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Alessandro Barchiesi, “Voices and Narrative ‘Instances’,” 72.

⁴⁹ I borrow the image of the wheel from Saccone’s analysis of the duel between Ruggiero and Rodomonte: see Eduardo Saccone, “Il ‘soggetto’ del ‘Furioso’,” in *Il ‘soggetto’ del Furioso e altri saggi tra quattro e cinquecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 1974), 201–47, cit. 241.

⁵⁰ See Maria Cristina Cabani, “Ovidio e Ariosto: leggerezza e disincanto,” *Italianistica* 37, no. 3 (2008): 13–42.