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**THE RHETORICAL TAPESTRY:
A MODEL FOR
PERSPECTIVE REALITY IN
ORLANDO FURIOSO AND *DON QUIJOTE***

Clorinda Donato

Cervantes has been credited with the creation of the first modern novel, *Don Quijote*. Considered an inferior form of the epic, where a unified vision of reality gives way to a fractured, piecemeal, reconstructed vision of one or many perspectives, the novel is uniformly accepted as the 'modern' literary genre. But between epic and novel, the vicissitudes of intermediary genres lead us through the romance to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the literary pivot from which the thrust towards the cervantine novel develops. For if the literary devices, authorial attitudes, preoccupation with subjective experience and ironic vision particular to the *Quijote* announce the arrival of the novel, the embryonic presence of the same elements in the *Orlando Furioso* certainly herald its emergence almost a century earlier. Though the relationship of Ariosto's work to that of Cervantes constitutes a classical problem of cervantine scholarship, the similarities in their narrative techniques have been primarily treated within the context of 16th-century literary theory,¹ rather than directly traced through the texts themselves. This article intends to examine the parallels in the narrative structures inherent to *Orlando Furioso* and *Don Quijote* in order to demonstrate the affinities in the vision of reality they wished to represent, a shared vision which determined the choice of the narrative tapestry as the model of inspiration.

The Metaphor of the Tapestry in Ariosto and Cervantes

The *Furioso* abounds in references to the tapestry, a form of art which was appealing to Ariosto in its concrete representation of the internal structure he envisioned for his masterpiece. A cursory look at the work immediately brings to mind the notion of "weave" as various narrative "threads" move through the poem connecting or disrupting scenes, action, and episodes. The metaphor

also proves a happy one when applied to the creator of the rhetorical tapestry, whose selecting and running of the threads reflects the strong controlling mechanics of a deliberate creative process. It is not surprising then to find the verbal "hand" of Ariosto weaving in and out of the narrative fabric at random intervals, thus establishing a new tripod author-reader-work relationship.

We know from numerous instances in Cervantes' oeuvre that Ariosto's literary areas, and in particular, the special corner reserved for the craftsman, provided a structural model worthy of further experimentation and certainly, viable for adaptation in a more ambiguous cultural situation than that of early 16th-century Ferrara. Beyond a suggested structure for narration, the tapestry was representative of the reality Cervantes wanted to imitate — that of perspectivism. But more than that, the finished product, the unified "tapestry" of perspectives hints at a possible totality (langue) which modern man hopes to find on the other side of the black hole of the perspective (parole). Thus the tapestry metaphor proves itself to be perfectly consonant with the dual structure of reality as perceived by Cervantes. As we have already stated, Cervantes has been acknowledged for ushering in the novel as a genre, the *Quijote* revealing with every passage the hybrid situation of flux which characterizes the modern vision of life. Let us now, however, shift a bit of that credit back to Ariosto as the first to deploy a literary apparatus which in the hands of Cervantes became the novel.

The Romance

Much to the dismay of diehard 16th-century Italian theorists, Ariosto had produced a form of romance whose very popularity and perfection of form, though in defiance of all precepts governing the epic, stood as a stubborn challenge to the arid theorists who tried to bury it. For to be sure, Ariosto was the most sophisticated poet to set pen to the romance, having borrowed only the chivalric topos from the older French and Spanish books. For Ariosto succeeded in transforming the haphazard hodgepodge of action and phenomena of the earlier romances into an organic literary process along the pre-ordained blueprint of the tapestry. What irked the rigid theorists who attacked the *Furioso* on grounds of flagrant inverisimilitude and lack of unity as defined by Aristotle,² was the fact that Ariosto's rendering of the romance changed that specious genre into a form which threatened the preeminence of the epic. It is not surprising that Torquato Tasso, one of the few theorists who was a creative writer as well, recognized unequivocally the importance of the Ariostean solution for the future of literature, and strove to reconcile the differences between epic and romance in the manner of the *Furioso*, a problem that will also be paramount to the creative endeavor of Cervantes. Though fully steeped

in the literary polemic of the time and under pressure from anti-Ariosteans to condemn the *Furioso's* "negative" example, Tasso had to admit that Giovanni Trissino's attempt to produce the first true Italian epic with his *L'Italia liberata dai goti* was a miserable failure despite Trissino's conscientious application of the rules. Tasso attributes Ariosto's greatness over Trissino merely to the amount of pleasure derived from the reading of the *Furioso* in comparison with the *Italia liberata*:

I grant what I deem to be the truth and what many would deny, that is, that pleasure is the end of poetry; I grant likewise what experience proves to us, that is, that the *Furioso* furnishes men of our time with a greater pleasure than the *Italia liberata* or even the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.

(Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*)³

At the conclusion to his chapter entitled "Romances of Chivalry and the Classical Aesthetic" in his work *Cervantes, Aristotle and the Persiles*, Alban Forcione states that what we are witnessing through Tasso's concession to Ariosto's success is the implicit acknowledgement of a shifting in critical taste, a new aesthetic point of view. It goes without saying that this shift mirrors a change in man's perception of reality. For if, as Freud says, the reader's pleasure from the artistic creation stems from the possibility of seeing a version of one's own experience recreated in the work, it is clear that the Virgilian epic no longer struck the same chord in the reading audience. We can apply the same principle if we consider our comparative response to the masterpieces of Virgil, Ariosto, and Cervantes. While our appreciation of the epic is great, we certainly feel much closer to Cervantes' world than we do to that of Virgil.

The Theme of Madness and the Tapestry

The theme of insanity, common to both the protagonists of the *Furioso* and the *Quijote*, and the similar vision of this state shared by the two authors as will later be discussed, relate directly to the choice of narrative technique. But to fully appreciate the convergence one finds in Ariosto and Cervantes, it would be helpful to review the evolution of the romance in Italy, and in particular, the precedent to the *Furioso*, Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* written in 1486. Boiardo's greatest legacy to the chivalric material absorbed by Ariosto was his fusion of the Carolingian and Arthurian cycles. In combining these two traditions, Boiardo consciously broke with tradition, as the nature of this blend attests. For he took the epic heroes (Roland, Rinaldo, Ruggiero) and trappings (the defense of Paris against the Saracen infidels) of the Carolingian *chansons*

de geste and infused them with the extravagant sentiment akin to the knights errant of the Arthurian round table. Thus the first chink in the knightly armor was made. By depicting Orlando "innamorato," and in love no less than with the heathen enchantress Angelica, Boiardo fully repudiates the epic Roland, chaste champion of Christendom, whose life was absorbed in conflicts with the pagan, fought in the interest of the common good. Roland has traded in his ideals for amorous desire, now elevated to preeminence as the prime force motivating human endeavor. The subjectivization of the epic hero constitutes the major breakthrough to be attributed to Boiardo. But the advance remains topical at best, and does not sift into the structure of the work until Ariosto. Though shifting the focus from epic fate to individual fate, the *Orlando Innamorato* can boast none of the narrative virtuosity present in the *Furioso*.

Boiardo's strengths as a narrator lie in the development of particular scenes and incidents which expound upon the joys of love — they are certainly not to be found in his management of the fable as a whole.

Lack of psychological development flaws characterization, particularly in the portrayal of Orlando. In line with the shallowness of his depiction is the absence of love's negative aspects.

In 1516, Ariosto returns to the humanized figure of the "Innamorato," but pushes him one step further — he becomes "Furioso." This shift in emphasis from love to madness as the main attribute of the protagonist bespeaks a more complex "vision du monde," which of course will culminate in the creation of the *Quijote*. Let us comment on the essential points in this evolution. While Ariosto is undeserving of excessive recognition in the area of characterization, he is certainly to be credited with seminal observations in regard to man's delicate relationship with reality, and with attempting to recreate that tenuous link through literature. Firstly, Ariosto has taken an Orlando vibrant with amorous desire and changed him into an Orlando who is sick as a result of frustrated desire, the cause of which is to be found in his erroneous perception of reality. The move from love to madness reflects a more sophisticated concept of desire. Ariosto has chosen to deal with the psychological aspect of yearning, rather than the physiological. As will later be shown, the correction of Orlando's erroneous perception of reality, which pushes Orlando to madness (the only viable antidote for thwarted desire), is central to the "tapestry" structure. Orlando's folly is the result of his unwillingness, and hence, inability to see beyond the subjective order he has imposed on reality. We are made aware of the extent of his belief in this unacquiescing reality during the scene of his fall into folly. In canto 23, the central canto of the *Furioso*, Orlando's search for his enemy Mandricardo leads him to the pastoral setting where Angelica and her recently wed husband, Medoro, the Saracen soldier, spent the

first days of their enamoration together. Trees bearing carved testimony of their tryst surround Orlando. But so far is he from fathoming that she could love another, that he first chooses to believe that the engravings are the work of another Angelica:

Va col pensiero cercando in mille modi
non creder quel ch'al suo dispetto crede
ch'altra Angelica sia creder si sforza,
ch'abbia il suo nome in quella scorza

O.F., 23, CIII⁴

But the familiarity of Angelica's handwriting demands another rationalization:

Poi dice: Conosco io pur queste note:
di tal'io n'ho tante vedute e lette.
Finger questo Medoro ella si puote:
forse ch'a me questo cognome mette.

O.F., 23, CIV⁵

But this "fraude a sé medesimo"⁶ as the author explains in the next few verses no longer works when Orlando is faced with equally incriminating inscriptions written in Medoro's hand, identifying Angelica as the daughter of Galafron (the one Orlando loves).

Liete piante, verdi erbe, limpide acque,
spelunca opaca e di fredde ombre grata,
dove la bella Angelica che nacque
di Galafron, da molti invano amata,
spesso ne le mie braccia nuda giacque;
de la commodità che qui m'è data,
io povero Medor ricompensarvi
d'altro non posso, che d'ognior lodarvi;

O.F., 23, CVIII⁷

Still, Orlando desists from acknowledging the truth, surmising that a rival, smitten with his lady had written those inscriptions to defame her and make him jealous. Thus Orlando reads objective reality subjectively, and what "seems" to him to be, takes precedence over what is.

There is no doubt that such a scene foreshadows Don Quijote's encounters with windmills and armies, the "baciuelmo" episode, and his belief in Dulcinea's enchantment. Ultimately, we arrive at the core of both works: the overriding, insoluble problem of subjective desire, the subtle transformation

of the knightly *quête* into the modern psychological *quête* of desire, a labyrinth whose course we are only now beginning to understand. But let us now turn to the question of how Ariosto and Cervantes underscore the dilemma of desire, and its relationship to madness through the use of the narrative tapestry. Through the use of narrative threads, the presentation of different characters and different perspectives, the desire of any single one is negated and proves itself an endless circle, with no escape. By introducing numerous others with their own personal desires and their own view of things, neither Ariosto nor Cervantes indulges their protagonists in their wishes, but rather, leaves the disturbing question of desire wide open to the only possible end left to modern man — madness. For contrast, it is interesting to keep in mind Alemán's total indulgence in the single perspective as reflected in the first person narration of *Guzmán*. For Cervantes, this constitutes a refusal to come to grips with the problematic of desire in a larger context, and does nothing to expose the dilemma. Ariosto, on the other hand, provides the most succinct synthesis of the issue in two of the most memorable images in the *Furioso*, both of which recall in miniature the narrative tapestry of the work: Atlante's castle and the moon, repository of all the saneness of the world. A brief description of both is in order.

At one point or another, in the *Furioso*, all characters pass through Atlante's castle, where they remain trapped indefinitely, victims of their own desire. For the enchanted palace lures its human prey by placing before them the vain image of a desired object. Once inside, they are unable to leave, caught in the throes of desire which spurs them to pursue the object which appears to lie just within their grasp. In canto 12, the reader follows Orlando into the castle, on the heels of an image he believes to be Angelica. Once inside, however, we find him crossing paths with other knights and kings, Christian and Saracen alike, each one intently chasing the elusive object of his desire:

E mentre or quinci or quindi invano il passo
 movea, pien di travaglio e di pensieri,
 Ferraù, Brandimarte e il re Gradasso,
 re Sacripante et altri cavallieri
 vi ritrovò, ch'andavano alto e basso,
 né men facean di lui vani sentieri;
 e si remarcavan del malvagio
 invisibil signor di quel palagio.

O.F., 12, XI⁸

Frustrated in their inability to possess the moving object, they wish to take out their frustrations on Atlante, the lord of the palace:

Tutti cercando il van, tutti gli danno
 colpa di furto alcun che lor fatt'abbia:
 del destrier che gli ha tolto, altri è in affanno;
 ch'abbia perduta altri la donna, arrabbia;
 altri d'altro l'accusa: e così stanno,
 che non si san partir di quella gabbia;
 e vi son molti, a questo inganno presi,
 stati le settimane intiere e i mesi.

O.F., 12, XII⁹

Thus has Ariosto created in the microcosm of Atlante's enchanted palace a scaled down version of the poem's structure. The narrative threads of each perspective cross in the pursuit of their desire, frustration leading to conflict, which in the body of the work reveals itself in the various duels and skirmishes the characters are forever engaging in. In the *Quijote*, the narrative principle is the same, only that the duels and skirmishes of the *Furioso* become fullblown psychological forays into the contrast of perspective which has fueled the encounters.

The same circular futility of the desirous fugue is implied in the strophes dedicated to Astolfo's lunar mission to recuperate Orlando's wits. But to his dismay, Astolfo, Orlando's means to restored sanity, finds that he too has lost his wits along with the rest of humanity, a victim of insidious desire. No one can escape it, as one of the most quoted passages of the *Furioso* recounts:

Altri in amar lo (sanity) perde, altri in onori,
 altri in cercar, scorrendo il mar, ricchezze;
 altri ne le speranze de' signori,
 altri dietro alle magiche sciocchezze;
 altri in gemme, altri in opre di pittori,
 ed altri in altro che più d'altro apreze.
 Di sofisti e d'astrologhi raccolto,
 e di poeti ancor ve n'era molto.

O.F., 34, LXXXV¹⁰

Again, a passage which conjures up a totality of single paths, moving in and around each other, sparked by desire, but all having ended in a loss of intellect. But what is most striking about the passage, is the fact that no category of desire is spared the inevitability of madness — no one is a savior (as we have seen by Astolfo's own loss of wits), no one transcends desire, not even the poet. At the top of the list we find of course the category of Orlando and Don Quijote, those who "in amor lo perde"; we also find Sancho's category,

among those who lose themselves "ne le speranze de' signori," but most importantly, we find a whole category devoted to those who pursue desire through a recreation of reality — artists, sophists, and poets. Ariosto has exposed the creative process as no more capable of arriving at absolute truth than any other means — it is, alas, only another subjective perspective. The author's desire to create, to transcend the desires of those he has so aptly classified is placed on the same problematic level as those of the heroes he has created. Thus Ariosto has succeeded in enmeshing his own thread of author/character with the ones of the other characters. Ariosto's work does not promise absolute truth, nor does it deliver it. What it does offer instead is a working model of reality, a model which is expandable and open ended, ready to accommodate additional perspectives.

Even more can be said in this vein for the *Quijote*. For Cervantes has woven his cloth with heavier thread; he has introduced a heightened sense of psychological time, observing from much closer range the pursuit of desire, and in particular, creative desire, as the telescoping of self-conscious narrators in the work substantiates.

As for the *Furioso*, the *Quijote*'s structure is flexible and open ended. But to fully appreciate the sense of this statement, we must consider the artificial resolution of the dilemma of insanity through which both authors leave an appearance of "denouement," which is unsatisfactory at best, and merely underscores the insolubility of reality's puzzle. Astolfo brings back Orlando's wits from the moon, and Don Quijote simply dies, having acknowledged his former insanity within the last few pages of the book, claiming to be cured on his deathbed. Both recoveries of lost intellect are placed within an artificial religious context, made to coincide with a return to the faith as well as to sanity. In both works, the newly introduced religious theme strikes a strident chord, religion having had no place in either work up to that point.

In both cases, it is clearly a temporary measure, a momentary exit from a problem which still remains open. This lack of true "cloture" common to both the *Furioso* and the *Quijote* betrays the presence of a new aesthetic model, that of the narrative tapestry. This model defies the finite, necessary structure required for the single, epic action charged with a transcendent metaphysical meaning. Instead, the multi-perspective subjective form reflects the ironic questioning of a surpassed order. We are invited to weave our own reader/character threads into the works at any time.

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NOTES

1. The best examples of this type of study are Alban Forcione's *Cervantes, Aristotle and the Persiles*, and E.C. Riley's *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel*.

2. According to the Aristotelian principle of unity, the poet's use of episode was limited to that on which the central plot was absolutely dependent. Ariosto was clearly in violation of this precept.

3. Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*. See note 37 in Alban Forcione's *Cervantes, Aristotle and the Persiles*, p. 29.

4. All translations of the *Furioso* have been taken from Allan Gilbert's 1954 translation of the work.

"With his imagination he keeps searching in a thousand ways to avoid believing what he believes in spite of himself; he forces himself to believe it is another Angelica who has written her name on that bark." 23, CIII

5. "Then he says: "I surely know these letters! I have seen and read so many such as they. She may be inventing this Medoro; perhaps she gives me this nickname." 23, CIV

6. "practicing fraud against himself" 23, CV

7. "Delightful trees, green grass, limpid waters, cavern dusky and pleasant with cool shade, where the fair Angelica daughter of Galafron, loved by many in vain, often lay naked in my arms — for the convenient place you have given me, I, the poor Medoro, cannot reward you otherwise than by ever praising you." 23, CVIII

8. "And while he was turning his steps uselessly now here now there, full of sorrow and thought, he found Ferrau, Brandimart, King Gradasso, King Sacripant, and other knights who were going high and low, making useless journeys no less than he, and complaining of the malicious invisible lord of that palace." 12, XI

9. "All keep searching for him (Atlante, the lord of the palace) all blame him for stealing something from them: because of the horse he has taken from him one is in distress; another is furious who has lost his lady; others accuse him of something else; and so they remain because they cannot get away from that cage; and many, caught by this trick, have been there whole weeks and months." 12, XII

10. "Some lose it for love, some for honors, some in seeking riches by scouring over seas, some in their hopes from rulers, some over the follies of magic, some in gems, some in the works of painters, and some in something else they value more than some other thing. There was much of it collected there from sophists and astrologers and poets too." 34, LXXXV

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