Ariosto's Irony of Fiction

Presence, Burial, and Rediscovery in the Reception History of the *Orlando Furioso*

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ABSTRACT: The following text is a preview of the English version of the introduction to Christian Rivoletti, *Ariosto e l'ironia della finzione: la ricezione letteraria e figurativa dell'Orlando furioso in Francia, Germania e Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014). The complete translation and publication of this work is currently in preparation.

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SCHLAGWÖRTER: Ariosto, Ludovico; Orlando furioso; Ironie; Fiktion; Rezeption; Schlegel, Friedrich

1. "Great was the goodness of knights of old!": Narration, Fiction, and Irony

The long tale of the *Orlando Furioso* begins with the flight of Angelica, once the reader has passed through the threshold of the poem's opening stanzas (its protasis, its dedication, and a succinct summary of the events narrated by Ariosto's predecessor Boiardo). Angelica, sensing the imminent defeat of the Christian army and taking advantage of the chaos of battle, opportunely escapes from Charlemagne's encampment. She only manages to make it a short distance before encountering a knight in the first of a rapid series of encounters (or perhaps better yet, collisions) that will punctuate the poem's first canto:

> entrò in un bosco, e ne la stretta via,
> rincontrò un cavallier ch'a piè venia.
> Indosso la corazza, l'elmo in testa,
> la spada al fianco, e in braccio avea lo scudo;

[0] I would like to thank Christopher Geekie for translating this text from the original Italian.

> e più leggier correa per la foresta,
> ch'al pallio rosso il villan mezzo ignudo. (*OF* I, 10–1)[1]
>
> [Entering a wood and following a narrow path she came upon a knight who was approaching on foot. He wore a breastplate, and on his head a helmet; his sword hung by his side, and on his arm he bore his shield; and came running through the forest more fleet of foot than the lightly-clad athlete sprinting for the red mantle at the village games.][2]

For the reader of chivalric romance, the appearance of this first knight of the poem seems somewhat unusual: he is fully armed, horseless, and running as quickly as a half-naked peasant. With a sly air of nonchalance, the narrator leaves his good reader of romance to marvel a moment at this unusual scene, before finally deciding to introduce the character in the following stanza. We are finally told that this is the noble paladin Rinaldo, whose faithful steed Baiardo has just given him the slip. The reader barely has enough time to readjust her horizon of expectations when there appears, two stanzas later, another knight in a similarly strange situation. Ferraù, "clothed in sweat and grime" ("di sudor pieno e tutto polveroso," *OF* I, 14), has momentarily left the heat of battle to freshen up at a river. In a rather banal moment of thirstiness (indeed in "greedy haste to drink" ["de l'acqua ingordo e frettoloso"], *OF* I, 14), he has dropped his helmet in the river and is attempting to fish it back out.

The characters we meet in these first octaves all appear to be at the mercy of chance, and none really seem to be the master of their own actions. Rinaldo finds himself, in a manner rather unusual for a knight, chasing after his own horse who has "made off without him – a *strange turn of affairs*" ["*per strano caso* uscito [...] di mano"] (*OF* I, 12, emphasis mine). Angelica, "quite unstrung" and unable to control her own steed, has "*left it to her horse* to find his own way through" ["di sé tolta | *lascia cura al destrier* che ve la faccia"] (*OF* I, 14, emphasis mine). Ferraù, meanwhile, has left the battle for only a moment to cool down at the river, "but here, *in spite of himself*, he was *now forced* to tarry" ["*mal grado suo*, quivi fermosse"] (*OF* I, 14, emphasis mine). In three consecutive stanzas,

[1] Citations from the *Orlando Furioso* are indicated by the initials O.F. directly in the body of the text. For my analysis of certain passages, I have kept in mind different commentaries, with particular attention to those found in the edition of the poem edited by Emilio Bigi (Milan: Rusconi, 1982), currently reprinted and edited by Cristina Zampese (Milan: Rizzoli, 2012), and the edition edited by Remo Ceserani and Sergio Zatti (Turin: UTET, 1997).

[2] English citations from the *Orlando Furioso* are taken (and if necessary, with slight changes) from the translation edited by Guido Waldman (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

almost as a kind of refrain, the hero (or heroine) finds himself (or herself) "by chance" in a certain situation and "in spite of" their own intentions. It is almost as if the arbitrariness of prosaic daily life has unexpectedly burst into the ideal and poetic world of chivalric tradition in order to break up its usual structure for the purpose of ironic amusement.

A few stanzas later, all three of these characters will end up meeting each other by complete chance, setting up the first duel of the poem between a knight without his horse and another without his helmet. As readers observing this scene, we cannot help but find it amusing. We can almost even hear an ironic laughter from on high, as if there were also present an amused and unseen spectator watching the tortuous paths followed by the three characters "in spite of themselves." Yet such a spectator does not yet exist, or if he does, he has yet to be seen.

Nonetheless we notice that we are not alone in watching this scene, and the very language of the text conjures up an amused presence accompanying the narration. This "presence" can be felt in the choice of adjectives, the skillfully measured tones, and even the rhythms binding together the stanzas, which mimic the uninterrupted forward momentum of events. The use of anadiplosis, a traditional technique in oral poetry, and here seen in the repetition of the last rhyme word of the preceding stanza, ensures a fluid continuity to the story. This movement evokes a certain familiarity, one which derives from the appropriation of a technique consolidated throughout the long tradition of early modern oral poets known as *cantastorie*. Yet, it is precisely through the use of this technique that our "singer-narrator," as if with an effortless wave of his hand, is able to create an entirely new kind of scene.[3] Rather than offer calm continuity with the preceding stanza, this scene surprises us, disrupting even our most natural expectations. Such is the case of the verses that describe Ferraù's unusual condition:

> Di sù di giù, ne l'alta selva fiera
> tanto girò, che venne a una *riviera*.
> Su la *riviera* Ferraù trovosse
> di sudor pieno e tutto polveroso.

[3] The *cantastorie* (or *canterini*) were oral poets, heirs to medieval minstrels, who composed and publicly recited epic-chivalric poems in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The narrator of Ariosto's learned poem knowingly, and often subtly, refers to this substantial and popular tradition, particularly to its characteristically oral aspects. Regarding the traces of orality found in chivalric romances, see Maria Cristina Cabani, *Le forme del cantare epico-cavalleresco* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1988).

> Da la battaglia dianzi lo rimosse
> un gran disio di bere e di riposo;
> e poi, mal grado suo, quivi fermosse,
> perché de l'acqua ingordo e frettoloso,
> l'elmo nel fiume si lasciò cadere,
> né l'avea potuto anco riavere. (*OF* I, 13–4, italics mine)
>
> [High and low, on and on through the deep, grim forest she coursed, until she came to a *river-bank*. On the *river-bank* stood Ferraù, clothed in sweat and grime: a great need to slake his thirst and to rest had withdrawn him early from the battle. But here, in spite of himself, he was now forced to tarry, for in his greedy haste to drink he had dropped his helmet into the river, and was still trying to recover it.]

The narrator does not fail to note, with an ironic slyness, that Ferraù is both "greedy" and "hasty" ("ingordo e frettoloso"). In so doing, he almost seems to be winking at the reader about the knight's subsequent loss of armor, a rather brazen choice, if we recall that this is the nephew of King Marsilio of Spain and the famed vanquisher of Argalia.

In the following stanza, the narrator describes how the knight immediately realizes that the maiden crying for help is Angelica herself:

> A quella voce salta in su la riva
> il Saracino, e nel viso la guata;
> e la conosce subito ch'arriva,
> ben che di timor pallida e turbata,
> e sien più dì che non n'udì novella,
> *che senza dubbio ell'è Angelica bella*. (*OF* I, 15, 3–8, italics mine)
>
> [Hearing her voice, the Saracen leapt up the bank and peered at her face. As soon as she was close he recognized her: many a day though it was since he had last had news of her, and pale and distraught though she now appeared, she could be none other than the beautiful Angelica.]

Reading this octave again, we recognize that the full sense of the passage has already been achieved by the seventh verse; in fact, the eighth verse is redundant. In other words, if we were to remove this verse, the overall meaning would not change, since the narrator has already explained in verse 3 that Ferraù immediately recognizes Angelica ("as soon as she was close he recognized her"). The last verse thus repeats this point with a vivid subjectivity by emphasizing the adjective "bella," placed in a stronger position at the end of the verse. The narrator also chooses to spell out her entire name ("Angelica"), unexpectedly interrupting the use of pronouns which previously helped

punctuate the narration of actions ("he peered at her face," "he recognized her" ["la guata," "la conosce"]). It is as though the narrator has subtly modulated his own tone with a kind of free indirect discourse, putting on a new voice to give space to the thoughts of the pagan knight. We can almost hear the cry bellowing from Ferraù's heart, "This truly is my beautiful Angelica!"

For that matter, regarding the subjective value of the adjective "beautiful" ["bella"], the narrator seems to continue winking at us in the following stanza. There he explains how Ferraù wastes no time in jumping into action, knowing exactly what he must do:

> E perché era cortese, e n'avea forse
> non men de' dui cugini il petto caldo,
> l'aiuto che potea tutto le porse,
> pur come avesse l'elmo ardito e baldo:
> trasse la spada, e minacciando corse
> dove poco di lui temea Rinaldo. (*OF* I, 16)
>
> [And because he was courteous, and perhaps no less hot-headed than the two cousins, he hastened boldly to her rescue, reckless of his lost helmet. Drawing his sword, he ran full of menace towards Rinaldo, who feared him but little.]

Ferraù thus intervenes to help this damsel in distress first and foremost because he is "courteous" (*cortese*), that is, because he respects the chivalric code. Just after, however, the narrator adds that "perhaps" (*forse*) he acts because he is also in love with Angelica. These two motivations are offered in simple juxtaposition through the use of a correlative conjunction ("*And* because he was [...], *and* perhaps [...]"). On closer inspection, however, these two reasons are in direct conflict, such that the one necessarily excludes the other. If Ferraù acts because he is "interested" in Angelica (which would in fact represent a new danger for the female character), this motivation must exclude that of "courteousness," which is necessarily disinterested. We now begin to see, at least at the level of language, the ways in which our narrator's irony functions. He often, and quite naturally, places together situations or concepts which are actually in conflict and often incompatible.

We also note the ironic use of the adverb "maybe" (*forse*), so cleverly emphasized by the rhyme. The narrator, up to now, has demonstrated his knowledge of everything, from external events to the internal feelings of his characters. Here he merely offers a hypothesis, thus leaving his own readers in doubt. In fact, he forces the reader to wonder, "What are Ferraù's real intentions?" As a result, the reader must wait for this character's next move,

observing him as if he were a real person in order to make sense of his underlying motives.

This question remains momentarily unanswered. For now, let us leave it open and turn our attention, meanwhile, to the second rhyme word of this stanza, "hot" (*caldo*), and the narrator's reference to the feelings of the "two cousins" ("de' dui cugini"). These two phrases take us back to the beginning of the poem and to the summary of previous events already narrated by Boiardo which range across five entire octaves (*OF* I, 5–*OF* I, 9). There too we find the pair of rhyme words *caldo/Rinaldo* ("una gara | tra il conte Orlando e il suo cugin *Rinaldo*, | che entrambi avean per la bellezza rara | d'amoroso disio l'animo *caldo*" [a quarrel had arisen a few days earlier between Count Orlando and his cousin Rinaldo, for both of them were aflame with love for this ravishing beauty]). It therefore dawns on us that, in those five stanzas, we already have a sense of the light and ironic tone of the narrating voice lurking in the smallest details.

Indeed, this irony is often hidden in the folds of the text, even in the rhymes. For instance, the narrator explains that Orlando, after protecting his dear Angelica from a thousand dangers across the Orient and Europe, ends up losing her in that most secure of locations: within his own camp and by the decree of his own king. In the rhyming couplet that closes this octave, we again encounter that use of irony by which two strongly contrasting elements (Orlando arrives at a "good moment," though it is certainly not "good" for him) are placed in clear juxtaposition (here through the phonetic analogy established by the rhyme):

> E così Orlando *arrivò* quivi *a punto*:
> Ma tosto si pentì d'*esservi giunto*:
> Che vi fu tolta la sua donna poi:
> Ecco il giudicio uman come spesso erra!
> Quella che dagli esperii ai liti eoi avea difesa con sì lunga Guerra,
> Or tolta gli è fra tanti amici suoi,
> Senza spada adoprar, ne la sua terra. (*OF* I, 6–7, italics mine)
>
> [So Orlando *arrived* at a good *moment*; but he was quick to *regret* his *return*, for his lady was taken from him. Such is the waywardness of human judgment! The damsel, whom he had defended so constantly all the way from the Hesperides to the shores of Sunrise, was taken from him now, now that he was surrounded by friends, in his own land, with not a blow struck.]

We also note the continuity between the irony hidden within the rhyming couplet "a punto | giunto" and the first direct comment–perhaps the first real

"voiceover"–from the narrator concerning his own narrated story: "look how often human judgment errs!" ("Ecco il giudicio uman come spesso erra!") In a flash, this briefest of observations ties together the fantastical story (that is, the entire chivalric and poetic world of the paladins) with the behaviors and psychological impulses that constitute the same human reality and daily experience of the reader. As a result, beginning with the earliest lines and continuing throughout the rest of the poem, the reader is encouraged to reflect independently on the relationship between epic fiction and reality.

Let us then return to stanza 16 and to the open-ended question of the psychological motivations behind Ferraù's behavior. In reality, we need only wait two stanzas, at which point a violent duel erupts between the two knights. Meanwhile, Angelica–in no way reassured by Ferraù's intervention–has taken up her flight once more, prompting Rinaldo to propose a deal with his rival: why not set aside their weapons for now and consider catching their prey (Angelica) together, before continuing to quarrel over her? "The proposal was not displeasing to the pagan" (*OF* I, 21), the narrator tells us rather mischievously and with an ironic use of litotes. A truce is immediately established, proving that Ferraù's alleged "courtesy" never really existed. Indeed, such a motivation had only been a possibility in the mind of the reader, with whom the narrator has been cleverly playing all along by letting her become engrossed in the story's fiction.

The narrator's game is sophisticated enough that he is even able to intervene directly across an entire stanza. Consider, for instance, the well-known octave that has often been a source of admiration as the first clear example of Ariostan irony. Here the narrator comments on the newly established truce between the duelists, a truce sealed with Ferraù's generous invitation to carry Rinaldo on the saddle of his horse:

> Oh gran bontà de' cavallieri antiqui!
> Eran rivali, eran di fé diversi,
> E si sentian degli aspri colpi iniqui
> Per tutta la persona anco dolersi;
> E pur per selve oscure e calli obliqui
> Insieme van senza sospetto aversi. (*OF* I, 22)

> [Great was the goodness of knights of old! Here they were, rivals, of different faiths, and they still ached all over from the cruel and vicious blows they had dealt each other; still off they went together in mutual trust, through the dark woods and crooked paths.]

The narrator thus bursts into emphatic praise of the moral virtues of ancient knights, precisely at the moment when serious doubts are beginning to form concerning those same virtues. The initial exclamation and the entire hymn of praise cannot help but sound entirely ironic, as Luigi Pirandello would later astutely remark.[4]

This octave's irony offers a fundamental key for "reading" the entire poem. It also hints at the narrator's complex game of references between reality, poetic fiction, and literary tradition. Indeed, the narrator proves quite capable of establishing a distance from the poetic fiction (thereby revealing it as such), as well as from the idealization of chivalric virtues passed down by the epic tradition. He shrewdly turns our attention back to reality and to human behavior, both social and psychological, as we saw with the earliest direct exclamation and the use of that ironic "maybe" (*OF* I, 7 and *OF* I, 16).

Irony in the *Furioso* is thus complex and multiform, as should be apparent with the analysis of little more than ten stanzas. This is an irony that unfolds at various levels of the text, from the narrator's comments to the arrangement and interweaving of the stories and characters (or in Hegel's terms, their "casual collisions"). It is also present in the refined and skillful use of language, which includes, as we have seen, even playing with rhyme-words. Nevertheless, beyond its protean character, this irony has a center, one that can be felt in its close link to the poem's fiction, as well as the self-aware game that it plays between this fiction and that which is not fiction–which is to say, reality.

The clearest example of this self-aware game appears in the second octave of the first canto, where the use of irony assumes the quality of self-irony [*autoironia*]. Here the narrating subject declares his own direct involvement in the narrated fiction not only by comparing himself with the protagonist Orlando, but also by subordinating the act of writing the poem itself to his own amorous desires and feelings:

[4] Pirandello observes that, in order to understand the irony of this verse, "it is necessary to consider how Ferraù might have responded to Rinaldo's offer to end the duel: 'I am not fighting for a prize, but to defend a woman seeking my help; and if I manage to protect her, I will have not fought in vain.' This is how a truly noble and good knight of old would have responded. […] The exclamation 'Great was the goodness of knights of old!' is truly ironic." See Luigi Pirandello, *L'umorismo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006), p. 863. For the entire passage, see section 6.2. Hereafter all similar references indicate the section number found in the original Italian edition of Christian Rivoletti, *Ariosto e l'ironia della finzione* (2014).

Dirò d'Orlando in un medesmo tratto
cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima:
che per amor venne in furore e matto,
d'uom che sì saggio era stimato prima;
se da colei che tal quasi m'ha fatto,
che 'l poco ingegno ad or ad or mi lima,
me ne sarà però tanto concesso,
che mi basti a finir quanto ho promesso. (*OF* I, 2)

[I shall tell of Orlando, too, setting down what has never been recounted in prose or rhyme: of Orlando, driven raving mad by love–and he a man who had been always been esteemed for his great prudence–if she, who has reduced me almost to a like condition, and even now is eroding my last fragments of sanity, leaves me yet with sufficient to complete what I have undertaken.]

2. The Burial of Ariostan Irony…

Virtually every reader today senses this impalpable and multifaceted irony which seems to permeate the entire *Furioso*. In fact, irony has come to represent not only an essential component of the work, but also one of its most fascinating and enjoyable qualities. For instance, modern writers such as Luigi Pirandello and Italo Calvino viewed Ariosto's use of irony both as an object of admiration and as a model for their own writing.[5]

But was it always this way? Did Ariosto's own audience understand and appreciate this quality that we find so masterfully infused throughout his work? In reality, this manner of reading the poem constitutes a relatively recent discovery, and an emphasis on the poem's irony has only gradually come to the fore in the last two centuries.[6] By and large, the preceding periods judged Ariostan irony to be "improper." Even during the sixteenth century, the poem's various aspects related to irony were already, and frequently, the object of censure by critics.

Take, for instance, the ironic interventions of the *Furioso*'s narrator. Throughout the first century of its existence, the poem lay at the center of intense debates between supporters and detractors of Ariosto. In both camps, there

[5] For Pirandello's and Calvino's views on Ariostan irony, see sections 6.2 and 6.3, respectively.

[6] A brief outline of this history can be found in Giorgio Forni, "Ariosto e l'ironia," in *Ariosto Today: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella, and Roberto Fedi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 475–88, in particular 475–8. This essay can also be found in Giorgio Forni, *Risorgimento dell'ironia: riso, persona e sapere nella tradizione letteraria italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), 77–93.

was a rather strong tendency to read and judge the poem on the basis of its greater or lesser adherence to classical norms.[7] One particular norm, derived from Aristotle's observations in the *Poetics*, concerned the almost total absence of the narrating subject in Homeric epic. This led to the condemnation of every intervention by the narrator within the story, a fundamental strategy for Ariostan irony.[8] Even among Ariosto's defenders there were few who attempted to justify this aspect of the narrative structure; those who did only praised the moral value of such interventions, while also insisting that the narrator's ironic tone was inappropriate.

Such an approach can be seen in Alberto Lavezuola's *Osservazioni*, a commentary included in the lavish 1584 edition of the *Furioso*. The impressive paratextual and iconographical apparatus of this particular volume, including the elegant copper etchings of Girolamo Porro, signals the culmination of the great editorial success of the poem, while also enshrining a certain classicizing manner of reading the text as an epic.[9] In his commentary, Lavezuola bristles at certain narratorial interventions. For instance, when the narrator observes with subtle (and mischievous) irony the possible double meaning

[7] On the sixteenth-century reception of the *Furioso* and related debates on epic and romance, see especially Giuseppina Fumagalli, *La fortuna dell'Orlando furioso in Italia nel secolo XVI* (Ferrara: Zuffi, 1912); Giuseppe Fatini, *Bibliografia della critica ariostea (1510–1956)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1958); Bernard Weinberg, "The Quarrel over Ariosto and Tasso," in Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), vol. ii, 954–1073; Klaus W. Hempfer, *Diskrepante Lektüren: die Orlando-Furioso-Rezeption im Cinquecento. Historische Rezeptionsforschung als Heuristik der Interpretation* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987); Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: the Canonization of Orlando furioso* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Francesco Sberlati, *Il genere e la disputa: la poetica tra Ariosto e Tasso* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001); Stefano Jossa, *La fondazione di un genere: il poema eroico tra Ariosto e Tasso* (Rome: Carocci, 2002); and Sergio Zatti, *The Quest for Epic: from Ariosto to Tasso* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[8] "The poet should speak as seldom as possible in his own character, since he is not 'representing' the story" (Aristotele, *Poetics*, 1460a). On issues of narrative in early modern criticism, see the reconstruction offered by Hempfer, *Diskrepante Lektüren* (in Italian *La ricezione dell'Orlando Furioso nel Cinquecento*, 130–9). The narrator's comments, as well as the proems, were seen as problematic because they interrupted narrative continuity, producing dissatisfaction in the reader. On this topic, see Javitch's analysis in *Proclaiming a Classic*, 86–105.

[9] The methods chosen by the engraver similarly confirm a total adherence to the "codifying frenzies of the supporters of modern heroic epic poetry, appropriately Aristotelian in character." See the observations by Massimiliano Rossi in *L'arme e gli amori: la poesia di Ariosto, Tasso e Guarini nell'arte fiorentina del Seicento*, edited by Elena Fumagalli, Massimiliano Rossi and Riccardo Spinelli (Livorno: Sillabe, 2001), exhibition catalogue, 156–7. See also my analysis of Porro's illustrations in section 7.2.2.

of a line spoken by the character Bradamante, Lavezuola rises up in mutiny: "See how the work abounds in these inappropriate and ridiculous remarks! In such poems I advise that they be avoided like a rock among the waves."[10]

This example, to which numerous others could be added, indicates the already widespread inability to grasp the value and function of the ironic dimension of the poem. There was even a general rejection of the playful irony of the narrative structure, which is to say, the interweaving of various narrative threads.[11] Due to the influence of the pseudo-Aristotelian principle of unity of action, this form was not well received and was heavily censured. As a result, the well-known sixteenth-century "canonization" of the *Furioso* also coincided with a simultaneous process of "burying" the text's various forms of irony.

Occasional positive evaluations of Ariostan irony did exist, but they are limited to a few isolated cases which do not really consider the complexity of this fundamental quality of the work. Even the number of occurrences of the word "irony" in sixteenth-century criticism on the *Furioso* could be counted on one hand.[12] Among these, the most significant example comes from the 1564 commentary by Lodovico Dolce, faithful admirer and defender of Ariosto's poem from its earliest editions. In octaves *OF* XXVII, 112–4 and *OF* XXIX, 1–2, which describe Rodomonte's tirade against the unfaithfulness of women, the narrator takes the floor to defend the feminine gender, feigning anger against the Saracen knight, while also admitting, however, that he too has only known unfaithful women. Dolce praises this intervention and

[10] *Osservationi del Sig. Alberto Lavezuola, sopra il Furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto*, in *Orlando furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto Nuovamente adornato di Figure di Rame da Girolamo Porro Padovano Et di Altre cose che saranno notate nella seguente facciata* (Venice: Franceschi, 1584), 30v.

[11] See section 1.2.2.

[12] There are only three occurrences recorded by Dilwyn Knox in *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 11, 83 (note 49) and 85 (note 67). Lodovico Dolce (whose use of the term "irony" is cited shortly) will also emphasize, in his commentary on the *Furioso*, the ironic tone of the character Marfisa in her address to Zerbino (*OF* XX, 128). See *Orlando furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto, corretto e dichiarato da M. Lodovico Dolce, con gli argomenti di M. Gio. dell'Anguillara* (Venice: per Gio. Varisco e compagni), 1568, p.110v. Prior to Dolce, Girolamo Ruscelli had also indicated the use of irony as rhetorical figure with the adjective "good" [*buono*] as used by the lord of Tristan's rock to refer to Pope Clement IV in *OF* XXXIII, 20 – though Ruscelli in his commentary refers erroneously to "Clement V." See *Orlando furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto, tutto ricorretto et di nuove figure adornato. Alquale di nuovo sono aggiunte le annotazioni, gli avvertimenti, et le dichirationi di Girolamo Ruscelli…* (Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, nella bottega d'Erasmo, 1556), 381.

acutely picks up on the value of Ariosto's self-irony, an element that lingers throughout the entire poem:

> The judicious poet's reprimand of Rodomonte's error against women is excellent, though it is wonderfully full of irony, which shows that he himself [i.e. the poet] has had misadventures in love.[13]

Other observations represent similarly isolated intuitions of the richness and complexity of the ironic dimension of the text. Among these, I would like to mention two of the earliest records of reception of the *Furioso*, even before its third and final edition of 1532. These two authoritative readers, Pietro Bembo and Baldassare Castiglione, immediately recognized the mixture of the serious and the playful which represents one of the essential components of the poem. As we know, this combination is directly connected to the work's ironic dimension, constituting one of its necessary conditions.

The *editio princeps* of the *Furioso* in 1516 contained a printing privilege granted by Pope Leo X and signed by the humanist papal secretary Jacopo Sadoleto. In reality, this document repeats, almost verbatim, a description of the poem found in an earlier letter written to Ariosto by Pietro Bembo, also papal secretary at the time. Bembo's letter, written in the name of the pope, depicts the *Furioso* as:

> libros vernaculo sermone et carmine de gestis errantium, quos appellant, equitum, *ludicro more*, *longo tamen studio* et multorum annorum cura vigiliisque, confeceris […][14].

Bembo, who had the opportunity to hear recitations of sections of Ariosto's text, here briefly summarizes its fundamental opposition between a playful manner ("ludicro more") of depicting the chivalric world and the seriousness of the poetic labor undertaken by Ariosto.[15]

[13] Lodovico Dolce, *Modi affigurati e voci scelte et eleganti della volgar lingua: con un discorso sopra a mutamenti e diversi ornamenti dell'Ariosto*. (Venice: Giovan Battista et Marchio Sessa, 1564), fo. 412v.

[14] Pietro Bembo, *Petri Bembi Epistularum Leonis Decimi P.M. nomine Scriptarum Libri Sexdecim* (Venice: Ioanne Patasinum et Venturino de Rossinellis, [1535]), book 10, letter 40, emphasis mine. The papal privilege reads: "libros vernaculo sermone et carmine quos Orlandi furiosi titulo inscripsisti, *ludicro more, longo tamen studio et cogitatione*, multisque vigiliis confeceris," *Orlando furioso de Ludovico Ariosto da Ferrara* (Ferrara: Maestro Giovanni Mazocco dal Bondeno, 1516), emphasis mine.

[15] For the significance of the expression *ludicro more*, see Klaus W. Hempfer's analysis in *L'età di Alfonso I e la pittura del Dosso*, *Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Ferrara, 9–12 dicembre 1998)*, edited by Gianni Venturi (Modena: Panini, 2004), 29–43: 31.

A few years later, Castiglione refers directly to this same mixed character of the *Furioso*, writing that "messer Lodovico has given us, *in a single work, both Homer and Menander.*"[16] Here we find expressed the full force of the novelty of Ariosto's creation, in which Homeric epic seriousness is joined with a comic and playful tone. This commingling of registers, capable of disrupting the rules of classical epic, proved to be so novel that Castiglione was forced to rely on the dramatic genre of comedy in order to account for it. In so doing, he became the first to formulate the widespread observation, later repeated countless times in the reception history of the *Furioso*, that the poem constituted a "generic hybrid."[17] However, while Castiglione intended this as praise for Ariosto, other critics would soon reverse this observation into an indictment, first in the sixteenth century in Italy, then later in France throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This latter period would eventually lead, as we will see, to Voltaire who, in 1756, would once more denounce the incompatibility of serious and comic registers which he found arbitrarily mixed in the *Furioso*.[18]

But if there *was* evidence of a sensibility capable of perceiving this abundant and complex aspect of the poem, why did it not grow or develop into a fuller, deeper understanding of Ariostan irony? Why do we witness, instead, a kind of "burying" of this dimension and its (more or less) conscious "repression"? The response to this question is anything but simple and doubtless requires looking at many different factors. Two of those factors, however, seem to have played a primary role in this historical "burying" process.

The first, and most evident, factor was the emergence of a cultural climate hostile to any reading of the *Furioso* free of prejudice or amenable to probing the significance of its irony. In the period immediately following the publication of the definitive edition of the poem (1532), the Counter-Reformation began to expand rapidly throughout Europe. At the same time, a normativiz-

[16] "Messer Lodovico Ariosto, che in *un solo ci dà Homero e Menandro*." This observation, found in a manuscript version of *The Book of the Courtier,* will be later expunged in the final edition of the text. See Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, edited by V. Cian (Florence: Sansoni, 1947), 378, note 14, emphasis mine.

[17] This mixture of the serious and the playful, of the tragic and the comic, is one of the distinctive aspects of the text. At the same time, this particular quality was destined to become quite problematic within theoretical debates concerning the *Furioso* that would emerge by the middle of the century. As is well known, due to its supposed generic irregularity, Ariosto's poem was the first work of modern European literature whose artistic legitimacy became the object of heated polemics and intense theoretical discussions.

[18] See section 3.1.1.

ing critical methodology began to take hold in Italy, one aimed at validating artistic works largely on the basis of pseudo-Aristotelian norms. This situation clearly did not offer the best conditions for free critical activity.[19]

A second factor resides in the nature of Ariostan irony itself, which represents a veritable innovation within the literary tradition. In its textual pervasiveness and in its overall effectiveness, this kind of irony knows no precursors nor contemporary models. In fact, an analysis of previous types of irony would be insufficient for explaining its singular character. It would be inadequate, for instance, to connect it to the Socratic model of irony mediated by the Ficinian-Platonic tradition, for the simple reason that Ariosto attenuates his irony within the genre of epic poetry, thereby producing forms and structures peculiar to that literary form.[20] It would be likewise insufficient to look back to Ariosto's predecessors within the epic tradition itself. If Pulci and Boiardo do in fact use irony, they use it in ways which are much less refined, complex, and widespread. Ariosto's irony, by contrast, is marked by a lightness of tone, an almost ubiquitous presence, and a multiplicity of forms; the results are entirely different from earlier chivalric models.[21] Lastly, it would not be enough to make comparisons with Lucian or Alberti, whose own irony was certainly well known to Ariosto in the sixteenth century. The humanists in Italy (and later in Europe) had rediscovered the Lucianic principle of a playful "poetic license," that is, an unrestrained and derisory attitude,

[19] Beginning in the 1530s, Aristotle's *Poetics* was rediscovered, read, and interpreted within a normative framework. On the basis of pseudo-Aristotelian prescriptions, a long list of accusations regarding the *Furioso* was formulated: it lacked narrative unity, it mixed different linguistic and stylistic registers, it was morally licentious, and many other supposed "defects," many of which were connected (as we shall see later) to the phenomenon of irony. For a reconstruction of the theoretical debates on the poet, see the works citated above in note 8.

[20] This is the hypothesis developed by Giorgio Forni in his study "Ariosto e l'ironia" (2003).

[21] Regarding those aspects that distinguish the novelty of the *Furioso*'s irony from its Boiardan model, see the lucid study by Giuseppe Sangirardi, *Boiardismo ariostesco: presenza e trattamento dell'Orlando innamorato nel Furioso* (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1993), especially 313–28. On the narrative techniques of the *Furioso* and on the ironic distance that characterizes the Ariostan narrator (also with respect to Boiardo), see the concise observations by Alberto Casadei, "Nuove prospettive su Ariosto e sul Furioso," *Italianistica* 34 (2008): 167–92, especially 181–2 and 190–1, as well as the related citations to earlier analyses found in Casadei, *Il percorso del Furioso: ricerche intorno alle redazioni del 1516 e del 1521* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 72–87, which refers frequently to the centrality of the relationship between literary fiction and historical reality in the poem.

even towards the high epic tradition of Homer.[22] For Ariosto, this principle constituted an important point of reference for the construction of a kind of irony directed at playing with narrative fiction. Yet, even in comparison with the more representative texts within the Lucianic-Alberti line of the humanistic *serio ludere*, Ariosto's creation presents a much more distinct and original physiognomy.[23] This *sui generis* quality would be destined (after its initial "misfortune") to find, in the following centuries, its own success, quite often independent from this earlier form of irony.

In response to the question that we originally posed, it seems clear that we must keep in mind this second aspect, namely the potential impact of the novelty of Ariostos's irony of fiction. On the whole, this type of irony would end up shifting the horizon of expectations of its readers–as happens with every great artistic innovation. Doubtless more time was needed in the early decades of the poem's life to understand and appreciate the richness and depth of this crucial aspect. Instead, time was terribly limited. Due to the progressive consolidation of both the Counter-Reformation and a normative poetics, the *Furioso* was inevitably "engulfed" in much different interpretative frameworks, which shifted critical attention away from the poem's playful uses of irony.

It took more than two centuries for a deeper and more conscious interest in these uses to develop. Only a new kind of literary criticism, one attentive to the dynamics of history–with its epochal breaks and innovations–would come to accept the hybridization of different genres and styles, even exalting their importance within a revolutionary theoretical framework. We might

[22] Lucian refers more literally to the "liberty to invent mythic stories." See Lucian, *True History*, book 1, section 4.

[23] The rediscovery of Alberti's collection of stories *Intercenales* and the identification of the story *Somnium* as a model for Ariosto's depiction of the moon has laid the groundwork for a new understanding of the "Lucianic-Alberti" line within Ariostan studies. The first scholars to recognize this relationship were Remo Ceserani, "Ariosto e Alberti," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 141 (1964): 269–70 and Mario Martelli, "Una delle *Intercenali* di Leon Battista Alberti fonte sconosciuta del *Furioso*," *La Bibliofilia* 66 (1964): 163–70. On this topic, see also Cesare Segre, "Leon Battista Alberti e Ludovico Ariosto," *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 7 (1965): 1025–33 (now in Cesare Segre, *Esperienze ariostesche* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1966), 85–95); Mario Santoro, "La sequenza lunare nel *Furioso*: una società allo specchio," in Mario Santoro, *L'anello di Angelica: nuovi saggi ariosteschi* (Naples: Federico & Ardia, 1983), 105–32; Bernd Häsner, "Albertis *Somnium* und Astolfos Mondreise im *Orlando Furioso*," in *Ritterepik der Renaissance, Atti del colloquio italo-tedesco (Berlino, 30 marzo – 2 aprile 1987)*, edited by Klaus W. Hempfer (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989), 185–210; Sergio Zatti, *Il Furioso tra epos e romanzo* (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1990), especially 127–71.

therefore venture two further questions: when and where did this take place; that is, when and with whom can we say that Ariostan irony was truly rediscovered? Secondly, what happened during the long "burial" period of the *Furioso*'s irony? Were there readers and artists who were still able to grasp and appreciate some of its more salient aspects?

3. …And Its Rediscovery: History and "Pre-History" of Irony

With this study, I have tried to offer a response to these questions in two ways. First, I identify the historical moment when Ariostan irony was rediscovered. Second, I reconstruct several fundamental stages of what might be called the "pre-history" of that rediscovery. Let us briefly consider the rediscovery itself.

If asked about the first real attention directed at the *Furioso*'s irony, the majority of well-informed readers would most likely think of Hegel. In a celebrated passage from his *Aesthetics* (published posthumously in 1835), he explains the Ariostan process of an ironic and playful "dissolution" of the chivalric world. By means of this fundamental ironic attitude, Ariosto's work (together with that of Cervantes) not only contributes to the historical shift from classical epic to modern novel, but also bears witness to the emergence of a new consciousness regarding the representation of "prosaic" aspects of reality.[24] After Hegel, one might proceed to Vincenzo Gioberti's *Primato* (1843) and then to the works of Francesco De Sanctis, first in his lectures in Zurich on chivalric poetry (1858–69), then in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870). From there, one might arrive at Luigi Pirandello's *Umorismo* (1908) and Benedetto Croce's essay *Ariosto* (1918), where the concept of Ariostan irony, despite taking on new forms, is once again endorsed and handed down to subsequent critical discussion in Italy and abroad.

But was Hegel really the discoverer of Ariostan irony, as we usually learn from traditional scholarship?[25] In reality, the observations found in the *Aesthetics* constitute a synthesis (doubtless brilliant and incisive) of discoveries and intuitions first formulated by earlier Romantic theorists and literary

[24] On Hegel's conception of the "prosaic," see section 5.4.1.

[25] For a history of Ariostan criticism, see the concise overviews by Walter Binni, *Storia della critica ariostesca* (Lucca: Lucentia, 1951), republished in idem, *Metodo e poesia di Ludovico Ariosto e altri studi ariosteschi*, edited by Rosanna Alhaique Pettinelli (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1996), 329–422: 375–6; Raffaello Ramat, *La critica ariostesca dal secolo XVI ad oggi* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1954); and Aldo Borlenghi, *Ariosto* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1961). Hegel's *Aesthetics* is identified as the point of departure for the discovery of irony even in the more recent study by Giorgio Forni, "Ariosto e l'ironia" (2003).

critics reading Ariosto. In fact, it was the German Romantics, and Friedrich Schlegel in particular, who were the first to discover Ariostan irony. They read the *Furioso* as a fundamental model for their understanding of irony, as well as of poetry more generally. In the writings of the young Schlegel (1795–1800), a new conception of irony emerged, alongside its classical definition as a rhetorical figure.[26] This new conception was intimately connected to literature, particularly narrative techniques that called for the continual disclosure to the reader of the fictional nature of the narrative. Schlegel envisioned the experience of the text as a dialectic between the identification of the subject with the invented story and her conscious distancing from the same narrated world. He considered Ariosto's poem as one of the fundamental models of this literary (and artistic) irony, appreciating both its complex narrative structure as well as the skillful alternation of serious, tragic moments with playful, comic elements. Perhaps more importantly, as we shall see later, he juxtaposed the poem with eighteenth-century novels, thereby staking a claim for the *Furioso*'s modern innovative force.

Schlegel's reading of Ariosto came at the end of an intense period of interest in the poem. For more than forty uninterrupted years (from the 1760s to the first decade of the 1800s), the *Orlando furioso* was read, cited, discussed, and reinterpreted by all of the major protagonists of the era: Wieland, Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Jean Paul, Schiller, the Schlegel brothers, Tieck, and Schelling. In fact, in this period there emerged a veritable fashion for "Ariostan-Romantic" poems, which had begun in earnest with Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), the most important poet of the era immediately preceding Goethe. The *Furioso* was therefore widely known in Germany by the time Ariosto's playful and ironic manner (together with Cervantes and Shakespeare) became a point of reference within theoretical discussions on the new Romantic literature undertaken by Schlegel and the Jena circle.

It is thus worth considering the reasons for which we have forgotten–at least within the more limited field of Ariosto studies–both the Romantics' and Friedrich Schlegel's interest in the *Furioso,* favoring Hegel's instead.[27] Be-

[26] For the ways in which Romantic irony relates to (and differs from) traditional irony, see the fundamental studies by Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, romantische Ironie, tragische Ironie: zum Ursprung dieser Begriffe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972) and Lilian Renée Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). For further studies, see section 1.1.1 note 2.

[27] This misunderstanding appears in all histories of Ariostan criticism (see the preceding

yond the authoritative role played by the *Aesthetics*, an apparently paradoxical attitude held by Hegel himself influenced this process of repression. If, on the one hand, he did indeed value the Romantics' critical observations on the *Furioso*'s irony, on the other hand, he also used the *Aesthetics* to attack openly and violently the theory of artistic irony formulated by Schlegel. This paradoxical position ended up obscuring the critical and interpretative path opened up by the Romantics. The only exceptions are perhaps De Sanctis and Pirandello, who drew not only on Hegel but directly on the ideas of the German Romantics. De Sanctis, however, never directly cited his own Romantic sources, at least in his interpretation of the *Furioso*. Pirandello meanwhile explicitly attacked Schlegel's position on irony, despite taking up the latter's ideas and applying them to Ariosto. In so doing, he followed a strategy rather analogous to the one used by Hegel.

All of this contributed to the repression of the historical nexus between Romantic thought and the valorization of the *Furioso*'s irony. In some cases, this nexus was misunderstood and even inverted into its opposing claim, according to which it was none other than Hegel himself who re-evaluated Ariosto

note). In his acute historico-critical summary of 1951, Walter Binni merely acknowledges–in a general manner–the fact that it was "Germanic Idealism" which examined in depth the "theme of irony," while also placing in opposition Hegel's ideas on Ariosto with those of Friedrich Schlegel. This juxtaposition was then taken up and elaborated three years later by Raffaello Ramat, who attributed to Hegel the valorization of the *Furioso* and its irony, going so far as to consider this as an inversion of the theoretical position of the Romantics (to whom, in reality, the idealist philosopher was largely in debt for his interpretative ideas on Ariosto): "Hegel claimed the importance of the *Furioso* against the judgment of Friedrich Schlegel, who, in his *History of Literature, Ancient and Modern*, spoke of Ariosto as a mere follower of Boiardo, even if he was a more felicitous stylist than the latter", Ramat, *La critica ariostesco* [1954]. In order to more accurately reconstruct the dynamics of this period of Ariostan criticism, Ramat should not have relied on Schlegel's *Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient and Modern*, held in Vienna in 1812 (and published three years later). At that point in his life, Schlegel had already retreated into a conservative and nationalist worldview as a recent convert to Catholicism and a fervent supporter of Metternich. Instead, Ramat should have looked to Schlegel's earlier writings, those of the young founder of Romanticism and sympathizer of the French Revolution. It is those works which contain Schlegel's truly revolutionary ideas on Ariosto and which had a decisive influence on Hegel's thought (see section 5.2). The judgments found in these authoritative historical overviews of Ariostan criticism also ended up influencing later studies. Several years after Binni's and Ramat's work, a third historico-critical overview emerged in which the author goes even so far as to say: "The Romantics never considered the genius of the *Furioso*, or its interpretation, as a particular concern […] Even the interest for our literature from authoritative foreign writers, ranging from Sismondi to Staël to Goethe, was felt to be in agreement with the thought of our own critics in the eighteenth century", Borlenghi, *Ariosto*, 50.

against a presumed de-valuation on the part of Schlegel and the Romantics. Even the more authoratitive histories of Ariostan criticism have participated in the diffusion of this misunderstanding, with the result that this historical repression exists even in our own period.[28]

With this book, I have therefore attempted, first and foremost, to shed light on the historical moment of the critical rediscovery of Ariostan irony. I have further attempted–a bit provocatively–to invert the common point of view, to see the modern interpretation of Ariosto's irony *not* as a point of departure, but rather as a point of arrival. It is by viewing this particular moment as the outcome of a submerged history that I have attempted to reconstruct the reception of Ariostan irony. Moreover, during the long period of over two and a half centuries that separates the appearance of the poem from the reflections of the Romantics, the force of the text's ironic dimension profoundly affected several particularly attentive and sensitive readers and artists, occasionally leaving traces of an implicit or partial influence. There thus also exists a "pre-history" to the Romantic discovery, a kind of historical red thread to follow and reconstruct. In many cases, there was a veritable passing of the torch between various protagonists of this pre-history, and, as a result, it became a matter of reconstructing a puzzle whose pieces needed to be carefully compared and evaluated. It also seemed a matter of further interest to examine several attestations of the influence of Ariostan irony

[28] On the history of Ariostan criticism, see the previous note. It is enough to browse through the index of names in volumes of Ariostan criticism to see that Hegel is often present, while Friedrich Schlegel and the Romantics are not. Within international studies, the sole exception is the work of the American critic Robert M. Durling dedicated to the presence of the narrating subject in Renaissance epic, which takes up several aspects of the Romantic theory of irony (in response to Hegel's criticisms). In a footnote, Durling even recalls how Schlegel juxtaposed the *Furioso* with narrative strategies found in eighteenth-century novels. See Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 10, note 16; 129–30. German scholarship instead seems aware of the historical discoveries of Schlegel and the Romantics on Ariosto. See Dieter Kremers, *Der "Rasende Roland" des Ludovico Ariosto: Aufbau und Weltbild* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973); Klaus W. Hempfer, "Die potentielle Autoreflexivität des narrativen Diskurses und Ariosts 'Orlando Furioso'," in *Erzählforschung: ein Symposium*, edited by Eberhard Lämmert (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1982), 130–56 (now in *Grundlagen der Textinterpretation*, edited by Klaus W. Hemfper and Stefan Hartung (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), 79–106); Karlheinz Stierle, "Malerei und Literatur der italienischen Renaissance in Hegels Ästhetik," in *Welt und Wirkung von Hegels Ästhetik*, edited by Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Otto Pöggeler (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986), 327–40; Karlheinz Stierle, "Italienische Renaissance und deutsche Romantik," in *Italien in Germanien: deutsche Italien-Rezeption von 1750–1850*, edited by Frank-Rutger Hausmann (Tubingen: Narr, 1996), 373–404.

within the field of figurative art, which interacted with the literary sphere in different ways depending on the period.

4. The Itinerary of the Book

First, it must be stated that the historical reconstruction carried out in this work is not comprehensive; rather, it is the result of a conscious selection. I have chosen to illuminate several moments of this pre-history which seemed particularly significant and representative. Nevertheless, the motivation for certain exclusions should be explained.

In my pursuit of the literary reception of Ariostan irony in Europe, I decided to move between France, Germany, and Italy, while setting aside both the English and the Spanish traditions, although for differing reasons.[29] In England, the first and most important mediators of the *Furioso* were John Harington and Edmund Spenser, whose methods of reading the poem were entirely distant from its ironic dimension.[30] In his verse translation of the *Furioso* (London, 1591), Harington, influenced by earlier Italian poetological debates, almost systematically purged the text of any ironic, mischievous, or ambiguous elements, enhancing instead its moralizing content.[31] In a not dissimilar manner, even Spenser in his *Faerie Queene* (1590), which takes Ariosto as one of its principal influences, tended towards an allegorizing con-

[29] Among the major European literary traditions, Russia has also been left out, since it unfortunately falls outside my linguistic and philological capabilities. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Ariosto's reception in Russia occurred rather late, in fact subsequent to early German Romanticism and thus following what I have defined the pre-history of the rediscovery of Ariostan irony. The first important author in whom the *Furioso*'s influence has been recognized (even in terms of irony) is Pushkin, in particular in his poem *Ruslan and Ludmila* from 1820. On the reception of Ariosto in Russian literature, see R.M. Gorochova, "La fortuna dell'Ariosto in Russia" and Z.M. Potapova, "Ariosto e Puškin," both in *Ludovico Ariosto: atti del convegno internazionale, Roma, Lucca, Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, Reggio Emilia, Ferrara, 27 settembre–5 ottobre 1974* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1975), 545–62 and 303–16, respectively.

[30] On the reception of the *Furioso* in English literature, see Mario Praz, "Ariosto in Inghilterra," in *Ludovico Ariosto: atti del convegno internazionale* (1974), 511–25; Alfonso Sammut, *La fortuna dell'Ariosto nell'Inghilterra elisabettiana* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1971); Joseph Gibaldi, "The Fortunes of Ariosto in England and America (with Bibliography)," in *Ariosto 1974 in America*, edited by Aldo Scaglione (Ravenna: Longo, 1976), 135–58; Javitch, *Proclaiming a classic*, 135–57; see also the useful annotated bibliography on Ariosto in the English world in *Ludovico Ariosto: Documenti. Immagini. Fortuna critica*, edited by Gino Badini (Rome: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento per l'informazione e l'editoria, [1992]), 462–99.

[31] For a discussion of Harington, particularly his use of Ariosto, see Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*, 134–57.

ception of epic poetry. One need only read Spenser's transposition of the celebrated octave 22 of the first canto of the *Furioso* to understand the extent to which the English narrator's nostalgia for the world of "ancient knights" is entirely devoid of irony.[32]

Since neither Milton nor Pope played a significant role in understanding Ariostan irony, it might instead be more worthwhile to consider the relationship between the *Furioso* and early eighteenth-century English novels. Indeed, Ariosto seems in some way to anticipate the use of the narrator and of narrative digressions which would later become essential to the work of Laurence Sterne–a characteristic later recognized by both Wieland and Schlegel (as already noted above).[33] To the best of my knowledge, however, the Italian poem's direct influence on Sterne remains an open question.

By contrast, Walter Scott's admiration for the "digressive poet Ariosto" is well known. Scott saw the *Furioso* as a model for narrative technique for managing the simultaneous plot threads of his own novels.[34] Such attention to the narrative construction of the text would persist throughout later Anglo-Saxon culture, appearing even in contemporary fiction and film. One need only consider the structure of David Lodge's *Small World* (1984) or the references to the *Furioso* in Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* (1989). As we have already seen, this manner of reading Ariosto comes from the important reinterpretation of the Italian poet undertaken by American literary critics, who produced fundamental studies beginning in the 1950s concerning (among other things) the "modern" and "novelistic" qualities of the poem.[35]

[32] See the classic study by Charles P. Brand, "Tasso, Spenser and the *Orlando Furioso*," in *Petrarch to Pirandello*, edited by Julius A. Molinaro (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 95–110. Yet, the lack of irony in the *Faerie Queene*, III, 1, 13 (where Spenser clearly imitates *Orlando furioso*, I, 22) should not be interpreted as a lack of comprehension, but rather as proof of a conscious change of tone with respect to the Italian model, as Paul Alpers notes in *The Poetry of* The Faerie Queene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 198–9.

[33] See sections 4.2 and 5.2.3

[34] Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*, edited by Clare Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 158. On the connections between Scott and Ariosto, see Daniela Delcorno Branca, "Strutture narrative e scansione in capitoli tra *Fermo e Lucia* e *Promessi Sposi*," in *Lettere italiane* 32 (1980): 314–50, especially 339 and following; and Roberto Bigazzi, *Le risorse del romanzo: componenti di genere nella narrativa moderna* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1996), 29–30.

[35] On the relationship between Scott and the contemporary rediscovery of the *Furioso*, see Stefano Jossa, "Coincidenze casuali e incontri possibili: Ariosto oggi", in *Versants* 59, 2 (2012): 189–211. For American studies on the *Furioso*, for which the present book owes a great deal, see (beyond the already cited critics) the overview found in section 1.2.1, note 40.

On the other hand, the situation in Spain is quite different. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (first part: 1605, second part: 1615) likely represents the first important step in Europe of an appreciation of Ariostan irony. Cervantes quickly recognized and appropriated the fundamental ironic distance assumed by the *Furioso*'s narrator (and its readers) regarding the chivalric world. In his novel, the authenticity of that world is confined to the mind of the reader-protagonist Don Quixote, consequently becoming the primary source of his madness. Yet, Cervantes also took up many of the other methods of Ariostan irony that I have identified throughout this study. Take, for instance, the game of oscillating between the twin poles of faith and incredulity regarding the literary tradition. In the *Furioso*, we find Ariosto referring ironically to the historical chronicler Turpin in order to guarantee the truth of narrated events precisely in those moments that are obviously invented and fantastical. In the *Quixote*, the figure of Turpin is extended and reworked into the character of Cide Hamete Benengeli, from whom Cervante pretends to have translated his tale, thereby triggering a series of ironic effects concerning the veracity of the story.

Even with the *Quixote*'s well-known "perspectivism," according to which we often come into contact with situations not directly but through the gaze of the characters,[36] we must look back to Ariosto's narrator and his ironic relationship with his own characters and readers.[37] In some cases, this ironic relationship even finds a direct continuation in the *Quixote*, such as in the first chapter of the second part of the novel, where Don Quixote expresses his own judgments about the protagonists of the *Furioso*.

In the course of this study, I repeatedly touch on the strong intertextuality between these two works, which is profoundly ironic in nature and which plays a significant historical role in the critical rediscovery of Ariostan irony. In fact, the German Romantics often associated Ariosto with Cervantes. If I have decided not to dedicate a chapter of this book to an analysis of *Don Quixote*, it is only because comparisons with the *Furioso* have already been the object of many detailed studies, which have specifically demonstrated Cervantes' use and appreciation of irony.[38]

[36] Leo Spitzer, "Prospettivismo linguistico nel *Don Quijote*," in Leo Spitzer, *Cinque saggi di ispanistica* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1962), 57–106.

[37] See section 1.6.

[38] On the intertextual connections between the *Furioso* and the *Quijote*, see at least Maxime Chevalier, *L'Arioste en Espagne (1530–1650). Recherches sur l'influence du* Roland Furieux (Bordeaux: Presses de l'Université de Bordeaux, 1966); Thomas R. Hart, *Cervantes and Ariosto: re-*

Following instead a lesser-known path, I have preferred to head to France, where–half a century after Cervantes–we find another author, Jean de la Fontaine (1621–1695), who reveals a profound ability to both understand and apply Ariosto's irony. Within the era of French classicism, a period essentially hostile to the *Furioso*'s irony, La Fontaine composed his *Contes en vers* (first published in 1664), which contain three noteworthy rewritings of Ariostan episodes. An analysis of these texts forms the basis of **Chapter 2.** This French author grasped perfectly the playful and ironic dialectic through which Ariosto blends plausible representations of human psychological behavior with an unrestrainedly fantastical and implausible rendering of magical creatures and events. La Fontaine reworked this dialectic in an original way in his *Contes*, while also including clever and direct allusions to the *Furioso* itself. Much like Ariosto, he winks at his knowledgeable reader, demonstrating an ability to read and appreciate the ironic games in the Italian poem. By avoiding the rules of the classicist doctrine that dominated his period, he deftly took advantage of an Ariostan motley of *vraisemblance* and the fantastic.

La Fontaine also recognized and embraced an array of different strategies from the *Furioso* for producing irony. It is worth mentioning two, which are based on narratorial intervention within the story: the game of referring to the "feigned source" Turpin and the use of the two fundamental ironic modes of the fantastical.[39] The *Contes en vers* would later be recognized as an interpretative key for the wittier and more licentious aspects of Ariosto's poetry. Indeed, these aspects figure prominently a century later in the work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), who illustrated La Fontaine's *Contes* before turning to the *Furioso* itself in order to translate its irony into images. Even before Fragonard, however, another French author had explicitly declared La Fontaine as the principal French disciple of Ariosto: Voltaire.

newing Fiction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Aldo Ruffinatto, *Cervantes: un profilo su smalti italiani* (Rome: Carocci, 2002); Karlheinz Stierle, "Ingegno e follia. Una configurazione dantesca e la sua trasformazione in Ariosto e Cervantes," in *Letteratura cavalleresca tra Italia e Spagna (da 'Orlando' al 'Quijote') - Literatura caballeresca entre España e Italia (del 'Orlando' al 'Quijote'))*, edited by Janvier Gómez-Montero and Bernhard König (Salamanca: semyr, 2004), 199–218, republished with modifications and additions in Karlheinz Stierle, *Il grande mare del senso: esplorazioni "ermenautiche" nella* Commedia *di Dante*, translated and edited by Christian Rivoletti (Rome: Aracne, 2014), 485–505. For further bibliography, see also Georges Güntert, "L'Arioste et Cervantès," in *L'Arioste: discours des personnages, sources et influences,* special edition of *Les Lettres romanes*, edited by Gian Paolo Giudicetti, 2008, 123–36.

[39] On the two modes of the fantastical used in the *Furioso*, the "complicitous" and the "metaphorical," see sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2.

As we will see in **Chapter 3**, before ever arriving at a deeper understanding and appreciation of the *Furioso*, Voltaire (1694–1778) was, in reality, embroiled in a veritable battle with himself and with contemporary poetic principles that he had absorbed. This struggle followed him nearly his entire life, before concluding with a surprising critical manifesto, the entry *Epopée* for the *Dictionaire philosophique* (1771), which contains an enthusiastic section dedicated to Ariosto.[40] In this text, Voltaire anticipates several modern critical ideas by noticing, among other things, the significance of the mixture of serious and comic tones that characterizes the *Furioso*, a mixture which makes the poem a particularly unusual work with respect to traditional epic.

It is interesting to note that Voltaire turned precisely to this Ariostan motley of tone and theme for the composition of his own epic poem, *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (1762). With this work, little studied by scholars (especially regarding the importance of the mixture of tones), Voltaire attempted to forge a new path for the genre of epic. To that end, and much as La Fontaine had already done in his fables, Voltaire reused and reworked Ariosto's imaginative use of irony (including the game of the "feigned source"). More so than his predecessor, however, Voltaire saturates all levels of his work with various kinds of an Ariostan irony of fiction, from the narrative structure to the use of rhyme. In his poem, alongside a more traditionally aggressive Enlightenment irony, there exists a lighter irony, modelled on the example of the *Furioso* and designed as a skillful and clever game played with the fiction of the narrative itself. This game also includes the narrator's systematic intervention in the proems of each of the cantos, an Ariostan device employed programmatically throughout the entire work. Not only did Voltaire imitate this particular strategy in his poem, but he would also declare its absolute novelty and importance in his article *Epopée*.

Several years after Voltaire's death in 1778, the illustrator Fragonard would become the first in a long line of visual interpreters of the *Furioso* to attempt to translate into images the introductions to the poem's cantos. His innovation consists in moving beyond portrayals of the *Furioso*'s characters to show Ariosto himself in the role of the narrator. In Fragonard's images, Ariosto sits at his desk while either contemplating, writing, or reciting his own poem, thereby also participating emotionally in the narrated events. In this manner, the irony of fiction in the original text is transported into the visual realm.

[40] See section 3.1.2.

Such attention to the figure of the narrator in the visual arts is doubtless of interest, especially considering the epoch. Fragonard's portrayals of Ariosto can immediately be juxtaposed not only with Voltaire's positions, but also–as we shall see later–with novels such as Laurence Stern's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) and Denis Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist* (circulating in manuscript before 1780). In these texts, the narrator functions almost as a "competitor" with respect to the plot being narrated. Scholars have yet to consider this interesting coincidence between literary and artistic history. As a result, the particular methodology of the present study, moving as it does between disparate fields of research, has proven to be quite fruitful.

In **Chapter 4**, I move from the French tradition to the German, beginning with an eighteenth-century Italianist named Nicolaus Meinhard (1727–1767), who was the first to "rediscover" Ariosto. Meinhard also introduced the Italian poet to–among others–Lessing, Gerstenberg, and Wieland, thereby signaling the beginning of a period of extraordinary critical interest in the *Furioso*. In those same years, or more precisely in 1766, an anonymous review appeared in one of the most well-known journals of arts and science in Germany at the time, the "Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste" ["The New Library of Fine Sciences and Liberal Arts"]. The unnamed critic, reviewing a recently published chivalric poem, immediately recognizes that it was Voltaire who had opened up a new path for the genre of epic poetry. For this critic, the French writer had broken with the rules of classicism and incorporated a specifically Ariostan mode of mixing serious and comic tones, thereby allowing for the distinction between classical epic and new epic. The reviewer concludes by hoping that this "romance" epic, initiated by Ariosto and carried into France by Voltaire, would soon arrive in Germany.[41]

Wieland would be the first to satisfy the expectations of both the public and the critics. Through his verse works, he launched a veritable literary craze, the "Ariostan-Romantic" poem, which would flourish for more than thirty years (thanks as well to the various translations and imitations of the *Furioso* itself). A witty and agile poet, Wieland played with the various techniques of Ariosto's irony of fiction, reworking them in an innovative manner: from the masterful and calculated metrical structure of his stanzas to the interweaving of stories and trajectories of his characters to the interruptions of the story in order to reveal the "orchestration" of the narratorial voice.

[41] For more on this anonymous review, see section 4.3.

Yet Wieland's importance as a reader of Ariosto lies, perhaps a bit paradoxically, in his attention to the present. I say paradoxically because Wieland was the greatest exponent of German Rococo literature, and thus a poet soon to be rejected by the pre-Romantic generation who saw him as outdated. His sensitivity to the present, however, allowed him to intuit certain elements that would later become central to the revolutionary aesthetics of the following generation. In fact, along with his verse epic, Wieland also cultivated the form of the novel, for which he could be considered the father of this modern genre in Germany.[42]

Wieland's ability to work simultaneously in two literary genres such as the epic (by then nearly extinct) and the novel (a new form) is highly representative of a period of important changes, which ultimately influenced his manner of reading Ariosto. Indeed, not only the *Furioso* but also the novels of Sterne served as models for his poems. In so doing, Wieland was perhaps the first to sense a continuity between Ariosto's poem and the English eighteenth-century novel, full of digressions, continuous and ironic interventions by the narrator, and the interweaving of characters and narrative threads. Wieland's intuition has, until now, been overlooked by critical studies on the writer. Such an oversight is surprising, given that Wieland's ideas anticipate Friedrich Schlegel, who, thirty years later, would fully develop similar notions within his own aesthetic theory.

Chapter 5 thus continues to trace Ariosto's reception within the aesthetic reflection of early Romanticism. The chapter begins with an analysis of Friedrich Schiller's well-known essay *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature* (1794–95). This work identifies the *Furioso* as the prime example of the fundamental Romantic idea that the presence and location of the narrating voice represents the distinctive trait of modern poetry in contrast to classical literature. This same idea would later reappear in the writings of the young Schlegel, architect of Romantic aesthetic theory and, more importantly, inventor of the concept of Romantic irony.

Schlegel admired the *Furioso* and considered it one of the greatest examples of Romantic poetry, alongside the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes. He appreciated the light and conversational tone, the wittiness, the imaginativeness, and the felicitous combination of seriousness and comedy that underlies the entire poem. He also admired the work's arabesque structure,

[42] This point is acknowledged by several scholars, such as Wolfgang Preisendanz (see section 4.2).

which allowed him to produce a new interpretation of the Ariostan *ut pictura poesis*. Schlegel compares the pictorial qualities of the *Furioso* with the imaginative and perfectly ordered chaos of a wondrous arabesque, not only in the poem's ability to "paint" characters and situations, but also in its entire compositional structure. Readers of Ariosto's poem, as if standing before an arabesque, must step back and place themselves at a proper distance in order to grasp and enjoy the work's chaotic interweaving of lines. Using this image of the arabesque, one of the key concepts of Romantic aesthetics, Schlegel juxtaposes the "Romanzo der Italiäner" (Renaissance Italian romance) with examples of contemporary "Romane" (the novels of Sterne and Diderot). Unfortunately, we do not know if Schlegel was familiar (even if only indirectly) with the sixteenth-century theories of Giraldi Cinzio and Pigna on the romance genre.[43] Nevertheless, it is certain that, through the imaginative comparison between Ariosto's poem and the late eighteenth-century European novel, Schlegel reframes the question of the genetic bond between epic and novel in entirely modern terms.[44]

Chapter 6 follows the vicissitudes of the concept of Ariostan irony after Hegel: first its development in the writings of Francesco De Sanctis (1817–1883) (and later Benedetto Croce, 1866–1952), followed by its theoretical reevaluation in Pirandello's essay *Umorismo*. My examination of the reception of Ariostan irony concludes with Italo Calvino (1923–1985), whose experiences more closely resemble (even for chronological reasons) the sensibility of contemporary readers of the *Furioso*. Before writing his fantastical trilogy of novels *Nostri antenati* in the mid-twentieth century, Calvino had sought to represent the difficult and contradictory reality of partisan resistance in World War II. To do so, he turned to the Ariostan model and its "ironic deformation" of the real.[45] For Calvino, the ironic and detached gaze of the *Furioso*'s narrator, suspended between fantastical adventure and a lucid penetration of reality, became a formidable and modern model for the novel, capable of avoiding the twin dangers of glorification and idealization of war. At the same time, with this model Calvino was able to adhere to the mixture

[43] For bibliography on these two Renaissance theorists, see the works cited above in note 8.

[44] In a somewhat different light, Hegel too analyzes this same bond. His *Aesthetics*, however, will have the paradoxical effect, as already suggested, of transmitting to following generations the concept of irony, all the while obscuring the theoretical positions and interest in Ariosto of the first Romantics.

[45] For Calvino's expression "ironic deformation," see section 6.3.

of prosaic comedy and tragic grief that constituted the core of his own lived experience.

In a different context, we then find various elements analogous to those already seen in early German Romanticism, elements which had inaugurated the modern reception of Ariostan irony. Much like the Romantics had already done in their aesthetic theories, Calvino claimed the modernity of the *Furioso*'s irony as a constructive tool. For him, this instrument could be reused for writing new kinds of literary texts, no longer within the field of epic poetry, but instead as an element of the modern genre of the novel. In a certain sense, then, the historical gamble on which Friedrich Schlegel and the first Romantics had staked their claims would find later success, *mutatis mutandis*, in Calvino's reading of Ariosto.

In **Chapter 7,** I respond to theoretical questions concerning the figurative interpretation of the *Furioso*. Is it possible to translate Ariosto's irony of fiction into images? Are there methods that are closely tied to the specific "literariness" (or textuality) of the narrator? In order to suggest an answer, I venture into a disciplinary field that, even today, still seems like an academic No Man's Land. Indeed, the field concerning the visualization of a literary text (in this case, the *Furioso*) does not normally fall into any single academic discipline, but rather requires a rigorous interaction of multiple kinds of expertise.

It is also for this reason that I have decided to investigate only those individual examples which seemed to be significant and which exist within the chronological period defined as the "pre-history" of the rediscovery of Ariostan irony. The figurative works under analysis do not offer a univocal response to the problem, but rather a series of possible solutions. As a result, we find artists across different periods who attend to the phenomenon of Ariosto's irony of fiction in all its complexity and in the multiplicity of its modes of expression. In some cases, such as that of Fragonard, we discover interesting coincidences between the textual and the visual spheres of Ariosto's reception.

And finally, there is **Chapter 1**, which the reader will encounter first, but which I could only have written at the end of this exploration of the centuries-long reception history of the *Furioso*. This chapter summarizes and analyzes the complexity and various levels across which Ariosto's irony of fiction is articulated in the poem itself. I offer a theoretical framework for this phenomenon, endeavoring to describe Ariostan irony on the basis of several con-

sistent characteristics, and despite the fact that its physiognomy seems so fluid and ephemeral throughout its historical progression. Indeed, due to the mutable nature of the irony of fiction, it seems difficult to locate a single, or even predominant, meaning. Instead, I have preferred, by moving from period to period, to reconstruct its various functions and meanings within individual historical contexts, authors, and works.

In the analysis of these works, we are, however, confronted with an apparently intrinsic dynamic within the phenomenon that is the irony of fiction, a kind of oscillation between two poles. On the one hand, there is a continuous identification with–or a continuous "belief" in–the illusion of the narrated story (in texts as well as images), an illusion which continues to move and compel us with its serious and tragic events. On the other hand, there is also an equally constant effort to establish a distance from the story, whether through openly exaggerated and fantastical moments, through the narrator's interventions, or through other "ironic" methods that shift our attention to the gap between illusion and reality. By reflecting on this distance, we also necessarily begin to consider the aspects of reality to which the text "refers."

In this sense, the irony of fiction can be seen as a kind of "device" contained within a work which can trigger a response that, in the end, pertains to the experience of art in any period. Art encourages us to reflect because, after absorbing us in its artistic illusion (whether narrative or visual), it also provides us with the time (and means) to establish a certain distance. We are able to think critically about the narrated (or represented) events with which we have identified and in which we have "participated" (at least imaginatively). By contrast, real life often does not allow us the time and means to step back from those events which we experience and which profoundly engage our attention. The phenomenon of the "irony of fiction" (such terms will be discussed in Chapter 1) reveals this aesthetic dynamic, which is comprised of two dialectical moments: "fiction," understood as the construction of an artistic illusion, and "irony," understood as the rupture of this illusion by means of an ironic distance and thus a critical reflection on the narrated story. This is a dialectic which, during its movement, wants us to become aware, as stated earlier, of the distinction between the twin spheres of fiction and the real, and thus of the existing relationship between art and reality. It is with this reference to reality, which runs like a red thread through the different stages of this work, that we perhaps recognize one of Ariosto's

most important lessons, a part of his legacy which even today strikes us as most significant, and one which invites us to reread his poem and still feel its continuing relevance.