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Beyond the story of storytelling: the Narrator as Lover in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*

Chi salirà per me, madonna, in cielo
a riportarne il mio perduto ingegno?
che, poi ch'uscì da' bei vostri occhi il telo
che 'l cor mi fisse, ognior perdendo vegno.
Né di tanta iattura mi querelo,
pur che non cresca, ma stia a questo segno;
ch'io dubito, se più si va scemando,
di venir tal, qual ho descritto Orlando.

Per rïaver l'ingegno mio m'è aviso
che non bisogna che per l'aria io poggi
nel cerchio de la luna o in paradiso;
che 'l mio non credo che tanto alto alloggi.
Ne' bei vostri occhi e nel sereno viso,
nel sen d'avorio e alabastrini poggi
se ne va errando; et io con queste labbia
lo corrò, se vi par ch'io lo rïabbia.[1]

It would be hard for any scholar interested in the *Orlando furioso*, no matter how resistant to metaliterature and theory, to dismiss Ariosto's pervasive and sophisticated use of self-reflexive devices, which unsettled critics and inspired writers for centuries, from Cervantes to Calvino. Most notably, his talkative Narrator 'not only forms one of the chief attractions of the poem, but has had great influence on writers as diverse as Spenser and Fielding'.[2] The studies partly or wholly devoted to metanarration and metafiction in the poem range from narratological approaches to historical inquiries on the use of *entrelacement* in the chivalric tradition, from political and moral readings to biographical interpretations, with or without a wider perspective on Ariosto's other works.[3] In particular, after the pivotal work by Durling, the figure of the Narrator has been discussed by Ascoli and Zatti in their major contributions

[1] Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. by Lanfranco Caretti (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 35.1-2. All subsequent quotations from the poem will be taken from this edition, henceforth referred to as *OF*. Except for the well-known linguistic changes implemented after the 1516 edition, no significant variants can be detected for these two stanzas in the other two editions of the poem published while Ariosto was alive (1521 and 1532).

[2] Robert Durling, *The figure of the poet in Renaissance epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 112.

[3] Daniela Delcorno Branca, *L'*Orlando Furioso *e il romanzo cavalleresco medievale* (Florence: Olschki, 1973), Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance. Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 16-53, Eugenio Donato, 'Per selve e boscherecci labirinti: desire and narrative structure in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*', in *Literary Theory / Renaissance texts*, ed. by Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 33-62, Albert R. Ascoli, *Ariosto's bitter harmony: crisis and evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), Sergio Zatti, *Il* Furioso *tra epos e romanzo* (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1990), Marco Praloran, *Tempo e azione nell'*Orlando Furioso (Florence: Olschki, 1999), Luca Berta, *Oltre la mise en abyme: toeria della metatestualità in letteratura e filosofia* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006), pp. 125-222, Rainer Zaiser, *Inszenierte Poetik. Metatextualität als Selbstreflexion von Dichtung in der italienischen Literatur der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: LIT, 2009), pp. 129-39.

on the *Furioso*; other metapoetic aspects have been investigated by Quint and Hanning, while Hempfer and Javitch have examined the textual strategies that advertise fictionality.[4] Significantly, in more recent years the Narrator has been tackled in general monographs on Ariosto rather than in contributions focused on the poem.[5] This suggests, on the one hand, how the features of the narrative persona in the poem become more evident in the light of Ariosto's *oeuvre*; on the other, that the interpretation of Ariosto's assumed self-reflexive performance in the poem is essential to the interpretation of his authorial self-portrait as a whole. Therefore, while referring to the bigger picture of self-reflexivity drawn by these studies, I will deliberately narrow down the field of my inquiry to focus on a very specific self-reflexive aspect, namely the construction of the Narrator as Lover, standing on the threshold between epic and lyric. The events of his allegedly autobiographical story, I believe, cannot be neutralized as '*supposed* personal experience',[6] but need to be taken as seriously as any other fact in a fictional account. Furthermore, the Narrator's different attitudes towards different addressees and topics should be seen as facets and moods of the same fictional individual rather than as distinct narrative masks worn at different times.[7]

By means of a close reading of two stanzas from canto 35, in which the voice of the 'Narrator as Lover' is heard in a distinct way, I aim to draw together the pieces of his *fabula* ('story' in the narratological sense, as opposed to 'plot'), highlighting its lyric background and its key position on the map of self-reflexivity in the *Furioso*.[8] The major and nuanced role of lyric hypotexts discussed in recent critical contributions is essential to the self-reflexive staging of the Narrator-Lover and is not at odds with the vividly anti-Petrarchan vision of Ariosto supported by Sangirardi and Ferroni.[9] On the contrary, as highlighted by Cabani,[10] Ariosto's

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[4] David Quint, 'The figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's poem', in *Modern Language Notes*, 94:1 (1979), pp. 77-91; Robert W. Hanning, *Serious play: desire and authority in the poetry of Ovid, Chaucer, and Ariosto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Daniel Javitch, 'The Advertising of fictionality in *Orlando Furioso'*, in *Ariosto today. Contemporary perspectives*, ed. by Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella, and Roberto Fedi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 106-125; Klaus W. Hempfer, *Letture discrepanti. La ricezione dell'*Orlando furioso *nel Cinquecento. Lo studio della ricerca storica come euristica dell'interpretazione* (Ferrara: Panini, 2004 [1987]), pp. 83-118.

[5] Giuseppe Sangirardi, *Ludovico Ariosto* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2006); Giulio Ferroni, *Ariosto* (Rome: Salerno, 2008).

[6] Durling, p. 132 (emphasis mine).

[7] On the distinction between three different narrative 'personae' see Hanning, p. 186.

[8] I have selected this extract because of its uniqueness, which makes it interesting in its own right, and because of specific features that provide an ideal springboard for a wider reflection on a partly overlooked aspect of self-reflexivity in the poem.

[9] Elisa Curti, ' "Le lacrime e i sospiri degli amanti": lamenti di eroine e cavalieri tra *Inamoramento de Orlando* e *Orlando furioso*', in *Boiardo, Ariosto e i libri di battaglia*, ed. by Andrea Canova and Paola Vecchi Galli (Novara: Interlinea, 2007), pp. 433-51; Francesco Ferretti, 'Bradamante elegiaca. Costruzione del personaggio e intersezione di generi nell'*Orlando furioso*', *Italianistica*, 37.3 (2008), 63-75. See also Tina Matarrese, 'La lirica e la formazione del linguaggio epico-cavalleresco', and Marco Praloran, 'Petrarca in Ariosto: il "principium

use of Petrarch reinforces the notion of his ideological anti-Petrarchism and, more importantly, helps identify a particular blend of lyric and narrative which sets the most natural and comfortable tone for his poetic voice. Both in terms of language and vision, the creation of the Narrator-Lover responds to a fertile compromise between Ariosto's narrative vein and his dominant tendency to expand the discourse of the self.

The stanzas I have chosen appeared from the first edition of the poem (1516) and have been often quoted and interpreted;[11] yet, to my knowledge, they were never made the object of a word-by-word close reading, which is encouraged by the quasi lyric isolation of the two stanzas from the main body of the canto. In all of the three editions published during the life of Ariosto, these *ottave* are inserted halfway through the episode of Astolfo's journey to the Moon,[12] which enables the rescue of Orlando's wits and is therefore a necessary premise for the narrative denouement. Being placed at the beginning of a canto (1516: 32.1-2; 1521: 32.1-2; 1532: 35.1-2), these lines share a special threshold status with the corresponding exordial sections of the other cantos. In the exordia of the *Furioso*, which Voltaire admiringly described as metaphorical 'vestibule*s*' of enchanted palaces (the cantos themselves),[13] the narrative flow is interrupted and the voice of the Narrator comes to the forefront with moral

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constructionis"', in *I territori del petrarchismo: frontiere e sconfinamenti*, ed. by Cristina Montagnani (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), pp. 15-28 and 51-74. All these works build in the first place on the extensive survey carried out in Maria Cristina Cabani, *Fra omaggio e parodia: Petrarca e petrarchismo nel* Furioso (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1990).

[10] Maria Cristina Cabani, 'Le *Rime* e il *Furioso*', in *Fra satire e rime ariostesche*, ed. by Claudia Berra (Milan: Cisalpino, 2000), pp. 393-427. On the similarity between Ariosto's *capitoli* and the exordia of the poem see ibid., p. 420.

[11] More or less cursory readings of these stanzas are found in Durling, p. 162; Parker, p. 27; Ascoli, p. 305; Alberto Casadei, *Il percorso del* Furioso*: ricerche intorno alle redazioni del 1516 e del 1521* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), p. 80; Hempfer, p. 103; Sangirardi, p. 93; Berta, pp. 163-64; Ferroni, p. 204; Stefano Gulizia, 'L'Arcadia sulla luna: un'inversione pastorale nell'*Orlando Furioso*', *Modern Language Notes*, 123:1 (2008), 160-78 (172); Stefano Jossa, *Ariosto* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), pp. 61-62; Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Ariosto e la tradizione del proemio epico-cavalleresco', *Rassegna Europea di Letteratura Italiana*, 38 (2011), 117-146 (128 and 139); Lina Bolzoni, *Il lettore creativo. Percorsi cinquecenteschi fra memoria, gioco, scrittura* (Naples: Guida, 2012), pp. 71-72. Unfortunately I have not yet had the chance to read Ascoli's recent contribution on canto 35, forthcoming in *Lectura Ariosti*, ed. by F. Tomasi.

[12] '[…] al centro del viaggio lunare si colloca ancora un commento "minimalista" del narratore, un commento cioè che comporta una riduzione ai minimi termini del fantastico (in tutti i sensi) recupero del senno di Orlando […]' (Casadei, p. 80).

[13] 'Il y a dans l'*Orlando furioso* un mérite inconnu à toute l'antiquité, c'est celui de ses exordes. Chaque chant est comme un palais enchanté, dont le vestibule est toujours dans un goût différent, tantôt majestueux, tantôt simple, même grotesque. C'est de la morale, ou de la gaieté, ou de la galanterie, et toujours du naturel et de la vérité' (Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, ed. by Christiane Mervaud, in *Les oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 36 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1994), *ad vocem* 'Epopée – Arioste'). The exordium of canto 35 is precisely one of the examples quoted by Voltaire, alongside canto 24. On the tradition of exordia in chivalric narrative and Ariosto, see Riccardo Bruscagli, *Studi cavallereschi* (Florence: Società Ed. Fiorentina, 2003), pp. 103-117, who emphasises Ariosto's movement towards 'un sistema integralmente, indefettibilmente morale del proemio cavalleresco' (p. 109), and Delcorno Branca, 'Ariosto e la tradizione', who accordingly states that 'il registro "morale" è […] connotazione prevalente dei proemi del *Furioso*' (p. 130) and points out the novelty of its 'prologhi storici'.

comments, signs of fictionality, and metanarrative remarks. Similar formulas are very often found also outside exordial spaces;[14] yet, for all the labyrinthine and intrinsically metafictional nature of narration throughout the *Furioso*, its *esordi* mark the climax of the Narrator's obtrusive presence, temporarily suspending narrative imitation and breaking the spell of mimetic illusion; for this and other reasons, they appeared especially problematic from the normative standpoint of sixteenth-century poetics.[15] In the exordia, the noise of epic events is off, as it were, whereas the self-referential voice of the Narrator sounds louder and more distinct; his 'story', in which the story of Orlando and the knights is embedded, comes to occupy the whole scene of narration. This is all the more evident in the case of canto 35.

The story of the Narrator-Lover

Canto 34 ends on a typical metanarrative finale, which interrupts the act of narration and announces its reprise in the future ('vi sarà narrato'), as if the continuation of the narrative depended on the approving nod ('segno') of listeners, who are explicitly addressed and identified as a benevolent audience, usually yielding 'grata udienza' (*OF* 34.92,8). Far from taking up the textual fiction of performance and transmission, which, though more common in Boiardo, is not unusual in Ariosto's *congedi*, the exordium of canto 35 stands out as a remarkably self-contained unit. While drawing a clear net of thematic references to the episode of Astolfo on the Moon, these lines remain syntactically and graphically independent from what precedes and what follows them, because the *esordio* and the narration neither overlap in the measure of the same stanza nor share any textual connection, as the account of Astolfo's visit to the Palace of the 'Parche' restarts abruptly in the first line of stanza 3. This manifest textual isolation, which is further emphasised by the direct apostrophe to the beloved lady, 'madonna', highlights the sudden shift of focus from Astolfo's story to what I would term 'the story of the Narrator-Lover'. This is the only time the Narrator addresses the lady directly and does not refer to her in the third person, whereas the apostrophe to the patron and audience is very frequent in the poem. Therefore, this is the only time the third-person, silhouette-like character of the lady turns into a second-person, volumetric figure. The radical change the apostrophe causes in the communicative process could be compared to the

[14] The studies by Durling and Javitch provide an exhaustive catalogue of these remarks.
[15] Hans Honnacker, 'La storia della ricezione dei proemi dell'*Orlando Furioso* di Ludovico Ariosto nell'ambito del dibattito cinquecentesco sul poema epico', *Schifanoia*, 19 (1999), 55-65. On the opinions of Giraldi Cinzio, Pigna, Speroni and Castelvetro see Jossa, p. 43.

difference between a profile and a frontal portrait.[16] The deictic positioning of the lady and her three-dimensionality as a character – character in the sense of a full-rounded deuteragonist and 'other' to the Narrator, no matter how vaguely shaped – is the main reason why I read this exordium as the most revealing chapter of 'the story of the Narrator-Lover' in the *Furioso*; certainly a minimal and elliptic story, whose limited fragments surface discontinuously, inside and outside the exordia, but whose scope cannot be reduced to the mere story of the Narrator's storytelling – namely the metanarrative 'tematizzazione' of narration, in Hempfer's terms.[17] Not only does the Narrator famously address the characters of the story he is narrating (and pretend to be addressed by them), triggering a playful interference between extra- and intra-diegetic narration, but he also comments on the events he narrates with reference to his moral stance, emotions and personal experience. I will therefore argue that the content of the Narrator's autodiegetic narrative, namely its *fabula* in the narratological sense, clearly exceeds the scope of the self-conscious action of narrating and managing narration, encompassing episodes which must be placed, in a fictional chronology, well beyond the limits of his act of narration. In other words, his 'story' (again, in the narratological sense) as Lover – and as Poet, we will see – begins before his 'story' as Narrator.

The story of the Narrator-Lover revolves mainly around his relationship with two characters, the beloved lady and the patron, to whom he responds respectively as poet-lover and as poet-courtier; these two roles are distinct and yet constantly interwoven, as the threat of amorous folly hovers over the act of narration and its celebrative duties. In this sense, my position is significantly different from that of Hanning, who distinguishes the 'chronicler', the 'lover', and the 'courtier' as three narrative voices.[18] Predictably, the amorous side of the Narrator's story assimilates features of the lyric genre and is to a great extent lyric in inspiration and expression. This is true also of the opening stanzas of canto 35, whose unmistakeable lyric resonance is emphasised by their isolation – highlighting the metrical kinship between the *ottava* and the sonnet –[19] and by the apostrophe to the lady. However, the adventure evoked in these lines does not appear to be merely interior or experienced within an amorous duo, as it involves a third hypothetical subject ('chi'), a helper or mediator who could do for the

[16] Here I refer to the argument discussed by Meyer Shapiro in his classic 'Frontal and profile as symbolic forms', in *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, 2nd edn. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), pp. 37-49.

[17] Hempfer, p. 97.

[18] '[…] the successive entrance, in the opening octaves of *Orlando furioso*, of three main narrative voices–the chronicler, the lover, and the courtier–that describe and respond to the poem's three major (and ultimately thoroughly intertwined) spheres of activity, respectively: martial, amorous, and dynastic' (Hanning, p. 186).

[19] 'Completo, autosufficiente, di soli endecasillabi, il sonetto è la forma metrica che più si avvicina all'ottava' (Cabani, 'Le *Rime*', p. 401).

Narrator-Lover what Astolfo, precisely at this stage in the poem, is doing for Orlando. The first verse ('Chi salirà per me, madonna, in cielo') echoes the incipit and syntactic move of *OF* 3.1,1 ('Chi mi darà la voce e le parole'), also referred to an ascensional movement and ultimately to a metaphorical flight ('chi l'ale al verso presterà, che vole / tanto ch'arrivi all'alto mio concetto?', 3.1,3-4), in the context of the only invocation of the poem.[20] What is missing – and wished for – in canto 3 is the poetic 'furor' and art to celebrate Bradamante's descendants, whereas in canto 35 what is supposedly lost is 'ingegno' itself. Significantly, the invocation in canto 3 is addressed to Apollo, while the question in canto 35 is directed to 'madonna'; the dim character – just slightly more than a conventional grammatical presence – who will hypothetically ascend 'in cielo' to rescue the Narrator's wits, is in fact mentioned within the very question addressed to the lady. Therefore, precisely when the story of the Narrator-Lover seems to gain access to an extra-lyric dimension, it closes up, once again, into the lyric domain. This contradictory move supports, from a different perspective, Hempfer's idea that the 'soggettivizzazione' of the act of narration in the *Furioso* is in most cases mediated by an intersection with the lyric genre.[21] One could argue, then, that the self-reflexivity exhibited in the exordia is a sort of derivative or parasite self-reflexivity,[22] building on the constitutional self-reflexivity of another genre: epic self-reflection would be performed through the mediation of the lyric discourse. Lyric poetry does not 'imitate' actions, indirectly justifying the criticism directed against Ariosto's *proemi* from the perspective of normative poetics centred on *mimesis*.[23]

At the end of the second line, the Narrator's wits are given, hyperbolically, as already lost ('*perduto* ingegno'), whilst just two lines later, via the combined action of polyptoton ('*perdendo*') and rhyme (v*egno* [ing*egno*]'), the loss is de-emphasised and brought back to the dimension of uncertainty that dominates the Narrator-Lover's story from the very start – 'se da colei che tal *quasi* m'ha fatto…' (*OF* 1.2,5). As is well known, the Narrator-Lover's story focuses on his continuous struggle to save his wits from amorous folly, and could be described as the story of a narration 'on condition that' ('*se* da colei …'), where narration

[20] As a possible source for *OF* 35.1 Casadei (p. 80) mentions *Deuteronomy*: 'Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "*Who will ascend into heaven* to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?"' (30.11-12, emphasis mine).

[21] '[…] la soggettivizzazione del procedimento narrativo si compie essenzialmente mediante il ricorso a possibilità appartenenti a un altro genere, vale a dire la lirica a partire da Petrarca […] Mentre […] per i canzonieri l'autoriflessione dell'io lirico è costitutiva, in un testo narrativo l'istanza di mediazione in tal modo si rende autonoma e si distanzia – se stessa e il lettore – dalla "storia" da mediare' (Hempfer, p. 103).

[22] On this aspect, Hempfer, pp. 101-107, is essential.

[23] It is only later in the century that lyric poetry will be defined as imitating emotions and thus indirectly drawn back within the order. See Guido Mazzoni, *Sulla poesia moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 43-63.

itself appears to be performed in lucid intervals (coinciding with the cantos), isolated within a dominant madness.[24] In this sense, the narrated story is epic but *the story of its narration* is essentially lyric, as highlighted by the matching moves of the most 'epic' and the most 'lyric' exordia (3.1: 'Chi darà'; 35.1:'Chi salirà'), eventually taken up in affirmative form at the beginning of the last canto (46.1,4: 'a *chi* nel mar per tanta via *m'ha scorto*'). The metaphorical arrow shot from the lady's eyes ignited the situation that caused the Narrator's progressive loss of 'ingegno', unstoppable and still ongoing in the present ('*ognior* perdendo vegno'). Even though the past participle ('perduto') can be logically explained also in the terms of a partial loss ('the amount of wits I have lost *so far*'), no doubt the movement from past participle to gerund has an attenuating effect; the extreme situation introduced in the first two lines is then further mitigated in lines 5-6, where the Narrator-Lover does not complain about his misfortune, provided the disruptive process does not go on, stepping beyond the present level ('segno') of his folly. The alternative, once again defined by a continuous tense ('va scemando'), would be for him to become like Orlando, who at this point in the poem is already mad. Significantly, this dark scenario is not evoked by means of a simple comparison (say, 'qual Orlando'), rather through a metanarrative periphrasis clearly focused on the narrative persona ('qual *ho descritto* Orlando'), with reference to the stanzas in which the same Narrator-Lover that is now reflecting on his own potential madness has narrated the features and consequences of Orlando's madness (cantos 23-24). The present of his homodiegetic narrative enunciation coincides with his unstable present condition, verging on a frightening future, while his heterodiegetic narration of Orlando's folly is referred to the past.

The beginning of the second stanza provides an answer to the question left open in the first two lines of the previous stanza ('Chi salirà…'). The hypothetical character-mediator ('chi'), in the role of Astolfo, has now disappeared, because the Narrator-Lover is all of a sudden aware that his 'ingegno', far from being lost on the Moon, is erring on a more earthly planet, that of his beloved's beauties. The second-person female subject, directly addressed in the first stanza, now takes on a more physical presence ('Ne' bei *vostri* occhi e nel sereno viso, / nel sen d'avorio e alabastrini poggi'); the emphasis on the breasts, in perfect rhyme with the verb 'poggi', connects her to the sensual portraits of Alcina, Angelica, and Olimpia, and to

[24] 'Ben mi si potria dir: - Frate, tu vai / l'altrui mostrando, e non vedi il tuo fallo. - / Io vi rispondo che comprendo assai, / or che di mente ho lucido intervallo;' (*OF* 24.3,1-4). See Durling, p. 176 and Elissa B. Weaver, 'A reading of the interlaced plot of the *Orlando furioso*: the three cases of love madness', in *Ariosto today. Contemporary perspectives*, ed. by Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella, and Roberto Fedi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 126-153, especially p. 132. Hanning, p. 235, highlighted that, additionally, the Narrator exhibits his lack of omniscience.

Ariosto's own lyric poems.[25] Accordingly, the referential force of the deictic ('*queste* labbia') creates the illusion of the bodily presence of an eager and fully anthropomorphised Narrator,[26] whose three-dimensional fictional life, made up of pain and desire, extends beyond the realm of the mere act of narrating. The captivating pleasure of his errancy is conveyed through the lingering gerund ('se ne va errando'), which contrasts rather sharply with the future tense ('corrò') that expresses the action through which the Narrator-Lover will forcibly take back his 'ingegno' with his own lips. The use of the verb 'errare' assimilates the erotically absorbed wandering of the wits on the beloved's body to the erring of the knights following the object of their desires, while the strong caesura ('se ne va errando; et io…') emphasises the role of the subject ('et io') and at the same time his separation from the vagabond wits, explorer of beauties. What could be read as a witty and interestingly subjective rewriting of a conventional topos of modesty (''l mio [ingegno] non credo che tanto alto alloggi') does in fact imply a strong interior splitting in the Narrator-Lover and a complex mirroring of the characters whose story he is narrating as extradiegetic narrator.[27] The Narrator's identification with Orlando ('dubito […]/ di venir *tale*...') here gives way to his identification with Astolfo, who now travels to rescue Orlando's wits (and, coincidentally, his own) but has been himself the victim of love, stuck into the self-enclosed circle of sensual pleasure and then turned into a myrtle tree in Alcina's garden (*OF* 6.28-56).[28] The Narrator-Lover displays traits of both characters, being the saviour of his own self, but he definitely has no armour to put back on and no holy battlefield to return to, as implied by the opposition between Orlando and himself in the exordium of canto 9:[29]

Già savio e pieno fu d'ogni rispetto,
e de la santa Chiesa difensore;

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[25] See *OF* 7.10-16 (Alcina), 10.95-96 (Angelica), 11.33 and 67-69 (Olimpia). Gulizia, p. 172, describes the double occurrence of 'poggi' as 'una diabolica *aequivocatio* imperniata sul rimante petrarchesco *poggi*'.

[26] A clear reference to the Narrator's body is also in *OF* 14.134, 7-8, where he has lost his voice ('io son già rauco') and needs to rest.

[27] See Durling, pp. 160-63, and Ascoli, p. 1.

[28] 'Io mi godea le delicate membra; / pareami aver qui tutto il ben raccolto / che fra i mortali in più parti si smembra, / a chi più ed a chi meno e a nessun molto; / né di Francia né d'altro mi rimembra: / stavami sempre a contemplar quel volto: / ogni pensiero, ogni mio bel disegno / in lei finia, né passava oltre il segno' (*OF* 6.47). The pleasure of amorous captivity is explored in the most sensual vein of Ariosto's lyric, for instance in the sonnet *Aventuroso carcere soave*, number 13 in the edition of his *Rime* published in Ludovico Ariosto, *Opere minori*, ed. by Cesare Segre (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1954), henceforth abbreviated as *R*. Ascoli, pp. 266-70, has singled out most effectively the connections between the episode of Ruggiero on Alcina's island and Astolfo's journey, as well as the 'convergence' of Orlando and Ruggiero in the lunar adventure – 'He [Astolfo] cures the madness of the former and repeats, parodies, and/or perfects the education of the latter' (p. 304).

[29] A moral interpretation of Orlando's ingratitude towards God in the light of religious sources has been proposed by Nicolò Maldina, 'Ariosto, l'ingratitudine di Orlando e gli amori di Sansone nel *Furioso*', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 88 (2014), 127-74 (with reference to *OF* 9.1, especially 165-67).

or per un vano amor, poco del zio,
e di sé poco, e men cura di Dio. (9.1, 5-8)

Ma l'escuso io pur troppo, e mi rallegro
nel mio difetto aver compagno tale;
ch'anch'io sono *al mio ben languido et egro*,
sano e gagliardo a seguitare il male. (9. 2, 1-4 [emphasis mine])

The Narrator-Lover blames himself for sharing the paladin's guilt, being equally lukewarm and reluctant in pursuing his unspecified good ('ben', corresponding to Orlando's military duties in defence of Christianity), and similarly vigorous in pursuing his 'male', with the antithesis strongly highlighted through chiasmus. In canto 35 his project of self-rescue is proclaimed with energetic confidence and at the same time sounds ambiguously self-indulgent, as the recovery of his wits implies a journey on his lady's beautiful body, whose ivory and alabaster landscape ('sen' can also mean 'gulf', while 'poggi' literally means 'hills') is implicitly contrasted to the Moon and Paradise. In other words, the re-conjunction of the Narrator-Lover's body and mind, whose violent separation has caused the terrible deeds of the mad Orlando, will literally take place on the loved body, and not away from it, in what appears to be the most audacious triumph of Ariosto's ideological anti-Petrarchism.[30] Despite, and even because of, the massive intertextual dialogue with Petrarch, what most strikingly distinguishes Ariosto's treatment of amorous themes in both his lyric and narrative poetry is the importance given to sensual gratification and 'una nozione dell'amore come felicità possibile'.[31] For all the highly contradictory features of love in the *Orlando furioso*, no reader can fail to acknowledge the vivid rendering of physical states of amorous pain, joy and desire, which is relatively rare in the Italian 'high' literary tradition and is strongly indebted to Boccaccio, fifteenth-century court poets and especially Latin models, whose influence has long been detected in Ariosto's *rime*.[32]

In my analysis so far I have intentionally left out the final line of the second stanza, which in fact re-establishes the suspended condition in which the Narrator-Lover finds himself at the beginning of his narration. The impetuous drive conveyed by the future tense ('corrò') is

[30] A further anti-Petrarchan hint is the subverted use of the rhyme *paradiso:viso*, singled out by Cabani, *Fra omaggio e parodia*, pp. 63-64. '[…] la guarigione dalla follia amorosa […] è data solo dalla soddisfazione del desiderio; il vero paradiso è il corpo della donna […]' (Bolzoni, p. 72). According to Durling, p. 163, the Narrator's compliment here is 'magnificently impudent'. In this respect, I agree with Jossa, p. 61 ('Orlando ha potuto riavere il suo senno grazie al viaggio di Astolfo sulla luna, ma per il poeta l'unica risposta all'amore è l'amore stesso, che si appaga solo di sé'), whereas I do not endorse the way he implicitly identifies author/poet and narrator ('se Ariosto è come Orlando', p. 59).

[31] Ferroni, p. 41. Cabani and Sangirardi have rightly emphasised the absence of guilt and repentance (Cabani, 'Le *Rime*', pp. 395 and 418; Sangirardi, p. 63).

[32] See Andrea Comboni, 'Il canzoniere ariostesco e la poesia delle corti padane: alcune annotazioni', and Stefano Carrai, 'Classicismo dell'Ariosto lirico', in *Fra satire e rime ariostesche*, pp. 291-308 and 379-92.

abruptly arrested by the counteraction of a condition: that the beloved, again addressed directly in the second person, agrees to let him take back his wits ('*se vi par* ch'io lo riabbia'). On the one hand, the Narrator takes on the charge of his own rescue, proclaiming himself ready and willing to embark on a journey which is parallel and opposed to Astolfo's – parallel because it may allow him to restore his 'ingegno', opposed as it overtly indulges in the desires that, on the Moon, are unmasked as illusionary; on the other hand, he immediately – and for the only time in the poem – addresses the lady ('madonna'), whom he then identifies as the only one who could ultimately give back his wits ('se vi par') and in a sense be his own 'Astolfo', or, perhaps more precisely, what God was to Astolfo in enabling his divinely ordained journey, and the coincidental and temporary restoration of his wits (*OF* 34.86,7-8). The lyric exordium of canto 35, therefore, bridges the gap between the proem in canto 1 and the exordium of canto 3 by handing to the lady full power over the Narrator-Lover's performance – including his role as 'chronicler' and 'courtier', in Hanning's terms – in keeping with the Propertian proem of Ariosto's unfinished *Obizzeide*, directly addressed to the beloved.[33] The apostrophe to the lady is the point where the Narrator as Lover most prominently protrudes from his narration into a conative and performative dimension, pointing at something allegedly standing outside the realm of his narration – 'madonna' – something addressed in the second and not referred to in the third person.[34] This outward movement is much more common in celebrative or metanarrative passages, where the Narrator very frequently uses the 'voi' to refer to Ippolito or to the readers. The direct address to the anonymous lady is all the more interesting because it appears right before the praise of Ippolito (mentioned with his full name in stanza 8 and addressed in stanza 14) and at the beginning of the most explicitly metaliterary canto of *Orlando Furioso*, dominated by Saint John's self-reflexive speech. To fully appreciate the combined effect of the two apostrophes in terms of self-reflexivity, it is necessary to analyse the distinction between their addressees, the two main characters in the story of the Narrator-Lover; the distinction between 'madonna' and Ippolito also concerns the supposed self-representation of the author in the text – a possibility that Ariosto explores and undermines at the same time.

[33] 'Voi l'usato favor, occhi soavi / date all'impresa, voi che del mio ingegno, / occhi miei belli, avete ambe le chiavi. / altri vada in Parnaso o a Cirra; io vegno / dolci occhi, a voi; […]' (*R*, capitolo 2, 4-8). For a discussion of this proem and its Propertian source see Sangirardi, p. 93. Delcorno Branca, 'Ariosto e la tradizione', notices that the question addressed to the lady occurs 'in un punto di massima tensione del confronto tra realtà e finzione' (p. 128) and explains it as an exception in the system of Ariosto's exordia, in her view justified on a stylistic basis ('a un livello stilistico sostenuto appartiene l'apertura di 35,1').

[34] In Ariosto's *Rime* (*R*) the word 'madonna' is used as incipit in sonnets 19 and 25.

The Narrator-Lover, the lady, and Ippolito

Scholars have devoted extensive attention to this topic, often assuming the Narrator as a straightforward self-portrait of Ariosto or, in the best cases, acknowledging the distinction between 'the Poet' and Ariosto but then inadvertently identifying them. As Hempfer has made clear, the theoretical distinction between narrator and author is all the more necessary when the present of the narrator becomes self-reflexive, namely when the authorial narrator, who is not part of the story, becomes the object of narration as the one who produces the text.[35] This is certainly the case in the *Furioso*; nevertheless, I will deliberately avoid the label 'authorial narrator', which, in my view, encourages the confusion between author and narrator and, more importantly, obliterates the crucial role of love in the 'story' of the Narrator, reducing it to the mere story of a narration, whereas it is, ultimately, the lyric story of an epic narration threatened by love's destructive effects.[36] This is why I have referred to the Narrator as 'the Narrator-Lover', who – as homodiegetic narrator – narrates about himself loving and narrating, while at the same time – as heterodiegetic narrator – he is narrating the story of Orlando and the knights.[37] Large areas of the Narrator-Lover as character remain out of reach; his experience, as far as it is narrated in his own words, revolves essentially around two conditions – being in love and writing/reciting narrative poetry – which interweave through the process by which narration itself takes place, under the constant threat of amorous folly. The Narrator-Lover narrates the story of Orlando in the intervals of his own madness, which means, to some extent, in the intervals of his lyric discourse. In fact he is not a flat figure, a poetic voice without a past; he has loved many times, unhappily, and he has written about love. The passages in which his amorous experience is made explicit – mainly exordia – are all part of the same lyric story (a fictional first-person account), while often implying a comparison between the Narrator's experience and that of a character in the epic story he is narrating: Orlando (*OF* 1.2; 9.1-2; 24.2-3; 30.3-4; 35.1-2), Rinaldo and Angelica (2.1-2), Grifone (16), Rodomonte (29). The exordium of canto 2, addressed to Love, is the most

[35] Hempfer, p. 101. The narrator presents himself as the author of the text and even portrays himself in the physical act of writing (*OF* 33.128, 7-8), mentioning his 'foglio' (33.128,7), his 'penna' (15.9) and, crucially, his 'carta' (46.1), possibly a map but also the poem itself (Ascoli, p. 20). On the ambiguous status of the narrator, useful observations are in Casadei, pp. 78-80.

[36] Bruscagli, p. 111, singles out love as one of the two main thematic areas in which the poem's 'macrotesto proemiale' and Ariosto's *Satire* overlap; one of his examples is canto 35. It is worth emphasising that, despite the quantitative prevalence of other themes in the exordia, love has in fact a key role because its consequences determine the possibility (or impossibility) itself of narration.

[37] In this sense, the *Furioso* differs from the *Commedia* and *À la recherche du temps perdu* also in a more basic narratological sense than the one discussed by Donato, pp. 54-57 ('Ariosto's narrative does not fit into the canonic forms of a literature that claims the possibility of disclosing the truth of desire').

explicitly centred on unrequited love, both in universal terms and with reference to the Narrator-Lover's own condition ('Gir non *mi* lasci al facil guado e chiaro, / […] / da chi disia il *mio* amor tu *mi* richiami, / e chi *m*'ha in odio vuoi ch'adori et ami'; *OF* 2.1, 4-8), further explored in canto 9 ([…] al *mio* ben languido et egro, / sano e gagliardo a seguitare il male. *OF* 2.1-4). A clearer background to his suffering is provided at the beginning of canto 16, where the Narrator-Lover hints not simply at his painful experience of love but at both his amorous pains and his 'register' of them; he has gathered ('raccolte') and probably written down his sufferings, to the extent that he can speak about them artfully and with expertise, as the underlying Propertian source would suggest:

Gravi pene in amor si provan molte,
di che patito io n'ho la maggior parte,
e quelle in danno mio sì ben raccolte,
ch'io ne posso parlar come per arte.
Però s'io dico e s'ho detto altre volte,
e quando in voce e quando in vive carte,
ch'un mal sia lieve, un altro acerbo e fiero,
date credenza al mio giudicio vero.

Io dico e dissi, e dirò fin ch'io viva,
che chi si truova in degno laccio preso,
se ben di sé vede sua donna schiva,
se in tutto aversa al suo desire acceso;
se bene Amor d'ogni mercede il priva,
poscia che 'l tempo e la fatica ha speso;
pur ch'altamente abbia locato il core,
pianger non de', se ben languisce e muore. (*OF* 16.1-2)

The movement from experiences ('patito […] ho') to their record ('raccolte', which Segre paraphrases as either 'intese' or 'annotate'),[38] and eventually to their description in words ('parlar') supports the Narrator-Lover's claim for the reliability and truthfulness of his amorous discourse, conveying a trustful opinion ('date credenza al mio giudicio vero'). The reference to other words previously ('altre volte') spoken or written by the Narrator-Lover is reinforced by the emphatic reprise with polyptoton ('s'io dico e s'ho detto'; 'io dico e dissi, e dirò'), connecting the two stanzas and stretching from the past to the future ('fin ch'io viva'). From his past to the present the Narrator-Lover has been a lover and a lyric poet, and we can assume he will continue to be both in the future. The Narrator's main discourse – the discourse of his life before the poem – seems to be a lyric discourse, in which epic narration is an interval and an exception. The specific topic introduced in the last two lines of the first stanza and explored in stanzas 2 and 3 is the distinction between different kinds of amorous

[38] See Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. by Cesare Segre (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), *ad locum.*

pain, on which the Narrator claims to theorise out of his own experience.[39] On the one hand (16.2), lovers who suffer for a noble object of desire must endure their torment and refrain from tears; on the other (16.3), those who have misplaced their heart in someone proud and corrupted must cry. The implicit assumption is that the Narrator-Lover has experienced both kinds of love but is now steadily in the condition of the first lovers, suffering for someone noble. This wisdom, despite its bitter taste, is strongly at odds with the radical condemnation of love as 'insania' and alienation – in tune with the upcoming account of Orlando's folly – pronounced in the exordium of canto 24:[40]

Chi mette il piè su l'amorosa pania,
cerchi ritrarlo, e non v'inveschi l'ale;
che non è in somma amor, se non insania,
a giudizio de' savi universale:
e se ben come Orlando ognun non smania,
suo furor mostra a qualch'altro segnale.
E quale è di pazzia segno più espresso
che, per altri voler, perder se stesso?

Which 'giudizio' should we keep to? His own (16.1,8) or that of the wise (24.1,4)? According to Durling, the inconsistency between these and other exordia is not problematic, because the condition of the fictional Poet, lovesick and mad, would account for his contradictory attitudes towards women.[41] 'Donne' are addressed directly in the exordia of cantos 22 (1,1 – 'Cortesi donne', as in the opening apostrophe of canto 38), 28 (1,1 – where the Narrator declares his subjection to women and his intention to celebrate them, further explored in 37.1-24), 29 (2,1 – against Rodomonte's misogyny), and 30.3-4, where the Narrator attributes his folly ('vaneggio') to his beloved enemy ('la nimica mia'), comparing his own innocent madness to Orlando's ('Non men son fuor di me, che fosse Orlando; / e non son men di lui di scusa degno', 30.4,1-2):

Ben spero, donne, in vostra cortesia
aver da voi perdon, poi ch'io vel chieggio.
Voi scusarete, che per frenesia,
vinto da l'aspra passion, vaneggio.

[39] The Narrator-Lover's experience is claimed as evidence also in *OF* 23.112,3-4, with reference to Orlando verging on madness: 'Credete a *chi n'ha fatto esperimento*, / che questo è 'l duol che tutti gli altri passa'.
[40] For a comprehensive overview of the sources of this exordium, including Petrarch and Bembo, see Klaus W. Hempfer, *Testi e contesti: saggi post-ermeneutici sul Cinquecento* (Naples: Liguori, 1998), p. 197, and Delcorno Branca, 'Ariosto e la tradizione', who highlighted the Horatian image of life as 'selva' (pp. 136-37).
[41] However, Durling ultimately downplays the serious role of love as a theme, endorsing a mainly ironic interpretation. With reference to *OF* 24.1,7-8 (22.1,7-8 in the 1516 edition) Casadei, p. 79, states that 'il narratore del *Furioso* non è un moralista o un filosofo *tout court*, né (essendo "dentro il ballo") può mai applicare con costanza i precetti che talora indica al suo pubblico'.

Date la colpa alla nimica mia,
che mi fa star, ch'io non potrei star peggio,
e mi fa dir quel di ch'io son poi gramo:
sallo Idio, s'ella ha il torto; essa, s'io l'amo. (*OF* 30.3)

Therefore, it is after having repeatedly – and contradictorily – addressed women in general, and after having expressed his hope to come across a faithful woman after many ungrateful ones (27.123-24), that the Narrator-Lover turns to 'madonna' directly, at the beginning of canto 35.

The anonymity of 'madonna' has important implications, which can be illuminated by looking at the other pole around which the Narrator's story gravitates – Ippolito. The most straightforward difference between the two poles – the patron and the beloved – is in fact the contrast between the exhibition of a name, 'Ippolito' (1.3,3; 3.50,2, 56,5, 60,8; 7.62,6; 13.68,8; 26.51,2; 36.2,5; 41.67,4; 46.86,1, 88,7 and 99,4), iterated in the full form 'Ippolito da Este' precisely in canto 35 (8,5-7), and the equally exhibited silence on another name (the lady's). The patron is repeatedly addressed and unmistakably identified with a historical figure, who has a definite status both inside and outside the text; the beloved, according to the fiction, has an existence of her own outside the text, but only once is addressed directly (35.1,1) and cannot be identified with a historical figure, despite the notorious and possibly over-emphasised winks to Alessandra Benucci, Ariosto's partner in life.[42] My point is obviously not to establish whether the woman is Alessandra or not – here I should only be concerned with the role of Ippolito and the beloved inside the text – but rather to highlight the gap between the ways in which the patron and the lady are represented, given roles, and involved in the assumed self-projection of the author. On the one hand, the references to Ippolito are individualising in that they anchor the Narrator-Lover to a specific point in time, to epic duties and historical circumstances, emphasising the ambiguous overlapping of the Narrator and Ariosto.[43] On the other, the references to the beloved and the Narrator-Lover's amorous life tend to draw the profile of a timeless, universal lover, lyric and exemplary – in a Petrarchan sense – of an anti-Petrarchan discourse of love, where the interior struggle of the self may be overcome by requited love and not by repentance.

[42] On this specific point I agree with Durling rather than with Ferroni (p. 206) or Bigi, who in his commentary *ad locum* states: 'La donna a cui l'A. qui si rivolge non può essere che la medesima di cui parla negli altri passi […] in cui accenna alla propria passione amorosa, e cioè, con ogni probabilità, Alessandra Benucci' (Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, ed. by Emilio Bigi (Milan: Rusconi, 1982)).

[43] The clearest example of the overlapping between narrator and author through the mention of specific historical detail can be found in the two references to the battle of Polesella (*OF* 36.2-9 and 40.1-5).

Ariosto's contemporaries featured in the *Furioso* are part of the fiction set up by the poem and at the same time are clearly cast 'in the role of themselves'. The same conclusion has often been assumed to be true for Ariosto himself. No doubt it is in the final canto that the Narrator and the author most tend to converge, so that, centuries before the narratological distinction between narrator and author, a woodcut could bluntly identify the ship entering the port in canto 46 as 'AR.[IOSTO]'.[44] McPhail has interpreted references to contemporary events and people in the *Furioso* as 'deictic' in that they would intentionally point at the historical figure of Ariosto.[45] However, most of these references do not break the mimetic illusion and are kept at a distance through a rhetorical and imaginative negotiation between the intention to refer and not to refer to the present; as Albert Ascoli and Marianne Shapiro have explained in detail, the majority of hints at historical figures and events in the poem are ingenuously filtered and distanced through *ekphrasis* and prophecy.[46] On a more basic level, it is also worth mentioning that contemporary figures, despite being given their real names, in most cases are presented in the third person and, therefore, not involved in a direct interaction with the Narrator, even though the possessive 'nostro'/'nostri'/'mio' and temporal adverbs assign them to the same time.[47] Furthermore, Durling noticed that, among Ariosto's contemporaries, only three are addressed directly by name (Ippolito d'Este, Alfonso d'Este, and Federico Fregoso),[48] whereas normally apostrophe is used with reference to the patron and the generic audience. Even the friends evoked in canto 46, although presented without the mediation of magic or painting, are referred to in the third person, as in a catalogue describing what the Narrator sees on arrival ('Veggo'; 'Ecco'). As his metaphorical ship approaches this

[44] This woodcut first appeared in the in quarto edition of the poem published in Venice by Valgrisi in 1556 (*Orlando furioso di m.* LODOVICO ARIOSTO […] *al quale di nuovo sono aggiunte le Annotationi, gli avvertimenti et le dichiarationi di* GIROLAMO RUSCELLI, *la vita dell'autore, descritta da signor Giovambattista Pigna* […], in Venetia, appresso Vicenzo Valgrisi nella bottega d'Erasmo, 1556). See Giuseppe Agnelli, Giuseppe Ravegnani, *Annali delle edizioni ariostee* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1933), I, pp. 98-110 and *Donne cavalieri incanti follia: viaggio attraverso le immagini dell'*Orlando Furioso: catalogo della mostra, ed. by Lina Bolzoni and Carlo Alberto Girotto (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 2012), pp. 24-25.

[45] Eric McPhail, 'Ariosto and the prophetic moment', *MLN*, 116:1 (2001), 30-53, mentions 'historical deixis, whereby the poet speaks not only in his own person but also in his own time and place' (p. 37), and 'the deictic immediacy that Ariosto achieves through prophecy, prologue, and impertinent intervention' (p. 38).

[46] Marianne Shapiro, *The poetics of Ariosto* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), pp. 192-239; Ascoli, pp. 22-23 and p. 262.

[47] See for instance *OF* 14.10,1-2, 'Come di capitani bisogna *ora* / che 'l re di Francia al campo suo proveggia, / così Marsilio et Agramante *allora*' (emphasis mine); *OF* 43.148,1-7, 'Quivi non era Federico *allora* / […] / come fer già molti anni, et *oggi* fanno'.

[48] See *OF* 14.2,4 and 42.20-22. I would add to Durling's list the lines addressing Francesco d'Avalos in *OF* 37.20,3-8.

virtual court,[49] the Narrator finds himself in a position similar to that occupied by Bradamante in canto 3: both are the addressees of a vision displaying a sequence of historical individuals to their eyes; however, the same Narrator who described Melissa's prophecy to Bradamante is here voicing his own vision, in an autodiegetic account; moreover, what he sees is not set in the future but in his own time.[50] As the contemporary 'donne e cavalieri' step out of their ekphrastic frame, the story of the Narrator-Lover finally joins the epic fiction, and the future becomes the present. The future turns into the present also in the case of Ippolito, who is both represented (as future) and addressed (as present) in the text.

The tension between different chronological dimensions is more puzzling in the case of the anonymous 'madonna'. Here, the future does *not* turn into the present and the character resists a straightforward assimilation into contingency. The Narrator cannot address the beloved by name, not only out of respect, but because he is moving inside the conventions of the lyric genre. It is not by chance that anonymity in poetry becomes the very object of discourse when the Narrator describes an octagonal fountain contemplated by Rinaldo, including what has been almost universally interpreted as a playful representation of Ariosto and his partner Alessandra:[51]

Dolce quantunque e pien di grazia tanto
fosse il suo bello e ben formato segno,
parea sdegnarsi che con umil canto
ardisse lei lodar sì rozzo ingegno,
com'era *quel* che sol, senz'altri a canto
(*non so* perché), le fu fatto sostegno.
Di tutto 'l resto erano i nomi sculti;
sol questi duo l'artefice avea occulti. (*OF*, 42.95 [emphasis mine])

This can be reasonably identified as a disguised portrait of the author through the mouth of the Narrator-Lover, who claims he does not know who the two figures are and why this poet is alone in supporting the statue. The separation between the Narrator and the anonymous poet, emphasised by the opposition between first person ('non so') and third person ('quel'), firmly if playfully undermines the assumed consistency of the authorial projection in the figure of the Narrator-Lover. Interestingly then, the clearest projection of the author hidden in

[49] Ariosto added a number of celebrative sequences in the 1532 edition, in which, as often suggested, the court is eventually a utopian project rather than a social reality, so that, for all the names praised, 'conta il valore esemplare anziché quello *referenziale*' (Jossa, p. 121, emphasis mine).

[50] Weaver, p. 136, has distinguished between 'the implied court public' and the 'listener or reader'. 'The destruction of Atlante's palace […] both prepares and prefigures the ending of the *Furioso* when the reader will be set free from the spell of the poem to confront his own historicity' (Quint, p. 84).

[51] See for example Cabani, 'Le *Rime*', pp. 393-94 ('Fra i poeti Ariosto ritrae anche se stesso, nell'atto di cantare l'amata Alessandra […]. Il ritratto di Alessandra è insieme 'realistico' e 'letterario').

the text cannot be superimposed onto the image of the Narrator-Lover that dominates the text, but rather constitutes a '*mise en abyme*' of the author inside the discourse of the Narrator. Moreover, the allusions to Alessandra usually detected in stanza 93,5-6 ('sotto puro velo, in nera gonna'; 'senza oro e gemme, in un vestire schietto') suggest her identification with the woman portrayed in the alabaster statue, not necessarily with the cruel 'madonna' loved by the Narrator-Lover – even though both are disdainful towards their suitors. The distance between the Narrator and the author seems confirmed in stanza 27.132, added in the 1532 edition, where the Narrator-Lover describes a faithful woman who could be assimilated to the 'Cortesi donne e grate al vostro amante' (22.1,1) and whom he hopes to come across in the future, contrasting her to common women and to the ones loved so far:

Se ben di quante io n'abbia fin qui amate,
non n'abbia mai trovata una fedele,
perfide tutte io non vo' dir né ingrate,
ma darne colpa al mio destin crudele.
Molte or ne sono, e più già ne son state,
che non dan causa ad uom che si querele;
ma mia fortuna vuol che s'una ria
ne sia tra cento, io di lei preda sia.

Pur vo' tanto cercar prima ch'io mora,
anzi prima che 'l crin più mi s'imbianchi,
che forse dirò un dì, che per me ancora
alcuna sia che di sua fé non manchi.
Se questo avvien (che di speranza fuora
io non ne son), non fia mai ch'io mi stanchi
di farla, a mia possanza, gloriosa
con lingua e con inchiostro, e in verso e in prosa. (*OF* 27.123-24)

While reinforcing the Narrator's anti-Petrarchan discourse on love as the only possible solution to lovesickness, and ultimately to itself,[52] this addition deepens rather than solving the lack of correspondence between the Narrator's beloved in the fiction and the author's lover in reality, because, if the two women had to coincide, the future prophesied in the fountain should coincide with the future-turned-present of Ippolito and Ariosto's contemporaries, whereas the hypothetical meeting with the faithful woman, strictly speaking, projects farther than the present of narration ('forse dirò un dì'). Without overlooking the possible gallant and ironic homage to the lady implied by this very contradiction, it is worth observing that the poetry to which the 'rozzo ingegno' is connected in canto 42 seems to be

[52] 'Invece di leggere l'ottava in chiave biografica […] sarà opportuno restituirle il posto che essa occupa all'interno dell'architettura del poema: l'amore lascia aperto lo spazio della possibilità e della fiducia […]. "E in verso e in prosa" sarà la celebrazione dell'amore fedele proprio come la storia di Orlando è "cosa non detta in prosa mai né in rima"[…]' (Jossa, p. 113).

amorous poetry devoted to the woman, whilst the poetic effort from which the beloved prevents the Narrator-Lover's 'ingegno' is epic. Significantly, then, through the Narrator-Lover in canto 42, Ariosto indirectly stages himself as a lyric poet, mirroring his own *rime* and the Narrator-Lover himself.[53]

Facing 'madonna'

This eventually brings me back to the exordium of canto 35 and the clash of lyric and epic produced by the apostrophe to the lady (1) and Ippolito (14). The climax of the poem's epic self-reflection, Saint John's speech in canto 35, is preceded by the most lyric, self-contained and anti-epic moment for the Narrator-Lover – the point where 'madonna' is addressed directly and the parallel fates of Orlando and the Narrator diverge most significantly ('Per riaver l'ingegno mio m'è aviso / che *non bisogna che* per l'aria io poggi / nel cerchio de la luna o in paradiso;'). Furthermore, it is precisely in canto 35 that we can gather a fleeting and implicit portrait of the author as epic poet: the image of the swans, opposed to the crows and white as Ippolito's 'insegna',[54] is 'in the third person', in the sense that it is objectified and externalised, and clearly distinguished from the Narrator speaking in the first person, despite his connection to Ippolito as addressee. In this respect, both the statue of the poet in canto 42 and the swans are different from the frequent metaphorical self-portraits of the Narrator as, for instance, weaver, magician, or painter, which are partly conveyed through the figures of Merlino and Atlante and partly set 'in the first person', being connected to the Narrator-Lover's own metanarrative and metafictional discourse, and hence to his own narrative persona ('Di molte fila esser bisogno parme / a condur la gran tela ch'*io lavoro'*; *OF* 13. 81.1-2). As argued by Durling and Hempfer, normally metanarration and metafiction, including *mise en abyme* (Atlante's castle, Cassandra's pavilion) and 'pseudo-authentications' such as the references to Turpino,[55] emphasise the control exerted by the Narrator over his plot. However, when the Narrator more overtly presents himself as Lover, there are no metaphorical mediations connecting the first person to an image of narrative control. Being

[53] In particular, the episode of the fountain provides a visual rendering of the sonnet *Altri lodan il viso, altri le chiome* by taking its metaphor literally: 'Et se l'opra mia fusse alla bontade / de la material ugual, ne farei viva / *statua*, che dureria più d'una etade' (*R* 15, 12-14). Cabani, 'Le *Rime*', p. 392 interprets this portrait as 'un omaggio scherzoso al suo passato di poeta lirico'.

[54] 'Fra tanti augelli son duo cigni soli, / bianchi, Signor, come è la vostra insegna' (*OF* 35.14, 5-6).

[55] On the metafictional function of the references to Turpino see Sergio Zatti, *The quest for epic. From Ariosto to Tasso* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 60-94 and Javitch, who uses the term 'pseudo-authentications' and describes many of the Narrator's comments as both metanarrative and metafictional.

no weaver or painter, the Narrator is just a lover and a poet-lover, stripped of all the metaphorical armours that protect him in several metanarrative and metafictional remarks; as such, in the exordium of canto 35 he addresses the beloved directly, facing frontally the condition on which his whole narration depends. The potential objection that the Lover could be seen as just another metaphorical mask of the Narrator can be easily countered from a number of perspectives. Firstly, the Lover implies a temporal depth which is unknown to the other self-representations of the Narrator – a self with a past and a present, not simply the flat (albeit clever) organising principle of narration. Secondly, the image of the Lover does not embody metanarrative and metafictional *enjeux* as directly as the other images; it conveys a condition rather than an action, with love being the state that will (or will not) allow narration. Thirdly, if there is indeed a strong metaphorical link between the poem and the Lover, it centres on the theme of errancy and madness, whereas most of the metaphors used to describe the activity of the Narrator emphasise craft and control, despite the parallel between the Narrator and Cassandra through weaving and folly.[56]

The risk taken by embedding the epic narration into a lyric frame is therefore radical, because the Narrator as master, who firmly holds the reins of both his epic plot and its metafictional doubles (the palace, the frescoes, the embroidered pavilion etc.), is in fact one with the Narrator-Lover at all times: in the fiction that I have called 'the story of the Narrator-Lover', amorous pain could extinguish the epic narration, of which all the other activities of the Narrator are only self-reflexive metaphors (weaving, painting, etc.). The utter dependence of the Narrator on the behaviour of the beloved is the dark side of his narrative control – the reverse of his narrative tyranny, whimsically exerted over his characters and readers. No matter how far-reaching and firmly established, this control could dissolve at the slightest intensification of amorous suffering, leaving the Narrator-Lover once again caught in the static alienation of lyric discourse. In fact in the 'selva', in which Dante's dark wood and Petrarch's amorous wood coalesce,[57] the metaphor for love madness and captivity literally becomes one with a *mise en abyme*, an image of the poem itself ('una gran selva, ove la via / conviene a forza, a chi vi va, fallire', *OF* 24.2, 3-4). In this sense, there is a strong consonance between *the story of the narration* and the object of the narration – between the condition of

[56] The theme of control has been discussed most effectively by Durling, who includes among its strategies even the Narrator's 'disclaimers of control' (most famously his ironic references to Turpino's authority), and by Hempfer, who states that absolute control is highlighted even when the Narrator ironically seems to suggest the limits of his omniscience and the 'autonomy' of the story. The interpretation of Cassandra as an 'estranged' double of the poet has been proposed by Ascoli, pp. 376-93.

[57] On the difference between the 'selva' of Dante and Petrarch see Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's laurels* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1992), pp. 81-89, 168.

the Narrator-Lover and that of his errant characters imprisoned in the amorous wood.[58] As Ascoli pointed out, Saint John's speech in canto 35 is framed at both ends by elements that counter Astolfo's flight and imply a fall or return to earth and by 'references to the narrator-poet's position, both of which suggest his own inability to transcend the limits of an earthly love […], to remain outside the reach of erroneous desire and universal madness more than fugitively'.[59] I would go further by adding that, as I suggested before, stanzas 35.1-2 could be described as the most lyric exordium in the *Furioso* and the point in which the Narrator addresses most directly the threat hovering over his narration: the possibility of epic ultimately depends on the earthly, anti-epic outcome of a lyric challenge. Cabani described the third *Furioso* as the 'vero approdo' of Ariosto's 'sperimentazione lirica',[60] a successful transformation or trans-codification of his Petrarchism which would have replaced his unaccomplished *canzoniere*. I would argue that the role of lyric experience in the poem is not limited to the pervasiveness of references to Petrarch or to their density in specific areas (monologues, amorous episodes, exordia); rather, it provides an intermittent self-reflexive frame in which the epic story is embedded. Instead of narrating a lyric story in a sequence of poems, Ariosto eventually created an exordial 'macrotext' hosting the homodiegetic account of a heterodiegetic narration – the self-reflexive story of a lyric poet and would-be-epic Narrator.

[58] 'Implicating its own narrator in the play of desire, the *Furioso* offers no Archimedian point outside its narrative from which to perceive the true structure of that desire' (Quint, with reference to Donato's main argument, p. 90, n. 18).
[59] Ascoli, p. 305.
[60] Cabani, 'Le *Rime*', p. 396.