

Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

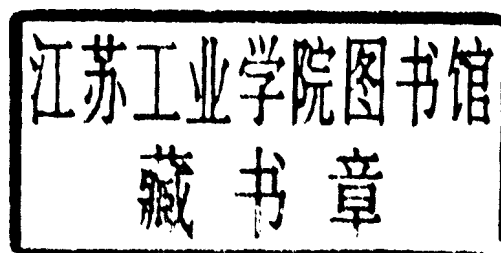
42

Poetry Criticism

*Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 42

David Galens
Project Editor



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Poetry Criticism, Vol. 42

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David Galens

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Poetry Criticism

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), PC offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by PC supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given

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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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Linden Peach, "Man, Nature and Wordsworth: American Versions," *British Influence on the Birth of American Literature*, (Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 29-57; reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, vol. 20, ed. Ellen McGeagh (Detroit: The Gale Group), 37-40.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xi

Ludovico Ariosto 1474-1533	1
<i>Italian poet and playwright</i>	
Lorine Niedecker 1903-1970	89
<i>American poet</i>	
Armand Schwerner 1927-1999	186
<i>Belgian-born American poet, translator, and essayist</i>	
Edmund Spenser 1552?-1599	211
<i>English poet and essayist</i>	
<i>Entry devoted to The Faerie Queene</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 373

PC Cumulative Nationality Index 463

PC-42 Title Index 467

Ludovico Ariosto

1474-1533

Italian poet and playwright.

INTRODUCTION

A contemporary of Niccolò Machiavelli, Baldassare Castiglione, Michelangelo Buonarroti, and Raphael Sanzio, Ariosto is considered one of the foremost poets of the Italian Renaissance. In his satires and comedies Ariosto departed from classical models in order to establish a new vernacular genre. Ariosto is best known for his epic romance *Orlando furioso*, which is generally considered one of the greatest literary achievements of the Italian Renaissance. A major influence on Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, *Orlando furioso* combined elements of Arthurian and Carolingian legend to create a myth that was both moral and entertaining. Along with Ariosto's comedies, the *Furioso* also provided source material for Shakespeare's plays, including *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Merchant of Venice*. With its intriguing, often ironic, blend of history and myth, realism and magic, sophisticated wit and swashbuckling adventure, *Orlando furioso* has entertained readers for over four hundred years.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The eldest of ten children, Ariosto was born in 1474 in the northern Italian town of Reggio Emilia, where his father, an official to the duke of Ferrara, was stationed. When Ariosto was ten years old, the family moved to Ferrara, one of the most splendid courts in Italy whose rulers, the house of Este, had built up a despotic control over a region stretching across Italy. In 1489 Ariosto attended the University of Ferrara, where he studied law at his father's insistence. After convincing his father that he lacked aptitude for law, Ariosto was free to pursue literature. Ariosto's father died in 1500, leaving a large family to support. In 1503 Ariosto took a position with Ippolito, Cardinal d'Este. Like other Italian courts in the Renaissance, the Ferrarese court was a cultural mecca, and starting in 1508, Ariosto was involved in the production of entertainments, especially the theater. Ariosto was one of the first authors to write comedies, which, though drawn from classical sources, were written in the vernacular and addressed contemporary themes. Ariosto's patrons, like those of his contemporaries, coveted the fame that their protégés could bring them. *Orlando furioso*, which Ariosto first published in 1516 but continued to revise until 1532, was dedicated to the Estensi, or Este family, and celebrated



its achievements. In addition to his courtly duties, Ariosto was expected to serve on diplomatic missions for the house of Este. His first two comedies, *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*, were performed in 1508 and 1509, but war interrupted the production of plays, and Ariosto did not see his other plays performed until 1528. In 1517, Ippolito, Cardinal d'Este decided to go to Hungary; Ariosto stayed in Ferrara and serve the Cardinal's brother, Alfonso d'Este. Between 1517 and 1524 Ariosto wrote seven satires, the first of which justified his decision not to go to Hungary; another addressed his misery at his appointment as governor of Garfagnana, a remote, lawless province, where he served from 1522 to 1525. Like his lyric poetry, these satires, however, were not published during Ariosto's lifetime. After returning to Ferrara in 1525 where he was offered a post organizing entertainments, Ariosto married Alessandra Benucci, a widow he had known and loved for over twelve years but who had been married when they met. Ariosto lived his last years quietly, working on his revision of *Orlando furioso*, which he finished one year prior to his death in 1533.

MAJOR WORKS

Ariosto's comedies, which display the same flashes of humor and irony found in the *Furioso*, established him as one of the foremost writers of Italian vernacular comedy. Strongly influenced by Plautus and Terence, the comedies contain characters and situations more recognizably products of the Renaissance than of classical Rome. The plots are variations on conventional love intrigues. Disguise, deception and trickery provide entertaining situations, skillfully elaborated in witty dialogue. Ariosto is also known for writing some of the first satires in the vernacular. Modeled on Horace, the satires take on the hypocrisy of the Ferrarese and sixteenth-century Italian society. Ariosto's major work, *Orlando furioso*, continues and completes the work of another Ferrarese poet, Boiardo, whose *Orlando innamorato* (1494). Boiardo's poem brought together features of Carolingian and Arthurian cycles. Orlando, the Italian version of the protagonist of the *Chanson de Roland*, falls in love and deserts his cause for an enemy princess. Like Boiardo's *Innamorato*, the *Furioso* follows the tradition of the epic romance, which combines elements of the classic epic—lofty, historical or legendary theme, usually of a military nature; heroic, larger than life characters; and a grandiose narrative style—with aspects of the medieval romance, including tales of knightly quests, chivalry, and love. *Orlando furioso* is written in ottava rima, or eight-line heroic stanzas, and the poem has often been praised for its fluidity and grace. Ariosto described the forty-six cantos of the *Furioso* as a tapestry whose multi-colored threads weave a subtle blend of comedy and pathos, irony and invective, burlesque and epic eulogy. The main themes are carefully interwoven, with each one surfacing as the poet follows his characters' adventures in successive phases. While enchanting readers with magical tales of chivalry and adventure, however, *Orlando furioso* simultaneously undermines its own sincerity and seriousness.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Orlando furioso has enjoyed critical and popular success since its publication. In 1517, Machiavelli wrote: "I have just read *Orlando furioso* by Ariosto, and truly the poem is fine throughout, and in many places is wonderful." The poem did not strike its earlier readers as a lighthearted burlesque of the romances of chivalry, and the passages most favored in France, Spain and England were those embodying serious, heroic elements—the battles and duels. French and Spanish lyric poets seized on the love lyrics in the *Furioso*. Allegorical interpretations flourished in the sixteenth century, and Renaissance readers believed its ethos supported Christian and courtly ideas. After the Counter-Reformation, the *Furioso* was criticized for licentiousness. Ariosto's fame declined in the seventeenth-century, but new interest arose in the eighteenth century. In 1727, Voltaire dismissed Ariosto as a poet "with low comical Imaginations," while Goethe praised his ease of style and harmonious verse, which obscured the serious-

ness of the poem. In the eighteenth century the poem came to be viewed as morally objectionable due to occasional licentiousness. The poem's lack of formal unity and its fanciful tales also came under attack in the eighteenth century, but as the century drew to a close and literary taste began to favor spontaneity and fluidity over rigid structural dicta, there was a resurgence of critical interest in Ariosto. Romantic critics found the poem flippant and failing to take the problems of the poet's age seriously. In the late nineteenth century, the poem continued to be much admired, although some frowned upon what they felt was questionable morality and insincerity. Contemporary critics are struck by the *Furioso*'s surprising modernity, wit and use of irony. Although *Orlando furioso* is no longer the "best seller" it was in the sixteenth century, it continues to enchant readers.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Orlando furioso 1532

Other Major Works

La Cassaria [*The Coffer*] (play) 1508

I Suppositi [*Supposes*] (play) 1509

La Lena [*Lena*] (play) 1528

Il Negromante [*The Necromancer*] (play) 1529

Ariosto's Satyres in Seven Famous Discourses (satire) 1534

Opera Minori de Ludovico Ariosto (poetry, play, satire, letters) 1964

CRITICISM

Torquato Tasso (essay date 1594)

SOURCE: Tasso, Torquato "Book II." In *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, translated by Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel, pp. 57-110. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1973.

[In the following excerpt originally published in 1594, Tasso discusses *Orlando furioso* in terms of the Aristotelian concept of epic unit.]

[The poet] must see to it that his fable (by fable I mean the form of the poem that can be defined as the weaving or composition of its events)—he must see to it, I say, that the fable he wishes to fashion is entire, or, as we may put it, whole, that it is of an appropriate magnitude, and that it is one. (p. 62)

The fable is to be whole or entire because it is to be perfect, and nothing can be perfect that is not entire. Perfection and integrity will be found in the fable if it possesses a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning is that which does not necessarily come after something else but has other things after it. The end is that which comes after all other things and has nothing after it. The middle is placed between the two, following some things and followed by others. But to depart a little from the brevity of definitions, I call a fable entire that contains in itself everything necessary to its intelligibility, sets forth the causes, and origin of the deed it undertakes to treat, and leads by due means to an end that leaves nothing inadequately concluded or resolved. Thus Homer, we see, has done in the *Odyssey*: first with the journey of Telemachus to Nestor and Menelaus, and then with the tale Ulysses tells Alcinous, he perfectly clarifies the state of affairs and what happened after Ulysses left Troy; and Virgil does the same with Aeneas' tale to Dido. Although the poet snatches the hearer into the midst of things as if they were already known, none the less he then proceeds to inform him little by little of what happened earlier. But *Orlando Innamorato* and *Orlando furioso* are not entire, but faulty in reporting what they involve: the *Furioso* lacks a beginning, the *Innamorato* an ending. Still, no artistic defect but death was at fault in Boiardo, and in Ariosto not ignorance but his choosing to finish what his predecessor had started. It is quite unnecessary to prove that the *Innamorato* is imperfect. So too *Orlando furioso* is obviously not a whole; for whether we take Ruggiero's love or the war between Charlemagne and Agramante as its main action, it lacks a beginning, since it does not tell when or how Ruggiero fell in love with Bradamante, or when or how the Africans began the war against the French, except perhaps with a bare reference in one or two lines. And readers would often have to grope in the dark for these stories if they could not learn what is necessary from the *Innamorato*. But, as I say, we must not consider *Orlando Innamorato* and *Furioso* two distinct works, but a single poem begun by one poet and completed by the other along the same lines, though with a better interweaving and colour; considered so, the poem is a whole, lacking nothing for the intelligibility of its stories. (pp. 62-3)

The supporters of unity, making a shield of the authority of Aristotle and the majesty of ancient Greek and Latin poets, and not lacking weapons provided by reason, have against them the habit of the present era, the universal agreement of ladies, gentlemen, and courts, and apparently experience as well, the infallible test of truth. For Ariosto, leaving the tracks of ancient writers and the rules of Aristotle, has encompassed within his poem many diverse actions; and he is read again and again by all ages and both sexes, is known in all languages, liked by everyone, praised by all, his fame ever alive and renewed, the glorious talk of men's tongues. (p. 66)

Let us grant what cannot be denied, that delight is the end of poetry; so too I grant what experience demonstrates, that *Orlando furioso* delights our contemporaries more

than [Trissino's] *Italia Liberata* or even the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But I do deny—and this is basic and all-important to our thesis—that multiplicity of action is more apt to delight than unity; for the opposite can be proved on the authority of Aristotle with the argument he adduces in the *Problems*. Although *Orlando furioso*, which contains several fables, gives more delight than any other Tuscan poem or even the poems of Homer, this is not because of unity or multiplicity of fable, but for two reasons that detract nothing from our argument. One is that the *Furioso* treats of love, chivalry, adventure, enchantment, in short of inventions more charming and more adapted to our ears; the other that Ariosto excels many other poets in propriety of manners and decorum of character. Both reasons are accidental, unrelated to multiplicity or unity of fable, and are not so involved with the one as to be unsuitable to the other. We should not therefore conclude that multiplicity delights more than unity. (pp. 76-7)

William Hazlitt (essay date 1815)

SOURCE: Hazlitt, William. "Sismondi's 'Literature of the South'." *Edinburgh Review* 25, no 44 (June 1815): 31-63.

[In the following excerpt, Hazlitt compares *Orlando furioso* with *Torquato Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered*.]

[Ariosto's excellence is] infinite grace and gaiety. He has fine animal spirits, an heroic disposition, sensibility mixed with vivacity, an eye for nature, great rapidity of narration and facility of style, and, above all, a genius buoyant, and with wings like the Griffin-horse of Rogero, which he turns and winds at pleasure. He never labours under his subject; never pauses; but is always settling out on fresh exploits. Indeed, his excessive desire not to overdo any thing, has led him to resort to the unnecessary expedient of constantly breaking off in the middle of his story; and going on to something else. His work is in this respect worse than *Tristram Shandy*; for there the progress dramatic or humorous shape; but here the whole fault lies with the author. The *Orlando furioso* is a tissue of these separate stories, crossing and jostling one another; and is therefore very inferior, in the general construction of the plot, to [Torquato Tasso's] *Jerusalem Delivered*. But the incidents in Ariosto are more lively, the characters more real, the language purer, the colouring more natural: even the sentiments show at least as much feeling, with less appearance of affectation. There is less effort, less display, a less imposing use made of the common ornaments of style and artifices of composition. Tasso was the more accomplished writer, Ariosto the greater genius. There is nothing in Tasso which is not to be found, in the same or a higher degree, in others: Ariosto's merits were his own. The perusal of the one leaves a peculiar and very high relish behind it; there is a vapidness in the other, which palls at the time, and goes off sooner afterwards. Tasso indeed sets before us a dessert of melons, mingled with roses;—but it not the first time of its being served up;—the flow-

ers are rather faded, and the fruit has lost its freshness. Ariosto writes on as it happens, from the interest of his subject, or the impulse of his own mind. He is intent only on the adventure he has in hand,—the circumstances which might be supposed to attend it, the feelings which would naturally arise out of it. He attaches himself to his characters for their own sakes; and relates their achievements for the mere pleasure he has in telling them. This method is certainly liable to great disadvantages; but we on the whole prefer it to the obtrusive artifices of style shown in the *Jerusalem*, where the author seems never to introduce any character but as a foil to some other,—makes one situation a contrast to the preceding, and his whole poem a continued antithesis in style, action, sentiment, and imagery. . . . Tasso has more of what is usually called poetry than Ariosto—that is, more tropes and ornaments, and a more splendid and elaborate diction. The latter is deficient in all these:—the figures and comparisons he introduces do not elevate or adorn that which they are brought to illustrate: they are, for the most part, mere parallel cases; and his direct description, simple and striking as it uniformly is, seems to us of a far higher order of merit than the ingenious allusions of his rival. We cannot, however, agree with M. Sismondi [in his *De la Litterature du Midi de l'Europe* (1813)], that there is a want of sentiment in Ariosto, or that he excels only as a painter of objects, or a narrator of events. The instance which he gives from the story of Isabella, is an exception to his general power. The episodes of Herminia, and of Tancred and Clorinda, in Tasso, are exquisitely beautiful; but they do not come up, in romantic interest or real passion, to the loves of Angelica and Medoro. We might instance, to the same purpose, the character of Bradamante;—the spirited apostrophe to knighthood, “Oh ancient knights of true and noble heart;”—that to Orlando, Sacripant, and the other lovers of Angelica—or the triumph of Medoro—the whole progress of Orlando’s passion, and the still more impressive description of his sudden recovery from his fatal infatuation, after the restoration of his senses. (pp. 35-37)

Robert M. Adams (essay date 1982)

SOURCE: Adams, Robert M. “Ariosto: Less Is More.” *American Scholar* (winter 1981/82): 95-102.

[In the following essay, Adams suggests that the genre-shifting, playful subversiveness of *Orlando furioso* makes clear the limitations of a contemporary literary criticism and academic discourse.]

Nobody gets less chance to read books for pleasure, all the way through, for their own sakes, than a professor of literature. The myth, of course, is quite different. The professor is supposed to sit in his study, placidly reading one Great Book after another, sipping and sampling and passing judgment, like a wine connoisseur with an infinite cellar and infinite time at his disposal. Hardly so, hardly so at all. His reading is really done by way of preparing

for a class, criticizing a paper, advising on a thesis, or writing a paper of his own; his time is divided into five- and ten-minute snippets by conferences, phone calls, meetings. It’s a rare and special pleasure when he gets to sit down and read a long, important book all the way through, for its own sake, for pleasure—as I have just finished reading the *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto.

I read it, in the first place, out of curiosity—of all motives the most proper for picking up a volume, not to speak of four. I read it in the original tongue, which I understand only imperfectly, and I read it without recourse to a dictionary, finding that sometimes the general sense of a passage sufficed for my purposes, and that when it did not I could generally decipher a difficult stanza by reading it over and over. I read the poem from beginning to end, beguiled—as I fancy Ariosto’s original readers must have been—by a simpleminded itch to learn what happened next, what concatenation of events would resolve the various problems confronting the poet’s characters. I had no loftier purposes in mind, none more immediate than the improvement of my understanding. The present essay is a retrospective rearrangement of experiences that took shape before it, the essay, was so much as thought of.

About the author himself I knew, and cared to know, no more than the basic commonplaces. His life straddled the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; he spent most of it, to no great material advantage, at the court of the Este family in Ferrara. Cardinal Ippolito and Duke Alfonso, unlike their splendid predecessors Dukes Borso and Ercole, were niggardly patrons and ungenerous employers. Ariosto got meager wages and little appreciation; much was asked of him in hard and uncongenial work. He might have done better by entering the church, but shrank from the idea of a long-term commitment. Messer Ludovico was also a great favorite with the ladies, but here too he wanted no long-term commitments and married only toward the end of his life (he died in 1533, not yet sixty years of age). A first version of the *Orlando furioso* was published in 1516, but Ariosto was revising it for a new edition as late as 1532. His poem follows previous tellings and retellings of the Charlemagne legends in Italy and France, especially a burlesque version by Luigi Pulci (*Morgante Maggiore*, 1483) and a more serious but also clumsier treatment by Matteo Boiardo (*Orlando Innamorato*, 1495). Despite the problems of translation into languages less rich in rhymes than Italian, *Orlando furioso* was an immediate success, continent wide. Things Italian were, for many provincial societies like England, the absolute acme of the suave and worldly. Books were just starting to be published in large numbers and at reasonable prices; the *Orlando furioso* traveled on the wings of scandal higher and faster than more weighty tomes, and in the end perhaps just as far.

Orlando furioso, I discovered without much surprise, is a very sophisticated poem; that is, it doesn’t take its ostensible themes very seriously, and the interplay of its levities (translated for the reader into a search for the center of gravity) is half the pleasure of reading it. On the

official level, the central action is Charlemagne's defense of Paris (therefore of France, Western civilization, and Christian culture at large) against the Saracens. This is the largest political and social action in the poem; Orlando's madness is important chiefly because it prevents him from taking part in the crucial conflict. But Ariosto quickly makes it clear that he isn't going to give the historical action very much weight. For long periods he departs altogether from the story of Charlemagne and the siege of Paris. There's one tremendous scene of assault and defense, but mostly the campaigns on both sides are left to take care of themselves. This isn't simply because big battles are poetically cumbersome; it's also because there isn't a great deal of operational difference between Christians and Saracens; they all act in very much the same way and, with a few exceptions, share the same values. The Saracens do indeed include some heavies like Rodomonte, and it is taken for granted that they are in religious error; but this is no way implies that they are not perfect gentlemen. The conflict is not, therefore, between good and evil, not even between very good and pretty good; it is not even a real conflict; it is a game with occasionally fatal consequences. An incident at the very beginning of the poem seems designed to underline these equivalences. Rinaldo and Ferrau—the one a Christian, the other a Saracen—are madly in love with Angelica, the wandering daughter of the King of Circassia. She is so staggeringly seductive that it's not clear what religion she professes, if any. All such secondary considerations disappear in the blinding radiance of her desirability. But she is a girl with a mind of her own. She doesn't like either Rinaldo or Ferrau, and when they begin to fight over her, she takes advantage of their distraction to run away from them both. Observing her departure after a time, they adjourn their fight and set out to seek the lady collaboratively, with the understanding that when they have found her they will go back to fighting again. Ariosto vigorously approves of this behavior, and says so in a famous passage of direct editorializing: "O gran bontà de' cavalieri antiqui!" The knights were of different religious faiths, rivals in love, and inflamed by rage; yet they sank all these differences in recognition of a common code of chivalrous conduct.

Well and good, then. The generous conduct commended by a code of honor carries high value in the poem—a higher value, it sometimes appears, than the defense of Charlemagne, France, Western civilization, and Christian culture. The emperor's difficulties arise in large part from the tendency of his best paladins to go wandering off across Europe, Asia, and Africa (not to mention the moon) in the pursuit of private feuds. These feuds are not simply petty quarrels; they are the international game of knight-errantry itself, which is played by its own rules and carries its own, largely intangible, rewards. One can't, one simply can't, leave a slight or insult unavenged or a challenge unanswered; the more terrifying the danger with which one is confronted, the more peremptory is one's obligation to march straight up to it. Ariosto is not without a mocking eye for some of the absurdities to which this code

gives rise. A group of heroes and heroines gets involved, on one occasion, in a round robin of challenges from which only a legal mind can extricate them by deciding who fights whom first. On the other hand, he clearly admires the refusal of one knight to accept unfair odds against another—the extravagant meticulousness of this moral bookkeeping, in which so many of the accounts can only be entered in blood. But there is a major exception to the rule of fair play, which throws the whole sheet out of balance. Any sort of magic influence one possesses (and there are many sorts) can be fairly used against an opponent. Thus if one has a magic spear or sword, one can triumph over opponents whose inherent ability is much greater. Ariosto accepts this circumstance without criticism, though it unbalances the whole chivalric game, and renders dubious the meaning of its basically intangible rewards.

A second and still more striking illogicality in Ariosto's presentation of the chivalric code involves the ladies. Much of the fighting is ostensibly intended to impress them; it is performed in their "service." When the knight has triumphantly defeated all the dragons placed in his way by fate or by his own sense of duty, it is the lady who bestows on him his reward—that is, naturally, her self. But in the story, things don't work out this way. Ruggiero—who must pass all sorts of difficult tests to win the hand of Bradamante, so that he may beget upon her the whole splendid house of Este—goes wandering off after so many foreign adventures that one suspects (with Bradamante) that he isn't much interested in her at all. And indeed she's a dull, dutiful lady with rather too strong a sense of her social position to be much fun. More strikingly still, Orlando's heroic deeds totally fail to impress Angelica. He is her devoted slave; he asks nothing better than the chance to hew armies to pieces in her service. But his sullen, lonely prowess makes no more impression on her than did that of Rinaldo and Ferrau; though she's been actively solicited by princes, belligerent barons, and heroes of every degree of heroism, she is unimpressed by any of them. Indeed, she uses them as convenience suggests, to get herself out of various scrapes, but she has no intention of "rewarding" any of these Nice Men for their service. Out of mere natural impulse, she goes instead to the simple Saracen youth, Medoro, who is wounded, pathetic, uselessly brave, and who learns to adore her. Thus the most attractive girl on stage, who is responsible for Orlando's madness and who thereby provides the main dramatic force of the poem, wanders out of it before the action is half completed, without doing anything to reward interpidity or endorse chivalric values.

An episode of this nature could be given grotesque or tragic or cynical or didactic or absurdist coloring; it has no preordained tonality. Ariosto's handling of it is therefore of great interest; and the fact is that he refracts it, divides it into several different emotional components. When he is dealing with Orlando, in the madness which comes on him when he knows that Angelica is lost forever, the note is of pathos, mixed with a kind of terrible comedy. Orlando mad is a great hairy, naked, bestial creature who murders

and ravages at random—he is superhuman strength and absolute invulnerability run wild. On the other hand, Angelica's idyll with Medoro is an exquisite pastoral. If one feels, watching Orlando, that love is a torment and a madness, one sees, with Angelica and Medoro, that it is a world of delicate delight. In refusing to play the chivalric game, in neglecting "merito," Angelica is either brutally cruel to Orlando or else she shows miraculous good sense; she's either above the rules of the courtly love game or beneath them. When, in canto 42, Rinaldo unexpectedly decides to seek out and punish the lady, he encounters the monster Jealousy, from whom he is rescued (in one of the occasional explicit allegories of the poem) by Disdain (Sdegno). But disdain isn't in the least what one feels for Angelica as she makes her perilous way back across Europe with Medoro, whom she is going to make King of Circassia. She has got exactly what she wants, and she doesn't have Orlando, whom she doesn't in the least want: his style of love isn't in fact what she either desires or deserves. There's a terrible ambiguous instance of this perception in the poem, when Orlando, seeking Angelica, captures her mare instead. He gallops off on the poor creature, rides it to death, and then struggles on, carrying the dead beast on his shoulders or dragging it behind him. This is passion all right, but horrifying, ghastly; Ariosto says he wishes Orlando had captured Angelica herself, so he could treat her in this way, but clearly he means the direct contrary, and we so understand him. Angelica creates her own nobility. Being Queen of the May with Medoro, she would be abasing herself by associating with a mere paladin—by accepting, for example, all the tedium and ceremony that attend the wedding of Ruggiero and Bradamante. In the world she has made she is free; in the world of "merit" and "honor" she would be bound. Ariosto rejoices in her escape, even as he pretends to deplore it.

One passage of broad fun and one of slightly subtler irony make this point pretty clear. When Astolfo goes to the moon and brings back Orlando's wits in a large jar, the episode culminates in a scene where the mad paladin has to be hog-tied and forced to snuffle up his brains again from the jar held under his nose. His madness has been terrible, but it is resolved in a guffaw; he really is a pretty coarse piece of machinery after all. And the balance of feeling is similarly tilted against Orlando in a mock-heroic apostrophe delivered when Angelica has just persuaded Medoro to take her virginity:

O conte Orlando, o re di Circassia,
vostra inclita virtù, dite, che giova?
Vostro alto onor dite in che prezzo sia,
o che mercé vostro servir ritruova.

"Tell me what good it did you, this virtue, honor, service, of which you talk so much?" The poet has to beseech his own characters to make sense of their beliefs (the implication is clear that he himself can't); and in joining Orlando with Angelica's father, the King of Circassia, he sets them and their conservative views against the "povero fante" whom he's really delighted to see carrying off the prize.

On a somewhat wider level of abstraction, spiritual freedom and physical mobility do indeed seem to be values that Ariosto takes seriously and views favorably. His characters career around the fringes of the civilized world like frantic water beetles; and the poet rejoices, just as much as they do, in their activity. They are to be found in the Orkney Islands and the Scottish Highlands; they are active in India, Ethiopia, Bulgaria, Galicia, Hangchow, and North Africa, as well as up and down the Italian and Hispanic peninsulas. Quirky Astolfo, just back from the moon, musters an army of Nubians and marches to attack Bizerte; himself an Englishman, he is aided by Dudone, a paladin from Denmark. Plebeian practical considerations, like the language to be spoken or the money to be put down for food and lodging, never impede these impetuous voyagers. They travel from one end of Europe to the other on a whim, a fancy; they go off in search of one another without having the faintest notion of where to look. Their errant travels give rise to very little extended description of specific scenery. Things pick up a little in this respect when we get into the near neighborhood of Ferrara, but for the most part it seems that the names of remote places and their mythological or genealogical resonance are what attract Ariosto. Spenser's characters, traveling through Faeryland, find themselves always in the same place or in interchangeable places; their allegorical significance determines that they will never find themselves in circumstances that don't test that significance. But Ariosto's people inhabit a real Europe, and when they go from one part of it to another the scene really changes; it isn't just "another part of the forest." Apart from tangible space, they live also in real historical time, enabled by elaborate prophecy to move forward from the era of Charlemagne just as far as Ariosto's own historical hindsight will take them. And in the other direction, they seem to inhabit a world that, for some reason inherent in its construction, constantly repeats scarcely disguised episodes from the major Greek and Roman epics.

A particularly intrusive feature of the poem is Ariosto's frequent and apparently random adaptation of narrative units prefabricated for his imitation by the classical poets and mythologists. Ruggiero, in possession (though only imperfect control) of the hippogriff, uses it to rescue Angelica from the orc, precisely as Perseus, borne on winged sandals, rescued Andromeda from the sea monster. Astolfo liberates Senapo from the torment of the harpies, just as Phineas was liberated from harpies by the Argonauts. The story of Bireno and Olimpia in canto 10 exactly repeats that of Theseus and Ariadne; the story of Norandino and the orc in canto 17 parallels that of Ulysses and his companions in the cave of Polyphemus; the night foray of Cloridan and Medoro in canto 18 recalls that of Ulysses and Diomedes in the *Iliad*, or Nisus and Euryalus in the *Aeneid*. This list, which could be greatly extended, fairly represents the scrappy and occasional nature of Ariosto's imitation. He isn't challenging comparison with the classics any more than he's satirizing them or his characters or himself; he isn't at all using them as a crutch to sustain his lame invention. His motive, which he does nothing