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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8r92r48c>

Journal

Carte Italiane, 1(1)

ISSN

0737-9412

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Publication Date

1980

DOI

10.5070/C911011185

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FOLLY IN THE *ORLANDO FURIOSO*: THE TECHNIQUE OF THEMATIC AND STYLISTIC BUILD-UP

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The thematic and stylistic build-up which culminates in the two narrative peaks of the *Orlando Furioso* (Orlando's fall into folly and his recovery) draws together the threads spun by the various infrastructures in such a way as to demonstrate the central importance of the theme of the loss of self resulting from "o per nostro difetto, o per colpa di tempo o di fortuna" (34, 73, 6-7).

These various infrastructures serve several purposes. Generally speaking, they parallel the central theme both for emphasis and for symmetry. But their development is not strictly linear. Each narrows the scope of the story and focuses it on one component which contributes to the main crisis, sketching it with its own characters, in its own shades of dark and light. Also, one narrative peak represents the positive pole to the other's negative, as will be demonstrated through the poem, both metaphorically and actually. Thus, one image cancels out the other, resulting in a literal and figurative vanishing of both physical and psychological elements. In other words, the crisis of Orlando's madness is not resolved by his recovery. Ariosto alludes to a problem which is greater and more far-reaching than that, which necessitates a recognition of the essentially futile nature of such aspiration, and the impermanence of human achievement, whose reversal or negation is implied by its very existence.

The structure of the poem, consisting of the narrative line of the crisis of Orlando's madness and his recovery, is essentially symmetrical. This can be demonstrated not only through a study of the structure of the crisis itself, but also through an examination of the construction and the juxtaposition of the infrastructures which parallel it. The central theme can be broken down into its several components by means of a study of how these infrastructures contribute to the climate in which the events of the central narrative line take place, since they gravitate to one central, synthetic image.

The opening lines of the poem's first canto consist of an enumeration of the same basic elements which will serve as a framework for the narrative structure of the poem: "Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori — le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto" (1,1, 1-2). This list of persons and objects participates in and contributes to the climate of self-doubt and loss of sanity: each of these elements has a separate narrative line based upon it which helps to build the story. Though Ariosto lists objects and persons, they serve as mechanisms which represent the concepts and values with which the poet is dealing in his work. Through them, once-fixed values will be shown to be in flux, and through the intervention of folly, chance, or time, each will show the opposite side of its nature, even as Orlando does. In turn, many of the questioned values will be restored and reaffirmed, though the tenor of doubt remains.

The extent to which the poet is questioning these concepts and values, and the intensity of the climate of doubt he creates, can be detected by his personal involvement in the crisis which befalls Orlando. Significantly, his first mention of Orlando's madness is tied to his own personal experience, setting the scene for the subsequent crisis with a gradual increase in intensity of tone:

Dirò d'Orlando in un medesimo tratto
 cosa non detta in prosa mai né in rima:
 che per amor venne in furore e matto,
 d'uom che sì saggio era stimato prima;
 se da colei che tal quasi m'ha fatto,
 che 'l poco ingegno ad or ad or mi lima,
 me ne sarà però tanto concesso,
 che mi basti a finir quanto ho promesso." (1,2, 1-8)

This first mention prepares for Orlando's madness; a later reiteration of this same theme takes place in canto 24, the canto in which Orlando's madness begins. Here, however, the poet is now preparing the way for the recuperation of Orlando's wits by expressing a hope for his own eventual recovery, despite the severity of his own crisis:

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;
 et ho gran cura (e spero farlo ormai)
 di riposarmi e d'uscir fuor di ballo:
 ma tosto far, come vorrei, nol posso;
 che 'l male è penetrato infin all 'osso. (24, 3, 1-8)

Similarly, the supporting elements listed in the prologue contribute to the unfolding of the narrative. The first of these elements is "le donne", and women play a central role in the crisis of Orlando's madness, on the two levels we have established. First, on the surface level of narrative cause and effect, it is Orlando's excessive, unrequited love for a woman which leads him to stray from the path of his chivalric duty, and, in consequence, he is punished by going mad.

Secondly, on the stylistic level, the changing shades of dark and light in which Ariosto depicts the role of women signal both the approaching crisis of Orlando's madness and the subsequent recuperation of his wits. Both individually and collectively, the position of the woman is questioned and rehabilitated. The character of Marfisa demonstrates this concept. Marfisa is perhaps the most isolated character in the poem; without family or background, she is seen only in the role of warrior, whereas Bradamante plays the dual role of lover-warrior. Her crisis of identity as a woman follows the crisis of Orlando's madness closely, and is interwoven with the story of Bradamante, which carries on the main line of the love theme. The resolution of the crisis of Bradamante's jealousy accomplishes several purposes. First, it establishes both Bradamante and Marfisa as women, on a purely physical and very concrete level, as can be seen in the description of their fight, which follows their chivalric duel: "che la battaglia fanno — a pugni e a calci, poi ch'altro non hanno." (36, 50, 7-8). Secondly, this episode serves to situate Marfisa within a family structure, explains her back-

ground, and sets the scene for her baptism which seals the process of her socialization. Thirdly, it contributes to the general atmosphere of a rehabilitation of the status of women in the poem, the rehabilitation of a socially isolated person, and thus hints at the approaching rehabilitation of Orlando himself. Also, this sudden and miraculous explanation of Marfisa's origins has the added effect of completely nullifying Bradamante's jealousy — at least for the moment. Therefore, the infrastructures set up by Ariosto confirm both the thematic and stylistic build-up. The theme of Marfisa's story parallels Orlando's recovery, while in the images we also find a stylistic similarity: for example, Orlando is wrestled to the ground by his knights and his struggles are described in the realistic terms which have lent a physical immediacy to both scenes: "Ad Olivier che troppo inanzi fassi, — menò un pugno sì duro e sì perverso..." (39, 50, 5-6).

The woman is also described in the communal setting, and in this case as well we find the images which parallel the build-up of Orlando's madness and the resolution of the crisis. The two collectives of women in the *Orlando Furioso* illustrate opposing points of view; positive and negative poles. The first group of women is encountered in canto 19; these women murder or imprison all men who venture near their shores unless they can fulfill the rules of combat; they must defeat ten champions in battle, and then sleep with ten women. This cruel and unnatural society is destroyed through the combined efforts of the prowess of a woman, Marfisa, and Astolfo's magic horn (significantly, the gift of a woman, Logistilla). In addition, at the beginning of this canto, Ariosto has already signalled the reader that this state of affairs will not persist; speaking in general terms of the negative image of women which literature has heretofore presented, he says:

Le donne son venute in eccellenza
 di ciascun'arte ove hanno posto cura;
 e qualunque all'istorie abbia avvertenza,
 ne sente ancor la fama non oscura.
 Se 'l mondo n'è gran tempo stato senza,
 non però sempre il mal influo dura;
 e forse ascosi han lor debiti onori
 l'invidia o il non saper degli scrittori." (20, 2, 1-8)

And such, indeed, is the case in Ariosto's poem. The next group of women encountered presents the opposite image, through the story of Marganorre and Drusilla. Here the virtuous nature of women is restored; in answer to the flexible morals of a Doralice or an Orrigille, we have instead a woman who commits suicide rather than submit to her husband's murderer. And in the prologue to this canto, Ariosto has reintroduced a theme which signals to the reader the approaching of a crisis. In canto 20 he has warned that the negative image of women would give way to a positive one, and now in canto 37 a lengthy argument contends that the time has come for women to receive their due praises and to be fairly represented in literature:

che, come cosa buona non si trova
 che duri sempre, così ancor né ria.
 Se le carte sin qui state e gl'inchiostri
 per voi non sono, or sono a' tempi nostri. (37, 7, 5-8).

Not only is this passage a near echo of 20, 3, 1-4:

Ben mi par di veder ch'al secol nostro
 tanta virtu fra belle donne emerga,
 che può dare opra a carte et ad inchiostro,
 perché nei futuri anni si disperga... (20, 3, 1-4)

but the two statements also contribute to the creation of a climate of flux, of progression, of a passage from evil toward good, preparing for Orlando's similar passage.

The next component of Ariosto's fictive world is "i cavallier". Indeed, throughout the poem, it is most notably the folly of man which gives rise to the various crises of the narrative. Can it be shown that these secondary crises in any way parallel Orlando's, and do they help to create the climate of anticipation which prepares the reader for the loss and the recuperation of his wits? Do they in addition bring into relief some of the nuances of Orlando's crisis?

One parallel example to Orlando's folly can be found in the episode of Grifone, who follows Orrigille and Martano to Damascus, having been deluded into believing that Orrigille is still faithful to him. The results are serious, though not so serious as they are for Orlando; Grifone is betrayed and imprisoned, though eventually he, too, regains the honor he had lost. But the reader is left with an overriding sense of

his folly in having believed Orrigille's tale, even as Orlando will attempt to delude himself into believing that it is another Angelica who has married Medoro.

This theme of delusion is worthy of further study; perhaps its most fully developed metaphor is found in the episode of the magic castle of Atlante, into whose trap men and women alike are lured by false images of their lovers created through sorcery. Even Bradamante, warned in advance by Melissa, is not immune to its lures: "perché voglio de la credenza altrui — che la veduta mia giudichi peggio?" (13, 77, 5-6).

Yet, in attempting to follow Ruggiero, she finds, as have all the others (including Orlando himself) that she has been following an illusion: "A tutti par che quella cosa sia, — che più ciascun per sé brama e desia" (12, 20, 7-8). Here many of the principal characters of the poem are made the victims of their universal weakness, pathetically wandering throughout the castle pursuing the false images of what they desire the most.

There are elements in Orlando's role in these canti, both thematic (his delusion) and stylistic (images and language which relate to and foretell his own impending crisis) which will be more fully developed later in canto 24 when he truly becomes mad:

Subito smonta, e fulminando passa
dove più dentro il bel tetto s'alloggia:
corre di qua, corre di là... (12, 9, 1-3).

Similarly, Rodomonte's rage upon learning of Doralice's infidelity foreshadows Orlando's madness; similarities in the text bear this out: for Rodomonte, Ariosto writes: "a tanta rabbia, a tal furor s'estende, — che ne a monte né a rio né a notte mira;" (18, 35, 5-6), and for Orlando: "In tanta rabbia, in tanto furor venne, — che rimase offuscato in ogni senso." (23, 134, 1-2).

However, beneath the semantic similarities, there is also an essential difference between these two stories; the conclusion of one represents the positive outcome, and the other, the negative. For Rodomonte, there will be no real recuperation, no salvation. His future becomes increasingly violent, from the killing of Isabella to his own demise. Significantly, the poem ends with his violent and bloody

death, not with Orlando's recovery, as if to warn of the inevitable consequences of excess. His is the counter-type to the story of Orlando's madness, as it is to Brandimarte's in battle. There is no salvation for him, whereas Orlando is restored to society. Orlando, Rinaldo, and Ruggiero will all achieve this recuperation, through different means; Orlando will reacquire his sanity, Ruggiero will be restored to the Christian social structure as was Marfisa. The cases of Rinaldo and Astolfo are problematical and contain nuances the others lack; they perhaps best represent Ariosto's intentions, an acceptance of the limits of human knowledge and of the impermanence of human achievement.

The next component of Ariosto's poetic structure is "l'arme", and the fates of the various arms and accoutrements of the Christian knights, which end up in the Saracens' hands, symbolize both the spiritual condition of the Christian army, whose soldiers are forever neglecting their duty for the sake of love, and the contemporary state of the spiritual and political affairs of the Italy of Ariosto's time. They trace throughout the complex narrative line of the poem a line of moral as well as physical straying from the right and an eventual return to it. In addition, this theme is connected with the necessity of recourse to the supernatural forces miraculously provided by Astolfo, who is also, by means of a supernatural voyage, able to restore Orlando's wits. The battle of positive and negative forces often takes place in this sphere as well, between sorcerers such as Melissa and Atlante, and through the use of magical weapons such as the ring or Astolfo's horn.

Love itself is mentioned next in the prologue, and the many digressions which follow throughout the poem on the nature and typology of love are summed up in the introduction to the pivotal canto 24:

Chi mette il pié 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 vòler, perder se stesso? (24, 1, 1-8)

Furthermore, a very cursory examination of the themes related to love (which could constitute a separate study in itself) shows the development of this theme in its various aspects and dangers, and also shows how closely its line follows the development of the Orlando theme of insanity and recovery. Canto 1 opens with the link not only between the author himself and Orlando, but also between love for a woman and insanity; in canto 2, Ariosto describes the state which has led to Orlando's madness — the unequal state of unrequited love. In canto 4, he presents the dangers of delusion; and in canto 5, strife between men and women; in canto 6, betrayal; and in canto 8, love resulting from enchantment. In canto 9, very significantly, Orlando abandons his duty to search for Angelica: "or per un vano amor, poco del zio, — e di sé poco, e men cura di Dio." (9, 1, 7-8).

In canto 10 the problem of infidelity is presented, and in canto 11 the fact that reason is seldom sufficient to deter a man from temptation: "raro è però che di ragione il morso — libidinosa furia a dietro volga, — quando il piacere ha in pronto" (11, 1, 3-5).

Canto 12 presents a significant parallel image to Orlando's search for Angelica which culminates in such despair; he is compared to Ceres searching for her lost daughter, and the same vocabulary and images are used to describe both scenes, with both Ceres and Orlando tearing up trees in their anguish.

Canto 13 reconfirms the negative image of women, presenting the difficulty of finding a virtuous woman. In canto 16, Ariosto discusses the penalties of love, such as enslavement; in canto 19 he warns that changes in fortune will demonstrate the difference between true and false friends, emphasizing the temporal nature of human emotions. In canto 20 we are again confronted with the negative image of women, in contrast to the positive male image which Zerbino personifies in canto 21. This contrast is further intensified by the presence of Gabrina in canto 22. In canto 23 wrong-doers are warned that bad actions have bad consequences, just as Orlando is punished for abandoning his duty. Canto 24 describes the madness of love, which sets the scene for the expanded description of Orlando's madness.

The arrival at the moment of crisis in the poem signals a turning point in the narrative. Significantly, the insertion of positive elements now begins to take place, as one canto later, Ariosto already prepares

for Orlando's recovery, stating that honor and duty can be compatible with love, and that love can be a force which influences toward good ends as well as bad: "Dunque Amor sempre rio non si ritrova: — se spesso nuoce, anco talvolta giova." (25, 2, 7-8).

Furthermore, canti 26, 27, and 28 serve to refute the negative image of women, while providing a reversal of the earlier contrast with an example of the unfaithfulness of men, in canto 29. In canto 30 Ariosto warns of future repentance when love gives way to fury, thus implying the potential for a recovered state, in which regret will be felt. In canti 31 and 32 the narrative line is transferred to Bradamante's crisis, and its resolution foreshadows the resolution of Orlando's own crisis. Canto 34 further prepares the reader for the scene of Orlando's recovery, as the agent of that recovery, Astolfo, chases the Harpies, symbolizing psychological torment, back to Hell. In canto 35 Ariosto asks rhetorically who will restore his own wits; in Canto 37 he praises women, and in canto 38 he stresses the importance of duty over love, through the example of Ruggiero, in a reversal of the error committed by Orlando. Finally, in canto 39, Orlando's wits are restored to him by Astolfo.

Thus, though other characters are often the agents who carry out these themes, there is a central unity which ties together the many diverse infrastructures. Thematically and stylistically, they are all linked to the central theme and the central narrative line; for example, Bradamante's adventures and misfortunes, though only occasionally intersecting Orlando's on the narrative level, not only serve to set the scene for them, but actually interpret and illuminate aspects of the central problem which he impersonates.

"Le cortesie", or chivalry, as a theme, serves much the same purpose; the violation of his knightly duty to Charlemagne results in madness for Orlando, and likewise, his impending recovery is signalled on the stylistic and thematic levels by an elevation in tone, and a maximum stress on chivalric language and concepts. For example, Ferrau gives as his reason for fighting Bradamante: "Non che vincer spero, — ma perché di cader più degna scusa — abbian, cadendo anch'io, questi guerrieri." (35, 74, 2-4). Also, the duel between Ruggiero and Rinaldo, and most especially the duel between Ruggiero and Dudone, literally become duels of chivalric speech:

— Per Dio (dice), signor, pace facciamo;
 ch'esser non può più la vittoria mia:
 esser non può più mia; che già mi chiamo
 vinto e prigion de la tua cortesia. —
 Ruggier rispose: — Et io la pace bramo
 non men di te; ma che con patto sia,
 che questi sette re c'hai qui legati,
 lasci ch'in libertà mi sieno dati. — (41, 6, 1-8).

Running alongside this theme is a perceptible tone of regret for the passing of a way of life which the author saw as better than the contemporary one:

Ben furo avventurosi i cavalieri
 ch'erano a quella età, che nei valloni,
 ne le scure spelonche e boschi fieri,
 tane di serpi, d'orsi e di leoni,
 trovavan quel che nei palazzi altieri
 a pena or trovar puon giudici buoni: (13, 1, 1-6)

Having discussed the role played by the woman in the build-up to Orlando's madness, and in his recovery as well, the role of the couple ought to be examined also. For example, the couple of Angelica and Medoro proves disastrous to Orlando on the surface level of narrative cause and effect. But what sort of infrastructures do the other pairings create, and do they contribute to the structure of the main theme? Many pairings occur in the canti immediately preceding Orlando's fall into folly, and dissolve with equal rapidity (Zerbino-Gabrina, Pinabello-La Donzella, Orlando-Isabella, etc.), and this climate of instability provides the psychological plane with anguish in preparation for Orlando's madness, itself the result of the pairing of Angelica and Medoro. Orlando has witnessed the fragility of the couple; now it becomes his personal experience (Bireno-Olimpia, Zerbino-Isabella). The instability of the Isabella-Zerbino couple was at first due to temporary circumstances, but in the violent explosion of events in the wake of Orlando's madness, the tragic destruction of this couple becomes permanent. The climate of impending tragedy is prepared by Zerbino's reaction to the sight of the temporary pairing of Orlando and Isabella:

perché si pensa, e senza dubbio tiene
 ch'Orlando sia de la donzella amante.
 Così cadendo va di pene in pene,
 e poco dura il gaudio ch'ebbe inante:
 il vederla d'altrui peggio sopporta,
 che non fe' quando udi ch'ella era morta. (23, 65, 3-8).

Is the role of the couple reestablished in the poem? This is not so clear. The eventual reconciliation of Bradamante and Ruggiero, though fraught with difficulties, serves to illustrate the point that duty must supersede love. However, the tragic ruin of the couple of Fiordiligi and Brandimarte leaves behind an overwhelming sense of loss. At best, the result is ambiguous, as in the case of Rinaldo and his wife; but here again, by means of this example, an important point is made; the necessity of accepting limits. Thus, in the *Orlando Furioso*, the couple is seen in all its various ramifications throughout the narrative: tragic (Isabella-Zerbino, Fiordiligi-Brandimarte), comic (Zerbino-Gabrina), deadlocked (Rodomonte-Doralice/Doralice-Mandricardo), and ambiguous (Rinaldo).

This lingering ambiguity brings the narrative full-circle. The stories of Rinaldo and Astolfo best illustrate this point. The two infrastructures which devolve from these two characters illuminate most clearly the follies and vicissitudes of Orlando's own adventures, and in addition, carry them one step further. By showing Astolfo's central role in the unfolding and resolution of Orlando's crisis, I hope to demonstrate that the choice of Astolfo for the fulfilling of this function was made with the express purpose of developing further the exploration of the theme embodied in Orlando's experiences.

When Astolfo is first encountered in the tale, he has already suffered misfortune from a foolish excess of love, just as Orlando will suffer later. Deluded and tricked by love combined with the magic element which accompanies Astolfo throughout the poem, he has not gone mad (though later we learn that he too has lost a share of his wits), but has been transformed into a plant and abandoned on Alcina's island. He himself refers to his folly: "Di mia sciocchezza tosto fui pentito" (6, 41, 7). When he is released, he receives instruction from the enchantress Logistilla, who embodies the opposing virtues of wisdom and good sense; she gives him a book which will

enable him to avoid enchantments and a horn with which to defend himself. Many of his adventures are symbolic and prepare the reader for his pivotal role in restoring Orlando's sanity: he destroys the illusory castle of Atlante, which symbolizes the delusions of love; he captures and kills Caligorante and Orrillo, respectively, just as he will capture and tie the mad Orlando. The net with which he binds Caligorante is, symbolically, the one made by Vulcan to ensnare the adulterous Aphrodite, combining the psychological problem of unfaithfulness and the fantasy element. When he chases the Harpies back to Hell, his role in eradicating the mental torment of Orlando is foretold. In addition, he uses his horn to destroy the island of the women, who symbolize all of the negative characteristics exhibited by individual women in the narrative. He travels to Hell, where he learns of the punishment of the ungrateful, and thence to the Earthly Paradise, a scene reminiscent of the idyllic landscape in which Orlando's madness takes place. He is also warned by Saint John of the transitory nature of fame through the image of the waters of Lethe. His personal experience will also serve as an illustration of the vanity of achievement. He learns that the things stored on the moon have been lost through time, chance, or our own folly. We are told that, after restoring his own wits, Astolfo was wise until he lost them again. Thus, the feeling of achievement in Orlando's recovery is negated even before that recovery actually takes place.

A profound sense of the absurdity of human endeavor is the overriding feeling which remains at the resolution of the poem. Nowhere is this feeling of vanity, of emptiness resulting from the final synthesis of thematic elements, more acutely felt than when the boats and armies created by Astolfo's magic are turned again into stones and leaves which blow away in the wind. This literal disappearance of both physical and psychological elements alludes to the larger problem of the futility of mortal accomplishment. Though Orlando's wits have been restored, and the battle is won, we are left with a sense of loss, an overwhelming awareness of the impermanence and fragility of life. All the values of love, war, and the chivalric code have been questioned. The essential opposites of folly and wisdom have synthesized and vanished. What, then, is left?

The answer is most clearly demonstrated by Rinaldo's acceptance of limits and measures. In his refusal to drink the wine which will tell him whether or not his wife is faithful, he imposes limits on his own desire to know, and reestablishes the value of faith. If Orlando's madness is the result of excess, Rinaldo's wisdom is an acceptance of limitations:

...ben sarebbe folle
 chi quel che non vorria trovar, cercasse.
 Mia donna è donna, et ogni donna è molle:
 lascian star mia credenza come stasse.
 Sin qui m'ha il creder mio giovato, e giova:
 che poss'io megliorar per farne prova? (43, 6, 3-8)

This leaves a far more satisfying, or at least realistically based, feeling of resolution than the uncorking of the vessel containing Orlando's wits. In addition, Rinaldo himself draws parallels between his own choice and that which has faced humankind since the folly of Adam, "che tal certezza ha Dio più proibita, — ch'al primo padre l'arbor de la vita." (43, 7, 7-8).

Furthermore, against the void created by the disappearance of Astolfo's magic, the inescapable sense of the vanity of endeavor left by the knowledge that Astolfo's cure is only temporary, and against the poet's poignant awareness of the passing of a tradition based on symmetry and measure, of a way of life palpable beneath the fantastical surface, we are faced with the fixed, permanent, symmetrical structure of the poetic creation itself, so clearly perceptible in a study of its thematic and stylistic elements.