

# Alfieri's tears

## Ariosto and the patriots

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses the eighteenth- to nineteenth-century reassessment of the figure of Ludovico Ariosto: a phenomenon rooted in municipal erudition of the old regime, but at the same time riddled with new 'patriotic' inspirations which saw the literary classics as the basis of an "Italian identity" to be rediscovered.

One of the first to exalt Ariosto in this light was Vittorio Alfieri, who counted him as one of the four 'Great poets' (together with Dante, Petrarch and Tasso) on whom the Italian literary canon was founded. The theme was then disseminated further thanks to various types of editorial undertakings and gave rise to a distinctive iconography which took shape, inter alia, in sculpture cycles on the façades of many Italian buildings, both private and public. Nationalist and patriotic rhetoric imported from France in the wake of the Napoleonic armies was grafted onto this bedrock of eighteenth-century origin. In the paper this important intersection is evoked through the "patriotic" festivities organized in honour of Ludovico Ariosto by General Miollis, first in Reggio Emilia and then in Ferrara. The celebrations culminated in the transfer of the poet's body to a new secular temple, the university library. In the years that followed, the municipality of Ferrara assigned one room in the library to Ariosto memorabilia, erected a statue of the poet in one of the main city squares and opened a museum in his house: these sites became part of the tourist circuit and were visited by travellers (such as Antoine-Claude Pasquin known as Valéry, and Corot who recorded the memory of Ariosto's chair, "Chaise d'Arioste," in his sketchbook).

After Unification (1861) these places, monuments and relics took on a new role as catalysts of national identity.

**KEYWORDS:** Art History; Ariosto, Ludovico; Alfieri, Vittorio; Patriotism; local identity; national identity; literary tourism; Ferrara; Miollis, Sextius-Alexandre-François; writers' houses

**SCHLAGWÖRTER:** Ariosto, Ludovico; Alfieri, Vittorio; Patriotismus; lokale Identität; Ferrara; nationale Identität; literarischer Tourismus; Miollis, Sextius-Alexandre-François

Ferrara is dull, solitary, and deserted, but still breathes a kind of courtly grandeur and magnificence; the castle especially [...] with its bridges, towers, and elegant balustrades, retains in its exterior a fairylike air in accordance

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with its poetical recollections; I was much struck by its aspect on the evening of my arrival, as I contemplated it by moonlight, which was reflected in its broad and brimming moat.<sup>1</sup>

This is how Antoine-Claude Pasquin, known as Valéry (1789–1847), opens the chapters on Ferrara in his *Historical, Literary, and Artistical Travels in Italy*. An important figure in the literary salons of Paris, a friend of Chateaubriand, Stendhal and Mérimée, a declared right-winger and *royaliste*, some years earlier Valéry had been appointed conservator of the library and archives of the Louvre and shortly afterwards he became the librarian of Versailles. It is no surprise, therefore, that he dedicated a great deal of space in his travel reports to “poetical recollections,” paying particular attention to the local cultural and literary scene, which he attempted to document accurately, reading the available bibliography but also visiting in person each library, museum and academy he happened to come across. In the case of Ferrara, in particular, Valéry dedicated an entire chapter to the public Library<sup>2</sup>, having had the opportunity to inspect its rooms at leisure, escorted by the custodian who was ready to improvise as a guide for the eminent visitor and accompany him through the gallery of portraits of prominent figures and the hall of Ariosto, brimming with anecdotes on the wit the poet used to set right his patron who was as powerful as he was obtuse (“but I must caution travellers generally not to pay too much attention to *custode* and *cicérone*, as in this case, there is no man of education in Ferrara that credits the tradition respecting this reparatee”). Here is Ludovico’s inkstand, chiselled with a cupid calling for silence (an “emblem of his discretion” in amorous conquests?); here is his chair, a faithful and humble companion to the great poet’s enduring literary labours; here is his funerary monument (fig. 1), too grandiloquent and ornate for a “theatrical decoration, unbecoming the grandeur of a sepulchral monument” (“of bad taste,” commented Valéry succinctly)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A.-C. Pasquin, known as Valéry, *Historical, Literary, and Artistical Travels in Italy: A Complete and Methodical Guide for Travellers and Artists*, by M. Valéry ... Translated with the special approbation of the author, from the second corrected and improved edition by C.E. Clifton. With a copious index and a road-map of Italy (Paris: Baudry, 1839), 218.

<sup>2</sup> Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, book VII, chapter XII, 224–9.

<sup>3</sup> “The mausoleum, at the end of the room, against the wall, is of bad taste; on each side is a daub of a large green curtain, with roses, doves, corbeilles, helmets, and plumes. The stone covering the bones of Tasso at Saint Onuphrius is preferable, with all its nakedness, to this theatrical decoration, unbecoming the grandeur of a sepulchral monument,” in Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, 228.



Fig. 1: Ariosto's tomb, Ferrara

It was, however, the Ferrarese literature hall that excited our learned traveller more than anything, enchanted by the rich collection of valuable editions and the presence of some already legendary manuscripts, such as the version of *Gerusalemme liberata* composed by Tasso in prison or the original *Pastor fido*, as well as, naturally, some fragments of *Orlando furioso* written by its author (“covered with corrections,” as Valéry observed)<sup>4</sup>. Before these relics of Ariosto the custodian – “a singularly solemn and pathetic personage” – displayed his entire “cantilena romana” showing the delighted and perplexed visitor the page on which Vittorio Alfieri had left signs of his passage: an inscription full of deference (“Vittorio Alfieri vide e venerò, 18 giugno 1783”) and a tear laden with romantic emotion which could still be glimpsed between the lines and crossings out of the great poet<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Vice versa, he did not manage to find trace of Titian's letter to Ariosto mentioned by Lord Byron (he had found mention of it in a recently released biography of Byron) which certainly would have been able to “furnish some curious particulars of a union then so common between writers and artists,” in Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, 227.

<sup>5</sup> “Alfieri, bending reverentially before the manuscript, obtained permission to inscribe the words *Vittorio Alfieri vide e venerò, 18 giugno 1783*. The custode, a singularly solemn and pathetic personage, expressing himself *con la cantilena romana*, shows even the trace of a tear shed by



Fig. 2: Corot, chaise d'Arioste

Other visitors of the time also spoke about this solicitous custodian, such as Samuel Rogers who in his *Journal* (October 26, 1814) remarked on the extraordinary “courtesy and intelligence” that he had shown to him, allowing him to sit on the chair of the great Ludovico (the day before Rogers had been to visit the poet’s house, and there too he could only delight at the “natural politeness & anxiety to please of the young Lady at the house”)<sup>6</sup>. We can also suppose that it was again thanks to the complaisance of the custodian, perhaps compensated by a large tip, that in 1828 Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, on the way home from his first trip to Italy, was able to make a quick sketch

Alfieri,” in Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, 223.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Rogers, *The Italian Journal of Samuel Rogers, Edited with an Account of Rogers’ Life and of Travel in Italy in 1814–1821* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954); the introduction by John Hale is still interesting, 182–4.

of the same chair, in a notebook currently conserved at the Louvre (fig. 2): not so much a study sketch, but rather a simple *souvenir* fixed on paper, next to which Corot had felt the need to write “chaise d’Arioste Ferrare” as a reminder<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps it was the particular interest aroused by the chair and the manuscripts that led Francesco Avventi, in his *Servitore di piazza* (the main nineteenth-century guide to the city of Ferrara), to explicitly invite tourists to take advantage of the helpful assistance of the library custodians: “the chair and inkstand that served the Ferrarese Homer are still preserved in this room, and the keepers will make it a duty to display them for the curiosity of all those who yearn to see them”<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, it was not only the library staff that profited from the curiosity of enthusiasts of Renaissance historical memories. Around this same time the English writer Amelia Gillespie Smyth (author of an important fictionalized biography of Olympia Morata) had been duped in the street by a “ragged boy” who suggested he accompany her to see the relics of the great poet – “sole boast and pride of declining Ferrara” – using a lure now familiar to us: “How proud you will be tomorrow, to write to your friends in England, that you have sat in Ariosto’s chair!”<sup>9</sup>.

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Valéry, Corot, Samuel Rogers and Amelia Smyth are just some of the early nineteenth-century travellers who testifying to the spread of an almost fetishistic cult of objects that had belonged to Ariosto, as well as the rooms in which he lived, and those in which his mortal remains were now conserved<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Corot Album, sheet 30, pencil on paper, 115 x 195 mm, Paris, Louvre, inv. RF 8725, 55.

<sup>8</sup> “si conservano ancora in questo locale la sedia ed il calamajo che servirono all’Omero ferrarese, ed i custodi si fanno un dovere di esporli alla curiosità di ogn’un che brami vederli,” in Francesco Avventi, *Il servitore di piazza: guida per Ferrara* (Ferrara: Pomatelli, 1838), 115.

<sup>9</sup> “The tomb, the chair and inkstand of Ariosto form still the sole boast and pride of declining Ferrara. A ragged boy, while conducting the writer and her party to the university, said exultingly: – How proud you will be tomorrow, to write to your friends in England, that you have sat in Ariosto’s chair!” [Amelia Gillespie Smyth], *Olympia Morata: Her Times, Life and Writings, Arranged from Contemporary and Other Authorities* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1836), 18. Similar opinions can be read in the diaries of other English travellers of the time, for example the Duke of Buckingham: cf. *Private Diary of Richard, Duke of Buckingham and Chandos* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), III, 227–30 (“the town old and ugly, and remarkable only as the birthplace of Ariosto and the prison-house of Tasso”). On Anglo-Saxon travellers in Ferrara, cf. Werner L. Gundersheimer, “Experiencing Ferrara: English and American Travellers and the Limits of Perception,” in Luciano Chiappini, Antonio Samaritani, and Ranieri Varese, eds. *L’Aquila bianca. Studi di storia estense per Luciano Chiappini* (Ferrara: Corbo, 2000), 625–48.

<sup>10</sup> In general, on the cult of writers’ tombs and houses and on the shaping of the fashion for “literary journeys,” cf. Harald Hendrix, ed. *Writers’ Houses and the Making of Memory* (New York:

In fact, for some time the house and tomb of the poet had become obligatory sites to visit for enthusiastic readers of *Orlando furioso*: not just Italians like Alfieri, but foreigners too such as Joseph Addison, who claimed he had not seen anything extraordinary in Ferrara, except for referring to Ariosto's tomb (which at that time was still in the Church of San Benedetto) as the only site worthy of mention in his *Remarks on several parts of Italy*<sup>11</sup>. Even Antonio Frizzi, in 1787, claimed that “non arriva in Ferrara un colto viaggiatore che non volia prestar omaggio alle ceneri dell’Omero italiano” (no educated traveller came to Ferrara who did not wish to pay tribute to the ashes of the Italian Homer)<sup>12</sup>.

With respect to this honourable and well-rooted tradition of visits, the precursors of which can be traced back to as early as the decades immediately following the death of the poet, the afore-mentioned descriptions reveal a novelty: in the early nineteenth century the itinerary of passing visitors no longer included just a building seen from the outside or a mausoleum, however elaborate, erected inside a church, but rather a series of specific rooms dedicated to the poet and set up accordingly. We have memorabilia, custodians aware of their role and tour guides, even if somewhat improvised. In other words the idea of a museum was already there: within a few years inexpensive reproductions for sale were produced and postcards were soon to follow.

It is very likely that, in the small world of Ferrara, behind this development there was Giovanni Andrea Barotti (1701–72): a scholar of vast interests and an authority on local lore. He was a prominent and controversial figure on the local cultural and political scene. A polemicist with unorthodox acquaint-

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Routledge, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy &c.: In the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London: J. Tonson, 1718), 87–8.

<sup>12</sup> “Si degnarono di onorarle di una visita anche ultimamente Giuseppe II Imperatore l’anno 1769, li 29 di maggio; Paolo Petrovitz figlio di Catterina II Imperatrice di Moscovia, e Gran Duca ereditario delle Russie con Maria Federovna di Virtemberg Stutgard, Gran Duchessa sua moglie, che viaggiavano sotto il nome di Conti del Nord, li 27 gennaio del 1782; e finalmente Pio VI Sommo Pontefice l’anno stesso, li 22 di maggio,” in Antonio Frizzi, *Guida del forestiere per la città di Ferrara* (Ferrara: Pomatelli, 1787), 55–6. The *Memorie istoriche di Letterari ferraresi* also states that the tomb was “visitato ed onorato da molti Poeti con latini, e italiani Componimenti”; two sonnets are transcribed – one of which was inspired by the visit to the tomb of Joseph II of Austria, on May 29, 1769 (Giovanni Andrea Barotti and Lorenzo Barotti, *Memorie istoriche di Letterati ferraresi. Opera postuma di Giannandrea Barotti*, Ferrara: For the heirs of Giuseppe Rinaldi, 1792, I, 220; 269–71).

tances he was also the man behind a significant project for the reform of the city's university and above all an erudite connoisseur of the bibliographic collections of the university library (the future Ariosteia), of which he was appointed permanent Prefect in 1747<sup>13</sup>. Barotti continued as Director of the library for over twenty-five years, not only greatly enriching the collections – also with substantial personal donations – but also actively dedicating himself to the defence and enhancement of the great Ferrarese poets of the past. To this end he collected a vast quantity of documents (which were then published posthumously by his son Lorenzo), and in particular was responsible for a monumental edition of the complete works of Ariosto, introduced by a highly documented biography<sup>14</sup>. It is Barotti who informs us that he had come into possession of the inkstand and chair (which for centuries had remained in the “*parva domus*” conserved without great care by the subsequent owners of the house), as well as other valuable documents that then – undoubtedly on his initiative – became part of the display in the rooms that were to become so famous in the following century<sup>15</sup>.

It so happened that around the same time that Barotti laid hands on the chair and inkstand, the Venetian publisher and typographer Antonio Zatta (1757–97) was preparing a new illustrated edition of *Orlando furioso*, which was issued in four elegant folio volumes between 1772 and 1773<sup>16</sup>. In the printer's foreword introducing the work, Zatta described the criteria

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Italo Zicari, “Barotti, Giovanni Andrea,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1964), vol. 6, *ad vocem*; Patrizia Castelli, ed. *La rinascita del sapere: libri e maestri dello Studio ferrarese* (Venice: Marsilio, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Andrea Barotti, ed. *Opere in versi e in prosa, italiane e latine, di Lodovico Ariosto con dichiarazioni*, 4 vols. (Venice: F. Pitteri, 1741). Other editions, corrected and expanded, were published in 1745 and 1766. Ariosto's biography, with a few excerpts from *Orlando furioso*, was also published in a separate volume: Giovanni Andrea Barotti, *Vita di Lodovico Ariosto e dichiarazioni all'Orlando furioso con li testi del poema in questa novissima edizione, corrette ed accresciute dall'autore* (Ferrara: Stamperia Camerale, 1771).

<sup>15</sup> “[...] Calamajo di bronzo, che fu sempre con gelosia conservato nella sua Casa [di Ariosto], e di cui non è molto, che mi fu fatto pregevol regalo da quella stessa amorevol gentile Persona che, molti anni sono, mi fece dono della vecchia, e parlata Scranna del medesimo Poeta, la quale, da poi che l'ebbi in poter mio, fu onorata di molte visite da distintissimi Personaggi, [...]” Giovanni Andrea Barotti, “Vita di Lodovico Ariosto,” in *Prose italiane di Giovannandrea Barotti*, 3 vols. (Ferrara: Stampa Camerale, 1770), II, 201.

<sup>16</sup> *Orlando Furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto*, 4 vols. (Venice: A. Zatta, 1772–3). On this edition, see: Maria Teresa Caracciolo, “Lectures de l'Arioste au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: du livre illustré au cycle peint,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1502 (March 1994), 123–46; Christina Ionescu, ed. *Book Illustration in the Long Eighteenth Century: Reconfiguring the Visual Periphery of the Text* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 80–3.

of excellence that guided him in the preparation of the edition, carried out with “infinite cure ed avvertenze” (great care and attention): his intent was above all to publish a “testo ben collazionato e ben corretto” (well collated and well corrected text), and thus he had collaborated with the “più valenti e più giudiziosi Letterati Ferraresi” (the most valiant and discerning Ferrarese literati) for the appropriate checks on the best manuscripts available. Particular attention was then given to the full page illustrations that preceded each Canto, carried out “di mano intelligente e maestra” (with intelligence and expertise) by a team of engravers (including Giuliano Zuliani and Giacomo Malosso) after drawings by Pietro Antonio Novelli. These illustrations were presented as innovative with respect to the traditional methods of representing the poem visually, in that each plate illustrated a single narrative scene, unlike previous series of engravings which combined different episodes in a single image (for example in the Orlandini edition of 1730, or the well-known De Franceschi edition of 1584, with plates by Girolamo Porro). Finally, the text of the poem was integrated with “Allegorie e note” by Girolamo Ruscelli, corrected and expanded by a “Letterato ferrarese” who however preferred to remain anonymous.

It is not difficult to imagine that the anonymous “Letterato ferrarese” with whom Zatta corresponded was our Barotti, who was also the author of *Vita di Lodovico Ariosto* which introduced the four volumes<sup>17</sup>. In all likelihood it was once again the Ferrarese librarian who suggested that Zatta enrich his text with some images capable of giving a human dimension to the events in life of Ariosto, offering readers a way to see evidence of the poet’s daily life: in addition to the house and mausoleum (figs. 3), the chair and the inkstand (figs. 4), and even an example of his handwriting.

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Zatta’s edition was an immediate and enormous success in Europe and was held in high regard: Pierre-Louis Guinguené, an authoritative historian of Italian literature, had an example in his library<sup>18</sup>; and even John Hoole, in his new English translation of *Orlando furioso* published in London in 1783, included, together with a biography of Ariosto, an image of the chair and

<sup>17</sup> “La Vita è quella stessa, che leggesi nel secondo Tomo delle Prose italiane di Giannandrea Barotti, stampate in Ferrara l’anno scorso,” printer’s device in *Orlando Furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto*, I, n.p.

<sup>18</sup> *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de feu M. P.-L. Guinguené, membre de l’Institut Royal de France, de l’Académie della Crusca* (Paris: Merlin, 1817), no. 486.



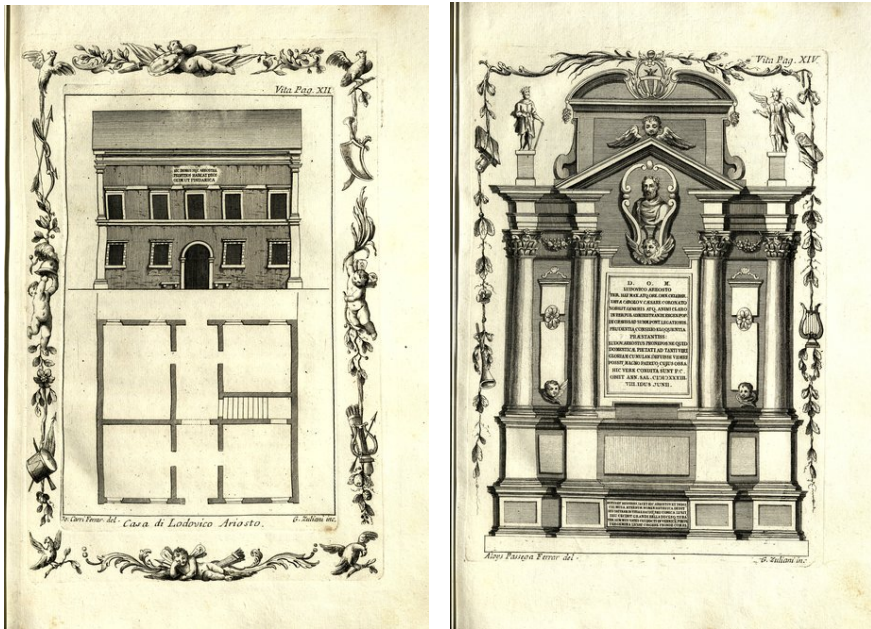


Fig. 3: Zatta: casa/sepulcro

inkstand first published by Zatta<sup>19</sup>. These new illustrated editions apparently fuelled the curiosity of readers, eager for further details of Ludovico's life, to such an extent that only a few years later the curators of *Universal Magazine* felt it was their duty to “comply with the request of many of our readers” and consequently published a long biography complete with a portrait of “a Poet who has ever been the boast of his countrymen, and whom they have distinguished by the title of “The Divine Ariosto”<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the English market was one that Zatta himself seemed to target, as demonstrated by the dedication of his *Orlando furioso* volumes to John Stuart, Earl of Bute, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Here the Venetian publisher mentioned, among other things, his aim to print another more extensive work to glorify the Italian Poets and to promote their appreciation by foreigners<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *Orlando Furioso: Translated from the Italian of Lodovico Ariosto; with Notes by John Hoole*, 5 vols. (London: printed for the Author, 1783), I, lxxxix.

<sup>20</sup> “Memoirs of the Life of Ariosto with a Fine Portrait of That Celebrated Poet,” *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, LXXXII (1788), 57.

<sup>21</sup> “La protezione in ch’Ella, siccome spero, vorrà prenderla, le concilierà grazia, e favore anche dagl’illustri, e in ogni genere di letteratura, e di scienza versatissimi, suoi Compatrioti.



Fig. 4: Zatta: sedia/calamaio

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Zatta's action was thus not free of incipient nationalistic tendencies in a period in which Italian culture was losing, or had in fact already lost, much of its visibility on the European scene. In this the Venetian publisher was not alone: on the contrary, this very idea of literary classics as the foundation of an "Italian identity" to be rediscovered was recognized as one of the common themes of the editorial production of this period, before the outbreak of the Revolution in France also gave the issue of the "Italian nation" more specifically political and patriotic meanings.<sup>22</sup> It was the era in which Vittorio Alfieri proposed the myth of the "four Italian poets": Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto

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Nel doppio motivo di consolazione, che mi verrà da un esito sì avventuroso, io potrò confermarmi più sempre nel proposito di por mano ad un'altra e più ampia di molto, e più utile impresa a gloria de' Poeti Italiani, che, per quanto sarà in me, io mi studierò in ogni tempo di render accettabili agli Stranieri," in *Orlando Furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto*, I, dedicatory epistle.

<sup>22</sup> Mariasilvia Tatti, "Idee di nazione nella seconda metà del Settecento: erudizione, editoria, giornalismo," in Beatrice Alfonzetti and Marina Formica, eds. *L'idea di nazione nel Settecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2013), 295–311.



Fig. 5: Stolberg, Montpellier (recto/verso)

and Tasso, dedicating a famous sonnet to them, the inspiration for which came from a drawing by the countess of Albany, now conserved in the Musée Fabre in Montpellier (fig. 5). It is worth reproducing the first version of the sonnet (then published in print two years later with some variants), written in Alsace in 1787 and penned by Alfieri himself on the back of the drawing, with the title “Chi son costoro?” (Who are they?)<sup>23</sup>:

Quattro gran Vati, ed i maggior son questi,  
 ch'abbia avuti od avrà la lingua nostra.  
 Nei lor volti gl'ingegni alti celesti,  
 benché breve, il dipinto assai ben mostra.

Primo è quei che scolpì la infernal chiostra:  
 tu, gran padre d'amor, secondo resti:  
 terzo è il vivo pittor, che Orlando inostra:  
 poi tu, ch'epico carme a noi sol desti.

Dall'Erculee colonne al freddo Neva,  
 dal Tamigi al Sebéto, io meco ognora  
 gli ebbi, norme divine; e in lor viveva.

<sup>23</sup> Signed with the initials of Vittorio Alfieri and dated “11 Maggio 1786. In Martinsburg. Lungi da quella, ch'io sempre [illegible word].” On the lower left Alfieri detailed the changes made to the sonnet printed in 1789 (*Rime*, sonnet CLXI).

Ha ciascuno il suo alloro: un serto ancora  
 pinto è nel mezzo, al qual chi gli occhi eleva,  
 degno n'è quanto il Nume lor più adora.

The four “gran Vati” are not named, but a verse was dedicated to each one. A fifth place – alluded to by the empty wreath in the centre of the drawing and the last triplet of the sonnet – remained vacant, perhaps for Alfieri himself. Ariosto occupied the third place in the tetrad, insofar as “vivo pittor, che Orlando inostra,” owing to a long tradition that, since the sixteenth century, had recognized the poet’s ability to evoke visual images with his verses (“nei suoi poemi non si legge ma si vede”, wrote Orazio Toscanella in his *Bellezze del Furioso* as early as 1574)<sup>24</sup>.

Alfieri had in fact cultivated this myth of the four poets for some time, as he himself recounted in the tenth chapter of the fourth epoch of his *Vita*, describing the trips made in search of consolation after being forced to take leave of his beloved (the countess of Albany) in Rome in May 1783<sup>25</sup>. He first visited – and shed tears – on Dante’s tomb in Ravenna, and then in the house and on the tomb of Petrarch in Arquà (“quivi parimenti un giorno intero vi consacrai al pianto e alle rime”), and then at the birthplace and on the tomb of Tasso respectively in Sorrento and Rome. He finally completed his “quarto pellegrinaggio poetico” (fourth poetic pilgrimage) and went to Ferrara to see the tomb and manuscripts of Ariosto: and it was there that he left the note – and the tear – that were later seen by Valéry<sup>26</sup>. It was also on that occasion that Alfieri – as had happened at the three previous places visited – was inspired to compose other verses; and the good Valéry would not have been displeased to read them at Ariosto’s burial monument instead of the old-fashioned lines, (“malgré leur mérite lapidaire”), composed at the time by Battista Guarini<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Monica Preti, “Nei suoi poemi non si legge ma si vede.” Voir l’Arioste?, in *L’Arioste et les arts*, eds. Michel Paoli and Monica Preti (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2012), 20–7.

<sup>25</sup> *Opere di Vittorio Alfieri* (Pisa: Nicolò Capurro, 1821), I, 287–8, where Alfieri declares: “Questi quattro poeti, erano allora, e sono, e sempre saranno i miei primi, e direi anche soli, di questa bellissima lingua: e sempre mi è sembrato che in essi quattro vi sia tutto quello, che umana mente può dare la poesia.”

<sup>26</sup> According to tradition, Alfieri decided to engrave some famous versus on a wall in Petrarch’s study in Arquà and, inspired within those walls, he composed some sonnets: *O cameretta* and *Se questo è il nido*, just as he had come up with two other compositions in the area around Ravenna: *O grande padre Alighier* and *Dante, signor*. Cf. Angelo Colombo, “Tra segno letterario e simbolo ideologico: Ugo Foscolo e le rovine della casa del Petrarca,” *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, no. 71 (2005), 189–214.

<sup>27</sup> “The inscriptions on Ariosto’s tomb have been given many times already; notwithstanding

Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme e gli amori,  
 le cortesie, le imprese, ove son ite?  
 Ecco un avello, intorno a cui fur smarrite  
 Stanno, aspettando in van che altr'uom le onori.

Sovr'esso io veggo in varj eletti cori  
 E le Grazie e le Muse sbigottite;  
 E par, che a prova l'una e l'altra invite  
 A spander nembo di purpurei fiori.

Oh gloriosa in vero ombra felice,  
 Che giaci infra sì nobile corteggio  
 Nella beata tua terra nutrice!

Qual già fosse il tuo nome, ormai nol chieggio:  
 Fama con tromba d'oro a tutti il dice:  
 L'Italo Omero entro quest'urna ha seggio<sup>28</sup>.

Here we see the return of the recommendation to rediscover the meaning of the ancient greatness, to cherish the memory of the poetic glories of the past in the wake of the "Italo Omero". This recalls an epithet that must have been very widespread at the time, if we find it already in use in the *Guida del forestiere* by Antonio Frizzi (where Alfieri had found it, relaunching it?)<sup>29</sup>.

The canon of the "Four Poets" then had a great influence on the literary culture and more generally on the imagination of the Italians in subsequent decades<sup>30</sup>. It formed the basis for a series of editions in one or more volumes that collected the masterpieces, and enjoyed a wide circulation not only in Italy but also, and perhaps above all, abroad. After a first Florentine edition in 1818<sup>31</sup>, others were issued in Paris (edited by the former Napoleonic exile Angelo Buttura, in 1823 and 1833)<sup>32</sup> and then Leipzig, in 1826, by the Italian-

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their lapidary merit, they are very inferior to Alfieri's sonnet, which I would rather have found there, beginning with these verses from the *Furioso*: 'Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori, / Le cortesie, l'imprese, ove son ite?,' in Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, II, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Vittorio Alfieri, *Rime*, sonnet LX.

<sup>29</sup> See above, footnote 2.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Di Benedetto, "Vittorio Alfieri e i 'Quattro poeti'"; Duccio Tongiorgi, "I canzonieri della nazione: sulle antologie poetiche di età risorgimentale," in Beatrice Alfonzetti, Francesca Cantù, Marina Formica, Mariasilvia Tatti, eds. *L'Italia verso l'Unità. Letterati, eroi, patrioti* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura), 407–20).

<sup>31</sup> *Collezione dei primi quattro poeti italiani* (Florence: Libreria della Pallade, 1818).

<sup>32</sup> *I quattro poeti italiani, con note di diversa per diligenza e studio di A. Buttura*, 10 vols. (Paris: J. Didot, 1823–30); followed by another edition in a single volume: *I quattro poeti italiani. Con una scelta di poesie italiane dal 1200 sino ai nostri tempi, pubblicati da A. Buttura* (Paris: Lefevre e Baudry,

ist Adolf Wagner, nephew of the musician – a work dedicated “al principe de’ poeti Goethe” which was then republished several times<sup>33</sup>. In the climate of the Restoration, in the wake of growing affirmations of national pride, the canon had great success also in terms of the figurative arts: an early and significant example of this can be seen in the frescoes produced by the Nazarene painters for Marquis Carlo Massimo in three rooms of his “Casino” in Laterano, between 1817 and 1829. These focused on episodes taken from the *Divina Commedia*, *Orlando furioso* and *Gerusalemme liberata*. Originally a fourth room decorated with Petrarch-inspired themes had also been designed, but nothing more was done about this project<sup>34</sup>.

The illustrated editions with effigies of the poets also helped to establish their iconography: one of the models imposed was that of busts developed by the Florentine engraver Raffaello Morghen. These had already been published separately in the prestigious *Collezione dei principali poeti italiani* edited by Giovanni Rosini (from 1804 onwards), and were then brought together within an architectural frame to decorate the frontispiece of the aforementioned anthology of the *Quattro poeti celeberrimi* edited by Adolf Wagner in Leipzig (fig. 6)<sup>35</sup>. A variation of this collective portrait can be found on the frontispiece of the Parisian edition of 1833, edited by Angelo Buttura, where we see the four poets projected in glory, and from heaven above looking down on the earth and on the same symbols of their worldly fame (lyre, book, laurels: fig. 7)<sup>36</sup>. An iconographic tradition was thereby established which was then used throughout the nineteenth century in various Italian cities, where we find the effigies of the four poets decorating private houses and public buildings alike: some of the earliest examples include the statues crowning the curvilinear façade of the eighteenth-century Teatro Verdi (formerly

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1833). In this volume, republished several times, the *Commedia*, Petrarch’s poetic work, *Orlando Furioso*, *Gerusalemme* and *Aminta*, are followed by a choice of poems by various authors in chronological order, even including some productions by Buttura himself.

<sup>33</sup> *Il Parnasso Italiano, ovvero i quattro Poeti celeberrimi italiani. La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri; Le rime di Francesco Petrarca; L’Orlando Furioso di Lodovico Ariosto; La Gerusalemme Liberata di Torquato Tasso* (Leipzig: Ernst Fleischer, 1826).

<sup>34</sup> Monica Minati, *Il Casino Giustiniani Massimo al Laterano* (Milan: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2014). For a reading of the symbolic significance of this cycle of frescoes, see also: Cordula Grewe, “Symbols of Time: Ariosto, the Nazarenes, and the Poetics of Epic Fresco,” in *Revision, Revival and Return: The Italian Renaissance in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Lina Bolzoni and Alina Payne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming in 2016).

<sup>35</sup> C. A. Schwerdgeburth after a drawing by R. Morghen.

<sup>36</sup> J. Hopwood after a drawing by A. J. Gaitte.



Fig. 6: Schwerdgeburch, Morghen, I quattro Poeti

Teatro Nuovo) in Padua, dating back to the renovation designed by Giuseppe Jappelli, completed in 1847 (figs. 8–9). On the neoclassical façade of Palazzo Cardoli in Sannazzaro de' Burgondi, near Pavia, we can still see the terracotta busts of not four but rather five poets: from left to right, Alfieri, Tasso, Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto (figs. 10–11). These were most likely added in 1862 as part of the renovation of the entire building constructed in the previous century. Some other examples follow: the façade of Teatro Camillo Sivori in Finale Ligure (Savona), inaugurated in 1868, with the bust of the four poets at the top of the split archivolt of the second-floor windows (from left: Ariosto, Dante, Petrarca and Tasso); or Villa Viti Mazzolla in Volterra, where the second register of the neo-Gothic façade created by the architect Luigi Campani in 1850 is decorated with niches featuring terracotta busts, while in the lower register the same number of niches accommodate statues from the four continents (figs. 12–13)<sup>37</sup>. This iconographic programme in fact re-

<sup>37</sup> From left, the order of the busts is: Ariosto, Dante, Petrarca, Tasso. The same statues, on a



Fig. 7: Hopwood, Galle, I quattro Poeti

flected the personality of Giuseppe Viti (1816–60), an alabaster trader and great traveller, as well as Republican patriot. Finally, a later example of the same style is Ceconi Castle in Pielungo di Vito D'Asio in the north-eastern Alps, a bizarre and impressive building dating from the start of the twentieth century and built in an eclectic style by count Giacomo Ceconi (1833–1910), a railway entrepreneur and inventor of modern tourism, as described by Francesco Amendolagine<sup>38</sup>. The statues of the four poets, aligned on the façade on overhanging corbels, were part of a decorative programme that mixed medieval and Renaissance themes: rather than symbols of homeland

different base, are found on the façade of the home of the archpriest Chicherio in Bellinzona (Canton of Ticino), as documented by a series of photographs by Riccardo Speziari which can be seen on Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>38</sup> Lucia D'Andrea and Alessandro Vigevani, eds. *Giacomo Ceconi un impresario friulano* (Udine: Camera di Commercio, 1994); Francesco Amendolagine, Federico Bulfone Gransinigh and Federica Cecconi, eds. *Il castello di Pielungo: la dimora di Giacomo Ceconi (1833–1910), un imprenditore oltre tutti i confini* (Pielungo di Vito D'Asio: Graphistudio, 2010).





Fig. 8: Padova, Teatro Verdi, facciata

glories here we seem to be dealing with good-natured sentinels placed at the entrance to an alpine residence, designed with a modern approach with an eye to the development of the tourism business (figs. 14–15).

For the eighteenth and nineteenth century public, the exaltation of the four poets, viewed from a patriotic and nationalistic perspective, was however still linked to the idea of Italian primacy. Leafing through the fifty-six volumes of the series *Parnaso dei classici italiani*, released by the Venetian Jesuit Andrea Rubbi between 1784 and 1791<sup>39</sup> this fact clearly emerges. In the first of the letters “agli Amici” (to Friends) which preceded each volume, Rubbi clarified the purpose of the campaign: to offer the reader “una progressione ragionata di tutti i migliori nostri poeti” (a reasoned progression of all our best poets), in chronological order<sup>40</sup>. While he dealt with the criteria on which he based the choice of the authors in a few words: “Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto e Tasso ecc. non conosco che un secolo solo, ed è quello della ragione e

<sup>39</sup> *Parnaso italiano ovvero Raccolta de' poeti classici italiani*, 56 vols. (Venice: A. Zatta e figli, 1784–91). On Antonio Rubbi see Walter Spaggiari, “Ebbero sempre nel cuore letizia e poesia”: Andrea Rubbi e il “Parnaso italiano,” in Paolo Bartesaghi and Giuseppe Frasso, eds. *Dal Parnaso italiano agli scrittori d'Italia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2012), 27–43; Tatti, *Idee di nazione nella seconda metà del Settecento*, 27–43.

<sup>40</sup> Andrea Rubbi, “A' suoi Amici,” in *Parnaso italiano*, I, 5–6.



Fig. 9: Padova, Teatro Verdi, statua Ariosto

del buon senso, che non tramonta giammai” (Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso etc. belong not only to a century, but to the century of reason and good sense, which never comes to an end). Rubbi’s aim was therefore essentially to demonstrate the full excellence of Italian writing, proposing a selection founded in part on the consolidated canon and in part on the ability of chosen texts to intercept the tastes of the contemporary public. The first volumes were dedicated to Petrarch and Dante, and thereafter a good five tomes were dedicated to *Orlando furioso*, whose author was defined as “primo nume del Parnaso italiano” (vols. XVIII–XXII). In several others of his writings, Rubbi then took a stance against the French culture – which he believed he should oppose also for religious reasons – exalting the excellence of the Italian tradition. Thus in his usual letter “agli Amici” in the introduction to the fifth tome of *Elogj italiani*, he criticized the undertaking of the *Encyclopédie*, “mole informe e bizzarra” (inchoate and bizarre pile of data) which “si propagò per l’Europa” (spread across Europe), hoping that Italy could soon set about publishing her own encyclopaedia. He actually introduced his tirade with the words: “Amo le vostre riflessioni, eccito il vostro coraggio, vendico la nostra nazione” (I love your reflections, I arouse your courage, I avenge our nation)<sup>41</sup>. The same inspirations in some ways also enlivened the *Storia della letteratura italiana* by another Jesuit, Girolamo Tiraboschi; and over the nineteenth cen-

<sup>41</sup> Andrea Rubbi, “A’ suoi Amici”, in *Elogj italiani* (Venice: Pietro Marcuzzi, 1782), V, III–XVI.



Fig. 10: Palazzo Cardoli, veduta generale

ture they developed in various directions, giving rise to the idea of the great poets – chief among them Dante<sup>42</sup> – as the founding fathers of the national community, in both linguistic and political terms, and as such a symbolic reference to the civil rights and desire for identity inherent in Italian Unification.

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An important turning point, in the matter in question, was the introduction into this substratum of 18<sup>th</sup> century origin, still powerfully riddled with municipalism<sup>43</sup>, of nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric imported from France in the wake of the Napoleonic armies. In our case we can observe this intersection through the great Ariosto celebrations organized in Reggio Emilia and Ferrara by the Bonapartist general Sextius-Alexandre-François de Miollis, in

<sup>42</sup> *Dante vittorioso. Il mito di Dante nell'Ottocento*, exhibition catalogue (Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, May 31–July 3, 2011), ed. Eugenia Querci (Torino: Allemandi, 2011); Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification: The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> This is very clearly felt even in the *Storia della scultura* by Leopoldo Cicognara, for example, where the author justified the long digression dedicated to Ariosto with his own “amor di patria” – that is, his *Ferrarese* origins more than the Jacobin militancy of his youth. See: Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della Scultura dal suo Rinascimento in Italia fino al secolo di Canova del conte Leopoldo Cicognara per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winkelman e di D'Agincourt*, edizione seconda riveduta e ampliata dall'autore, Volume quinto (Prato: Fratelli Giachetti, 1824), 55.



Fig. 11: Palazzo Cardoli, Ariosto

1800–1<sup>44</sup>. It was not the first time that the general, a republican but converted to the religion of the Empire due to his absolute devotion to Napoleon, campaigned to promote the cult of the great men of the past in cities that had just been ‘liberated’ by the revolutionary armies, for overtly patriotic purposes but also to consolidate consensus for the new government of the second Cisalpine Republic. Earlier on, in Mantua in 1797, he had organized a series of celebrations in honour of Virgil, and in Pietole – the home town of the Latin poet – he had had a monument erected in his memory (some years later he raised another monument in Mantua when he was the city governor)<sup>45</sup>. The two ceremonies in Reggio and Ferrara were in keeping with the previous ones, even if each of the two episodes had its own characteristics and followed its own procedures, shrewdly orchestrated by Miollis on the basis of the local political scene<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> On Miollis the reference bibliography is still: Henri Auréas, *Un général de Napoléon: Miollis* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Auréas, *Un général de Napoléon*; Ada Levi Segre, *Feste celebrate in Mantova in onore di Virgilio per iniziativa del generale Alessandro Miollis* (Mantua: Tipografia Aldo Manuzio, 1928).

<sup>46</sup> *Descrizione della festa celebrata a Reggio il 20 vendemmiale anno IX in onore dell'Ariosto* (Reggio: Michele Torreggiani, An IX 1800/1801), 52 pgs. (Italian-French bilingual text); *Prose e rime per il trasporto del monumento e delle ceneri di Lodovico Ariosto, seguito ne' giorni XVII e XVIII pratile dell'anno IX repubblicano* (Ferrara: Socj Bianchi e Negri, anno X – 1802), 268 pgs., 5 plates outside the text. Cittadella published a series of documents on the payments made to various



Fig. 12: Volterra Mazzolla, facciata

In Reggio Emilia (October 12, 1800) the general proposed to the administrators of the newly appointed Department that a monument be erected in honour of Ariosto in an important location in the city. He also proposed commemorating on the same occasion two distinguished fellow citizens who had recently died (the poet and economist Agostino Paradisi and the naturalist Lazzaro Spallanzani). Within a week the town square was festively decorated with oak wreaths and a stage erected with busts of the three great men and trophies symbolizing Poetry, Science and Fame. With the support of performances by the local band and manoeuvres of the Civil Guard on horseback, between official speeches and banquets, two memorial stones were laid – one on what was believed to be the birthplace of Ariosto, and the other on the site where the monument was to stand, the present-day Piazza Armando Diaz. The monument in Piazza Diaz bore the names of the Department administrators alongside that of the French general who by common agreement – in the name of the “Patria riconoscente” – had decreed to bestow the great honour on “Lodovico Ariosto, cittadino di Reggio, e sommo poeta italiano”<sup>47</sup>. The concerts, the cries from the crowd and the fireworks continued into the

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artists for the preparation of the celebrations in Ferrara: Luigi Napoleone Cittadella, *Notizie relative a Ferrara per la maggior parte inedite ricavate dai documenti ed illustrate* (Ferrara: Tipografia Taddei, 1864), 22–225. See also: Lanfranco Caretti, “Il generale Miollis e le feste ariostesche del 1801,” *Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 79 (1975), nos. 1–2, 305–9.

<sup>47</sup> The monument was then not erected.



Fig. 13: Volterra Mazzolla, Ariosto

evening, when the streets could be illuminated thanks to the new system of oil lamps – latest achievement of progress! – recently introduced into use by the Republican administration.

A pamphlet was also produced for the occasion, which opened with an engraving depicting the bust of Ariosto crowned with a laurel, and olive and oak branches at the base together with the trumpet of fame. The bust rested on a cippus with an inscription taken from *Satira II*: “Se a perder si ha la libertà, non stimo il più ricco cappel che in Roma sia.” Lying in the foreground, the Poetry Genius held in his hand a book open on the first verses of *Orlando furioso*. The pamphlet closed with the speech of a commissioner of the French war which ended with these words:

La memoria dell'Ariosto è ancora cara agli abitanti di Reggio sotto un altro rapporto. Gli Uomini liberi amano, e coltivano le Scienze, e le Arti, e il favorito delle Muse, il Cantore degli Eroi Guerrieri, il pittore della bella natura ha dei diritti incontrastabili alla venerazione degli uomini liberi [...]. Viva l'Ariosto in tutti i tempi, e in tutti i cuori, viva la Repubblica.



Fig. 14: Pielungo, Castello Ceconi, facciata

In the case of Ferrara (June 6–7, 1801), it was not only a question of honouring a great poet, but also – applying the revolutionary principles that Napoleon had endorsed – of removing the tomb from the monopoly of the Church and transferring it to a place where it could be safeguarded under the aegis of the State: a place like the university Library, a place of secular knowledge aimed at scientific progress. The ceremony started in the Church of San Benedetto transformed into an “antico Salone Lombardico [*sic*], riccamente addobbato a damaschi e guarnito d’oro con profusione” (an ancient Lombardy salon richly decorated with damasks and profusely garnished with gold). From here a large procession solemnly set out to escort the ashes of Ariosto – placed on a “macchina mobile” (moving vehicle) next to a bust of the writer “attorniato da vasi ardenti di arabi profumi” (surrounded by flaming vases of Arabic perfumes) – to the Palazzo del Paradiso, where his “sacri resti” (sacred remains) were stored in a room designated for this purpose, where the funerary monument had been previously moved with the new setting that some years later Valéry would deem to be of such bad taste<sup>48</sup>.

The volume published at the time was richer than the one released for the Reggio Emilia celebrations, both in terms of the number of pages (a good 268) and the substance of the contents (one hundred poems written by around seventy authors, in addition to various texts in Latin, Greek and Hebrew), as

<sup>48</sup> See above, footnote 2.



Fig. 15: Pielungo, Castello Ceconi, Ariosto

well as the rigorous editorial presentation which the young Pietro Giordani (1774–1848) may have had a hand in. He was a future collaborator of Leopoldo Cicognara in the *Storia della Scultura* and then secretary of the Department of the Lower Po<sup>49</sup>. Among the authors, almost all from Ferrara, the names of Girolamo Baruffaldi, Alfonso Varano, Leopoldo Cicognara and his uncle Girolamo appeared. In addition to the portrait of Ariosto “Tre volte sommo” (thrice great) engraved on the frontispiece, the volume was enriched with another five plates outside the text, the same ones that were in the Zatta edition and that we are now familiar with: the burial monument (moved from the Church of San Benedetto to Palazzo del Paradiso), the house, the inkstand, the chair and the autograph of Ludovico. Girolamo Baruffaldi the Younger dedicated his sonnet to the chair<sup>50</sup>:

<sup>49</sup> Giuseppe Monsagrati, “Giordani Pietro,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000), vol. 55, *ad vocem*.

<sup>50</sup> *Prose e rime per il trasporto del monumento*, 169.



Dunque da questo umil tarlato Scanno  
 Sciogliea la voce il Ferrarese Omero,  
 Né alcun tra i discendenti di Ruggero  
 Vestì un sedile almeno di greggio panno?

Tal mercede pur troppo a coglier vanno  
 Color che battono il Febeo sentiero,  
 E alfin trascorso anche l'arringo intero,  
 Le stanche membra ove posar non hanno:

Ma de' secoli, ad onta oscuri e ingrati  
 Non che l'Avello, il Simolacro e l'Ossa,  
 Ha questi Legni il Patrio amor serbati;

Né il dì forse è lontano, in cui rimossa  
 La cattedra dai Segni in Ciel Stellati,  
 Sedia d'Ariosto nominar si possa.

As we can clearly see, the ceremonies promoted by General Miollis were orchestrated with extraordinary skill, aiming to solicit – if not to shape – the national pride of the new citizens of the Cisalpine Republic: an aim that was pursued lucidly by associating a series of designated places and monuments with civil values, if not more generally transforming the entire urban space into a great stage for Republican rites capable of intercepting the recreational/festive requirements of the new public ‘masses.’ We can measure the lasting effects of this initiative from the new *civile*, patriotic connotation that began to characterize the myth of Ariosto in these years. As early as 1803, for example, it was the members of the ancient and glorious local *Accademia degli Intrepidi* who thought it appropriate to change the name, giving it the epithet “*Accademia Ariostea*” (which was later changed to “*Accademia degli Ariostei*” in 1814)<sup>51</sup>. Not even ten years later Ariosto’s “*parva domus*” was bought by the Town Council, which did not hesitate to celebrate the event with another memorial stone, again prepared by Pietro Giordani, one of the directors of the festivities of 1801:

Ludovico Ariosto in questa camera scrisse e questa casa da lui edificata abitò,  
 la quale CCLXXX anni dopo la morte del divino poeta fu dal conte Girolamo

<sup>51</sup> Thus commenting: “The ancient academy degli Intrepidi, which in 1803, after existing two centuries, became the Ariostea academy, and in 1814 the scientific and literary academy degli Ariostei, holds its sittings in the palace del Magistrato. The last transformation of the Intrepidi seems an improvement; the scientific researches of provincial academies, as that of Ferrara may now be called, must be preferable to their poetry, as they collect and publish facts,” in Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, II, 218.

Cicognara podestà co' danari del Comune comprata e restaurata, perché alla venerazione delle genti durasse<sup>52</sup>.

“The house of Ariosto is now one of the monuments of Ferrara” – recorded Valéry shortly thereafter in his *Travels*<sup>53</sup>; while in his guidebook Francesco Avventi, praising the “saggia determinazione” (wise determination) with which the Ferrara magistrates had wished that “conservata fosse quella preziosa e patria memoria” (the precious and homeland memory be preserved), published two lithographies which illustrated the exterior as well as, for the first time, the interior of the house used as a museum where visitors wandered around contemplating the former refuge of the great poet<sup>54</sup>. (figs. 16–17)



Fig. 16: Avventi, Esterno, Casa Ariosto in Ferrara, 1838

In 1833 the long wave of the Ariosto celebrations of the early years of the century finally reached Piazza Nuova (now Piazza Ariostea), which for almost two centuries had been one of the places designated to exhibit the sovereign

<sup>52</sup> *Iscrizioni di Pietro Giordani, CXXIX, dal 1806 al 1834* (Parma: Stamperia Carmignani, 1834). On the “*parva domus*,” see: Marco Folin, “Ariosto architetto,” in *I voli dell’Ariosto. L’Orlando furioso e le arti*, exhibition catalogue, eds. Marina Cogotti, Vincenzo Farinella and Monica Preti (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2016), 63–77.

<sup>53</sup> Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, II, 229.

<sup>54</sup> Francesco Avventi, *Il servitore di piazza: guida per Ferrara* (Ferrara: Pomatelli, 1838), 186–7.

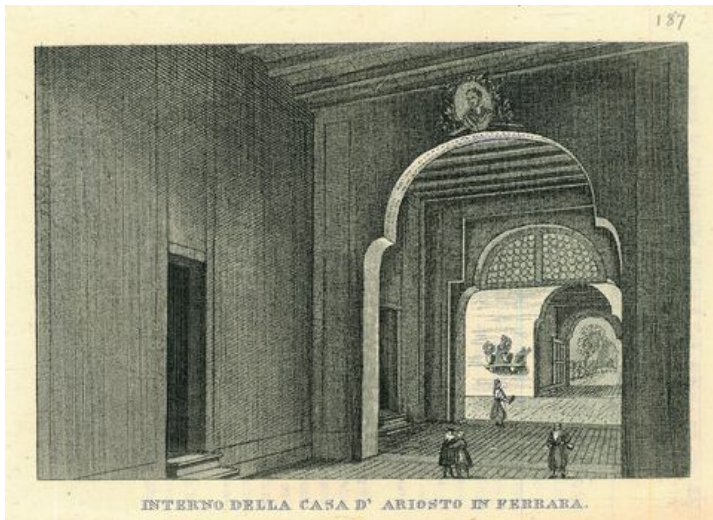


Fig. 17: Avventi, Interno, Casa Ariosto in Ferrara

power in the city and that had more recently become the setting for an extraordinary kaleidoscope of monuments<sup>55</sup>. With the arrival of the revolutionary armies in 1796, the statue of Pope Alexander VII, which had dominated the centre of the square from 1675, was removed and replaced with a gypsum statue of Liberty, which remained there until 1800 when – after the Austrians entered the city – it was also demolished. In 1810 it was the turn of a statue of Napoleon, inaugurated with great pomp while the square as a whole was renamed “Piazza Napoleone”; but only four years later the effigy of the emperor was taken down and destroyed overnight. In the aftermath of this umpteenth demolition the city administrators decided to confirm the strength of their newly found common purpose naming the square after their most famous countryman, who had now acquired the role as a point of reference par excellence of local identity: and so it was that the square obtained its current name. We can suppose that even then the plan to raise a monument to Ariosto in the centre of the area had been circulating. Emblematically it was to regain that space which had, for too long, been usurped by foreign symbols and powers. However nothing was done at first, certainly also due to the aver-

<sup>55</sup> Cittadella, *Notizie relative a Ferrara*, 422–9; Charles M. Rosenberg, *The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152–80, with the bibliography cited therein.

sion of the papal authorities who had never welcomed an author traditionally considered to be immoral and irreverent, and much more awkward now after the festivities organized by Miollis. Thus, at the time of Valéry's visit (who was a pragmatic conservator let us not forget) the project still had to get off the ground:

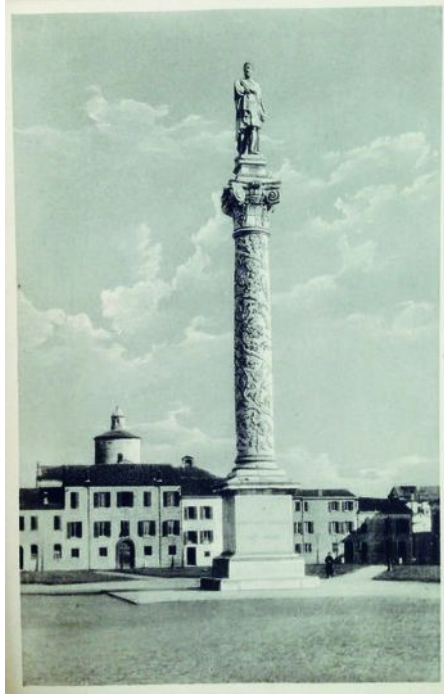


Fig. 18: Piazza Ariosteia, cartolina, 1880 ca.

La grande piazza che per qualche si chiamò piazza Napoleone è diventata, nel 1814, la piazza di Ariosto, nome che è entrato subito nell'uso, come a Parigi quello di rue de la Paix: la fama dei conquistatori non resisterà mai contro la gloria delle lettere o la felicità pubblica. I demagoghi del 1796 avevano fatto sparire da questa stessa piazza la statua di papa Alessandro VII; quella di Napoleone subì la stessa sorte: semmai vi sarà innalzata la statua dell'Omero di Ferrara, essa saprà resistere a questi rovesci<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> "The great square, which for some time bore the name of Napoleon, became in 1814 the Piazza di Ariosto, a name which took immediately, as at Paris that of the Rue de la Paix: the renown of conquerors cannot hold out against the glory of letters or the public welfare. The



Fig. 19: Piazza Ariostea

Only two years later, but in an entirely different climate, Valéry's hopes were finally fulfilled when the town council decreed – with a spirit singularly akin to his own – to place on the column a monument “che non potesse giammai cadere sotto i colpi dell'odio e del furore di partito che nasce sulle ruine di un altro,” choosing for this a figure outside the parties, whose value could be considered universal heritage: “Lodovico Ariosto, gloria di Ferrara, d'Italia e d'Europa”<sup>57</sup>. The sculptors Francesco and Mansueto Vidoni received the commission for the statue (in 1881, however, their work was replaced with the statue we see today, sculpted by Ambrogio Zuffi) (figs. 18–19)<sup>58</sup>. A “poetic tribute” was published for the inauguration, produced by the Ferrarese writer and scholar Giuseppe Maria Bozoli<sup>59</sup> and a simple inscription, albeit fraught with aspirations, was placed on the base of the column: “A Lodovico Ariosto, la Patria”. This inscription still arouses interest today as we can see from a photograph where it appears next to the ‘new Ariosto’, embodied by the singer-songwriter Matteo Pedrini, as part of the “Per conto di Ariosto” project organized on the occasion of the quincentenary of the first edition of *Orlando furioso* (fig. 20).

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demagogues of 1796 removed the statue of Pope Alexander VII from this same square; that of Napoleon was served the same: the new statue of the Homer of Ferrara, erected in 1833, will brave all such vicissitudes,” in Valéry, *Travels in Italy*, II, 232.

<sup>57</sup> Cittadella, *Notizie relative a Ferrara*, 428.

<sup>58</sup> On 4 February 1834 Salvatore Anau published an article that traces the entire history of the statue in detail, also giving its measurements: 3.80 metres (*Annali universali di statistica, economia pubblica, storia, viaggi e commercio*, vol. 39, Milan, 1834, 221–2).

<sup>59</sup> *Per l'innalzamento della statua Ariosto, omaggio poetico* (Ferrara: Tipografia Bresciani, 1833), 15 pgs.



Fig. 20: Ferrara, statua Ariosto, basamento, Matteo Pedrini

In truth, many conflicts were concealed under the cloak of ecumenism, and at least in the 1840s the language of the homeland was still characterized by the party system. There is lively testimony of this in a letter describing a trip made by Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1789–1867): American writer, politically engaged (her family was actively deployed on the abolitionist front, and her father was one of the strong defenders of Italian exiles in the United States), friend of Federico Confalonieri, Silvio Pellico and Sismondi, some years later Edgar Allan Poe devoted an elegiac profile to her in his *The Literati of New York City* (1846)<sup>60</sup>. During her stay in Ferrara, in 1839, a family friend, “Signor B.” acted as her guide: “a man of letter,” “enlightened” and above all “a first-rate hater of priests and kings”<sup>61</sup>. He – who from a series of details we can recognize as Giuseppe Maria Bozoli – felt obliged to accompany the dynamic foreigner around the city, taking her to see, among other things, the

<sup>60</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Literati of New York City,” in *Essays and Reviews*, ed. Gary Richard Thompson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1201–4. On Catharine Maria Sedgwick, cf. Rolando Anzilotti, “Un’amica americana del Sismondi: Catharine Maria Sedgwick (con 19 lettere inedite),” *Studi e Ricerche di Letteratura Americana* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), 51–119; Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, *Risorgimento ed emigrazione* (Viterbo: Edizione Sette Città, 2014); Daniele Fiorentino, *Gli Stati Uniti e il risorgimento d’Italia 1848–1901* (Gangemi: Editore, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon), I, 123.

monument he himself had contributed to celebrate some years earlier. Here he recounted a long story to her about the “furious opposition” with which the Jesuits had attempted to prevent the monument from being erected, attempting to obtain support from Rome, only to leave humiliated by the rapidity with which “the wits of Ferrara” managed to raise the statue by working day and night, even going so far as to draw satisfaction from burying the entire history of the matter under the statue: so that one day, when this monument too fell, posterity would know “*mille belles choses*” about the Jesuits and the bigots that supported them<sup>62</sup>.

Truth? Fanciful boasting by “Mister B.”? Or rather the imaginative reinterpretations of a writer who in her texts never missed an opportunity to lash out against the “imbecility of the papal government, the most imbecile in Italy”<sup>63</sup>? It is difficult to know, also because the monument seems destined to survive for longer than its predecessors, as Giosuè Carducci had already proclaimed by 1875, in the fourth centenary of the birth of Ariosto:

su quella colonna che l'Ariosto vide portata a Ferrara per sorreggere la statua del duca estense sotto il quale egli nacque, e che invece sopportò un pontefice, una repubblica, un imperatore; dal 1833 in poi su quella colonna sta l'effigie di Ludovico Ariosto scolpita da Francesco Vidoni. E né papi, né imperatori, né la Libertà medesima cacceran te di lassù, o poeta divino, che scrivesti l'Orlando, e ti rallegravi e consolavi tanto del crescere de' sambuchi credendo fossero capperi<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> “He accompanied us to the green square, where there has been recently placed a colossal statue of Ariosto on a beautifully-sculptured white marble pillar, with this comprehensive inscription: “A Ludovico Ariosto la Patria”. *Multum in parvo!* Is there not? The Jesuits made a furious opposition to the erection of the statue being no lovers of Ariosto, or favourers of any image to secular eminence. They wished to put the statue of his holiness on the pillar, and wrote to Rome for a decree to that effect; but before the answer came, the wits of Ferrara had outwitted them. By dint of working night and day the statue had been placed on its lofty pedestal; and buried under it is a history of the controversy, and, as “B\_i” said, “mille belles choses” of the Jesuits, which, when time shall have knocked down the column, will serve to enlighten posterity as to the history and true character of the bigots. In the meantime, the poet stands, as he did in life, high above his fellows;” in Sedgwick, *Letters from Abroad*, I, 123–4.

<sup>63</sup> Sedgwick, *Letters from Abroad*, I, 119. The reference is *A New England Tale* (1822).

<sup>64</sup> “On that column which Ariosto saw brought to Ferrara to support the statue of the Este Duke under whom he was born, and that instead supported a pontiff, a republic, an emperor; from 1833 onwards the effigy of Ludovico Ariosto sculpted by Francesco Vidoni was placed on that column. And no popes, nor emperors, nor Liberty itself shall tear you down from there, O divine poet, who wrote Orlando, and you were so cheered and consoled by the growth of the elderberries believing them to be capers;” in Giosuè Carducci, *Delle poesie latine edite ed inedite di Ludovico Ariosto* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1875), 203.

