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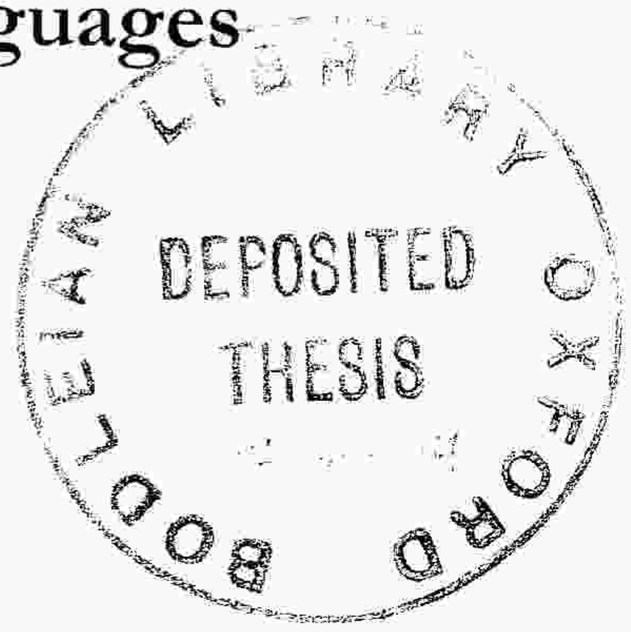
The Reception of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) by Three Italian Women Writers of the Sixteenth Century

Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages
University of Oxford

Hilary Term 2006



SHORT ABSTRACT

'The Reception of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) by Three Italian Women Writers of the Sixteenth Century'

Caroline Waring
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D.Phil
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The thesis aims to bridge a gap in the current re-evaluation of women's contribution to the literature of Renaissance Italy, by focussing on the reception of Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* – published in its 'final' version in 1532 – by three female poets of the sixteenth century: Isabella di Morra (1516/18-45/46), Laura Bacio Terracina (c.1519-77) and Moderata Fonte (1555-92). The thesis examines how the 'Ariostism' of all three women writers challenges the model of Petrarch as benchmark for female literary production during the Cinquecento.

Chapter One outlines some of the gender-related issues raised in the *Furioso*, with which the three female poets may subsequently be said to engage. The chapter looks at both narratorial statements and constructions of masculinity and femininity within the text, revealing Ariosto's complex relationship with the question of gender.

Chapter Two considers the Ariostan echoes present within Isabella di Morra's *Rime*, first published in full in an anthology of 1559. Her small *canzoniere* – not typically Petrarchan in its themes and tone – is re-considered in light of the *Furioso*, especially with regard to the topos of the 'abandoned woman' and the twin themes of harsh landscape and malevolent Fortune which are central to her poetics.

Chapter Three discusses Laura Bacio Terracina's *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti d'Orlando Furioso* (1549), a moralizing commentary in *ottava rima* which constitutes one of the most direct responses to Ariosto's poem. Terracina's bold appropriation of the model of the *Furioso* incorporates aims of both a poetic and an ideological nature, since her engagement also revolves around moral issues that are mostly gendered in their emphasis.

Chapter Four considers Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581), the first 'original' romance epic to be written and published by a woman. The *Floridoro* contains strong thematic and structural parallels with the *Furioso*; yet the chapter also highlights the ways in which Fonte diverges from the Ariostan precedent, re-writing the epic genre in feminine – and 'feminist' – key.

The thesis concludes that the poetic model of the *Furioso* would play an increasingly important role in the development of the female literary canon as the century progressed.

LONG ABSTRACT

'The Reception of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) by Three Italian Women Writers of the Sixteenth Century'

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This thesis aims to bridge a gap in the current re-evaluation of women's contribution to the literature of Renaissance Italy, by focussing on the reception of Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* – published in its 'final' version in 1532 – by three female poets of the sixteenth century: Isabella di Morra (1516/18-45/46), Laura Bacio Terracina (c.1519-77) and Moderata Fonte (1555-92). The thesis examines the ways in which each of the three women writers self-consciously engages with the precedent of the *Furioso*, giving rise to a form of 'Ariostism' that challenges the model of Petrarch as benchmark for female literary production during the Cinquecento. This aspect of Italian women's writing has been relatively under-explored in recent criticism, which has tended to focus on the female-authored Petrarchan love lyric. The thesis will thus provide a counter-balance to previous critical analysis of female Petrarchism, considering as it does the 'gendered' appropriation of the epic genre, and of the *Furioso* in particular. The *Furioso* itself is seen to become something of a canonical text for the three women writers, in terms of both content – especially regarding its ambivalent position within the so-called *querelle des femmes* – and form, namely *ottava rima*.

After a short introductory piece that summarizes the literary and historical context of Renaissance women's writing, Chapter One outlines some of the gender-related issues raised in the *Furioso*, with which the three female poets may subsequently be said to engage. The chapter firstly looks at the 'gendered' framework

of Ariosto's *proemi*, the preliminary stanzas at the beginning of each *canto*, in which the male narrator is often seen to pronounce distinctly pro-feminist opinion on subjects such as male-female relationships and identities. The chapter then considers whether such statements are negated by the less considered and more 'spontaneous' narratorial outbursts that punctuate the text, as ironic – and often misogynistic – asides or subtle insertions into the story-telling, which give a somewhat fuller picture of the narrator's conflicting attitudes towards questions of gender. The analysis then turns to the various constructions of femininity and masculinity within the *Furioso*, with particular reference to the concepts of *arme* and *amor*; here, a sliding scale of femininity is seen to emerge from the presentation of female characters in the poem. The chapter also looks at ideas of sexuality and transgression in these constructions, in which Ariosto explores various 'extremes' of behaviour in a more subversive representation of gender identities. The author is seen deliberately to create ambiguity and conflict through both the narrator and the presentation of characters in order to challenge the reader's preconceptions regarding gender issues, which are shown in all their complexity.

Chapter Two considers the Ariostan echoes present within Isabella di Morra's *Rime*, which were first published in full in an anthology of 1559. Her small *canzoniere* – which does not appear typically Petrarchan in its themes and tone – is analysed in light of the *Furioso*, especially with regard to the topos of the 'abandoned woman'. Morra's poem III appears to display an awareness of the Olimpia episode in *canto* X of the *Furioso*, with which it has several parallels; the chapter duly examines the thematic and linguistic resonances with the section involving Olimpia's abandonment, and furthermore suggests that Morra may well have felt a greater degree of identification with the suffering heroines of Ariosto's epic than with the

male poet-protagonists of the existing lyric canon, namely Petrarch and Petrarchism. The bitter lyricism of Morra's lament contains linguistic echoes of passages in the *Furioso* concerning female characters in similar situations of distress, such as Olimpia, Isabella, Bradamante and Fiordiligi. The analysis then widens to include an evaluation of the apparent 'Petrarchism' of Morra's *Rime*, but also highlights the differences with Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which is continually adapted to Morra's very personal experience. The chapter also dwells on the violence of both imagery and style in her poems, which appears to draw from an alternative source: what emerges is that one of Morra's main poetic models was Ariosto. The twin horrors of harsh landscape and malevolent Fortune – major themes in the *Rime* – are re-considered in light of the *Furioso*, again revealing linguistic correspondences of some significance. Morra's originality lies in her ability to transcend the narrow confines of the stylized Petrarchan code of expression, incorporating elements that pertain to her individual situation; the chapter argues that Ariosto's poem serves as a highly pertinent reference point for such an endeavour.

Chapter Three moves away from considerations of female Petrarchism proper and towards the female appropriation of the epic as a genre. Laura Bacio Terracina's *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti d'Orlando Furioso* (1549), a moralizing commentary in *ottava rima*, constitutes one of the most direct responses to Ariosto's epic, since its very structure is based on lines taken from the first *ottava* of all 46 *proemi* in the *Furioso*. Terracina's bold appropriation of the model of the *Furioso* incorporates aims of both a poetic and an ideological nature, since her engagement also revolves around moral issues that are mostly gendered in tone. The chapter firstly situates the *Discorso* within the context of contemporary discourse, before outlining Terracina's unusual method of poetic extraction, which effectively

deconstructs the *proemi* of the *Furioso* – including any statements that the narrator may wish to impart to the potential reader. The body of the chapter explores the 'gendered' issues that emerge as the defining thrust of Terracina's commentary, which responds directly to Ariosto's subject matter as voiced by his narrator. In so doing, Terracina reveals her status as one of the first female authors to assume the mantle of defender of women's interests; her popular *Discorso*, comparatively unknown to a modern critical readership, indeed constitutes one of the first female replies to the contemporary *querelle des femmes*. The chapter lastly examines the 'literary' feminism promoted by Terracina, namely her exhortation to other women to study and to write – seemingly unprecedented in the Italian literary tradition. The construction of a 'didactic' tool for her women readers can be discerned in Terracina's clear feminist agenda, which takes issue with Ariosto's poem to startling effect. Her *Discorso* would necessarily widen the boundaries for women writers, leading to the full appropriation of the 'masculine' genre of the epic.

Such an appropriation is explored in Chapter Four, which considers Moderata Fonte's relatively unknown romance epic entitled *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581), the first 'original' chivalric fiction to be written and published by a woman. The *Floridoro* contains strong thematic and structural parallels with the *Furioso*, as close textual analysis of the two poems reveals; yet the chapter also highlights the ways in which Fonte diverges from the Ariostan precedent, creating a specifically 'feminized' version of the genre which allows for subversion of the stock scenarios and characters – particularly male figures – of the romance tradition. The chapter examines the feminist agenda that underpins Fonte's poem, which can also be seen in the author's treatment of male and female characters; indeed, her gentle undermining of masculine heroic ideals borders on satire. The promotion of strong female identities as the

logical alternative to masculine posturing constitutes a move away from romance conventions, which are in many ways revised or otherwise entirely re-written by Fonte. The analysis elucidates the author's methods in the *Floridoro* of challenging existing preconceptions concerning the characterization of certain recognizable female figures – who do not simply parallel their Ariostan counterparts – alongside the construction of chivalric scenarios that deliberately upset the gendered stereotypes of the romance tradition. Fonte's appropriation of the 'masculine' form of the epic poem is seen as highly innovative within the existing female literary canon, even if the apparently unfinished nature of the *Floridoro* precludes full analysis of certain story-lines and other structural features. Fonte's engagement with Ariosto's text functions on the level of both content and form, yet her originality lies in the systematic and deliberate creation of characters and chivalric set-pieces that bear the hallmark of her uniquely feminist perspective.

The thesis concludes that the poetic model of the *Furioso* would play an increasingly important role in the development of the female literary canon as the century progressed. Indeed, Ariosto's text would enable all three women writers to experiment with linguistic, thematic and structural features within their own literary output that were not solely bound to the tenets of Petrarchism; and this would continue into the seventeenth century, with the historical epics of Margherita Sarrocchi (*La Scanderbeide*, published in full – in 23 *canti* – in 1623) and Lucrezia Marinella (*L'Enrico overo Bisanzio Riacquistato*, a poem of 27 *canti* published in 1635). The thesis does not examine the latter two works since they lie outside its remit of specifically sixteenth-century women writers influenced by Ariosto, and are themselves perhaps less obviously guided by the poetic model of the *Furioso*; yet much would be gained from further study of this area of female-authored long

narrative, which has so far attracted little critical attention. In its examination of Morra, Terracina and Fonte, the thesis aims to show that the *Furioso*'s exploration of gender issues would furthermore provoke a specifically 'literary' response in such women writing in the wake of Ariosto's poem. Despite the presence in Ariosto of a strain of misogynistic thought, his chivalric epic would paradoxically prove extremely fruitful for the advancement of women's writing in sixteenth-century Italy.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Martin McLaughlin, for his much-valued guidance, advice and inspiration during the course of this project. I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor, Dr Marco Dorigatti, without whom my interest in Renaissance women writers would not have been sparked.

Thanks also go to the staff of the Bodleian, Taylor Institution and Modern Languages Faculty Libraries, Oxford; those at the British Library, London; and those at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice, and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, for their advice and assistance. I would like to acknowledge the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council) for its generous funding of the project for the first three years, alongside substantial travel grants from St John's College and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation of New York, which enabled me to spend time in Venice looking at various early printed editions.

I would like to thank my friends – particularly David Clark, Mike Froggatt, Kate McClune and Stella Moss – for their invaluable support during the course of my graduate studies; and Joe Carlisle, whose encouragement has been unstinting and much appreciated, especially in the final year of the doctorate. Thanks also go to Andy, Debs and Ned in St John's College bar, for much-needed doses of wisdom and humour.

I would lastly like to thank my family – my mother and father, Elizabeth and Nigel, my sister Melissa and my brother Nicholas – for their quiet but continued support of the project, without which it would never have reached completion. This thesis is dedicated to my parents, with love and thanks.

Introduction

Ariosto, Women and Writing

The publication of the final version of Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1532) was to prove pivotal in the history of Italian literature, crowning as it did the long tradition of chivalric narratives that had been popular since the medieval period. In terms of both subject matter and style, Ariosto's delicate but masterful handling of his lengthy poem would elevate the romance epic to new heights: incorporating a dizzying variety of material in the interweaving strands of plot and sub-plot, the author's skill in the art of *ottava rima* would be no less visible. The ensuing polemic concerning the *Furioso*'s supposed disregard for both the unity of action and the high moral tone expected of the epic genre – following the diffusion of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the 1530s and 1540s – would paradoxically ensure the status and prominence of the work in the sixteenth-century collective literary consciousness, as supporters and detractors subsequently debated the merits of its so-called 'allegorical' content.

In addition, Ariosto's work would go on to enjoy a sphere of influence that encompassed various aspects of literary and artistic life. The success of the *Furioso* spawned a glut of chivalric epics written by minor poets keen to seize onto the public's enthusiasm for romance; whilst the poem itself would be translated into French, Spanish and English by the end of the century. The *Furioso* was also adopted by dialect writers, whose translation of Ariosto's text was not always in satirical vein, but often a means of elevating their own literary production; furthermore, comic writers such as Giulio Cesare Croce later carried out their own parodic 'transformations' of the Ariostan model. The *Furioso* was variously viewed as an exemplary text to be studied in schools; as a tool for misogynistic writings; and as a

source – particularly in the *lamenti* of its central characters – for musical compositions, which would later find expression in opera libretti of the early seventeenth century.

In this sense, Ariosto's poem would remain something of a model for both contemporary and future writers; yet the role of the *Furioso* as 'tool' for the promotion of female literacy and literary renown has been relatively under-explored in recent criticism, which has tended to focus on the more substantial body of Petrarchan lyric poetry produced by women writers during the course of the Cinquecento. This thesis will attempt to provide a further angle to the on-going examination of women's writing in Renaissance Italy, by its analysis of the reception of the *Furioso* by three female poets writing in the aftermath of Ariosto's poem.

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The comparatively marginal status of women in the social, political and economic spheres of early modern Europe was of course highly influential in the subsequently limited development of female cultural and intellectual pursuits, and much has been made of their disadvantaged position in the reconstruction of a 'female' history which includes literary output as one of its most concrete frames of reference.[1] The place of women either 'within' or 'without' the male canon has been variously debated, with some critics claiming that women's voices can be found in the midst of male versions of history, forming a 'culture within the culture' rather than one outside it, and thus engendering a process of recuperation and reintegration in

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[1] See for example Joan Kelly's classic essay, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?', in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 19-50, in which she challenges Jacob Burckhardt's famous assertion in his 1860 work that in the Renaissance, 'women were regarded as equal to men' (cf. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, ed. & intro. Irene Gordon [New York, Mentor Books: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1961], p. 280). See also Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1985); and the informative essays in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown & Robert C. Davis (London & New York, Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1998).

order to complete the otherwise male-orientated picture;[2] whilst others see the female voice – particularly in its strictly 'literary' guise – as disembodied from prevailing ideologies, as distinctly 'other' or 'de-centred', and which can in reality only stand apart from tradition.[3] The voices that did emerge in Renaissance Italy – whether as part of a proto-feminist response to the misogynist train of thought or as personal and individual literary output – were in any case in a distinct minority in comparison to the male-dominated literary sphere.

Women were firstly marginalized in relation to the humanist movement of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries owing to their crippling lack of education, which to a large extent did not allow them to engage with contemporary poetic, philosophical, moral and other discourse, written in Latin. The few educated women humanists whose works survive – such as Isotta Nogarola (1418-66), Cassandra Fedele (c.1465-1558) and Laura Cereta (1469-99) – were most probably exceptions to the rule, and were themselves aware that their activities could not be continued in the same way as in their formative years once they had reached adulthood, when the choice of either marriage or religious vocation inevitably disrupted the path of purely 'secular' study.[4] This 'choice' would continue to pose a problem well into the

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[2] Cf. Ginevra Conti Odorisio, 'Per una storia delle idee femministe', in *Donna e società nel Seicento*, intro. Ida Magli (Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 1979), pp. 19-26.

[3] Cf. Marina Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria italiana* (Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1998); Zancan claims that 'esse [le voci femminili] si configurano come decentrate, voci minori, occasionali, immagini mute, indecifrabili' (p. x).

[4] Modern translations of these women writers now exist: cf. Isotta Nogarola, *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, ed. & trans. Margaret L. King & Diana Robin (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2004); Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. & trans. Diana Robin (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, transc., trans. & ed. Diana Robin (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997). See also Margaret L. King's two contributions, 'Thwarted Ambitions: Six Learned Women of the Italian Renaissance', *Soundings* 59 (1976), pp. 280-304; and 'Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance', in *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York, New York University Press, 1980), pp. 66-90. Both essays can now be found in Margaret L. King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women: Essays on the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2005), numbered VIII & XI.

sixteenth century, and arguably still provides the cornerstone for much modern feminist debate.

Both the emergence of printing in Italy from the 1470s onwards – particularly in the commercial centres of Rome, Venice, Florence and Naples – and the 'sanctioning' of writing in the vernacular following Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525) saw a widening of the reading public that was also favourable to women. Nonetheless, the chronic lack of female education and exclusion from all forms of literary and learned associations meant that women were slow to enter the literary arena. Following the 'canonization' by Bembo of Petrarch as the ultimate poetic model, the movement of Petrarchism in the Cinquecento would be seen to dominate all subsequent lyric production, including that of female lyric poets such as Veronica Gambara (1485-1550) and Vittoria Colonna (c.1490-1547). However, the lack of a specifically female role model in a literary tradition steeped in male discourse and masculine perspectives meant that potential women writers were faced with a linguistic code that did not allow for the expression of the female psyche. Such difficulties are indeed echoed in modern Italian feminist thought, in which the need for a female guide or 'mother figure' is acknowledged in order to establish a gendered identity of difference to but independence from men.[5] In order to carve out their own niche in Italian literary history, women writers would be forced to find ways in which to create an individual poetic voice whilst still adhering to the accepted canon.

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[5] See Itala T. C. Rutter's essay 'Woman as Subject: Theory and Micropolitical Practices in Italian Feminist Texts', in *Gendered Contexts: New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hairston & Silvia M. Ross (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1996), pp. 19-29. Rutter explains the concept of *affidamento* necessary for such a dynamic, drawing on the philosophy of Luisa Muraro and the Diotima group: 'Women need a female source of authority, a figure or symbolic mother with whom to form a social contract to legitimate them in their difference. The practice of "affidamento" will bring this about; it involves a recognition, a debt of gratitude to be paid to the mother, and a submission to *female* measures of judgment' (p. 26). For a short history of modern Italian feminist thought, see Sharon Wood, 'Aesthetics and Critical Theory', in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza & Sharon Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 267-81, especially pp. 273-78.

The twin problems of chastity and originality arise at this point. The first, because women had traditionally been conditioned by (patriarchal) society into accepting that silence and obedience were the 'natural' states for the female sex, and that the act of reading, let alone writing, was potentially dangerous and thus subject to control and limitation. The second, because adherence to the existing literary canon imposed certain stylistic and linguistic norms, even if the fact that the writing subject was female would itself constitute a form of transgression. If the Petrarchan model was based on a male-female dynamic in which the suffering male poet-protagonist spoke of his love for an absent, and mostly silent female beloved – whose idealized description incorporated the gendered blazon of bodily parts – then the female poet would be forced to 'feminize' the canon, reversing its gender roles and adapting its linguistic expression to her own poetic aims.[6] The Petrarchan code of female inaccessibility, based on distance, indifference and even death, would necessarily undergo a radical transformation, with the writing 'I' creating a female subjectivity that would supplant the silent and disembodied female ideal.

However, the expression by women of emotion, self-praise or self-affirmation was in large part considered 'irregular' and ultimately 'unchaste', unless it remained within the boundaries of socio-sexual decorum: as such, Vittoria Colonna's poetry – sonnets in memory of her dead husband, alongside religious poems – would be deemed exemplary. The women writers who did manage to create an authentic and at times subversive literary style amongst masculine conventions were often considered 'irregular' themselves, such as the courtesan-poets Tullia d'Aragona (1510-56) and Veronica Franco (1546-91), alongside the more ambiguous figure of Gaspara Stampa

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[6] For a reading of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* in light of the Diana-Actaeon myth, see Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981), pp. 265-79.

(1523-54). From their marginal positions, they succeeded in questioning the gendered polarities perpetuated by the Italian lyric tradition.[7]

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Nonetheless, the three poets discussed in the thesis that follows do not belong to the above category of slightly more unorthodox female figures. Rather, all three women – Isabella di Morra (1516/18-45/46), Laura Bacio Terracina (c.1519-77) and Moderata Fonte (1555-92) – came from socially elevated, if not always noble, families, and were assured a 'respectable' status. However, in the works examined during the course of this thesis, all three may be said to work 'outside the box' of Petrarchism proper, even if they are profoundly influenced by Petrarch's writings; and all three demonstrate a desire to exceed the narrow cultural expectations imposed on women engaged in literary activities, so that the literary canon in which they self-consciously work is both adapted to a female perspective and developed as necessary. The role of Ariosto within this canon proves vital, as I shall attempt to show in subsequent chapters; and Ariosto's own stance regarding questions of gender provides a further stimulus to such women writing in the wake of the *Furioso*, so that their

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[7] For an idea of women's response to writing within the male canon, see Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence', *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), pp. 135-53; and Fiora A. Bassanese, 'What's in a Name? Self-Naming and Renaissance Women Poets', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 104-15. Much work has been done in the second half of the twentieth century to bring women writers of the Renaissance to light. See, for example, the following recent anthologies, histories and related works (in chronological order): Natalia Costa-Zalessow, *Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo: testi e critica* (Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1982); Marina Zancan, ed., *Nel cerchio della luna: figure di donna in alcuni testi del XVI secolo* (Venice, Marsilio Editori, 1983); Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Athens & London, University of Georgia Press, 1987); Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990); Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1991); Marilyn Migiel & Juliana Schiesari, ed. & intro., *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance* (Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1991); Petra Wend, *The Female Voice: Lyrical Expression in the Writings of Five Italian Renaissance Poets* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1995); Maria Ornella Marotti, ed. & intro., *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon* (University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Laura Anna Stortoni, ed., *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, trans. Laura Anna Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie (New York, Italica Press, 1997); and Letizia Panizza, ed., *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society* (Oxford, Legenda, 2000).

engagement with his chivalric epic functions on both poetic and ideological levels. Accordingly, in its discussion of Terracina and Fonte, the thesis moves away from analysis of female Petrarchism to a less studied area, that of female 'Ariostism' or texts in *ottava rima* written by women, and influenced by Ariosto's romance epic rather than the sonnet.

The first chapter of the thesis will outline some of the gender-related issues raised in the *Furioso*, so that subsequent (female) commentary on or reaction to the work may be placed in context. The following three chapters will then examine how the richness and complexity of Ariosto's work provided an important poetic model for the three women writers in question, albeit in very different ways. The discussion will focus on how the *Furioso* appears to have enabled all three to experiment with different linguistic, thematic and structural features within their own literary output; and – ultimately – to broaden the female literary tradition so that it was not inextricably bound to the tenets of Petrarchism, problematic as the latter movement was for the female voice. This will be seen firstly in the small *canzoniere* of Isabella di Morra – published in full in an anthology of 1559 – which I analyse in terms of its thematic and linguistic resonances with the *Furioso*, particularly with regard to the topos of the abandoned woman. I then turn to the *Discorso* (1549) of Laura Bacio Terracina, a moralizing poetic commentary on Ariosto's work which raises issues of both form and content. I lastly look at Moderata Fonte's short romance epic entitled *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581), evaluating the construction of a 'feminized' version of the genre that incorporates her often subversive feminist vision.

Fonte's 'feminine' appropriation of the 'masculine' chivalric epic in *ottava rima* constitutes a defining moment in Italian literary history; and the final chapter on Fonte may in many ways be considered a climax to the entire thesis, the increasing

chapter lengths of which reflect an increasing engagement with the *Furioso* as the century progresses. Indeed, going into the seventeenth century, the historical epics of Margherita Sarrocchi (*La Scanderbeide*, published in full in 1623) and Lucrezia Marinella (*L'Enrico overo Bisanzio Riacquistato*, published in 1635) would continue this 'appropriation' of the *ottava*; however, the thesis does not examine the latter two works since they lie outside its remit of specifically sixteenth-century women writers influenced by Ariosto, and are themselves perhaps less obviously guided by the poetic model of the *Furioso*. Through close textual analysis of Morra, Terracina and Fonte, the thesis aims to show that Ariosto's poem was extremely significant for the development of the female literary canon.

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The three chapters on individual women writers each begin with biographical and textual detail regarding the writer, since each remains comparatively obscure within the wider spectrum of the Italian literary canon as it is known to a modern critical readership; although Terracina was one of the most printed female poets of her time, her works are now relatively unknown and rarely studied. It is uncertain to what extent the above works of Morra and Fonte were known and appreciated in the sixteenth century and beyond, aside perhaps from the printing circles of Venice and Naples; these works have also been relatively under-explored in recent criticism concerning women writers of the Italian Renaissance.

Chapter One

The Female Self: Representation and Identity in the *Orlando Furioso*

The formation of a rationale that deals accurately with Ariosto's ideas of female representation, characterization and identity in his epic poem has been attempted in multifarious ways in the past, by various scholars. A 'gendered' study of the *Orlando Furioso* (the 'final' version of which appeared in 1532)[1] may indeed reveal insights into its ideological basis and enable the reader/critic to progress towards a greater understanding of the poem as a whole.[2] In this chapter, I aim to elucidate the question of 'gender' in Ariosto by looking at his statements, particularly in the *proemi*, concerning issues such as male-female relationships and identities, as well as the narrative insertions within the body of the text that often reveal a more spontaneous – and perhaps more genuine? – outburst of feeling on such matters. I

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[1] All quotations are taken from the following edition of the poem: Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, a cura di Cesare Segre (Milan, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1976, repr. 1990). I have also benefited from the extremely useful notes and summaries etc. contained in Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, a cura di Lanfranco Caretti, presentazione di Italo Calvino (Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1992), 2 vols. Amongst the substantial bibliography on Ariosto, gendered critical approaches notably include (in order of most recent publication): Constance Jordan, 'Writing beyond the *Querelle*: Gender and History in *Orlando Furioso*', in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 295-315; Judith Bryce, 'Gender and Myth in the *Orlando Furioso*', *Italian Studies* 47 (1992), pp. 41-50; Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1992); Deanna Shemek's two articles, 'Of Women, Knights, Arms, and Love: The *Querelle des Femmes* in Ariosto's Poem', *Modern Language Notes* 104 (1989), pp. 68-97, and 'That Elusive Object of Desire: Angelica in the *Orlando Furioso*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 116-41; Maggie Günsberg, '"Donna liberata"? The Portrayal of Women in the Italian Renaissance Epic', *The Italianist* 7 (1987), pp. 7-35; Pamela Joseph Benson, 'A Defense of the Excellence of Bradamante', *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 4 (1983), pp. 135-53; Margaret Tomalin, *The Fortunes of the Warrior Heroine in Italian Literature: An Index of Emancipation* (Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1982); and idem, 'Bradamante and Marfisa: An Analysis of the "Guerriere" of the "Orlando Furioso"', *Modern Language Review* 71 (1976), pp. 540-52.

[2] I use the term 'gender' in its broader sense of notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' and prescribed forms of social and cultural roles, as opposed to 'sex' which denotes the biological fact of being either male or female. The term 'sexuality' would then imply modes of sexual activity and behaviour. On definitions of gender, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London, Penguin Books Ltd., 1994); and Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'Dueling Dualisms', in *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, Basic Books, 2000), pp. 1-29. See also Günsberg's 'deconstructive' approach for an attempt at a multi-faceted categorization of types of masculinity and femininity in both Ariosto and Tasso (Günsberg, art. cit., especially pp. 8-10 for the outline of her scheme).

shall then examine the various methods that Ariosto employs to create the many constructions of femininity and masculinity within the poem. I shall also look at ideas of sexuality and transgression in these constructions, which give rise to a more ambiguous view of representation and identity between the sexes, and allow for the possibility of a strand of subversion within the narrative. This short study is intended to act as an overview of gender-related problematics already within the *Furioso*, which either influence or are commented on and 're-written' by the three women writers who constitute the major focus of my thesis: Isabella di Morra (1516/18-45/46), Laura Bacio Terracina (c.1519-77) and Moderata Fonte (1555-92).

Ariosto's 'proemi': A Gendered Framework?

The *proemi* – the preliminary stanzas that constitute short introductory discourses to each *canto* of the *Furioso* – may be considered of value in the study of Ariosto's presentation of gender issues, since many of them are concerned with questions of this nature. Literary theorists such as Gérard Genette have commented on both the form and the function of the preface, which in many ways acts as a pre-emptive attempt to influence the reader before the latter has even reached the text.[3] In view of the fact that Ariosto's *proemi* are deliberately positioned as distinct and separate from the rest of the poem, and mostly act as narratorial commentaries on

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[3] Genette defines as 'paratexts' those devices that subtly influence the reception of a text, i.e. 'a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations': cf. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, forewd. Richard Macksey (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1; *Seuils* was originally published in Paris by Editions du Seuil in 1987. His chapter 8 ('The Prefatorial Situation of Communication', pp. 161-95) includes a useful section on the origins of what we now call a preface (pp. 163-70), and mentions Ariosto as being part of the epic tradition of the 'incorporated preface' (p. 164) in which both the statement of one's subject and the justification of one's dedication slide into the text itself. Genette also notes that 'the beginnings (and possibly the endings) of texts are where one must seek these statements in which the author presents, and sometimes comments on, his work' (pp. 163-64). The following chapter ('The Functions of the Original Preface', pp. 196-236) suggests the idea of authorial manipulation through such a preface before the reader has even got to the text, claiming that 'its location is introductory and therefore monitory (this is *why* and this is *how* you should read this book)' (p. 197). Ariosto's presentation of ideas through the mouthpiece of his narrator may perform a similar, if slightly more indirect, function.

particular episodes, they can be considered important in the assessment of Ariosto's portrayal of gender relations, and may even constitute his personal opinion on certain matters, despite the difficulties associated with authorial assertions.[4] Several of the discourses appear to display a certain 'pro-feminism', in that they convey an understanding of male-female relationships and an awareness of the disadvantaged position of women, both in contemporary Renaissance society and in the wider context of humanity throughout the ages.[5] Given the number of misogynistic treatises published in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy and elsewhere, Ariosto's standpoint is seemingly indicative of an unusually sympathetic attitude towards women.[6] His own struggles in love with regard to Alessandra Benucci, whom he

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[4] Apart from the obvious problem of distinguishing between 'author' and 'narrator', Ariosto's notorious use of irony forces the reader to question any statement that he may appear to make; however, the clarity and directness of the *proemi* are strong indicators of genuine authorial feeling, even if critics hesitate to make definitive attributions in other sections of the poem, or are aware of later textual contradictions. On irony in the *Furioso*, see Benedetto Croce, *Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1944). His chapter entitled 'L'attuazione dell'armonia', pp. 42-57, has provided the basis for all subsequent studies. See also Elizabeth J. Bellamy, 'Alcina's Revenge: Reassessing Irony and Allegory in the *Orlando Furioso*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 12 (1994), pp. 61-74.

[5] Benson has defined 'pro-feminism' as relating to mostly male-authored Renaissance texts, wherein is displayed a 'reluctance to initiate political reform' despite awareness of, and praise for, female capability and feminine virtues; cf. Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 2.

[6] 'Misogyny in the Middle Ages and Renaissance was founded in deeply entrenched cultural attitudes, codified in civil and canon law, intellectually supported by Aristotelianism and scholasticism, and reinforced by the structures of political and ecclesiastical institutions' (*The Oxford Companion to Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Hainsworth & David Robey [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002], entry for 'Misogyny', p. 386). In literary terms – very schematically – the later thirteenth century saw the *dolce stil novo* counteracted by the school of *poesia comico-realistica*, with its vulgar and often misogynistic themes; whilst Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio* (c.1355) is often cited as being a pivotal early Italian misogynist text, with its antidotes to poisonous scheming by women, in this case a greedy widow. The humanist movement also brought with it a re-evaluation of medieval ideas of the nature and role of women, particularly with regard to the family unit, although attitudes were slow to change and to accept the idea of woman as independent, thinking being. Towards the sixteenth century, the strain of misogynist thought left over from scholastic notions of woman as Eve/whore manifested itself in various forms, from anonymous attacks on the female character to restrictive treatises that reinforced the standards of chastity and obedience, alongside negative or ambiguous female characterization in literary works. The cautious pro-feminism of works such as Baldassarre Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) was counter-balanced in this debate – known from its French origins as the *querelle des femmes* – by works of a greater or lesser misogynistic content. In c.1529, Giovanni della Casa wrote a Latin treatise questioning the usefulness of wives; cf. Giovanni della Casa, *Una questione piacevolissima, se si debba prendere moglie / Galateo*, a cura di Arnaldo Di Benedetto (Milan, I classici italiani TEA, 1992), which contains the vernacular text of *Questio lepidissima an uxor sit ducenda*. This was in fact a continuation of a well-worn theme from antiquity, on whether a wise man (i.e. scholar/philosopher) should take a wife; the answer was invariably negative. The rhetorical aspect

eventually married in 1527, may also influence some of the 'gendered' attitudes in the text, especially since the narrator voices similar concerns; however, even within this frame of reference, the *proemi* can be considered the separate musings of the fictional narrator, and include both generalizations and personal invocations that may be subject to confusion or contradiction, depending on the narrator's state of mind at any one time.

This is seen in *canto* II, in which the narratorial diatribe against Love's universal injustices ('Ingiustissimo Amor, perché sì raro / corrispondenti fai nostri desiri?', II, i, ll. 1-2) includes a more personal touch ('da chi disia il mio amor tu mi richiami, / e chi m'ha in odio vuoi ch'adori et ami', II, i, ll. 7-8). A separate entity – *Amor* – is blamed for the complications involved in human relationships, rather than the female sex, as is mostly the case in the misogynist tradition. Similarly, the *proemio* of *canto* IX rails against Love rather than women in particular when commenting on Orlando's lack of allegiance to his leader ('Che non può far d'un cor ch'abbia suggetto / questo crudele e traditore Amore...', IX, i, ll. 1-2). Orlando's desire for Angelica is described as 'un vano amor' (IX, i, l. 7), and appears even more frivolous when set against his status as defender of the Church (IX, i, l. 6) and his

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of arguing both sides of such a question was later played out between Ercole and Torquato Tasso; the former's *Dello ammogliarsi* (1594) covers much the same ground as Della Casa's treatise. Giuseppe Passi (1569-1620) wrote in similar vein (*Dello stato maritale trattato di Giuseppe Passi Ravennate...Nel quale con molti essempi antichi, e moderni, non solo si dimostra quello, che una donna maritata deve schivare, ma quello ancora, che fare le convenga, se compitamente desidera di satisfare all'officio suo...* [1602]), but also composed a more obvious attack on the female character: *I donneschi difetti* (1599). For a lucid summary of the debate surrounding the 'woman question', see Benson, 'A Defense of the Excellence...', art. cit., pp. 136-41. See also Conor Fahy, 'Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women', *Italian Studies* 11 (1956), pp. 30-55, especially for his appendix of treatises, pp. 47-55; Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1956), for an extensive bibliography of treatises and other works (pp. 326-424); and those listed in Marina Zancan, ed., *Nel cerchio della luna: figure di donna in alcuni testi del XVI secolo* (Venice, Marsilio Editori, 1983), pp. 237-46. For a consideration of medical, legal and theological thought concerning women in the Renaissance, see Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study of the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980); see also Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1990), for a wide-ranging look at the background to the debate.

disobedience of God's will (IX, i, l. 8); yet the narrator excuses him partly because he himself is in the same position ('Ma l'escuso io pur troppo, e mi rallegro / nel mio difetto aver compagno tale', IX, ii, ll. 1-2). Love and desire are here seen as weaknesses, and the universal cause of strife in human relationships and behaviour. Love is also later considered akin to insanity, as seen in the *proemio* to *canto* XXIV, shortly after the episode involving Orlando's descent into madness:

> 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...(XXIV, i, ll. 1-4)[7]

The narrator himself is afflicted with this 'malady' and cannot escape his feelings ('ma tosto far, come vorrei, nol posso; / che 'l male è penetrato infin all'osso', XXIV, iii, ll. 7-8). Again, a personal perspective on this issue is juxtaposed next to the generalization that constitutes the starting point of the prefatory discourse; and this only serves to add credence – or the illusion of it – to the statement itself.

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[7] Love's association with madness was a common Renaissance theme, although its origin dates back to antiquity: the Latin concept of *furor* (madness, frenzy, passion) is taken from Plato, whose dialogue *Phaedrus* discusses the four divisions of divine 'madness' – the greatest of which is love – alongside the two types of amorous *furor*, divine and earthly (the latter equated with infatuation and irrationality). The Florentine humanist Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) translated all of Plato's dialogues into Latin, and also composed a commentary on the *Symposium*, subtitled the *De amore* (which he also translated into the vernacular); this work would underpin all subsequent theory on love during the Renaissance. The Roman poet Horace, meanwhile, mentions 'amabilis / insania' in his *Odes* (Book III, Ode IV, ll. 5-6; cf. Horace, *The Odes and Epodes*, trans. C. E. Bennett [London, William Heinemann Ltd., & Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1952], p. 186), whilst the title of Ariosto's epic itself harks back to Seneca's tragic epic *Hercules furens*. The idea is also found in Poliziano's *Stanze* (where the hero Iulio condemns love as 'un van furore', I, xiii, l. 3, and as being 'dolce insania', I, xiii, l. 6) and in his *Fabula di Orfeo* (where Aristeo laments his love for Euridice, claiming 'mie mente d'amor divenne insana', l. 31); cf. Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze / Fabula di Orfeo*, a cura di Stefano Carrai (Milan, Mursia Editore, 1988), pp. 44 & 142. The latter quotation is echoed in the preliminary statements in the *Furioso*: the narrator describes the fate of Orlando, which the poem will later describe ('che per amor venne in furore e matto, / d'uom che sì saggio era stimato prima', I, ii, ll. 3-4) – the treatment of Orlando's madness indeed being the poem's claim to originality, given the preceding romance tradition ('Dirò d'Orlando in un medesmo tratto / cosa non detta in prosa mai né in rima', I, ii, ll. 1-2). On Ariosto's classical sources, see Pio Rajna's seminal study of 1876, *Le fonti dell'Orlando Furioso*, a cura e con presentazione di Francesco Mazzoni (Florence, Sansoni Editore, 1975). For a discussion of the title of the poem and the theme of *furor*, see Eduardo Saccone, *Il "soggetto" del Furioso e altri saggi tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Naples, Liguori Editore, 1974), pp. 201-10 & 216-18. In the various plot machinations of the *Furioso*, Ariosto largely appears to send up the higher form of *furor*, and shows that we are instead nearly all enmeshed in the lower form.

Moreover, the nature of love is expanded on in the *proemio* to *canto* XVI, where Ariosto's narrator discusses honest and dishonest loves and again draws on his own experiences ('Gravi pene in amor si provan molte, / di che patito io n'ho la maggior parte', XVI, i, ll. 1-2). He claims that if a suitor finds himself 'in degno laccio preso' (XVI, ii, l. 2), then 'pianger non de', se ben languisce e muore' (XVI, ii, l. 8), because the object of his affections is at least worthy of his love, even if she does not share his feelings. Those worthy of pity, on the other hand, are the ones who become slaves for 'duo vaghi occhi e [...] una bella treccia' (XVI, iii, l. 2), under which lies 'un cor protervo, / che poco puro abbia con molta feccia' (XVI, iii, ll. 3-4). In these circumstances, '[vorria] il miser fuggire; e come cervo / ferito, ovunque va, porta la freccia' (XVI, iii, ll. 5-6). Love can thus be considered a noble state if the intentions of both parties are pure and honest; yet the narrator claims that there is much scope for deception and wickedness in such matters, leading to suffering particularly on the part of the male suitor.[8] The harsh condemnation of male lovers in *canto* X – discussed later in the chapter – nonetheless off-sets the slight indictment of the female sex in this part of the poem.

The discourse on sexual jealousy in the *proemio* to *canto* XXXI also deals with another possible effect of love, for either sex, since it is described in neutral terms. The delights of love are tainted by this negative emotion, variously described by the narrator as 'quel sospetto rio' (XXXI, i, l. 6) and 'quella frenesia' (XXXI, i, l. 7). Although 'non conosce la pace e non l'estima / chi provato non ha la guerra prima' (XXXI, ii, ll. 7-8), jealousy only serves to poison the mind against the beloved, and adds nothing to the experience of love. According to the wisdom of the narrator, the effect of jealousy is also irreversible once clearly embedded in the heart of a lover

[8] This discourse is occasioned by Grifone's negative experience of love with the treacherous and aptly named Orrigille, first encountered in *canto* XV. Despite Grifone's knowledge of her fickleness, he remains in thrall to her fascinations ('non si può emendare, e il suo error vede', XVI, iv, l. 2).

(XXXI, iv-vi). The impression given here is one of an understanding of the potential difficulties involved in male-female relationships, combined with an attitude of apparently 'genderless' impartiality.

Furthermore, in the *proemio* to *canto* V, the first three stanzas constitute a refutation of specifically male violence against women, using the animal kingdom as a contrast with mankind ('se [gli animali] vengono a rissa e si fan guerra, / alla femina il maschio non la face', V, i, ll. 3-4). Indeed, the narrator laments the fact that anger is evident in relations between the sexes, and wonders how it came to be so:

> Ch'abominevol peste, che Megera
> è venuta a turbar gli umani petti?
> che si sente il marito e la mogliera
> sempre garrir d'ingiurïosi detti,
> stracciar la faccia e far livida e nera,
> bagnar di pianto i genïali letti...(V, ii, ll. 1-6)

According to the narrator, to hit a woman (although she must necessarily be considered a 'bella donna', V, iii, l. 4, in order to merit such attention), is 'non sol gran mal, ma che l'uom faccia / contra natura e sia di Dio ribello' (V, iii, ll. 1-2). A man should not even touch the hair on her head; and one who poisons or stabs such a woman to death is not a man, but 'in vista umana un spirto de l'inferno' (V, iii, l. 8).

These statements – occasioned by the first sight in the text of Ginevra's maid, Dalinda, being attacked by two men in the woods – are projected in a forceful and unequivocal manner, and follow on from the end of the preceding *canto*, in which Rinaldo himself speaks of the unequal relationship between the sexes. He hears of the plight of Ginevra from the monks, and interestingly takes the side of the lady even if she is destined to be exposed as guilty of a liaison with her lover. However, this is revealed to be a typical 'courtly love' stance made even more poignant by Rinaldo's own suffering at the hands of Angelica; he is thus keen to condemn those 'cruel' women who do not succumb to their suitors ('Debitamente muore una crudele, / non

chi dà vita al suo amator fedele', IV, lxiii, ll. 7-8). Nonetheless, Rinaldo also points out the injustice of this law that targets women alone, and denounces the hypocrisy of those who invented it:

> perché si de' punir donna o biasmare,
> che con uno o più d'uno abbia commesso
> quel che l'uom fa con quante n'ha appetito,
> e lodato ne va, non che impunito?(IV, lxvi, ll. 5-8)

He is the first to highlight the inequality of the sexes in love: while men are allowed to boast of their conquests, any expression of female sexuality is condemned ('Son fatti in questa legge disuguale / veramente alle donne espressi torti', IV, lxvii, ll. 1-2). An argument could be made here for the appropriation of the character of Rinaldo by the author for the defence of women, exposing the hypocrisy inherent in the wider context of contemporary Italian society, and adding to the debate on gender relations.[9]

In *canto* VIII, the *proemio* deals with deceivers of both sexes, taking its cue from the Alcina story ('Oh quante sono incantatrici, oh quanti / incantator tra noi, che non si sanno!', VIII, i, ll. 1-2); yet this statement is later developed to depict the wiles and stratagems of men alone, particularly young and faithless lovers, thus continuing the 'indirect' defence of women commenced by the narrator. The betrayal of Olimpia by Bireno in *canto* X is preceded by a notably pro-feminist rant, in which the narrator addresses all women directly ('donne, alcuna di voi mai più non sia, / ch'a parole d'amante abbia a dar fede', X, v, ll. 3-4), and warns them of the fickleness and strategies of deception of male suitors ('I giuramenti e le promesse vanno / dai venti

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[9] Rinaldo's comments on women's sexual freedom would appear doubly revolutionary, because pro-feminist writers still maintained the expectations of female restraint and chastity even while praising these virtues in women and condemning their opposing vices in men; cf. Benson, 'A Defense of the Excellence...', art. cit., p. 140. However, some caution must be applied when assessing the seriousness of Rinaldo's claims, and a case for irony made; cf. Shemek, 'Of Women...', art. cit., pp. 72-75. For an idea of contemporary socio-sexual norms of behaviour, see Guido Ruggiero, 'Marriage, Love, Sex, and Renaissance Civic Morality', in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 10-30; and Brian Richardson, '"Amore maritale": Advice on Love and Marriage in the Second Half of the Cinquecento', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 194-208.

in aria disipate e sparse', X, vi, ll. 1-2). Deception occurs as soon as the suitor has obtained what he desires, although this is left ambiguous: either promises of love or betrothal, or virginity itself ('tosto che tratta questi amanti s'hanno / l'avida sete che gli accese et arse', X, vi, ll. 3-4). The narrator warns all women to take heed of the example of Olimpia and to beware of false protestations of love and fidelity:

> Siate a' prieghi et a' pianti che vi fanno,
> per questo esempio, a credere più scarse.
> Bene è felice quel, donne mie care,
> ch'essere accorto all'altrui spese impare.(X, vi, ll. 5-8)

The poem appears at this point to encompass a rhetorical stance that is firmly placed on the side of the female sex, and to depict not only an understanding of the latter's unjust treatment, but also a desire to raise awareness of their situation.[10]

The narrator's warning continues with the statement that young suitors in particular are to be mistrusted, since their fancies come and go extremely quickly and are more likely to be fuelled by superficial lust:

> Guardatevi da questi che sul fiore
> de' lor begli anni il viso han sì polito;
> che presto nasce in loro e presto muore,
> quasi un foco di paglia, ogni appetito.(X, vii, ll. 1-4)

Such suitors are compared to hunters who are only interested in the 'thrill of the chase', and who swiftly lose interest after their prey has been caught. As long as the objects of their affection remain 'dure e proterve' (X, viii, l. 2) towards them, they remain loyal and respectful ('v'amano e riveriscono con quanto / studio de' far chi fedelmente serve', X, viii, ll. 3-4); yet as soon as they have achieved the end to their desires ('ma non sì tosto si potran dar vanto / de la vittoria', X, viii, ll. 5-6), their 'beloveds' lose their inherent power and no longer control the situation ('di donne,

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[10] Günsberg appears to miss the point of this particular pro-feminist gloss, commenting that 'these apparently complimentary addresses [to women] can be interpreted not only as, at times, stereotypically patriarchal; they can also be regarded, by their very presence, as actual indicators of the lower status of women (even among the courtly classes) since they need to be made visible in this way' (Günsberg, art. cit., p. 11). Other addresses are 'overtly disparaging' (ibid).

serve / vi dorrete esser fatte', X, viii, ll. 6-7). They are then discarded and abandoned for another conquest ('da voi tolto / vedrete il falso amore, e altrove volto', X, viii, ll. 7-8). Despite the dangers involved in such emotional entanglements, the narrator does not, however, entirely exclude the lover-beloved relationship ('Non vi vieto per questo (ch'avrei torto) / che vi lasciate amar...', X, ix, ll. 1-2), and even states that a woman without a suitor is lacking something ('sareste come inculta vite in orto, / che non ha palo ove s'appoggi o piante', X, ix, ll. 3-4); yet he cautions against impetuous youth, which is 'volubile e inconstante' (X, ix, l. 6), whilst also advising against more elderly suitors ('côrre i frutti non acerbi e duri, / ma che non sien però troppo maturi', X, ix, ll. 7-8). The middle path of moderation – in both behaviour and choice of suitor – emerges as the most desirable option here, and is actively endorsed by the narrator; the latter also reveals a decidedly pro-feminist stance in his concern for the welfare of women in relation to the potential for deception contained within masculine courtly conventions.

In addition, Ariosto reserves some of the *proemi* in his poem for the praise of female figures, both ancient and contemporary, and for the discussion of their status and fame in comparison to those of men. These discourses are preceded by a digression in *canto* XIII, where the warrior heroine Bradamante asks about the female descendants of her future lineage, and hears them listed by the sorceress Melissa. Although there are fewer of them than their male counterparts – listed at great length in *canto* III, and including praise of Ariosto's patron, Ippolito d'Este – Melissa claims, somewhat conveniently, that this is because there are simply too many to be named.[11] However, her comments may still be interpreted as projecting a positive

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[11] On Ariosto's references to dynastic, political and other contemporary issues, see C. P. Brand, *Ludovico Ariosto: A Preface to the 'Orlando Furioso'* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1974), pp. 107-25.

authorial view of female achievement, despite the scapegoat mechanism involved in using a female character for the more limited expression of women's worth:

> - Da te uscir veggio le pudiche donne,
> madri d'imperatori e di gran regi,
> reparatrici e solide colonne
> de case illustri e di domìni egregi;
> che men degne non son ne le lor gonne,
> ch'in arme i cavallier, di sommi pregi,
> di pietà, di gran cor, di gran prudenza,
> di somma e incomparabil continenza.(XIII, lvii, ll. 1-8)

The emphasis in this stanza is on solidity and strength, encompassing the idea of women as the basis for or foundation of (inevitably male) greatness. Femininity is seemingly not an obstacle in the formation of laudable qualities such as courage and prudence, but modesty, chastity and temperance are also underlined as suitable female virtues. There is nonetheless specific mention of Isabella d'Este, wife of Francesco II Gonzaga: she is named as 'quella / d'opere illustri e di bei studii amica' (XIII, lix, ll. 1-2), owing to her patronage of the arts. Ariosto affords her ample praise via the mouthpiece of Melissa:

> ch'io non so ben se più leggiadra e bella
> mi debba dire, o più saggia e pudica,
> liberale e magnanima Isabella,
> che del bel lume suo dì e notte aprica
> farà la terra...(XIII, lix, ll. 3-7)

Some indication of a lasting type of fame is given here, and this is developed in later *proemi*, where the question of recognition of female merit is addressed. The male-female dynamic permeating the text is shown to be increasingly problematic as the cumulative effect of Ariosto's introductory statements begins to manifest itself, and a more complex picture is seen to emerge.

The motif of praise, particularly in these mini-discourses, is continued in *canto* XX, where the *proemio* deals with praise of women in both arms and letters: 'Le donne antique hanno mirabil cose / fatto ne l'arme e ne le sacre muse' (XX, i, ll. 1-2).

Although the women specified are restricted to ancient times, their fame is clearly evinced ('di lor opre belle e gloriose / gran lume in tutto il mondo si diffuse', XX, i, ll. 3-4), and the narrator goes on to name two mythical figures, Harpalyce and Camilla, as being expert in battle, and two real-life figures, Sappho and Corinna, as being learned. He claims that women have indeed excelled in every art ('Le donne son venute in eccellenza / di ciascun'arte ove hanno posto cura', XX, ii, ll. 1-2) but, importantly, have been held back by men or unfairly ignored – an explanation for the apparent dearth of talented women in recent years ('forse ascosi han lor debiti onori / l'invidia o il non saper degli scrittori', XX, ii, ll. 7-8). Since envy and ignorance are postulated as the factors influencing the lack of proper recognition of female merit, the signs within this *proemio* point to a complex and unequal relationship between the sexes; however, the narrator declares that he can see 'tanta virtù' (XX, iii, l. 2) emerging amongst women in his century (and giving rise to 'opra a carte et ad inchiostro', XX, iii, l. 3), that all those who slander them ('odiose lingue', XX, iii, l. 5) will be submerged in infamy. Nevertheless, the overall impression gained by the reader remains mixed: on the one hand, there appears to be clear authorial support for female intellectual effort; on the other, the presence of detractors appears both well-established and resolute.

Ariosto then continues the discussion of this particular gender issue in the longest of the *proemi* in the *Furioso*: the discourse to *canto* XXXVII, which comprises 23 stanzas, and to which Terracina responds in particularly vehement fashion in her *Discorso*. The focus remains on the issue of women, praise and fame, with particular regard to women writers. Ariosto's narrator duly recognizes that there has been only a limited appreciation of female achievement in the past, but that the situation is being rectified by contemporary writers, and will continue to improve in

the future owing to women's own intellectual abilities and the creation of a new female literary canon. He reiterates that female writers have been held back by their male equivalents out of envy:

> ai quali [scrittori] astio et invidia il cor sì rode,
> che 'l ben che ne puon dir, spesso è taciuto,
> e 'l mal, quanto ne san, per tutto s'ode...(XXXVII, ii, ll. 4-6)

However, the picture painted here appears more harsh and less flexible than the one outlined in *canto* XX, even if the narrator is quick to specify that he writes of those in distant antiquity. At that time, female writers were suppressed as often as possible ('Non le vorrian lasciar venir di sopra, / e quanto puon, fan per cacciarle al fondo', XXXVII, iii, ll. 5-6), since their success was perceived as threatening ('quasi l'onor debbia / d'esse il lor oscurar, come il sol nebbia', XXXVII, iii, ll. 7-8). These lines reveal a culture of fear and jealousy between the sexes, although the narrator maintains that true merit will surface and be recognized in time, despite the power of the voice or pen in the service of defamation and calumny (stanza iv). He again mentions those women who excelled in arms in antiquity (stanza v) and who do indeed enjoy eternal fame; and conversely those who displayed loyalty, chastity, wisdom and fortitude throughout the world and who are not remembered even in writing because of male envy ('perché avuto hanno ai lor tempi / gli scrittori bugiardi, invidi et empi', XXXVII, vi, ll. 7-8). The outlook in the first part of the discourse is thus overwhelmingly bleak, despite the narrator's attempts to contextualize the suppression of female creativity, and to encourage its re-emergence.

The tone then changes to one of attempted optimism, as the narrator directly exhorts women to continue their fight against male prejudice ('Non restate però, donne, a cui giova / il bene oprar, di seguir vostra via', XXXVII, vii, ll. 1-2), especially since now is their time ('Se le carte sin qui state e gl'inchiostri / per voi non

sono, or sono a' tempi nostri', XXXVII, vii, ll. 7-8). However, he still retains some degree of male superiority even in this act of encouragement, by naming contemporary male writers who serve as examples of good style, as well as of a supposedly 'pro-women' stance (stanzas viii and xii-xiii). Nonetheless, he suggests that women are, more and more, writing for themselves and creating their own 'glory', in a conscious appropriation of the literary canon:

> voi per voi stesse dar ve la potete;
> poi che molte, lasciando l'ago e 'l panno,
> son con le Muse a spegnersi la sete
> al fonte d'Aganippe andate, e vanno...(XXXVII, xiv, ll. 3-6)

According to Ariosto's narrator, women are then, importantly, even capable of ascending to a more influential literary status than men ('e ne ritornan tai che l'opra vostra / è più bisogno a noi, ch'a voi la nostra', XXXVII, xiv, ll. 7-8). Even if the formulation of praise in this *proemio* could be said to adhere to the demands of courtly decorum, the statements endorsing female activity in the spheres of literature and culture are significant in a work that itself enjoyed recognition and fame, and whose impact was far-reaching.[12] The exceptional length of the *proemio* is also indicative of a degree of commitment to the gender issues discussed therein.

This mixture of courtly formality and genuine interest in the status of women writers is evident in the narrator's subsequent dilemma of wanting to name and praise all such 'worthy' women but of having to continue his narrative, and incorporates his desire not to offend those whom he does not mention ('Che farò dunque? Ho da tacer d'ognuna, / o pur fra tante sceglierne sol una?', XXXVII, xv, ll. 7-8). He decides to celebrate the virtues and achievements of one woman only, Vittoria Colonna, praising her 'dolce stil' (XXXVII, xvi, l. 6) as a poet, and calling her 'un altro sole' (XXXVII,

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[12] On the fortunes of the *Furioso*, see Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of 'Orlando Furioso'* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991).

xvii, l. 8). He claims that her honour is greater than that of other mythical female figures who wished to be buried alongside their dead spouses, since she has made her husband immortal through her poetry. Interestingly, the notion of 'honour' here combines the more recognized 'female' aspects of loyalty and continence with intellectual merit and recognition; and the latter do not appear to oppose the former. Yet the narrator cannot express all her merits in this *proemio*, and promises to return to her later in the poem, since he still wishes to complete his praise of her; this he does, but only in passing. The conclusion of the discourse in *canto* XXXVII is nonetheless positive in tone, since it reaffirms the possibility of female immortality through female literary endeavour, a position that could be regarded as being considerably 'pro-feminist' in its leanings.[13]

The *proemio* of the final *canto* of Ariosto's epic also demonstrates the formula of courtly praise, in its listing of illustrious women and men, known by or familiar to the author ('Oh di che belle e saggie donne veggio, / oh di che cavallieri il lito adorno!', XLVI, iii, ll. 1-2). The poet-narrator claims to see both the narrative end of his epic in the distance, and the crowds of people waiting for him on the shore as he nears the end of his 'journey'. The majority of women in his list are merely named, or attributed with the qualities of beauty or goodness, but the poetic works of Veronica Gambara are also praised ('sì grata a Febo e al santo aonio coro', XLVI, iii, l. 8), and there is again mention of Vittoria Colonna's output (stanza ix). However, the narrator inevitably lingers on the 'dotta compagnia' (XLVI, xiii, l. 2) provided by male figures such as Pietro Bembo, whom he singles out as having produced the exemplary model for the standard of vernacular Italian. Although the list of male

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[13] Although in Colonna's case, the literary endeavour in question is based around the praise of a man, her husband. On the significance of Ariosto's choice of Colonna as the greatest contemporary female poet, see Nuccio Ordine, 'Vittoria Colonna nell'*Orlando Furioso*', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 42 (1991), pp. 55-92.

names is treated in similar fashion, the men substantially outnumber the women; and the emphasis in the male group is on learning and eminence ('Veggo sublimi e soprumani ingegni / di sangue e d'amor giunti, il Pico e il Pio', XLVI, xvii, ll. 1-2; 'Ecco il dotto, il fedele, il diligente / secretario Pistofilo', XLVI, xviii, ll. 1-2), while the female group is generally limited to 'feminine' traits such as beauty and virtue. Thus, although the narrator displays an appreciation of the merits of the female sex, some gender stereotypes are upheld even as he attempts to further the female cause. Nonetheless, the nature of his understanding of male-female relationships and the disadvantaged position of women within those relationships – ostensibly projected in the various *proemi* – is still indicative of a considerable degree of sympathy for women, and duly elevates the 'pro-feminist' status of Ariosto's work within the *querelle des femmes*.

Narrative Interruptions: Hidden Truths?

The pro-feminist declarations set out in the introductory prefaces of several of the *canti* appear less clear-cut, however, when certain other statements are taken into account. Ariosto's poem is interspersed with occasional comments of a more misogynistic outlook, which serve to balance out the pro-feminist feeling in his *proemi*. Such comments appear in the form of narrative asides, insertions and even spontaneous diatribes against women in general, which change the reader's attitude towards the narrator's supposedly 'enlightened' standpoint where gender issues are concerned.[14] These negative statements are mostly found in the body of the text rather than in the *proemi*, and could be seen as narratorial musings on the subject

[14] Shemek observes that 'Ariosto allows the self-conscious persona of the narrator to vacillate in its adoption of specific *querelle* positions, thus leaving the reader in a quandary of conflicting "lessons" about women' (Shemek, 'Of Women...', art. cit., p. 69). Bellamy warns that in the *Furioso*, 'the discourse of the *querelle des femmes* eludes interpretation because irony is (rhetorically) unlocatable' (Bellamy, art. cit., p. 66), adding that 'the *Furioso*'s irony is so thoroughly disintegrative that the concept of "womanhood" itself cannot survive its corrosive reach' (p. 67).

matter being discussed, written contemporaneously rather than as considered after-thoughts, and therefore perhaps more indicative of 'unfettered' opinion. As author of the entire work, Ariosto is seemingly also in control of such inclusions; and although the fictional subject matter does not necessarily reflect a personal point of view, the choice of both plot-lines and resulting commentary is ultimately his, and therefore carries some resonance, despite the sly deflection of responsibility in the narrator's protestation that he is merely relating stories from the previous oral tradition.[15] In any case, these narrative insertions also contribute to the *querelle des femmes* as it is presented in the *Furioso*, although their presence is often artfully masked by the text.

For example, when Bradamante is first reunited with Ruggiero in *canto* IV, and the knights and ladies are freed from the sorcerer Atlante's castle, the narrator rather maliciously writes that 'furon di lor molte a chi ne dolse; / che tal franchezza un gran piacer lor tolse' (IV, xxxix, ll. 7-8). The adjective 'molte' refers only to women; the statement thus aligns to a certain extent with the misogynist tradition, since it appears to be a jibe at the supposedly pleasure-seeking or frivolous nature of the female sex. Furthermore, shortly before Ruggiero meets the wicked fairy Alcina, he comes across another palace with a golden gate and columns, around which 'lascive donzelle' (VI, lxxii, l. 2) are frolicking; the narrator goes on to comment that 'se i rispetti debiti alle donne / servasser più, sarian forse più belle' (VI, lxxii, ll. 3-4), therefore implying a certain norm or code of behaviour – one which perhaps involves

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[15] Cf. for example 'Quei che la mensa o nulla o poco offese / (e Turpin scrive a punto che fur sette)...' (XIII, xl, ll. 1-2); 'Turpin, che tutta questa istoria dice, / fa qui digresso...' (XXIII, xxxviii, ll. 6-7); and 'Il buon Turpin, che sa che dice il vero, / e lascia creder poi quel ch'a l'uom piace, / narra mirabil cose di Ruggiero' (XXVI, xxiii, ll. 1-3). For a useful exploration of narrative discourses and story-telling in the *Furioso*, see John Bernard, '"Ch'io nol lasci ne la penna": Ariosto's Discourses of Desire', *Italica* 76 (1999), pp. 291-313. Bernard notes that '[the] labyrinthine narrative path is that of romance "error", and [the narrator's] imprisonment in it is sometimes associated with the eponymous "Turpino", the conventional source of the Carolingian oral epic' (p. 294). Other sources alluded to – presumably including the obvious precedent of Boiardo – are 'both nameless and subject to error', and 'introduce the possibility of revision and invention' (ibid). See also Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1965).

more restraint – to which 'virtuous' female characters should adhere. The insertion serves as a reminder of the socio-cultural prejudices that may also be projected through the text by the narrator at any one time, and that may then go on to influence reader response, sometimes unwittingly.

In addition, the countless traces of irony in the text appear to suggest a more ambiguous attitude towards women on the part of the narrator. The description of the origins of the law governing the island of Ebuda, with its orc or sea monster, and the daily sacrifice of the young maiden, is rounded off by a comment that is somewhat ambiguous in tone, but smacks of misogynistic sentiment. The narrator interjects that 'Ben ch'esser donna sia in tutte le bande / danno e sciagura, quivi era pur grande' (VIII, lviii, ll. 7-8). Womanhood itself would here appear to be a source of pain not only to women – because of the law that goes against them – but also to others, i.e. men, for very different reasons. The tone of mock melodrama that follows ('Oh misere donzelle che trasporte / fortuna ingiurïosa al lito infausto!', VIII, lix, ll. 1-2) only adds to the mood of slight derision at this point in the story; and although the injustice of Angelica's fate is emphasized ('Oh troppo cara, oh troppo escelsa preda / per sì barbare genti e sì villane!', VIII, lxii, ll. 1-2), the suspicion of mockery remains. The following stanza also contains dubious overtones, when the narrator repeats the motif of 'la gran beltà' (i.e. Angelica herself) as having caused uproar in many characters' lives, but as now being helpless and alone ('ora non ha (così è rimasta sola) / chi le dia aiuto pur d'una parola', VIII, lxiii, ll. 7-8). These lines betray a somewhat sadistic glee at the thought of the great beauty, Angelica, at the mercy of the barbarians, and also suggest a more general idea of revenge on women for previous male enslavement at their hands (again, the example of Alessandra Benucci in the author's own life is pertinent here); this would also corroborate the idea of

womanhood as being a source of pain to men, as mentioned earlier.[16] A more complex picture of gender relationships thus begins to emerge, purely through the narrator's intervention in the text; indeed, the narrator appears unafraid to comment on story-lines from a position of distance, and in so doing brings his own prejudices to the text which the reader must then 'deconstruct'.

Moreover, the poem also contains some subtle generalizations on women which could be construed as misogynistic, alongside more obvious jibes against the female character. For example, when Orlando comes upon Isabella in the grotto, she is arguing with the old woman, Gabrina ('facean gran contese', XII, xcii, l. 1); this situation prompts a subsequent narratorial comment, in parenthesis, that inextricably links female nature with such argument and strife: '(come uso feminil spesso esser suole)' (XII, xcii, l. 2). Both Isabella and Gabrina fall silent when the paladin enters, and he greets them courteously, which is again commented on rather mockingly by the narrator in another parenthesis: '(come con donne sempre esser si vuole)' (XII, xcii, l. 6). The vein of misogynistic thought here is subtle, since it is disguised by the use of parenthesis and almost converted into a form of conversational 'truth'; yet a gendered reading of the passage uncovers the negative attitude behind these narratorial insertions. A more ambivalent position regarding gender perceptions and inequalities is thus disclosed, adding another layer of complexity to the framework of the poem, and which the reader is then forced to take into account when assessing the representation of women within the *Furioso*.[17]

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[16] Iris Murdoch has interestingly commented that '[an] author's irony often conceals his glee', and that this concealment 'is possibly the chief function of irony'; cf. Iris Murdoch, *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1979), p. 37.

[17] Bernard mentions the idea of 'narrative gamesmanship' in terms of the narrator's power to convey, withhold or delay imparting information to the frustrated reader (Bernard, art. cit., p. 298); this phrase also provides an apt description of the narrator's teasing stance on the question of gender, as exemplified in his often subtle insertions of (ironic) commentary. The 'zigzag' effect of the narrative interruptions themselves also creates a certain 'textual edginess', as if the narrator can only push a story-line so far, stopping short of the full 'exposé' and full 'commitment' to it – again similar to his

Indeed, the courtly gloss of some of the *proemi* dealing with addresses to women can often be stripped down to reveal a less than complimentary agenda. The *proemio* to *canto* XXII, for example, contains a misogynistic jibe concealed under the mantle of a rather back-handed compliment to women. The narrator manages to declare that not many women are both faithful to, and content with, one single lover, whilst simultaneously praising these very women:

> Cortesi donne e grate al vostro amante,
> voi che d'un solo amor sète contente,
> come che certo sia, fra tante e tante,
> che rarissime siate in questa mente...(XXII, i, ll. 1-4)

He addresses these 'rare' women in an attempt to placate their possible anger at his harsh treatment of the wicked hag, Gabrina, in the previous *canto*. He goes on to state that he will not hide the faults of Gabrina, but for this reason will also not conceal the merits of those virtuous women who deserve recognition ('Per questo io non oscuro gli onor summi / d'una e d'un'altra ch'abbia il cor sincero', XXII, ii, ll. 3-4); yet the latter are, in his words, noticeably few in number ('of one or another...'). The narrator lastly offers to praise one hundred women for every one that he condemns, a compensatory promise that smacks of insincerity and artifice. In both the emphasis on 'so many' lascivious and faithless women, and the superlative employed to describe the 'extremely rare' virtuous women, the lasting impression of female sexual conduct – as constructed and controlled by the narrator at this point – would appear distinctly negative.

Since he foresees a reaction to the misogynistic tale told by the innkeeper to the pagan warrior Rodomonte in *canto* XXVIII, meanwhile, the narrator again offers a placatory remark to his women readers in his *proemio*: 'Donne, e voi che le donne

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problematic stance on the *querelle*. Javitch has defined these narrative interruptions as quasi-sexual denials of narrative pleasure to the reader, whose expectations are constantly thwarted: cf. Daniel Javitch, '*Cantus Interruptus* in the *Orlando Furioso*', *Modern Language Notes* 95 (1980), pp. 66-80.

avete in pregio, / per Dio, non date a questa istoria orecchia' (XXVIII, i, ll. 1-2).[18] In a gesture of disingenuous playfulness, he simply advises women not to read this particular *canto*, all the while protesting his own respect and love for the female sex:

> Ch'io v'ami, oltre mia lingua che l'ha espresso,
> che mai non fu di celebrarvi avara,
> n'ho fatto mille prove; e v'ho dimostro
> ch'io son, né potrei esser se non vostro.(XXVIII, ii, ll. 5-8)

Such a ploy serves to protect the narrator's pro-feminist persona but also allows him to retain the anti-feminist anecdote within his narrative.[19] In any case, his supposedly positive – albeit tongue-in-cheek – stance is swiftly negated at the end of the following *canto*. The narratorial insertions commenting on the madness of Orlando firstly demonstrate some sympathy for his plight, but go on to express the rather sadistic wish that Angelica had not been rendered invisible, so that Orlando could have had his revenge on a generic 'Evil Woman', on behalf of all men:

> Deh maledetto sia l'annello et anco
> il cavallier che dato le l'avea!
> che se non era, avrebbe Orlando fatto
> di sé vendetta e di mill'altri a un tratto.(XXIX, lxxiii, ll. 5-8)[20]

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[18] In his chapter on the theme of love in the *Furioso*, Brand notes the change in tone from the first to the second half of the poem, i.e. from youthful passions and adventures to the worries of the cuckolded husband and stories focussing on (in)fidelity and disappointment (cf. Brand, op. cit., pp. 57-83).

[19] Shemek is dismissive of this rather underhand tactic, declaring that 'the narrator's insistence that women can skip over a text that slanders them because the story/history "will be just as clear without it" overshadows him with a patronizing cowardice' (Shemek, 'Of Women...', art. cit., pp. 85-86). Although this section of the chapter deals mainly with the hints of narratorial misogyny that can be discerned throughout the poem in asides and other insertions, the interplay between outright misogyny and the defence of women in the story involving Rodomonte, the innkeeper and the wise old man is worth noting at this point (see also Terracina's response to the story-line in Chapter Three of the thesis). Ariosto frames the innkeeper's bawdy tale of chronic female infidelity (XXVIII, iv-lxxiv) with the opposing views of Rodomonte (whose deeply misogynistic musings are seen in XXVII, cxvii-xxi) and the old man (a Christ-like figure who raises objections to the tale in a speech that attacks both the generalizing logic of male assumptions about the female character, and masculine inability to refrain from casting the first stone: XXVIII, lxxvi-lxxxiii). The attribution of contrary views to different narrators who then overturn one another is compounded by the narrator of the *Furioso* himself, who comments on the inconstant nature of man in the following *canto* ('O degli uomini inferma e instabil mente! / come siàn presti a varïar disegno!', XXIX, i, ll. 1-2); this is prompted by Rodomonte's own change of heart on seeing the maiden Isabella. The misogynistic thrust of this episode is thus seen to exist in a more complex scheme of narrative balance and counter-balance.

[20] Bryce has noted at this point that the 'mock indignation of the narrator [...] is linked to the larger deployment of irony in the poem but irony means that the author can have his cake and eat it –

The narrator then embarks on a mini-diatribe including even more generalized misogynistic statements:

> Né questa sola, ma fosser pur state
> in man d'Orlando quante oggi ne sono;
> ch'ad ogni modo tutte sono ingrate,
> né si trova tra loro oncia di buono.(XXIX, lxxiv, ll. 1-4)

Since all women appear to be equally wicked in the explosion of narratorial feeling presented in these stanzas, any previous declaration of female goodness, virtue or merit is seemingly undermined, and the pro-feminist ideology outlined in the *proemi* considerably damaged.

The beginning of *canto* XXX constitutes a bid to restore the image of mostly pro-feminist feeling that had accumulated up until this point; the narrator apologizes for his outburst and claims to have been temporarily overcome by grief and anger (''l cieco furor', XXX, i, l. 3) at his own unrequited love. He is quick to ask for forgiveness from his women readers ('Ben spero, donne, in vostra cortesia / aver da voi perdon, poi ch'io vel chieggio', XXX, iii, ll. 1-2) and blames his 'aspra passïon' (XXX, iii, l. 4) for his beloved:

> 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.(XXX, iii, ll. 5-8)

He claims to be as worthy of readerly pity as Orlando ('Non men son fuor di me, che fosse Orlando; / e non son men di lui di scusa degno', XXX, iv, ll. 1-2). His personal 'madness' is the factor blamed for any correlation to the misogynist train of thought; yet faced with these conflicting positions on gender issues, the reader is forced to re-evaluate the 'gendered' ideologies – if any – that emerge from the narratorial frame of the *Furioso*.

Angelica's infinite availability and non-availability are simultaneously implied' (Bryce, art. cit., p. 49, n. 26).

In his various statements, the narrator appears publicly in favour of gender equality and the re-evaluation of female merits, but privately tormented by his own affairs and harbouring some misogynistic prejudices.[21] The portrayal of the narratorial psyche is in fact highly representative of Ariosto's desire to show the human condition in all its weakness and failings, as well as in its aspirations to noble conduct and exalted sentiment. The apparent conflict within the narrator regarding the female identity would appear to be a deliberate creation of the author, who wishes both to challenge the reader's perceptions of one-sided logic in gender issues, and to open the reader's eyes to the full complexity of gender relations. I now examine whether a similar ideology can be discerned in Ariosto's methods of female characterization and representation within the body of the text.

'Arme' and 'Amor': Constructions of Femininity

The *proemio* of the very first *canto* of the *Furioso* gives some idea of a starting point for Ariosto's constructions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. The Carolingian and Arthurian concepts of arms and love (*arme* and *amor*) are linked with knights and ladies, the projected subject matter of the author's epic poem: 'Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto' (I, i, ll. 1-2); yet some degree of ambiguity, regarding the extent of a rigidly symmetrical correspondence in the above lines, is already suggested. An interpretation that favours an alternating sequence in the first line would seem, unusually, to connect women with weapons, and to place love, on the other hand, as a major concern of

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[21] Indeed, Tomalin's (negative) note in her article that Bradamante's courtesy quickly turns to spite in relation to Marfisa (cf. Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., pp. 546-47) is indicative of such reasoning. Ariosto may be saying that in the narrator's case (regarding the *proemi* and narrative asides), along with that of Bradamante and other characters, it is easy – and very human – to forget broad parameters of praiseworthy qualities or behaviour, and to revert to prejudices and irrational impulses, when personal interests are at stake; and that furthermore, ironically, these make for the most interesting plot-lines.

knights, influencing their individual story-lines and often leading them astray from Charlemagne's military campaign. However, the line could also be viewed as having an outer and an inner structure, following a chiastic order, with women and love – the elements of traditional romance narratives – as a frame enclosing men and weapons of war, the supposedly central core encompassing the epic topos of 'arma virumque'. Line two could refer to either sex; thus already a more open interpretation of the roles assigned to his male and female characters is encouraged, however tacitly, by the author, especially since the line itself was consciously re-written to produce this range of effects.[22]

The idea of a degree of 'crossover' in these roles, based on the key factors of *arme* and *amor*, is pertinent in the discussion of both femininity and female sexuality as portrayed in the *Furioso*, and also links in with the theme of appearance/reality that pervades the poem. Despite the fact that traditional notions of masculinity would normally be associated in this context with weaponry and armour, the symbols of (male) chivalric identity, Ariosto's epic uses appearance to allow for a sliding scale of femininity in its presentation of female characters, ranging from the pure embodiment of *amor* to the ideal of *arme*. The outer appearance of weapons, including the helmet that hides sexual identity, proves crucial in both establishing and de-stabilizing modes of masculinity and femininity. I shall discuss the creation of a degree of ambiguity in male representation and masculine norms of behaviour in the poem in a later section;

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[22] Indeed, the move from 'Di donne e cavalier gli antiqui amori' to 'Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori' constitutes a move towards a line that is emblematic of Ariosto's technique of *entrelacement*. See Shemek for a further consideration of the meanings inherent in *canto* I, i, ll. 1-2 (cf. Shemek, 'Of Women...', art. cit., pp. 69-71). She later declares that '[the] poem's female characters, in their richness and complexity, serve as Ariosto's most powerful commentary on the limited terms of the *querelle*' (p. 72), whilst the move away from a 'black and white' logic constitutes 'a rejection of the either/or terms of the *querelle* and a recognition of the far greater complexity of human relations in the real world' (p. 97).

for now, I shall limit the discussion to female traits of representation, with particular reference to the inter-linking dynamic of *arme* and *amor*.

An analysis of this dynamic proves revealing for an understanding of the female self as presented by Ariosto. As the reader of the *Furioso* progresses through the text, (s)he becomes aware of a scale of female representation that can be embodied in the three major female characters of the poem: Angelica, Bradamante and Marfisa. Angelica comes to be associated with the attributes of *amor*, whilst Bradamante encompasses a certain balance between *amor* and *arme* and the maiden warrior Marfisa represents the female version of *arme* alone.[23] An examination of their individual characterizations reveals an insight into Ariosto's vision of constructions of femininity and female sexuality within the poem, which may then lead to the production of an 'ideal' of female identity between the different extremes. I shall firstly deal with the character of Angelica, who appears in the first *canto* of the poem.

As a focus of both love and lust, Angelica is inextricably associated with these emotions whether as object or subject. She is pursued by a considerable number of male knights in the poem – the epitome of masculinity, weaponry and war – precisely because she acts as their opposite extreme: an object of pure femininity, as well as of fascination and obsession.[24] As such, her lack of masculine accoutrements gives way to nakedness, an extreme representation of female sexuality; and her later invisibility, occasioned by the magic ring, compounds her symbolic status as a highly elusive

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[23] For contemporary female warrior figures, see chapter 3 of Tomalin's book, 'Actual warrior "heroines" and treatises on the behaviour of women' (cf. Tomalin, *The Fortunes of the Warrior Heroine*..., op. cit., pp. 59-72).

[24] Indeed, her fictional representation bears all the hallmarks of a male illusion, with which the Ariostan voice of irony is also quick to engage.

figure of femininity.[25] Indeed, her beauty and sexuality are such powerful elements in her characterization that she is forced to hide behind the protective mask of invisibility in order to gain some autonomy and travel alone, unaided and without the threat of pursuit.[26] She mostly refuses to engage with her pursuers, and instead flees their inevitably dubious intentions, whether coming from pagan knights (Sacripante in *canto* I, Ruggiero in *canto* X), hermits (in *canto* VIII) or Christian paladins (the eternal quests of Orlando and Rinaldo).[27]

However, Angelica is not presented merely as a passive object of desire: her characterization is given an added layer of complexity with the suggestion that she is not only aware of her sexuality, but also happy to employ its power for her own ends, as seen in the episode with Sacripante in *canto* I. Since she is in need of a guide, she decides to manipulate his feelings for her ('alcuna finzïone, alcuno inganno / di tenerlo in speranza ordisce e trama', I, li, ll. 5-6), and thus shows herself to him in a carefully orchestrated moment of revelation: 'E fuor di quel cespuglio oscuro e cieco /

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[25] In the episode on the island of Ebuda in *canto* X, Angelica is chained naked to the rock and left for the orc to devour. The narrator stresses both her beauty ('la bellissima donna', X, xcv, l. 3) and her vulnerability, in a passage that is decidedly sexualized ('così ignuda / come Natura prima la compose', X, xcv, ll. 3-4), with disguised references to flesh on display ('Un velo non ha pure, in che richiuda / i bianchi gigli e le vermiglie rose', X, xcv, ll. 5-6). Günsberg notes that 'overt physical/sexual description can easily be replaced by covert insinuation, by the use of metaphor, to achieve the same result of making sexuality the major defining characteristic of the feminine' (Günsberg, art. cit., p. 17). Angelica's escape from her rescuer, Ruggiero, due to her invisibility, occurs in the following *canto*.

[26] In her Lacanian analysis of Angelica's movements through the poem, Shemek observes that '[her] moments of autonomous action occur only when she recedes from the [male] gaze' (Shemek, 'That Elusive Object...', art. cit., p. 127). According to Finucci, the function of Angelica is necessarily limited to that of the damsel in danger of ravishment. She argues that Angelica is removed from the text when her invisibility causes her circumstances to shift towards an idea of independence: 'Incorporeality guarantees Angelica's survival as narrative matter, in the sense that it protects her against unwelcome sexual attacks, which, by eliminating her value as "verginella", would precipitate her exit from the text. Yet [...] it is this very incorporeality that requires her eventual demise, since an Angelica freed from the necessity of fleeing ravishment is, narratively speaking, a dead Angelica' (Finucci, op. cit., p. 120).

[27] For Lacanian and Freudian analyses of Angelica's relationships with Ruggiero, Sacripante, Orlando and Rinaldo, see Finucci's chapter 'The Narcissistic Woman: Angelica and the Mystique of Femininity' (cf. Finucci, op. cit., pp. 107-44). According to Finucci, Angelica's danger lies in the fact that 'the [Freudian] narcissistic woman can disrupt sexual dichotomies because the self-enclosed nature of her desire enables her to do without man and his desire' (p. 115). However, I feel that Finucci's (speculative) line of interpretation is pushed a little too far with proclamations such as '[the] cry with which Angelica enters the narrative [...] mirrors the cry that Orlando hears in his dream the night he decides to embark on his quest for her, a foreboding scream of distress he hopes to transform into one of coital joy' (p. 130).

fa di sé bella et improvisa mostra' (I, lii, ll. 1-2). Yet her deliberately provocative stance here is not repeated in a later scenario in which she urgently requires help: in the episode with the sea monster, she appears entirely embarrassed at being spoken to while naked, and there is no attempt to use her sexuality in order to manipulate a potential rescuer:

> Forza è ch'a quel parlare ella divegna
> quale è di grana un bianco avorio asperso,
> di sé vedendo quelle parte ignude,
> ch'ancor che belle sian, vergogna chiude.(X, xcviii, ll. 5-8)

Angelica appears to embody a dual dynamic of love and hate, seemingly inspiring the amorous attentions of almost all those whom she encounters, yet desiring no-one herself, and even actively assuming a position of vigorous aversion to, and detachment from, her suitors. This changes in the pivotal episode in which she meets the wounded pagan soldier Medoro and falls in love with him, becoming transformed from an object of love/lust into a subjective being that experiences these same emotions.[28]

The narrative device of Cupid is employed here in order to precipitate a transformation to the other extreme, in the only detailed description of falling in love

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[28] It is interesting to note that Angelica is dressed in humble shepherd's clothing ('avolta in pastorale et umil veste', XIX, xvii, l. 2) when she encounters Medoro, as if her external covering acts as a signifier for a potential change of personality or state of mind. Just as armour denotes chivalric allegiance, faith and status, so the clothing of Angelica normally represents her nobility, or indeed, with the lack of it, her symbolic link to *amor*. In this instance, her more humble garb hints at a possible transformation within her character itself, and her preparation for love; she indeed meets her match in the beauty of Medoro (a character explored in Günsberg's article, pp. 16-20, in terms of his apparent effeminacy; Günsberg points out the similarities in the 'angelic' physical descriptions of both characters, but concludes that 'androgyny is, in effect, constructed in order to be deconstructed, thereby reinforcing the dominant ideology', p. 20). Angelica is in fact the only major female character in the poem to achieve the 'dream' of happiness in love, since the marriage of Bradamante and Ruggiero could be said to be somewhat overshadowed by the intervention of Rodomonte, which interrupts the supposed 'happy ending'. Brand observes that there is in fact 'no general equation in the *Furioso* between virtue and happiness in love' (Brand, op. cit., p. 59). Finucci's essentially pessimistic exploration of female characterization in the *Furioso* points out that Ariosto 'recontains disorder by reaffirming the need for alignment through normalization (marriage) or elimination (death or displacement to mythical lands) of the different female characters' (Finucci, op. cit., p. 16).

and of the experience of love in the poem itself. It is Angelica's arrogance that is supposedly being punished by the god of love:

> Tant'arroganzia avendo Amor sentita,
> più lungamente comportar non vòlse:
> dove giacea Medor, si pose al varco,
> e l'aspettò, posto lo strale all'arco.(XIX, xix, ll. 5-8)

In a neat reversal, the physical wound of Medoro heals as the wound of love in Angelica increases. Unlike other maiden figures in the poem, she declares her love to him, unable to endure her torment. The narrator's report of these events is typically ambivalent in tone, at once disapproving of her 'bold' actions, but also hinting at an understanding of her desperation:

> Dunque, rotto ogni freno di vergogna,
> la lingua ebbe non men che gli occhi arditi:
> e di quel colpo domandò mercede,
> che, forse non sapendo, esso le diede.(XIX, xxx, ll. 5-8)

The turnaround in Angelica's characterization is made complete by her marriage to Medoro, which is depicted in terms of her infatuation with, and dependence on, her new husband ('Più lunge non vedea del giovinetto / la donna, né di lui potea saziarsi', XIX, xxxiv, ll. 5-6). Both physical intimacy and emotional dependence are represented from Angelica's point of view ('Se stava all'ombra o se del tetto usciva, / avea dì e notte il bel giovine a lato', XIX, xxxv, ll. 1-2), as is the depiction of a deeper level of intimacy, desired by Angelica herself:

> matino e sera or questa or quella riva
> cercando andava, o qualche verde prato:
> nel mezzo giorno un antro li copriva…(XIX, xxxv, ll. 3-5)

Ariosto may be hinting, through the continued emphasis on Angelica's new pursuit of the delights of love, that the opposite extreme of excessive sexuality is no more desirable than the supposedly arrogant, even narcissistic self-sufficiency that marked her earlier characterization. The construction of her femininity is rooted in the

concept of *amor*, whether that of her suitors or her own, and in the idea of extremes of behaviour. Yet this construction is also filtered through the narrator's slightly ironic tone of detachment in the presentation of Angelica – not to mention his potentially prejudiced voice of comment – and must be interpreted accordingly.

The character of Bradamante, on the other hand, seemingly represents a more balanced amalgamation of *arme* and *amor*. She is a maiden warrior, but her quest for Ruggiero brings her within the sphere of love and its associated attributes of femininity; unlike Angelica, however, there is no use of her sexuality in her dealings with knights.[29] Indeed, on her first appearance in the poem, in *canto* I – where she defeats Sacripante in a joust in the woods, and hinders his attempted seduction of Angelica – she is described as wearing white clothing beneath her armour, and a white feather on her helmet, an indication of her purity and modesty. The messenger who later identifies her also cites her courage without diminishing her femininity, stating her 'alto valor' (I, lxix, l. 8) but also describing her as 'gagliarda, et [...] più bella molto' (I, lxx, l. 1). Bradamante is in charge of defending the cities of Montpellier, Narbonne and Marseilles, and is trusted by the emperor Charlemagne ('però che 'l suo valor con maraviglia / riguardar suol, quando armeggiar la vede', II, lxiv, ll. 5-6); yet despite this 'masculine' authority, she retains her femininity since her role in the poem is largely focussed around the task of finding Ruggiero, with whom she fell in love in Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*. Since her union with Ruggiero will result in an illustrious line of descendants, predictably culminating in Ariosto's patrons, the Estensi – as foretold in *canto* III by Melissa and the spirit of Merlin – her characterization is somewhat restricted by the constraints of socio-sexual decorum, i.e. exemplary behaviour leading to marriage. As a result, Bradamante's

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[29] Tomalin declares that 'Bradamante's motives are rarely free from self-interest' (Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., p. 546); yet I would argue that Bradamante's personal quest for Ruggiero surely sets out her motives as being necessarily self-interested.

deep attachment to Ruggiero is duly expressed at several points in the *Furioso*, in passages that clearly emphasize her femininity.[30]

This is the case in *canto* IV, when Ruggiero is once again separated from her at the hands of Atlante, and flies away on the hippogriff. Her frustration and distress are eloquently portrayed by the narrating voice: 'Tuttavia con sospir, gemito e pianto / non ha, né vuol aver pace né triegua' (IV, xlviii, ll. 5-6). Her loyalty to Ruggiero constitutes one of the 'constants' in the poem, in contrast to the motif of appearance/reality and the accusations of fickleness in other female characters; indeed, the narrating voice is never less than approving of her 'feminine' outlook.[31] The latter is seen to poignant effect in *canto* VII, when she learns of Ruggiero's stay in Alcina's kingdom, yet declares her love for him: 'dato il core e dato avria la vita, / pur che n'avesse il suo Ruggiero aita' (VII, xlviii, ll. 7-8). Bradamante also laments his protracted absence later on, in *canto* XIII. Her role as a warrior is in evidence, in her protection of Provence ('ella ben facea l'ufficio vero / di savio duca e d'ottimo guerriero', XIII, xlv, ll. 7-8), but she also fears for Ruggiero's safety ('vivea in timor di mille casi rei', XIII, xlvi, l. 4), and is distraught when Melissa appears without him ('resta pallida e smorta, e sì tremante, / che non ha forza di tenersi in piede', XIII, xlvii, ll. 3-4).

Bradamante would appear to embody, within herself, a dichotomy of *arme* (in her bravery and military aggression) and *amor* (in her tenderness and timidity, which

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[30] Indeed, Benson places Bradamante's entire characterization within the scope of the refined sixteenth-century lady, a model that was emerging around the time of the *Furioso*'s composition, and which retained certain conservative values ('To think of Bradamante as entirely independent is to misapprehend Ariosto's characterization of her: she is always portrayed as an accomplished woman with domestic goals'; Benson, 'A Defense of the Excellence...', art. cit., p. 148).

[31] Nonetheless, many of the female characters in the *Furioso* serve as a foil to such accusations, including the exemplary figures of Isabella – whose loyalty to Zerbino after the latter's death is so great that she arranges her own death at the hands of Rodomonte rather than be forced to marry him (XXIX, x-xxx) – and Drusilla, who refuses to accede to the desires of her husband's murderer, killing him before killing herself (XXXVII, li-lxxv; this story serves as part of the background to Marganorre's tyrannical reign). Their loyalty, fortitude and heroism act as strong antidotes to other instances of female wickedness in the poem.

occasionally lend her the attributes of passive 'damsel in distress') – a dichotomy that has frustrated many 'gender-conscious' critics of the poem.[32] Nonetheless, her masquerade in armour, which lends her the outer appearance of masculinity, is necessary in order to proceed without excessive difficulty through the chivalric milieu, as for example when she hides her sex from Brunello in order to effect the manoeuvre of deception advised by Melissa ('simula ugualmente / e patria e stirpe e setta e nome e sesso', III, lxxvi, ll. 6-7). In this context, gender is as important and as potentially divisive or distracting as allegiance to country, religion, rank or family. Bradamante's concurrence with the need for disguise provides a touch of realism in the portrayal of the active female self within the poem.[33]

The factor of *arme* is thus fundamental for the representation of Bradamante, to the extent that not only is it seen to exist as an integral part of her characterization – as seen in her grief over the rumours surrounding the relationship of Ruggiero and Marfisa in *canto* XXXII, where her armour 'accompanies' her lament ('senza disarmarsi, sopra il letto, / col viso volta in giù, tutta si stese', XXXII, xxxvi, ll. 1-2) and indeed prevents her from committing suicide[34] – but Bradamante herself also becomes a champion of the female right to bear arms and to be judged accordingly, on the same terms as male knights. This is notably seen in the Rocca di Tristano episode, also in *canto* XXXII, in which she proves the point that beauty and skill in arms are

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[32] For example, Tomalin questions Bradamante's independence and claims she is 'basically unsure [of] which role she wishes to play' (Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., p. 540), whilst 'the completion of her search inevitably requires her to relinquish the role of *guerriera* and accept that of the passive *donna*' (ibid).

[33] Following this, it is difficult to understand statements by Finucci such as 'the knowledge that Bradamante is a woman in armor has no effect on others' (Finucci, op. cit., p. 206), when it is precisely this knowledge of her sex that many of her opponents lack, at least initially; on discovery, their defeat by her is then a source of shame. Finucci would appear to contradict herself later with the comment that 'precisely because she seems androgynous, [Bradamante] engenders a greater fear of castration in men, for she appears as both woman and man and signifies both lack and absence of lack' (p. 210).

[34] Tomalin comments on Bradamante's lament in *canto* XXXII, xxv, as constituting 'a rueful recall of her former independence' (Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., p. 548). I would argue instead that in this stanza, Bradamante is deploring her current 'abandoned' status in relation to the hope of a future union with Ruggiero, and only blames Merlin and Melissa for showing her such a happy situation when it is not yet close to fruition.

compatible. Although the ancient rules governing preferential access to the inn are based around the best performance of a male knight in a joust, or (for women) the most perfect beauty of a maiden, Bradamante deliberately challenges the current occupiers – the entourage of the ambassadress for the Queen of Iceland, and the three Scandinavian kings – in the masculine mode of a knight. She swiftly defeats the three kings, and is welcomed into the inn with great honour; but then causes amazement by removing her helmet and revealing that she is a woman, in much the same vein as when she first identified herself to Ruggiero in the *Orlando innamorato*. Her long blond hair again provides the measure of her femininity, yet this is balanced out by the notion of *arme*:

> ...caderon sparsi
> giù per le spalle, e la scopriro a un tratto
> e la feron conoscer per donzella,
> non men che fiera in arme, in viso bella.(XXXII, lxxix, ll. 5-8)

The above lines construct a balance between valour in arms and the outward appearance of 'feminine' beauty, without apparent contradiction.

However, the problem of the conflicting presence of the queen's ambassadress then arises, since two beautiful women are not permitted to lodge at the inn at the same time – even though Bradamante defeated the three kings in the context of *arme*. Bradamante is chosen as the most beautiful by common consensus ('non men di beltà l'altra vincea, / che di valore i guerrier vinti avea', XXXII, xcviii, ll. 7-8, lines that again give equal value to both beauty and valour); yet she disagrees with their ruling and proposes her own 'saggio aviso' (XXXII, ci, l. 3), in one of the most important feminist passages of the poem. She claims to have jousted and won on 'masculine' terms, and uses the theme of appearance/reality to underline the fact that her sex is irrelevant within this frame of reference:

> Io ch'a difender questa causa toglio,

dico: o più bella o men ch'io sia di lei,
non venni come donna qui, né voglio
che sian di donna ora i progressi miei.(XXXII, cii, ll. 1-4)

She disputes the idea that the supposed visibility of her sex should change their attitude towards her achievement in the joust, and even queries their certainty of gender identification on a purely visual basis ('Ma chi dirà, se tutta non mi spoglio, / s'io sono o s'io non son quel ch'è costei?', XXXII, cii, ll. 5-6).

She goes on to argue the difficulties of ascribing the 'fact' of a male or a female sex to certain codes of 'gendered' behaviour ('perché dunque volete darmi nome / di donna, se di maschio è ogni mio gesto?', XXXII, ciii, ll. 5-6), and reiterates her claim to lodge at the inn via *arme* alone, were she to lose the 'feminine' contest of beauty ('Perder per men beltà giusto non parmi / quel c'ho acquistato per virtù con l'armi', XXXII, civ, ll. 7-8). Her rhetoric is seen to be victorious, and both she and the ambassadress remain at the inn. The episode appears to champion the idea that one's sex alone should not automatically define notions of behavioural roles.[35]

Through the character of Bradamante, Ariosto may be stating that *arme* and *amor* are mutually tolerant within reason, or adaptable to personal choice, and that the idea of femininity need not necessarily be destroyed by the assumption of traditionally 'male' chivalric roles or authority – such as the right to bear arms. Nonetheless, Bradamante's ultimate renunciation of her warrior maiden role in order to assume that of wife and mother is indicative of an inability to combine the two extremes to any lasting degree.[36]

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[35] Jordan succinctly notes that '[in] Tristano's castle, Bradamante exploits her complex subjectivity to interpret casuistically a single rule – superiority receives privilege – so that it has more than one application' (Jordan, 'Writing beyond the *Querelle...*', op. cit., p. 305).

[36] Commentary on the role of Bradamante, and in particular on the Rocca di Tristano episode, has been varied. Benson's article declares that the Rocca di Tristano passage 'makes it clear that Bradamante herself is equal to and yet different from men' but that it also 'stresses the differences between the sexes as forcefully as it attacks the restrictive definition of women' (Benson, 'A Defense of the Excellence...', art. cit., p. 143). She links the contemporary *querelle* with the characterization of Bradamante ('Like the ideal lady of the controversy about women, she freely chooses not to be

Marfisa, finally, comes to represent the female embodiment of chivalric aggression and military glory in the poem, since she also is a maiden warrior, but with no sense of *amor*, only *arme*. Unlike Bradamante, who retains a degree of femininity, she appears fully masculinized in her role as a fierce knight. She is of virginal status, with no amorous interest; is renowned for her courage and strength; and is intent on the pursuit of glory above all else:

> ...'l dì e la notte armata sempre andava
> di qua di là cercando in monte e in piano
> con cavallieri erranti riscontrarsi,
> et immortale e glorïosa farsi.(XVIII, xcix, ll. 5-8)

Marfisa challenges the two knights she encounters in the Middle East, Astolfo and Sansonetto, before fully recognizing them ('perché di provarsi avria diletto, / per isfidarli avea il destrier già mosso', XVIII, c, ll. 5-6), thus demonstrating her confidence in her battle skills. She commands respect from Astolfo ('Non men da l'altra parte riverente / fu il paladino alla donna eccellente', XVIII, ci, ll. 7-8), suggesting a combination of deference to her sex and admiration of her reputation. She is keen to join them in their search for Grifone ('Marfisa, sempre a far gran pruove accesa, / – Voglio esser con voi (disse) a questa impresa. –', XVIII, cii, ll. 7-8), and is willingly accepted as their 'compagna d'arme' (XVIII, ciii, l. 2).

However, the character of Marfisa is also presented as embodying leanings towards arrogance, with the narrator hinting at an extreme pride concerning battle and the pursuit of glory. She later displays tactlessness in the episode of the joust in Damascus, when she recognizes the weapons to be given as a prize as her own, and simply takes them ('se gli accosta a un tratto, e la man stende, / e senz'altro rispetto se

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independent', p. 151). Finucci is largely pessimistic in her appraisal of Bradamante's role: 'the project of the epic, as I understand it, is to define the limits of her appropriation of paternal rights, and to show that her choice of unconventional clothing and of an unfeminine role is temporary' (Finucci, op. cit., p. 237), claiming that she ultimately becomes 'the beacon of domestic fidelity' (p. 253). Tomalin concludes that 'Bradamante cannot resolve the conflict of her divided nature' (Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., p. 552).

le prende', XVIII, cx, ll. 7-8); her actions then provoke a large battle. The subsequent show of female aggression in the context of warfare (XVIII, cxiii) is even reminiscent of the violence and brutality of Rodomonte; yet Marfisa's actions are never overtly condemned by the narrator, and she is in no way seen as 'monstrous'.[37] She is haughty in her explanation to the king of Damascus (XVIII, cxxvii-viii), but accepts her weapons back from Grifone, since she does not believe her honour has been compromised ('Esser qui parme / l'onor mio in tutto', XVIII, cxxxi, ll. 5-6).[38] Marfisa appears most comfortable in the company of male knights, since her confidence in her ability commands an immediate level of equality with them.

However, she is not entirely bereft of 'feminine' qualities, as seen in *canto* XXVI, where she reveals her identity as a woman to Ruggiero and his group of knights, whom she has joined. In battle, both she and Ruggiero admire each other's skill and courage ('non men di Ruggier gli occhi a sé trasse, / ch'ella di lui l'alto valor mirasse', XXVI, xxiii, ll. 7-8); in similar vein to Bradamante, she then takes off her helmet and astonishes the onlookers by her sex. Her physical appearance is described in the stock terms of femininity: 'fu conosciuta all'auree crespe chiome / et alla faccia delicata e bella' (XXVI, xxviii, ll. 3-4). Nonetheless, her love of arms and glory also translates into an idea of behaviour towards others, and in particular those whom she considers worthy of her attention, to the extent that the impression conveyed – albeit through the voice of the narrator – is again one of arrogance ('Sol mira ella Ruggier, sol con lui parla: / altri non prezza, altri non par che vaglia', XXVI, xxix, ll. 3-4).

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[37] On early depictions of the Amazonian woman as monstrous 'Other', see Juliann Vitullo, 'Contained Conflict: Wild Men and Warrior Women in the Early Italian Epic', *Annali d'Italianistica* 12 (1994), pp. 39-59. Vitullo notes that most warrior women in early French and Italian epics are ultimately 'contained', either by being killed off or by being subsumed into non-threatening domestic roles.
[38] The brusqueness of Marfisa's manner and speech is interpreted by Tomalin as being a sign of her 'direct and positive personality' (Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., p. 544) rather than a sign of her arrogance.

Furthermore, it is only at the request of her companions that Marfisa remains in feminine clothing rather than in her normal armour:

> ...ben che veder raro si solea
> senza l'osbergo e gli altri buoni arnesi,
> pur quel dì se li trasse; e come donna,
> a' prieghi lor lasciò vedersi in gonna.(XXVI, lxix, ll. 5-8)

Her desire to remain 'masculinized' by normally always wearing armour perhaps suggests that she considers overt femininity as a weakness, in a quasi-denial of her sex; or that, in more practical terms, she believes that a display of 'distracting' femininity would lessen the equal status with male knights that she strives to maintain.

Such a scenario is indeed played out in the subsequent turn of events: the pagan knight Mandricardo sees her in these clothes, and decides to joust for her in order to give her to Rodomonte – in exchange for Doralice, whom he has appropriated for himself. However, in dialogue that is similar in tone to Bradamante's feminist discourse at the Rocca di Tristano, Marfisa undermines Mandricardo's claim that no other male knight is left to defend her, famously declaring that she herself will act as her protector, since she is bound to no-one and is mistress of herself ('Io sua non son, né d'altri son che mia: / dunque me tolga a me chi mi desia', XXVI, lxxix, ll. 7-8). She immediately removes her skirts and arms herself for the fight, simultaneously revealing herself to be quite Amazon-like in her bodily make-up:

> ...le belle fattezze e il ben disposto
> corpo mostrò, ch'in ciascuna sua parte
> fuor che nel viso, assimigliava a Marte.(XXVI, lxxx, ll. 6-8)

Again, the female right to bear arms is emphasized, in spite of existing gender codes and the expectations of appearance. Marfisa's joust is nonetheless interrupted by

Rodomonte, who comes to remind Mandricardo of his duty to his king; Marfisa then accompanies the pagans to their camp, in search of more glory for herself.[39]

However, despite Marfisa's love of *arme* – which is also presented as being related to a form of self-love – she comes closest to an outpouring of humane *amor* in *canto* XXXVI, on learning that she is in fact Ruggiero's sister. This link of brotherly love causes her to betray some emotion, an unusual occurrence within the scope of her characterization. During a lengthy and ferocious battle with Bradamante, whose jealousy regarding Ruggiero's relationship with Marfisa spills over into hatred, the three warriors find themselves in the woods. Marfisa and Bradamante continue to fight each other, and when Ruggiero attempts to intervene, Marfisa attacks him too; but a voice, that of Atlante, is heard from a nearby tomb, warning them of Ruggiero's kinship with Marfisa. The revelation provokes amazement and joy in both brother and sister, who openly show their mutual affection ('ad abbracciarsi, senza offender quella / che per Ruggiero ardea, vanno ambidui', XXXVI, lxvii, ll. 3-4).

Nevertheless, Marfisa's identity is most closely linked to the concept of *arme*, which provides the focus of her characterization and the very purpose of her presence in the text. As the opposite extreme of *amor*, the idea of pure combat may also be tainted with a negative association by the narrator; indeed, the narratorial commentary on Marfisa's actions alludes to the connection between the pursuit of military glory and the attribute of arrogance.[40]

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[39] It is only after Marfisa has met the emperor Charlemagne and been baptised, early in *canto* XXXVIII, that she truly commits to the Christian cause and fights alongside the paladins. Before then, she acts as a 'free agent', pursuing glory on both sides of the battlefield, although she swears to worship the Christian God after learning of her Chiaramonte family origins (XXXVI, lxxviii).

[40] For example, the narrator comments on the phoenix emblem on Marfisa's helmet as being either a symbol of her chastity, or 'per sua superbia, dinotando / se stessa unica al mondo in esser forte' (XXXVI, xviii, ll. 1-2). Commentary on the character of Marfisa appears similarly divided: Benson's article remarks on the virago-like qualities of a woman 'whose bearing and sense of herself divide her from her sex' (Benson, 'A Defense of the Excellence...', art. cit., p. 146), whilst Tomalin's article celebrates the fact that 'Marfisa remains alive and magnificently independent to the end' (Tomalin, 'Bradamante and Marfisa...', art. cit., p. 541). Günsberg nevertheless notes that Marfisa does not fight

In his presentation of major – and indeed minor – female characters, Ariosto displays an understanding of the complexity surrounding the concept of 'femininity', which seemingly results in a potential multiplicity of female identities. The author again challenges the 'black and white' logic of his readers' assumptions concerning gender representations in his portrayal of often contradictory female figures. In the scale ranging from *amor* to *arme*, represented by Angelica, Bradamante and Marfisa, Ariosto would appear to advocate the middle path of balance and order, so that the 'ideal' construction of femininity would incorporate elements of both concepts – whether literally or symbolically. In the *Furioso*, this ideal nonetheless undergoes a process of gradual 'containment' of its more radical elements, and as such lies closest to the identity of Bradamante. However, the 'feminist' edge of Ariosto's characterization – particularly in the transgressive charge of the *guerriera* – should not be ignored.

From Norm to Extreme: Ideas of Sexuality and Transgression

Ariosto's constructions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' extend to an idea of sexual identity, which may also be linked to the outer appearance of masculinity afforded by armour and weaponry. Armour would seem to enclose masculine traits in both male and female characters (such as Ruggiero, Bradamante and Marfisa), but when taken off, to bring about the emergence of femininity, or even the transferral of feminine attributes onto male characters. As I have previously discussed, the three major female characters in the poem reveal various degrees of femininity, and even sexuality, with regard to the removal of, or concealment via, armour and the outer accoutrements of weaponry. Angelica never appears in armour, and is even presented

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again after her conversion to Christianity, and links her to Bradamante: 'Religious conversion therefore performs the same narrative function in her case as marriage in that of Bradamante, in subordinating the masculine [within the female character]' (Günsberg, art. cit., p. 24).

with no covering of clothing at all, thus embodying pure sexuality; Bradamante reveals her femininity when she takes off her helmet, but her sexuality is confined to her role of progenitor – alongside Ruggiero – of the future d'Este family, as outlined by her guide Melissa; and Marfisa rarely takes off all her armour, in a portrayal that does not allow for sexuality, despite a glimpse of femininity when she too removes her helmet (as confirmed in a later comment by the narrator: 'era armata, perché in altra guisa / è raro, o notte o dì, che tu la coglia', XXXVI, xvi, ll. 3-4). However, the emergence of 'feminine' traits is not limited to female characters alone in the removal of 'masculine' armour: Ruggiero himself displays a distinctly effeminate side after his seduction by the Circean Alcina, to subversive effect.

Both the relinquishment of his armour and his adaptation to Alcina's choice of clothing point to a collapse of Ruggiero's personal gender identification and to a transgression of the male chivalric norm, linked to excessive sexuality. Whilst on Alcina's attractive island paradise, he is transformed into a creature of languid sensuality, as expressed in the clothing woven by Alcina herself and given to him to wear ('Il suo vestir delizïoso e molle / tutto era d'ozio e di lascivia pieno', VII, liii, ll. 5-6). The materials of silk, gold and jewels are far removed from the figure of the warrior and the idea of *arme*; the narrator also comments that 'ne l'uno e ne l'altro già virile / braccio girava un lucido cerchietto' (VII, liv, ll. 3-4). Ruggiero even wears pearl earrings, whilst his hair is curled into ringlets and smells of sweet perfumes. The shift to the feminine is also seen in his behaviour ('tutto ne' gesti era amoroso, come / fosse in Valenza a servir donne avezzo', VII, lv, ll. 3-4). The narrator speaks of 'corruption', or degradation ('non era in lui di sano altro che 'l nome; / corrotto tutto il resto, e più che mézzo', VII, lv, ll. 5-6), a notion deriving from excessive sexuality. The latter is considered a danger to both masculine virility and honour

through *arme*, rendering effeminate and lethargic those who indulge in it. The motif of *mollezza* – weakness, feebleness or softness – recurs in this context, as a reminder of the unhealthy connotations of inordinate sexuality.[41] It is thus that Alcina's habitat is described as a 'regno effeminato e molle' (VII, xlviii, l. 3), and more specifically as the 'lascivo e molle / palazzo [...] de la puttana vecchia' (VII, lxxix, ll. 5-6) – the character of Alcina providing the major instance of 'wanton', and indeed 'unnatural', female sexuality in the poem.[42]

Similarly, the episode of the Syrian town ruled by homicidal and sexually voracious women (XIX-XX) serves as another example of an extreme of behaviour, linked to sexuality, which brings about an effect of effeminacy with regard to its male inhabitants. Here, the dynamic between *arme* and *amor* is taken to extreme lengths, and employed as a matter of survival and power.[43] In a display of gender role reversal, the male population, used for domestic work, is made to wear female clothing ('con vesti feminil che vanno giuso / insin al piè, che gli fa molli e lenti', XIX, lxxii, ll. 3-4) and is also depicted in the same vein of languid weakness as Ruggiero. The notion of armour as indicator of a certain degree of masculinity would

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[41] The concept of *mollitia* or *mollities* also appeared in medieval confessional treatises – for example, the fifteenth-century *Summa Confessorum* by Antonino of Florence – concerned with various sexual misdemeanours censored by the Church, including all forms of sensual indulgence such as masturbation. The Latin definition carries the meaning of weakness and effeminacy alongside softness.

[42] It is nevertheless interesting to note that despite the narrator's overt disapproval of Alcina's conduct, she would not have tired of Ruggiero – as she usually does of her lovers – due to Atlante's sorcery; and Ruggiero would also have permanently reciprocated her love since he has been charmed by her: a therefore potentially agreeable situation (VII, xliv). However, since such a scenario goes against Ruggiero's destiny, as outlined by Melissa and Merlin, it cannot be allowed to continue, and Alcina is symbolically exposed as a hideous old hag. See Bellamy, art. cit., pp. 68-73, for an exploration of the 'ironic' Alcina versus the 'allegorical' Logistilla; and Melinda J. Gough, '"Her filthy feature open showne" in Ariosto, Spenser, and *Much Ado about Nothing*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39 (1999), pp. 41-67, especially pp. 41-46.

[43] Those who land at the town's port are either killed or taken as slaves; this fate can only be avoided by killing ten men on the battlefield, and then satisfying the sexual desires of ten women. If the first but not the second goal is achieved, the pretender is killed, and his men made slaves in agricultural work; if he succeeds in both undertakings, his men are freed, but he must stay in the town and act as husband to ten women of his choice (XIX, lvii-lviii). See Günsberg, art. cit., pp. 33-34 for a reading of this episode as a 'male wish-fulfilment fantasy' (p. 33). Critics have noted the 'counter-balance' to this episode in the tyrannical reign of Marganorre (XXXVII, xxv-cxxi), under which women suffer a humiliating subjugation owing to the deaths – supposedly the fault of the female sex – of the king's two sons (on this episode, see Shemek, 'Of Women...', art. cit., pp. 94-97).

appear to be de-stabilized in the case of the removal of such armour from male characters in the poem, particularly when extremes of sexual behaviour are in question. The concepts of *amor* and *arme* are thus linked to the depiction of various levels of sexuality, with regard to both male and female characters.

In the case of Ruggiero, furthermore, armour constitutes a type of control of, or 'check' on, his sexuality; this fails spectacularly when it is removed, as seen in the episode with Alcina, but also contrives to thwart his designs on Angelica after he has rescued her from the sea monster in *canto* X. He is prevented from fulfilling his amorous intentions by the weight and awkwardness of his armour, which then forms a barrier between himself and the object of his desire: 'l'arnese il tenne, che bisognò trarre, / e contra il suo disir messe le sbarre' (X, cxiv, ll. 7-8). In this instance, the relationship between *amor* and *arme* is one of direct opposition, and engenders a situation of comic dimensions as Ruggiero becomes increasingly desperate ('Frettoloso, or da questo or da quel canto / confusamente l'arme si levava', X, cxv, ll. 1-2).[44]

Weaponry and armour also come to assume different meanings for male and female knights. For male knights, they constitute an extension of both 'masculinity' and male sexual prowess, particularly in the sphere of battle and conquest. For female knights, they are seen as tools for purely aggressive purposes, and as such are symbolic of 'masculinity' in that they provide an outer covering that conveniently hides the opposing element of 'femininity', and by extension female sexuality. Both definitions nevertheless share a common interest: that of *onor*, the chivalric emblem

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[44] Indeed, Ruggiero's lack of restraint – which would characterize the truly heroic male knight – is denoted by the literal and metaphorical tangle into which he clumsily plunges himself ('che s'un laccio sciogliea, dui n'annodava', X, cxv, l. 4).

of honour.[45] However, on the part of the male knights, particularly pagans, the language of love and war becomes intermingled in the desire for both territorial and sexual conquests that are connected to the concept of honour. Female characters are thus associated not only with the trappings of honour, but also with the (sexualized) spoils of war.[46]

Angelica is a case in point in this context. Even within the Christian camp, she is used as a strategy in war by the emperor Charlemagne, since he declares to Orlando and Rinaldo that whoever kills the most infidels will win her (I, ix). She thus becomes the focus of honour in a military context, but also its objectified and sexualized 'prize'; again, the concepts of *arme* and *amor* are seen to function in a closely linked dynamic. Moreover, in *canto* XIV, the idea of women as the spoils of war is clearly evoked in the episode involving Mandricardo and the maiden Doralice, who had been promised in marriage to Rodomonte. After massacring the retinue of knights that had accompanied Doralice, Mandricardo's aggression changes into tenderness as he sets eyes on the damsel and falls in love with her; *arme* and *amor* can therefore be seen to co-exist within even the most pagan and violent of knights. Doralice is highly aware of her status as expendable object to be claimed as the 'prize' after battle, and fears for her safety ('nel bel viso si vedea che insieme / de l'altrui mal si duole, e del suo teme', XIV, l, ll. 7-8).

Mandricardo's enchantment with her nonetheless constitutes a reversal of the ideas of 'conqueror' and 'conquest':

> né de la sua vittoria altro guadagna,
> se non che in man de la sua prigioniera

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[45] For an articulate reading of Ariosto's preoccupation with the question of honour, see Katherine Hoffman, "'Un così valoroso cavalliero": Knightly Honor and Artistic Representation in *Orlando Furioso*, Canto 26', in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 178-212.

[46] Finucci indeed states that 'sex can be used to affirm male superiority, and a woman can be conquered in the same way as a country' (Finucci, op. cit., p. 184).

si dà prigione, e non sa in qual maniera.(XIV, lii, ll. 6-8)

However, any illusions of a gentle pursuit of the beloved are immediately destroyed as Mandricardo forces Doralice to accompany him and leave behind her retinue of ladies ('sopra un bianco ubino / montar la fece, e tornò al suo camino', XIV, liii, ll. 7-8). She is even described as 'la gran preda' (XIV, lvi, l. 1), which confirms her status as object 'rightfully' claimed after victory in battle. Nevertheless, the episode with Doralice constitutes the only instance in the *Furioso* of a kidnapped damsel who comes to be happy with her situation, since she later transfers her affections to Mandricardo (a move viewed as pragmatic rather than fickle by some critics).[47] Ironically, the knight for whom she was originally destined, Rodomonte, is later commented on as loving only Doralice ('Era costei che Rodomonte amava / più che 'l suo regno e più che gli occhi sui', XIV, cxv, ll. 3-4) and as fighting the battle in Paris just for her – his personal focal point of honour ('e cortesia e valor per lei mostrava, / non già sapendo ch'era in forza altrui', XIV, cxv, ll. 5-6). The intimation here is that the (fickle) woman appears less than deserving of such an endeavour – another sly contribution to the *querelle des femmes* on the part of Ariosto.[48]

If the concept of 'honour' is related to physical prowess or skills – both military and sexual – as well as a certain nobility of conduct for male knights, it has a different significance for female characters, both knights and damsels. Female *onor* is mostly associated with the values of virtue, chastity and virginity, and it is these

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[47] See for example Finucci's opinion on this convenient change of heart: 'I would claim [...] that Doralice was practical, rather than wanton, in choosing to transform Mandricardo's inevitable rape of her into a seduction and that she showed self-respect in refusing Rodomonte's claim to her person as a prize' (Finucci, op. cit., p. 182).

[48] If women's supposed fickleness is seen to cause varying degrees of madness in many of the *Furioso*'s male characters (Orlando, Rinaldo, Rodomonte, Grifone etc.), then abandonment would appear to cause its female characters to lose their senses (Olimpia, Alcina, even Angelica suffers anxiety at the thought of losing Medoro). Such extreme passions also bring about extreme situations: it is interesting to note that the Rocca di Tristano entrance traditions arise from male jealousy, although this is not in fact linked to an example of female fickleness (XXXII, lxxxiii-xciv), whilst the rules governing the domain of the homicidal women arise from their previous abandonment at the hands of their lovers (XX, x-lxiv). Neither 'solution' appears to be endorsed by Ariosto.

which decide the reputation of the character. As the embodiment of feminine allure, Angelica is naturally the primary focus of the question of *onor* in the poem, since she spends most of her time fleeing the unwelcome attentions of various suitors and pursuers. Orlando, for example, loses his senses halfway through the poem out of jealousy: he realizes Angelica is in love with another man, Medoro, but more importantly, that her virginity has been lost to him. Indeed, her virginity appears to obsess those who fall in love with her, as revealed in Sacripante's lament (I, xli-xliv). He had protected her virginity in Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, and equates this with his right to possess her. In his mini-discourse, the loss of a maiden's virginity – presumably to someone other than himself – amounts to a certain devaluation or degradation of her merit in general, as seen by other male suitors ('il pregio ch'avea inanti / perde nel cor di tutti gli altri amanti', I, xliii, ll. 7-8). However, Angelica then tells him that Orlando had protected her virtue in India (also in Boiardo), so that ''l fior virginal così avea salvo, / come se lo portò del materno alvo' (I, lv, ll. 7-8) – a statement somewhat disputed by the narrator himself in the next stanza, in a famously ironic aside ('Forse era ver, ma non però credibile / a chi del senso suo fosse signore', I, lvi, ll. 1-2).[49]

However, since Angelica is not an entirely mute female heroine, she is afforded the opportunity to hit back at the narrator's insinuations in *canto* VIII, where she expresses her own view of events. She casts herself as a victim of Fortune, suffering continual torments rather than the death she would prefer, and as one who unfairly endures a sullied reputation through the very act of fleeing danger and threats to her chastity. She laments her absence from home, but also, and more importantly, her damaged reputation ('ho perduto l'onor, ch'è stato peggio', VIII, xli, l. 5), which

[49] Compare also the rather self-indulgent tone in the narratorial description of the 'dolce assalto' (I, lix, l. 2) intended by Sacripante on Angelica.

she nevertheless insists is still intact, even though her wandering lifestyle gives rise to slander:

> ...che, se ben con effetto io non peccai,
> io do però materia ch'ognun dica
> ch'essendo vagabonda io sia impudica.(VIII, xli, ll. 6-8)

By her own admission, therefore, female *onor* is of the greatest importance ('Ch'aver può donna al mondo più di buono, / a cui la castità levata sia?', VIII, xlii, ll. 1-2), but she also implies that her reputation is to some extent out of her control, since her beauty automatically prejudices the judgements of others:

> Mi nuoce, ahimè! ch'io son giovane, e sono
> tenuta bella, o sia vero o bugia.
> Già non ringrazio il ciel di questo dono;
> che di qui nasce ogni ruina mia...(VIII, xlii, ll. 3-6)

Angelica is thus as inextricably linked to the question of *onor* as she is to the concept of *amor*. For Bradamante, on the other hand, the idea of *onor* combines both 'masculine' and 'feminine' associations – albeit without the identification with sexual conquests for the former – because she is a maiden warrior and her role encompasses prowess in battle as well as the standard of virtue and virginity (necessary for the successful pairing of Ruggiero and herself, and the future d'Este lineage). Honour for Marfisa is of a purely military sort, both for the demonstration of 'masculine' skill in battle and for the defence of her reputation; although she too is of virginal status, her personal chastity does not form an integral part of her identity and is neither questioned nor discussed.

What also emerges from the poem, along with the concept of women as the spoils of war, is a sometimes uneasy line between chivalric respect for female *onor*, and the desire to deflower the virginal damsels of such encounters. Ariosto is not afraid to show the contradictions inherent in the chivalric code, subtly mocking the (self-imposed) high moral tone of his knights. For example, in the sub-plot involving

the maiden Ginevra, daughter of the king of Scotland, her suitor Arïodante's love remains on a platonic level, as he himself affirms:

> ...né cerco più di questo, né desio
> de l'amor d'essa aver segno più espresso;
> né più vorrei, se non quanto da Dio
> per connubio legitimo è concesso...(V, xxxv, ll. 3-6)

However, a note of bitterness may be detected in his tone when he swears to concede his ground to the villain Polinesso if the latter's claims of sexual intimacy with Ginevra can be proven ('prometto di costei lasciar la traccia, / a te sì liberale, a me sì avara', V, xli, ll. 5-6). This is perhaps an indication of the innate hypocrisy of the male chivalric tradition, as embodied to a greater or a lesser extent in the various characters of the *Furioso*.

Orlando provides a similar example. His sexual possessiveness of Angelica manifests itself in an odd mixture of respect and desire, particularly when he speaks of her virginity:

> ...il fior ch'in ciel potea pormi fra i dèi,
> il fior ch'intatto io mi venía serbando
> per non turbarti, ohimè! l'animo casto,
> ohimè! per forza avranno colto e guasto.(VIII, lxxvii, ll. 5-8)

This attitude towards Angelica is then taken to extremes in the episode with Ruggiero's rescue of her from the sea monster; he becomes enraged after she has made herself invisible with the magic ring, and accuses her of ingratitude.[50] He feels that the sexual act is 'owed' to him because he rescued her:

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[50] Ariosto's technique of 'embedding' his stories is again visible in the two rescues from the rock on the island of Ebuda, seen at the end of *canto* X and in *canto* XI. The classical model of Perseus' rescue of Andromeda (in Book IV, lines 663-739, of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller [Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, & London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1956], vol. I, pp. 224-31) is clearly recognizable; yet Ariosto's deliberate juxtaposition of Ruggiero's rescue of Angelica and Orlando's rescue of Olimpia is intended to remind the reader of the honourable behaviour of Perseus, and the extent to which Ariosto's heroes differ in their chivalric conduct. The narrator's warning of the inability of reason to stand up to 'libidinosa furia' (XI, i, l. 4) in the *proemio* to *canto* XI precedes the description of Ruggiero's (failed) attempt to take advantage of the naked Angelica; yet the antidote to his lustful pursuit is seen in the same *canto*, with Orlando's exemplary conduct following the rescue of the similarly naked Olimpia. In these two

> e la donna accusava di quello atto
> ingrato e discortese, che renduto
> in ricompensa gli era del suo aiuto.(XI, vii, ll. 6-8)

Ruggiero calls Angelica an '[ingrata] damigella' (XI, viii, l. 1) and tries in vain to lure her back with promises; in so doing, he reveals the complex relationship between the chivalric code of noble behaviour and male sexual desire – a relationship that is seen in the *Furioso* to cross boundaries of military allegiance and religious belief, apparently uniting both Christian and pagan knights.

In all these explorations of sexuality, the message that would appear to come across, in tones both light-hearted and serious, is that immoderate desire leads to multifarious negative outcomes: inordinate possessiveness, unhealthy focus or association, madness, deviation from duty, effeminacy, and even – courtesy of Alcina's magic – transformation into trees, plants or animals. The 'middle path' of moderation appears as the implicit counter-balance to the extremes of behaviour seen in various parts of the *Furioso*. However, the ironically detached view of the poet also contrives the sending up of the chivalric code of noble conduct, in depictions of (male) knights who fail to live up to this ideal. Their high moral standards inevitably collapse when baser human instincts take over; and the female sexual identity presented in the *Furioso* is seen, more often than not, as both spoils of war and rightful 'reward' following a (male) chivalric undertaking.

Only female characters who spurn the male sex, have the aid of magic, or are maiden warriors seem to have any degree of self-sufficiency in the text; and this is, on many occasions, far from lasting. Ariosto's imaginative explorations of extreme – even grotesque – solutions to such gender politics are again intended to challenge the reader's preconceptions of relations between the sexes, often to disquieting effect.

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incidents from the same tale in Ovid, Ariosto shows a 'good' love, with honour and restraint (Orlando), and a 'bad' love out of control (Ruggiero); the 'double view' of this comparison also reveals the author's subtly pro-feminist approach to his portrayal of gender relations.

The opposing forces of excess and restraint – seen to bring about conflict in so many of the characters and situations in the *Furioso* – serve as a constant reminder of the human fallibility at the heart of the poem, a central motif that also links the reader to the text.

Conclusion

On a first reading, it would appear that the *proemi* at the beginning of each *canto* – the so-called 'public face' of Ariosto's epic – command a greater authority than any other narrative aside or authorial insertion. In terms of both clarity and supposed didactic aim, the discourses stand out from the substance of the poem as separate ideological expressions on a variety of issues, many of them related to questions of gender. As such, however, they may also be considered deliberately artificial constructs, which do not contain the spontaneity and even vivacity inherent in the more disguised asides within the body of the text. In this light, the narratorial attitude that emerges could be construed as embodying a dichotomy based around the private and the public, so that inner turmoil – often tinged with a sharply misogynistic gloss – is glimpsed behind the facade of mainly 'pro-feminist' public statement.

These conflicting narratorial positions on gender issues form part of Ariosto's desire to challenge his readers' perceptions of the 'black and white' logic of the *querelle*: by deliberately creating ambiguity and confusion through both the narrator and the presentation of characters in his epic, he invites a re-evaluation of the relations between the sexes, the complexities of which defy simplistic reasoning. Through his female characterization, the author challenges 'fixed' notions of femininity and the female self; whilst his depictions of sexuality often focus on extreme reactions or behaviours that are no more desirable. He appears to promote neither the inferiority nor the superiority of women, with characters of both sexes in

the *Furioso* equally in thrall to the vagaries of human nature. The multiplicity of views in the various story-lines of the poem also appear carefully calculated to contradict as well as corroborate each other.

However, the tone of anger that permeates the *proemio* to *canto* X, in which the falseness of male suitors is exposed, appears to reveal a genuinely pro-feminist attitude, as do the narrator's passionate denunciations of violence against women in the *proemio* to *canto* V. The importance of Ariosto's overtly pro-feminist stance – given the increasing momentum of the debate on women in Italy during the 1530s and 1540s – should also not be underestimated. The fact that many of the important sub-plots involving a debate on gender and identity were additions to the final edition of the poem in 1532 – the Olimpia story, the Rocca di Tristano account and the Marganorre episode – demonstrates the increased interest of Ariosto in questions of this kind and his search for a potentially pro-feminist solution to the conflicting portrayals of, and associations with, both masculinity and femininity. The author's teasing promotion of potentially transgressive models lends his work the air of subversion, but the extremes of gender relations depicted therein are never actively endorsed. The *Furioso* would, in any case, go on to provoke differing reactions in women writers of later decades, as the chapters that follow will attempt to show.

Chapter Two

Fiction as Friction: Olimpia Re-Visited in Isabella di Morra's *Rime*

This chapter will analyse the reception of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* by one of the less well known 'Petrarchist' female poets of the sixteenth century, Isabella di Morra, whose *Rime* were first published in full in an anthology of 1559. Since Morra's small collection of poems contains resonances with the previous literary tradition of the 'abandoned woman', the present study will focus first of all on a comparison with the episode concerning Olimpia's abandonment in *canto* X of Ariosto's epic, and will further suggest that Morra was both aware of the story, and keen to adopt it as a thematic and linguistic template for the expression of her own grief. The study will then widen to include an evaluation of the 'Petrarchism' of her *Rime*, but will also highlight the intrinsic violence of her poetic output, which seems to draw from a source more in line with the harsh imagery often found in Ariosto. I propose that the *Furioso* may have constituted a significant poetic model for Morra's own literary production, not only in the topos of the abandoned woman's lament, but also in the description of a harsh southern landscape, and in the personification of a *Fortuna* figure with a distinctly malevolent influence.

Isabella di Morra: A Biographical Outline

Isabella di Morra was born in the fief of Favale, now Valsinni, in the region of Basilicata, in either 1516 or 1518, the third out of eight children.[1] The daughter of a

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[1] In addition to her poetry (which, despite the difficulties involved in automatic assignation of autobiographical status, we may largely assume to be autobiographical, especially given the nature of poem XI, the *canzone* which charts the life of the young female poet in roughly chronological order), the majority of biographical detail regarding Morra's life is to be found in the family chronicle written in Latin in the following century by her nephew, Marcantonio di Morra, son of the youngest brother in the family, Camillo. The *Familiae nobilissimae de Morra historia* (Naples, Io. Dominici Roncalioli,

baron, Giovan Michele di Morra, and of Luisa Brancaccio, she appears to have received a broadly artistic education in the wake of her father's own literary bent and his contact with the intellectual and cultural circles of Naples. However, her father was forced to flee to France in August 1528 following the defeat of the French king Francis I – to whom the Morra family had sworn allegiance – by the Spanish emperor Charles V, whose territories dominated southern Italy, including the kingdom of Naples.[2] Her father's exile at the French court in Paris would prove to be pivotal in the life of the young Isabella: without his protection, and left in the care of the brutal male members of her family (in particular the eldest son, Marcantonio, and her

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1629), which I have been unable to consult, forms the basis of Benedetto Croce's seminal study of her life and poetry: cf. Benedetto Croce, *Isabella di Morra e Diego Sandoval de Castro: con l'edizione delle "Rime" della Morra e una scelta di quelle del Sandoval* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1929). The latter volume, taken from the magazine *La Critica* (vol. XXVII, 1929), is reproduced, with corrections and amplifications, but without the actual poems, in the chapter 'Isabella di Morra e Diego Sandoval de Castro', in Croce's work entitled *Vite di avventure di fede e di passione* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1947), pp. 293-330: all quotations will be taken from this volume. Croce's chapter is divided up into the following sections: I – *Il racconto del nipote*, pp. 295-99; II – *I Morra alla corte di Francia*, pp. 299-303; III – *Diego Sandoval de Castro*, pp. 303-10; IV – *Isabella di Morra nel castello di Favale*, pp. 310-14; V – *La tragedia*, pp. 314-21; VI – *La poesia d'Isabella di Morra*, pp. 322-26; and VII – *Il paese dove ella visse e morí*, pp. 327-30 (a lyrical account of his own 'pilgrimage' to Valsinni). Croce both summarizes and corrects the 1629 document, and his study has no doubt provided the basis for all subsequent editions of the *Rime* that contain biographical and historical material, namely (in chronological order): Domenico Bronzini, *Isabella Morra: con l'edizione del canzoniere* (Matera, Edizioni Montemurro, 1961); Adele Cambria, *Isabella: la triste storia di Isabella Morra. Le Rime della poetessa di Valsinni*, con note e commento di Giovanni Caserta (Venosa, Edizioni Osanna, 1996), Intro. pp. 9-32; and Isabella Morra, *Rime*, a cura di Maria Antonietta Grignani (Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2000), Intro. pp. 11-38 (the latter taken from Grignani's previous study, 'Testi e documenti per Isabella di Morra', in *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 2 [1984], pp. 519-54). Recent anthologies containing biographical sketches include: Natalia Costa-Zalessow, 'Isabella di Morra', in *Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo: testi e critica* (Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1982), pp. 68-72; Valeria Finucci, 'Isabella di Morra', in *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Chicago & London, St James Press, 1991), vol. II, pp. 876-77; Juliana Schiesari, 'Isabella di Morra (c.1520-1545)', in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (Westport, Connecticut & London, Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 279-85; and Laura Anna Stortoni, ed., 'Isabella di Morra', in *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, trans. Laura Anna Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie (New York, Italica Press, 1997), pp. 114-27. For an overview of her life and work, see the proceedings from a recent meeting of critics, journalists and writers in Valsinni, published in Neria De Giovanni, ed., *Isabella Morra e la poesia del Rinascimento europeo* (Alghero, Nemapress Editrice, 2001).

[2] Croce also cites, as another reason for his exile, the quarrel between Morra's father and the Prince of Salerno, Ferrante Sanseverino, who inhabited the nearby territory of Rotondella and who supported the Spanish cause: cf. Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., pp. 296-97. Giovan Michele was put on trial in Naples, accused of treason, but failed to present himself for the defence, choosing instead to flee to France. In his absence, a fine was paid and the fief transferred to the eldest son, Marcantonio. In 1533, the father was in fact absolved, and could in theory have returned to Favale, yet did not; he had by then procured a comfortable position at the Parisian court, with a pension from the king and the opportunity to pursue his poetry, along with other Italian figures such as Luigi Alamanni (to whom Morra addresses her fifth sonnet).

younger brothers Decio, Cesare and Fabio; the 'scholarly' second-born son, Scipione, was also taken to Paris by the father so that he could further his studies), she was rendered a virtual prisoner in the family castle and became increasingly isolated, both literally and psychologically.[3] One could say that she suffered from both the *condizione femminile* and the *condizione meridionale*: limited on all fronts by her sex and the wild, remote area of the south in which she lived (and to which she alludes in her poems, including the small river Siri, now Sinni). Her *pedagogo* or private tutor, about whom little information has come to light and whose name is not known, continued to accompany her in her studies, but Morra appears to have had little other social or cultural exchange, unlike the learned women of central and northern Italy. It was in these circumstances that she wrote the thirteen poems – ten sonnets and three *canzoni* – that constitute her small *canzoniere*, or what remains of it.

Her tutor is said to have acted as go-between in an apparent liaison with the Spanish nobleman Don Diego Sandoval de Castro (c.1505-46), lord of a castle in Cosenza and himself a poet,[4] whose wife Antonia Caracciolo lived in a castle in the nearby territory of Bollita, now Nova Siri.[5] It is said that Sandoval used his wife's

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[3] The many references in Morra's *canzoniere* to the French king and the court in Paris (poems I, IV, V, VI and XI) cause Croce to name the latter as 'il paese del suo sogno' (Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 312). Morra regards Francis I as both guardian of her father and potential 'saviour' of herself. Her brothers are described by Stortoni as 'uncultured and cruel men who did not understand her refined and poetic temperament' (Stortoni, op. cit., p. 114).

[4] His *Rime*, edited by Girolamo Scuola di Faenza, were published in Rome by Valerio Dorico & Loisi fratelli in 1542 (cf. Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 307, n. 1); for a modern edition, cf. Diego Sandoval di Castro, *Rime*, a cura di Tobia R. Toscano (Rome, Salerno Editrice, 1997). Croce disparagingly describes the collection (43 sonnets, 3 madrigals, some *ottave amorose* and one *canzone* to the emperor Charles V) as 'un volumetto' (p. 306), from which the reader gleans little biographical information. Sandoval was in fact accepted into the Accademia Fiorentina, albeit teased by the poet Anton Francesco Grazzini, known as 'il Lasca', for his desire to write in the Petrarchan idiom in order to acquire fame, whilst not adequately knowing the Italian language or its style (pp. 307-08).

[5] The details surrounding Sandoval's circumstances are somewhat vague: he appears to have been accused of an unspecified crime by the court of Naples, and after failing to present himself for the defence, lost possession of the castle at Cosenza (cf. Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 309). Croce posits – perhaps rather speculatively – that his military background could also have been indicative of an argumentative temperament, the cause for quarrels ('il Sandoval doveva essere uomo di sangue e di corrucci', p. 310). In any case, Sandoval moved to Benevento, a more neutral location, but continued secretly to visit his wife (and at least three children) in Bollita. Croce, taking his cue

name to send letters and verses to Morra, although the family chronicler, Marcantonio di Morra, claims that this happened only once, and that she was surprised by her brothers with the unopened first letter still in her hands. The nature of the supposed relationship between Morra and Sandoval is not clear, but it was enough to cause her brothers to murder first her tutor, and then Morra herself, either at the end of 1545, or very early in 1546. Finally, in either September or October of 1546, the brothers (Decio, Cesare and Fabio), along with two uncles (Cornelio and Baldassino), committed a third murder, that of Sandoval himself, in a pre-meditated ambush at Noia (present San Giorgio Lucano), three miles from Favale.[6] The killing so outraged the Spanish Viceroy Don Pedro de Toledo that a full investigation was launched, mainly led by the Spanish governor of the province, Alonso Basurto, who visited Sandoval's widow.[7] The five assassins, meanwhile, were forced to flee first to Rome, and from there to Paris, where they joined the father and Scipione. It appears that the guilty members of the Morra family were not only accepted by Giovan Michele, but also assisted in the process of settling into a new life in France, leading to a far from uncomfortable existence: we know at least that Decio became an abbot in an

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from the family chronicle, describes Sandoval as 'di nobile stirpe, ricco, di bella presenza, valente nelle armi e nelle lettere' (p. 306).

[6] Regarding the family chronicle, Croce states: 'è cosí doloroso e cosí poco onorevole per quasi tutti i componenti della famiglia, che si ha in ciò stesso forte argomento di veridicità' (Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 296). For the exact timing of the three murders, detail of the ambush, and related events, see Croce's reconstruction, pp. 319-21.

[7] Croce's account cites the report filed by Basurto that corroborates the suspicion – based only on hearsay, however – of Sandoval's liaison with Morra: 'ché se diceva che dicto don Diego havea festeggiato [courted] una sorella del dicto barone [Marcantonio, the eldest son] et fratelli, et che in poter suo li haviano trovate certe lettere et soneti che 'l dicto don Diego li mandava et epsa ancora li havea risposto et donava orechie' (Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 319). This was considered cause enough for his murder; yet critics such as Maria Antonietta Grignani are of the opinion that the greater slight to family honour would have been Sandoval's pro-Spanish, pro-imperial status in the face of the Morras' loyalty to Francis I (cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 18). Grignani also casts doubt on the supposed relationship between Morra and Sandoval because of this very factor (pp. 18-19), later adding her hypothesis of events: 'dal silenzio dei testi (i superstiti, perché nulla vieta di ipotizzare distrutti dalla famiglia quelli compromettenti) si potrebbe inferire una conoscenza tardiva tra i due, quando Isabella, ormai vicina ai trent'anni, aveva dato corso alle proprie rime e cercava conferma nel gentiluomo poeta' (p. 22). Their respective poetry in fact reveals nothing in terms of particular love intrigues. In any case, the imperial secretaries summed up Sandoval's murder as follows: 'le sucedió la muerte por ciertas liviandades [*leggerezze*] en que anduvo con una hermana de un baron' (cited in Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 321).

Augustinian abbey, whilst Cesare advantageously married a French noblewoman and gained lands.[8] Only the eldest son, Marcantonio, was punished by imprisonment, since he was considered an accomplice to the crime; yet after relegation to Taranto, he was eventually pardoned. In 1549, and thus three to four years after Morra's death, documents show that Giovan Michele di Morra was still in receipt of a pension from the French king, never having returned to Favale. I have dwelt slightly longer on Morra's biographical details in this section in order to give some idea of the rather unusual context of her literary production, which certainly comes to be an influence on, if not an integral part of, her art itself.

Textual Transmission

According to Croce, it is unlikely that Morra's poems circulated beyond Favale and possibly Bollita during her lifetime.[9] The discovery of her *canzoniere* came about, in all likelihood, during the judicial investigations of the Spanish authorities, when the family castle was searched for evidence connected to the killings. The manuscripts then travelled to Naples, the centre of the inquiry, where they may have been read by a wider audience, although Croce is vague as to how the poems eventually came to printed.[10] In any case, eight sonnets and one *canzone*[11] first appeared in book III of the anthology entitled *Rime di diversi illustri signori napoletani*, edited by Lodovico Dolce and published in Venice by Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, in 1552.[12] Apart from various re-prints of the same volume with new

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[8] Grignani's tone of disgust is discernible in her Introduction to the *Rime* when she writes of the conspiracy of silence evident in this case, and the 'stupefacente asse maschile dei Morra' (Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 20).
[9] Cf. Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 322.
[10] He states: 'furono letti [i versi] con pietà e ammirazione; e un primo gruppo di otto sonetti e una canzone vennero nelle mani di Ludovico Dolce' (Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 322).
[11] Poems I-VIII and XII (the *canzone* 'Signor, che insino a qui') in Grignani's edition; all quotations will be taken from her edition of the *Rime*.
[12] The title indicating solely Neapolitan authors was in fact nominal: the collection contains writers from both the South and other areas of Italy, including Ferrante Carrafa (to whom the volume is

additions, the next significant edition containing poetry by Morra was book VII of the anthology *Rime di diversi signori napolitani, e d'altri: nuovamente raccolte et impresse*, edited again by Dolce and published in Venice by Giolito in 1556. This contained the remaining two sonnets and three *canzoni*, including a revised version of the first *canzone* to be published.[13] The thirteen poems then appeared in their entirety in 1559, in the important anthology of 53 female poets entitled *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime, et virtuosissime donne*, edited by Lodovico Domenichi and published in Lucca by Vincenzo Busdrago.[14] At the end of the following century, the poems appeared, albeit with some evidence of Counter-Reformation censorship (mainly regarding the tone of mystical sensuality in the two religious *canzoni*, poems XII and XIII), in two volumes produced by Antonio Bulifon in Naples: *Rime delle Signore*

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dedicated), Angelo di Costanzo, Fabio Galeota, Vittoria Colonna, Pietro Aretino, Ercole Bentivoglio, Luigi Tansillo, Bernardo Tasso and Antonio Minturno. In his decidedly gruff note 'Ai lettori', Dolce blames any imperfections in the course of both editing and printing on the poor quality of the poetic submissions themselves – which, he claims, follow no specific order apart from the one in which they were received.

[13] In the dedication to the Genovese nobleman Matteo Montenero, Dolce claims to have received these *Rime* from the Neapolitan bookseller Marcantonio Passero, who was apparently anxious that they should see publication; and Dolce again states that he was unable to impose an order on the collection, the different poems being sent to him at different times. Cambria, in the Introduction to her edition of the *Rime*, claims that all of Morra's poems were rescued by Passero from a Neapolitan archive, where they had been put by Spanish officials during the inquiry, and sent off to Dolce, who then edited them (leading to inclusions in both the 1552 and the 1556 editions): cf. Cambria, op. cit., p. 30. This seems unlikely, nevertheless, since Dolce would most probably have published all of the poems together in one edition, with the appropriate dedicatory remarks, had he received them from the same source at the same time. The 1556 edition includes new texts from authors already in the 1552 volume, along with writers such as Montenero himself, Antonio Terminio, Laura Terracina (three poems) and Chiara Matraini (with a substantial body of 102 poems). Grignani's edition includes both versions of Morra's *canzone* to Christ ('Signor, che insino a qui'): cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 77-82.

[14] In Cambria's edition, Giovanni Caserta comments on the editorial techniques of both Dolce and Domenichi: cf. Cambria, op. cit., pp. 42-43. According to Caserta, Domenichi seems to have been influenced by the 'Tuscan standardization' movement proposed by Bembo in particular, which advocated linguistic alterations to texts if necessary ('toscanizzare i testi', p. 43). Domenichi also imposes a strictly Petrarchan structure onto Morra's small *canzoniere*, so that a perceived 'arc' of bitterness in her poems culminates in the two religious *canzoni*. For an interesting look at the ideology behind the 1559 edition, see Marie-Françoise Piéjus, 'La première anthologie de poèmes féminins: l'écriture filtrée et orientée', in *Le pouvoir et la plume: incitation, contrôle et répression dans l'Italie du XVI^e siècle. Actes du colloque international organisé par le Centre Interuniversitaire de Recherche sur la Renaissance italienne et l'Institut Culturel Italien de Marseille: Aix-en-Provence, Marseille, 14-16 mai 1981* (Paris, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1982), pp. 193-213 (on the inclusion of Morra's *canzoniere*, see pp. 206-08). Domenichi dedicates his anthology – which, he claims, celebrates the nobility and excellence of women, and as such also takes part in the *querelle des femmes* – to the Milanese nobleman Giannoto Castiglione; alongside Morra, other poets in the collection notably include Veronica Gambara, Vittoria Colonna, Ippolita Mirtilla and Gaspara Stampa (the latter with five sonnets only).

Lucrezia Marinella Veronica Gambara ed Isabella della Morra (1693) and *Rime di cinquanta illustri poetesse* (1695).[15]

From this point onwards, Morra's *canzoniere* was variously published, either in fragments or as a whole, in anthologies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Luisa Bergalli's ground-breaking two-part collection of Italian women poets, the *Componimenti poetici delle più illustri rimatrici d'ogni secolo*, published in Venice by Antonio Mora in 1726.[16] However, the poems were in danger of becoming veiled in obscurity until the critic Angelo De Gubernatis rediscovered them in the late nineteenth century, including them in his *Antologia delle poetesse italiane del secolo decimosesto* (Florence, Arte della Stampa, 1883) and then producing his own edition in the early twentieth century.[17] It is here that Benedetto Croce became involved: invited by De Gubernatis to 'promote' the poet or at least to take an interest in her fate, he went on to produce a study of her life and to edit her poems himself.[18] Nonetheless, Croce was unaware of the full textual history of the poems, and omitted to include the 1552 edition as its starting-point, a fact he later remedied in an article written in 1939.[19] The revival of Morra's *canzoniere* continued into the twentieth

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[15] The first of these two volumes by Bulifon takes its structural cue from the two editions by Giolito, placing the three *canzoni* and two sonnets (in that order) of the 1556 edition before the eight sonnets of the 1552 edition. The second volume returns to Domenichi's Petrarchan structure.

[16] Bergalli's desire to promote the female *ingegno* is confirmed in the preamble to her collection, in the quotation of Moderata Fonte's feminist *proemio* to *canto* IV of her epic poem, the *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (for which see Chapter Four). The collection contains six poems (five sonnets and the *canzone* 'Quel che gli giorni a dietro') by Morra, who is given the date of 1550 in Bergalli's chronological scheme.

[17] Cf. Isabella Morra, *Le Rime*, ristampate con introduzione e note di Angelo De Gubernatis (Rome, Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato, 1907). De Gubernatis' work on Morra prompted an early study of the poet: cf. Bianca Molari, *Isabella di Morra: poetessa del Cinquecento* (Naples, Stab. tip. Michele Gambella, 1907), although the examination of Morra's *Rime* (pp. 28-62) contains much romantic conjecture and is personal in tone.

[18] The 1929 study *Isabella di Morra e Diego Sandoval de Castro* (already cited), the foreword of which (dedicated to Raffaello Piccoli, friend and disciple of Croce) explains Croce's debt to De Gubernatis, but also clarifies the fact that he was forced both to correct and to enlarge upon the latter's work.

[19] Cf. Benedetto Croce, 'Sulle prime stampe delle Rime d'Isabella di Morra', in *Aneddoti di varia letteratura* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1953), vol. I, pp. 372-76, in which he clarifies both the order of publication of the poems and the selection of particular poems in each anthology. He also includes the textual variants of all editions (pp. 375-76), leading to corrections of his own edition. For a clear textual history and listing of variants, see the 'Nota ai testi' in Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 91-97.

century, with the editions of Bronzini in 1961,[20] Cambria in 1996 and Grignani in 2000[21] – coinciding with the increase in critical interest in European women writers, and in particular those of the Renaissance, in the second half of that century; yet despite some analysis of Morra's supposed 'Petrarchism', little attention has been given to the influence of Ariosto on her work. I now turn to her 're-working' of Olimpia's abandonment in the *Furioso*, particularly as seen in poem III of the *Rime*.

Poem III and the Classical Precedent for Ariosto's Olimpia

Poem III in Morra's collection,[22] a sonnet in which the poet paints a very visual scene of abandonment and lament, continues the long literary tradition of the topos of the abandoned woman, evident in classical texts[23] but also in both medieval[24] and Renaissance[25] literature. In this section, I shall explore the overtones present in

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[20] His edition includes the categorization of the poems as follows (with a short description of each): I – Speranza nell'arte; II – A Giunone pronuba; III – Al padre in esilio; IV – Speranza di nozze; V – Al poeta Alamanni; VI – Sfortuna francese; VII – La selvaggia vallata; VIII – La torbida corrente; IX (XI in Grignani) – L'avversa Fortuna; X (IX in Grignani) – Speranza e timore; XI (X in Grignani) – Il tesoro eterno; XII – La Figura Divina; XIII – La Vergine Maria (cf. Bronzini, op. cit., pp. 31-40).

[21] Grignani's edition contains excellent explanatory and contextualizing notes and footnotes, particularly for the linguistic cross-references to Petrarch, Bembo, Sannazaro, etc. which permeate Morra's poetry.

[22] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 49-52.

[23] Notably Catullus's 408-line poem LXIV, which contains the story of Theseus's abandonment of Ariadne: cf. Gaius Valerius Catullus, *Poems*, trans. F. W. Cornish, in *Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris*, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, & London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1976), pp. 98-127. The particular section concerning the abandonment is in lines 52-264 (pp. 100-17). See also Virgil's account of Dido's abandonment by Aeneas, in Book IV, lines 296-665, of the *Aeneid*, in Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, trans. H. R. Fairclough, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 414-41; and the laments of abandoned women in Ovid's *Heroides*: cf. Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, ed. & rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, & London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1977).

[24] Cf. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, a cura di Maria Pia Mussini Sacchi (Milan, Mursia Editore, 1987), especially chapters V (pp. 107-64) and VI (pp. 165-204). See also Suzanne C. Hagedorn, 'Abandoned Women and the Dynamics of Reader Response: Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione* and *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*', in *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, & Chaucer* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 102-29; and her Introduction, 'Abandoned Women and Medieval Tradition' (pp. 1-20).

[25] Cf. Vittoria Colonna's youthful lament to her absent military husband, the *Epistola a Ferrante Francesco d'Avalos suo consorte nella rotta di Ravenna*, written in 1512 in *terza rima*, in Vittoria Colonna, *Rime*, a cura di Alan Bullock (Rome & Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1982), A2: I, pp. 53-56. Gaspara Stampa's poetic *querele* are also aimed at her often absent lover, Count Collaltino di Collalto: cf. Gaspara Stampa, *Rime*, introduzione di Maria Bellonci, note di Rodolfo Ceriello (Milan, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1994); and the bilingual edition of Gaspara Stampa, *Selected Poems*, ed.

Morra's poem of the Olimpia episode in the *Furioso* (*OF* X, xxi-xxxv), a scene of striking similarity to the poet's own situation, in terms of both sentiment and geographical location.[26]

A short summary of the Olimpia episode is perhaps necessary at this point. The story begins in *canto* IX, when Orlando comes across a damsel in distress: she is named as Olimpia, daughter of the Count of Holland. Orlando helps Olimpia to rescue her lover Bireno, Duke of Seeland, who has been captured by the King of Frisia, a neighbouring rival whose son was first spurned, then murdered, by Olimpia herself, in a conflict in which she saw both her father and brothers killed. The story then continues in *canto* X, in which the reunited couple set sail for Seeland; there, Bireno plans to marry off the daughter of the dead enemy king to a younger brother of his. However, he is soon consumed with desire for her himself, and so abandons Olimpia on a wild, deserted island where the company is forced to land temporarily. She is entirely unsuspecting, and wakes up the next morning to find the ship and crew have departed without her. She runs to the shore, then goes to sit at the top of an over-hanging rock looking out to sea, where she can see the retreating ship's sails in the distance. Her lament encompasses both Bireno's abandonment of her and morbid thoughts concerning her own death on the savage island; and she eventually descends into a kind of madness. Olimpia is finally rescued by Orlando in *canto* XI, having

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& trans. Laura Anna Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie (New York, Italica Press, 1994). On Stampa's use of classical sources in her laments, see Ann Rosalind Jones, 'New Songs for the Swallow: Ovid's Philomela in Tullia d'Aragona and Gaspara Stampa', in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. & intro. Marilyn Migiel & Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 263-77; and Patricia Phillippy, '"Altera Dido": The Model of Ovid's *Heroides* in the Poems of Gaspara Stampa and Veronica Franco', *Italica* 69 (1992), pp. 1-18. For a close comparison of Stampa and the figure of Fiammetta, see Maria Pia Mussini Sacchi, 'L'eredità di Fiammetta: per una lettura delle "Rime" di Gaspara Stampa', *Studi italiani* 10 (1998), pp. 35-51. On Stampa, see also Fiora A. Bassanese's useful study, 'What's in a Name? Self-Naming and Renaissance Women Poets', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 104-15; and Frank Warnke, 'Gaspara Stampa: Aphrodite's Priestess, Love's Martyr', in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens & London, University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 3-21.

[26] Quotations will continue throughout the thesis to be taken from Segre's edition of the poem. For a study of the intertextual elements (both classical and contemporary) in the *Furioso*, see Stefano Jossa, *La fantasia e la memoria: intertestualità ariostesche* (Naples, Liguori Editore, 1996).

been transported to the island of Ebuda by pirates and set up, like Angelica before her, as a sacrifice for the orc or sea monster.

The elegiac *querela* of Morra's poem III diverges from the usual 'female' subject matter of a loss of or an abandonment by a lover, and instead centres on her situation, that of literal and cultural isolation, caused by her father's involuntary abandonment of her through exile.[27] Nevertheless, the scene depicted is strongly reminiscent of the previous tradition, and the stance of the poet is similar to that of Olimpia. In the poem, Morra creates a definite persona which she is keen to put forward, and from the existing, almost theatrical template of the grieving damsel, she appears to take a linguistic template from the *Furioso*, particularly in its use of a language describing violent emotion and harsh circumstance: an altogether less lyrical model than Petrarch.[28] The lament amidst the elements of nature, looking to sea from a high mountain or hill, near a deserted shore, with the desire for a ship carrying the required individual back to land, are all factors present in the Olimpia episode; and such a predicament is echoed in Morra's poem. Although the sonnet exercises restraint, and some degree of narrative thrust, over the raw material that the poet wishes to convey, the tone of desperation is still discernible: whilst Olimpia descends into the extreme of madness, Morra's distress is no less convincing.[29]

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[27] The definition of *querela* may be understood in its more usual context of a lament expressing amorous torment, particularly in the case of unrequited love; yet it may also express regret and resentment for wrongs suffered, discontent at unfair treatment, and dissatisfaction regarding adverse circumstances or indeed a type of life not to one's liking. The second definition would appear highly appropriate in Morra's case.

[28] Indeed, the early 1970s saw the production of a French play loosely based on Morra's life: cf. André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Isabella Morra: pièce en deux actes* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1973). The character of Isabella recites French verse translations of eight sonnets by Morra (respectively poems II, III, I, VI, VIII, IX, VII and X in Grignani's edition) at various points in the play; her brothers Decio, Cesare and Fabio are characterized by a semi-incestuous and sadistic violence. The play ends with the murder of Isabella.

[29] Grignani comments in her Introduction that '[la] rimatrice [...] intende porre se stessa e la propria vicenda come *exemplum* di sofferenza alle altre donne e lo fa puntando su un certo realismo psicologico' (Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 30).

The scene-setting of poem III, with its emphasis on looking, mirrors the structures in place in the description of Olimpia as she realises her abandonment. Morra's geographical situation ('D'un alto monte onde si scorge il mare / miro sovente io', ll. 1-2) complements the rock onto which Olimpia climbs ('Quivi surgea nel lito estremo un sasso', *OF* X, xxiii, l. 1) in order to look out to sea, whilst the motif of sight recurs in Morra as it does in Ariosto. Along with the first two lines, poem III also refers in lines 9-10 to the inability to see a ship on the deserted shore: 'Ch'io non veggo nel mar remo né vela / (cosí deserto è lo infelice lito)'.[30] Olimpia is also described as looking repeatedly out to sea ('va guardando [...] / se veder cosa, fuor che 'l lito, puote', *OF* X, xxii, ll. 4-5, followed immediately by 'né, fuor che 'l lito, vede cosa alcuna', *OF* X, xxii, l. 6). From the rock, she believes she can see Bireno's ship ('di lontano le gonfiate vele / vide fuggir del suo signor crudele', *OF* X, xxiii, ll. 7-8); later on, the verb *mirare* is also used ('pur al fin si levò da mirar l'acque', *OF* X, xxvi, l. 7), as it is in line two of Morra's sonnet (cited above).[31] The 'legno spalmato' (l. 3) bringing news of Morra's father mirrors the *legno* (*OF* X, xxv, l. 4) of Bireno, although this phrase is used in full (albeit in the plural) in Petrarch ('legni spalmati', *RVF* CCCXII, l. 2). As we can see from the above quotations, both the first quatrain and the first tercet of Morra's poem revolve around visual concepts concerning landscape, where the poet's perception of certain physical, concrete elements linked to her abandonment – sea, ship, oars, sails swollen by wind, deserted shore – not only plays a pivotal role in the actual setting of the sonnet, but also

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[30] Compare 'e quanto in più selvaggio / loco mi trovo e 'n più deserto lido' (*RVF* CXXIX, ll. 46-47); cf. Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, introduzione e note di Piero Cudini (Milan, Garzanti Editore, 1998), p. 189. All quotations will be taken from this edition, although in order not to clutter the text, I shall not give the page numbers each time. See also Ariosto's model: 'che nei deserti liti e boschi fieri' (*OF* XX, xxiii, l. 5).

[31] The motif of sight also recurs in the classical source of Catullus: 'prospicit, eheu, / prospicit...' (ll. 61-62), as Ariadne famously surveys the deserted shore ('"perfide, deserto liquisti in litore, Theseu?"', l. 133) from a position high up on the mountain-side ('ac tum praeruptos tristem conscendere montes, / unde aciem in pelagi vastos protenderet aestus', ll. 126-27); cf. Catullus, op. cit., pp. 102 & 106.

strongly relates to the Olimpia episode, in both tone and lexis.[32] Morra's sonnet is indeed structured so that the second quatrain and second tercet, by contrast, deal with the more abstract concept of Fortune, the guiding force in the poet's unhappy circumstances.

The poem then moves to the language of violent despair, as Morra names Fortune – recognizable in the abstract form of the star – as the factor inhibiting her happiness. The second quatrain begins dramatically with the realization that her hopes will forever be dashed in such circumstances:

> Ma la mia adversa e dispietata stella
> non vuol ch'alcun conforto possa entrare
> nel tristo cor, ma di pietà rubella,
> la calda speme in pianto fa mutare.(ll. 5-8)[33]

The strong and blunt change in direction associated with the adversative term *ma*, and the sibilant alliteration of the letter 's' in line five, contribute to the idea of the harsh and inexorable nature of Fortune, as if the words are being spat out in rage and disdain by the author. The negative construction of line six, with *non* and *alcun*, only adds to the sense of extreme gloom. These sentiments are reminiscent of Olimpia's lament, the *pianto* and *grido* (*OF* X, xxvi, l. 4) of which are noted by Ariosto's narrator, and which itself includes the line spoken by Olimpia, 'chi mi dà aiuto? ohimè, chi mi consola?' (*OF* X, xxvii, l. 8) – linked to the *conforto* lacking in Morra's condition. It is also worth noting at this point that the phrase 'adversa e dispietata stella' finds a rhythmical and thematic resonance in *canto* XXIX of the *Furioso*, in which Morra's namesake Isabella, another damsel in distress, is reminded of her 'crudele e dispietata sorte' (*OF* XXIX, xi, l. 6) at the hands of Rodomonte.

Furthermore, in *canto* XXXII, Bradamante's pain similarly prevents any idea of

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[32] The Ariostan echoes are indeed noted by Grignani: cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 50.
[33] Compare a similar tone of despair in Ariadne's lament, also forceful in its rhythm: 'nulla fugae ratio, nulla spes: omnia muta, / omnia sunt deserta, ostentant omnia letum' (ll. 186-87); cf. Catullus, op. cit., p. 110.

comfort from entering her mind ('Sì l'occupa il dolor, che non avanza / loco ove in lei conforto abbia ricetto', *OF* XXXII, xxvi, ll. 1-2). Interestingly, Bradamante also provides the only exact example of the phrase 'di pietà rubella', when trying to attack Ruggiero ('venìa con mente di pietà rubella', *OF* XXXVI, xxxvii, l. 6); the phrase does not exist in Dante or Petrarch, the latter coming closest with 'rubella di mercé' (*RVF* XXIX, l. 18).

Grignani's edition notes the Dantesque use of a 'lessico "forte"', however, with regard to the verb *fendere*,[34] used in line eleven of the sonnet ('che l'onde fenda o che la gonfi il vento', in relation to the ship's oars and sails); nonetheless, this strong verb is also present in Ariosto ('fende / con tanta fretta il suttil legno l'onde', *OF* XLIII, lxiii, ll. 1-2), although not in the Olimpia episode. The first tercet, as I mentioned earlier, constitutes a return to the visual landscape of the first quatrain, in its depiction of the calm sea and deserted shore. The final tercet, like the second quatrain, returns to abstract forms and lays out her lament in simple terms ('Contra Fortuna alor spargo querela', l. 12); Morra's lexis here mirrors the language describing 'i prieghi e le querele / de l'infelice Olimpia' (*OF* X, xxvi, ll. 3-4), alongside Fiordiligi's lament in the *Furioso* ('empiendo il ciel di voti e di querele', *OF* XLI, xxxiv, l. 6; indeed, Fiordiligi is lamenting the departure of her beloved Brandimarte, whose ship she watches as it goes out to sea: 'quanto con vista seguitar le puote, / segue le vele in alto mar remote', *OF* XLI, xxxiv, ll. 7-8). Again, the register in these examples, with their greater (female) connection to Fortune and injustice, sits more aptly with Morra than would the Petrarchan equivalent ('Già desiai con sì giusta querela', *RVF* CCXVII, l. 1). The final lines of poem III state her

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[34] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 51, n. to ll. 9-11. The verb *fendere* appears frequently in the *Commedia*: compare for example, 'quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora', *Par.* XXIII, l. 68, in Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, introduzione di A. Chiari, note di G. Robuschi (Milan, Casa Editrice Bietti, 1965), p. 584. All quotations will be taken from this edition, although I shall not give the page numbers each time.

hatred of her surroundings with forceful clarity ('ed ho in odio il denigrato sito, / come sola cagion del mio tormento', ll. 13-14), recalling a somewhat Dantesque vision of hell and entrapment. It is likely, nonetheless, that Morra felt a greater degree of identification with the more forlorn female figures of Ariosto's epic – particularly in the cases of lament provoked by abandonment and suffering – than with the male poet-protagonists of the existing literary canon. Both the general situation of Olimpia and some precise verbal echoes suggest that this particular episode of the *Furioso* was a subtext in the construction of poem III.

The 'Petrarchism' of Isabella di Morra

Nonetheless, Isabella di Morra, like all lyric poets of the Cinquecento, was certainly influenced by the writings of Petrarch, and in particular the *Canzoniere*. The linguistic cross-references are immediately obvious, as Grignani's detailed textual analysis has shown. The structure of Morra's *canzoniere*, despite the difficulties involved in the ordering of the poems,[35] is also similar to the Petrarchan model.

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[35] The poems are neither named nor dated; the order in which they are presented is largely taken from the early printed editions, but remains open to interpretation, particularly the 'later' numbered sonnets and the *canzoni*. For a discussion of the structure of Morra's *canzoniere*, see Giovanni Caserta, 'Vicende filologiche e struttura del *Canzoniere* di Isabella Morra', in *Isabella Morra e la poesia del Rinascimento europeo*, a cura di Neria De Giovanni (Alghero, Nemapress Editrice, 2001), pp. 21-34, especially pp. 32-34. Caserta claims that 'bisogna pensare alle tredici liriche come alla punta emergente di un meditato e tormentato lavoro sotterraneo' (p. 31), adding, rather patronizingly, that 'si deve ammettere che a quella padronanza linguistica, stilistica e metrica ella non poteva arrivare se non dopo lunghe esercitazioni' (ibid). Grignani, meanwhile, takes issue with critics including Croce (who claims 'il non vedervisi segno alcuno di esercitazione o bellurie letteraria' in Morra's poetry: cf. Croce, 'Isabella di Morra...', op. cit., p. 324) on the 'gendered' question of the intuitive and the emotional vs. the cerebral and the rational, i.e. the harnessing of passions in poetry via stylistic control (cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 24-30). Grignani exposes the inability of (male) critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to reconcile spontaneity of sentiment in female poetry with deliberation of expression or poetic artifice ('sembrano arrestarsi pensosi di fronte alla cultura raffinata di queste donne pur diverse tra loro per provenienza e pratica di scrittura', p. 27). She goes on to denounce the pernicious effects of such an attitude: 'Nell'imbarazzo ad attribuire alla donna le virtú, tradizionalmente maschili, di razionale impiego della cultura e di controllo stilistico, o dell'elocuzione, rientra a mio parere anche l'interesse per le biografie increspate o interpretate romanticamente piú che per l'oggettualità degli scritti, un atteggiamento latamente crociano che ha danneggiato già abbastanza i lavori critici sul petrarchismo in genere' (p. 28). The critic Olivia Sears also points out the 'no-win' contradictions inherent in such criticism, observing that 'women poets have been criticized both for failing at Petrarchan imitation and for succeeding at the expense of sincerity'; in addition, '[they] are expected to devote themselves entirely to poetry, rather than to governing or raising a family, while

Indeed, the first sonnet,[36] which acts as *proemio* to the rest of the collection, sets out the intentions of the poet to write of her misfortunes ('I fieri assalti di crudel Fortuna / scrivo piangendo, e la mia verde etate', ll. 1-2) and to gain the reader's compassion, despite Fortune's attempts to thwart her literary aspirations ('e spero ritrovar qualche pietate / malgrado de la cieca aspra importuna', ll. 7-8). The Petrarchan resonances here are undeniable;[37] yet the violence of Morra's poetry, in both thematic and stylistic terms, separates her to a certain extent from the many Petrarchists of the sixteenth century[38] (and I shall explore the language of violence in her *Rime*, along with Ariosto's influence, in the following section). Although critics have rightly recognized Morra's debt to Petrarch,[39] many have also discussed her uniquely marginal status as a point of reference for poetic originality, away from the trappings of Petrarchism.[40]

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maintaining their "femminilità"'. She concludes that '[any] discussion of a Renaissance woman's poetry never seems to lack an evaluation of her character and her private life'; cf. Olivia E. Sears, 'Choosing Battles? Women's War Poetry in Renaissance Italy', in *Gendered Contexts: New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hairston & Silvia M. Ross (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1996), pp. 79-91 [p. 83]. This study discusses the Petrarchan poetry of Gaspara Stampa, Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna in the contexts of war and loss.

[36] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 45-47.

[37] Compare Petrarch's famous line 'spero trovar pietà, non che perdono' (*RVF* I, l. 8), confirming the prefatory nature of Morra's poem; however, unlike the tone of backward-looking nostalgia tinted with disillusionment in Petrarch, Morra is very much in the present with her distress – her 'verde etate' is being wasted now, unlike Petrarch's 'lost youth' of the past ('Tutta la mia fiorita e verde etade / passava...', *RVF* CCCXV, ll. 1-2). Morra's phrase 'scrivo piangendo' (l. 2) also has Petrarchan precedents: 'piangendo i' 'l dico, e tu piangendo scrivi' (*RVF* CCCLIV, l. 14); and 'passato è quella di ch'io piansi e scrissi, / ma lasciato m'à ben la penna e 'l pianto' (*RVF* CCCXIII, ll. 3-4).

[38] Studies on sixteenth-century Petrarchism include (in chronological order): Arturo Graf, *Attraverso il Cinquecento* (Turin, G. Chiantore, 1926); Benedetto Croce, 'La lirica cinquecentesca', in *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1933), pp. 339-438; Leonardo Olschki, *La poesia italiana del Cinquecento* (Florence, Casa Editrice "La Nuova Italia", 1933); Luigi Baldacci, *Il petrarchismo italiano nel Cinquecento* (Padua, Liviana Editrice, 1974); and Giulio Ferroni, ed., *Poesia italiana del Cinquecento* (Milan, Garzanti Editore, 1978).

[39] Indeed, Bronzini, in his discussion of her poems, claims that '[classicismo] e petrarchismo sono [...] la tela di questa poesia' (Bronzini, op. cit., p. 49).

[40] As, for example, the critic Sara Adler, who states that 'Di Morra's poems, in part because she did not participate in the activities of the literary establishment [Petrarchism], remain immune from the standardization of emotions and perceptions that were mass produced by this literary establishment': cf. Sara Adler, 'The Petrarchan Lament of Isabella Di Morra', in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. Ada Testaferri (Ottawa, Dovehouse Editions Inc., 1989), pp. 201-21 [p. 203]. This essay deals with the themes of *Fortuna*, nature and religious feeling in Morra as 'filtered' through Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Stortoni comments that 'this cultural isolation made her a more original and spontaneous poet, in that it effectively insulated her from too strict an adherence to the Petrarchan lyric mode prevailing in Italy'

However, the Petrarchan code is still evident throughout Morra's *canzoniere*, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the tone of the individual poem. Poem IX,[41] a sonnet, is 'forse il testo di piú stretta osservanza petrarchesca di tutto il piccolo *corpus*' according to Grignani;[42] indeed, the model for the poem would appear to be Petrarch's sonnet 'Pace non trovo e non ò da far guerra' (*RVF* CXXXIV), in terms of theme, single lexical elements and the rhyme scheme in *-accio*. Poem IX encompasses Morra's desire for escape from her 'prison', in spite of her antagonists, the figures of Fortune and Death. In a scenario replete with Petrarchan antitheses, she is equally assailed by desire and fear, with the resulting uncertainty causing her pain, and, eventually, despair. I shall examine some of the lines in this poem with key Petrarchan conceits as the founding literary influence.

I shall cite the entire first quatrain of the sonnet, since the long hypothetical clause gives rise to a rather disjointed unit of verse:

> Se a la propinqua speme nuovo impaccio
> o Fortuna crudele o l'empia Morte,
> com'han soluto, ahi lassa, non m'apporte,
> rotta avrò la prigione e sciolto il laccio.(ll. 1-4)

The figures of *Fortuna* and *Morte* mentioned together can also be found in Petrarch ('non basta ben ch'Amor, Fortuna e Morte / mi fanno guerra intorno e 'n su le porte', *RVF* CCLXXIV, ll. 2-3; see also *RVF* XL, 'S'amore o morte non dà qualche stroppio', one of many Petrarchan poems beginning with *Se*), but it is the climactic final line of the quatrain that contains the most recognizable references to the *Canzoniere* (compare 'Tal m'à in pregion, che non m'apre né serra, / né per suo mi

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(Stortoni, op. cit., p. 115). She even goes on to state that the *Rime* are 'perhaps the most autobiographical and artifice-free in all of Italian Renaissance women's poetry' (ibid). For a similar exploration of the Petrarchan influence on the poet Chiara Matraini, see Paola Malpezzi Price, 'Chiara Matraini: Petrarchist or anti-Petrarchist? The Dilemma of a Woman Poet', in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. Ada Testaferri (Ottawa, Dovehouse Editions Inc., 1989), pp. 189-99.

[41] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 63-65.

[42] Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 63.

riten né scioglie il laccio', *RVF* CXXXIV, ll. 5-6). The Petrarchan terminology – usually employed in the context of love and passion – nevertheless has an uncomfortably realist feel, since Morra was in fact writing as a virtual prisoner of her brothers. Moreover, in lines 5-6 of Morra's sonnet ('Ma, pensando a quel dí, ardo ed agghiaccio, / ché 'l timore e 'l desio son le mie scorte'), we find elements that are easily identifiable with the same Petrarchan sonnet ('e temo e spero; ed ardo e son un ghiaccio', *RVF* CXXXIV, l. 2).[43] Again, however, the state of psychological paradoxes described in Morra have an edge of palpable pain as well as of uncertainty, as we see in her line eight ('e, in forse, di dolor mi struggo e sfaccio', which has as its linguistic model Petrarch's line 'Aspettando ragion mi struggo e fiacco', *RVF* CXXXVII, l. 5, which gives a somewhat less violent impression). In the tercets of Morra's poem, the metaphorical actions of both desire and fear are illustrated, with Fortune finally leading the poet to despair; line eleven ('per trar quest'alma da perpetui affanni') again finds a precedent in Petrarch ('ma per trarti d'affanni', *RVF* CCCLIX, l. 62). Poem IX would thus appear to follow the Petrarchan canon, albeit with differences that accentuate the (literal) suffering of the poet in her particularly concrete and unpleasant situation, and with the notable absence of love as primary poetic inspiration.

Poem X,[44] on the other hand, presents similarities with Petrarch in as much as it constitutes a 'sonetto di pentimento', a renunciation of previous concerns in favour of embracing a more spiritual way of life.[45] Morra here repents of her diatribes against Fortune and the isolation of her wild surroundings, the recurrent themes in the

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[43] See also *RVF* CLXXVIII, ll. 1-2: 'Amor mi sprona in un tempo ed affrena, / assecura e spaventa, arde ed agghiaccia', again in the context of love.
[44] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 65-67.
[45] However, the collection is too small (and may have been truncated) to make definitive judgements on whether Morra's poetic intention was to create a *canzoniere* in the absolute mould of Petrarch.

majority of poems in her *canzoniere*, and aspires instead to glory in God.[46] She realizes that her poetry concerning the blows of Fortune will bring her little honour, and that eternal life and freedom will eventually overtake her present, miserable existence, where she is not favoured by Fortune. I shall cite the first two quatrains of the sonnet:

> Scrissi con stile amaro, aspro e dolente[47]
> un tempo, come sai, contra Fortuna,
> sí che null'altra mai sotto la luna
> di lei si dolse con voler piú ardente.
> Or del suo cieco error l'alma si pente,
> che in tai doti non scorge gloria alcuna,
> e se de' beni suoi vive digiuna,
> spera arricchirsi in Dio chiara e lucente.(ll. 1-8)

The tone of resignation, acceptance of her fate and hope for salvation in God in these lines are all factors that correspond with some of the later poems in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*;[48] in addition, specific linguistic references are evident. The self-referential nature of the first line can be compared, for example, with Petrarch's naming of his own 'doloroso stile' (*RVF* CCCXXXII, l. 56).[49] It is interesting to note at this point the position of supremacy that the poet claims amongst the specifically female writers (designated by her phrase *null'altra*) who may also lament their fate at

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[46] In contrast to Petrarch, who renounces the concerns and anxieties of earthly love for a higher, spiritual contemplation. Grignani claims that the first line of the sonnet, in which Morra writes of her previous 'stile amaro', may refer to poems I, VI, VIII and XI (the latter having perhaps been written before poem X); cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 65. I would argue that the general nature of this line could refer to most, if not all, of the poems that dwell on her unhappy circumstances. In poem X, the dominant sentiment is one of belief that her focus on the 'evil divinity', Fortune, has been erroneous, and that she must now concentrate her attentions on the true Christian God, a more glorious endeavour.

[47] The same adjectives, it may be noted, are used elsewhere by Morra to describe her situation, or Fortune itself, so that in this case her very pain may be said to penetrate her writing style. See Matteo Palumbo, 'Lo "stil ruvido e frale" di Isabella di Morra', in *Les femmes écrivains en Italie au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance: Actes du colloque international, Aix-en-Provence, 12, 13, 14 novembre 1992* (Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1994), pp. 259-73, for a study that underlines the influence of Petrarch on Morra's poetry (especially pp. 263-65), but also claims that Morra's overriding concern is with her *stile* ('La materia dell'esperienza, che pure entra così vistosamente nella sua opera, è solo l'abbrivo di un cammino che porta verso la nobiltà dell'espressione', p. 269). According to Palumbo, the poet ultimately aspires to '[la] conquista della parola' (ibid).

[48] In particular, poems CCCLXIV ('Tennemi Amor anni ventuno ardendo') and CCCLXV ('I' vo piangendo i miei passati tempi').

[49] Cf. also line 74 of the same poem: 'e 'n aspro stile e 'n angosciose rime'.

the hands of Fortune (ll. 3-4). Her line five, meanwhile, is a combination of Petrarchan lines: 'che del suo proprio error l'alma s'appaga' (*RVF* CXXIX, l. 37) and 'e del suo error, quando non val, si pente' (*RVF* CXXXI, l. 8). The tercets in Morra's sonnet are based around the negative construction of *né* ('Né tempo o morte il bel tesoro eterno, / né predatrice e vïolenta mano...', ll. 9-10), also found in Petrarch's poem CXIV ('Né del vulgo mi cal né di fortuna, / né di me molto né di cosa vile...', ll. 9-10). Morra's second tercet, describing the blessed climate of heaven ('ché non si sente mai caldo né gielo', l. 13) is also highly reminiscent of the *Canzoniere* (see, for example, line 13 of *RVF* LXXVII: 'che fu disceso a provar caldo e gelo').[50] Poem X, with its religious register, in many ways acts as precursor to the two religious *canzoni*, XII and XIII in Grignani's edition;[51] again, we are reminded of the structure of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which ends with the *canzone* to the Virgin Mary ('Vergine bella, che di sol vestita', *RVF* CCCLXVI).

The two *canzoni*, dedicated to Christ (XII) and the Virgin Mary (XIII), would thus appear to complete Morra's small *canzoniere*, indicating a change of heart and an increased acceptance of her fate with the hope for future salvation. Poem XII, addressing the figure of Christ, is similar in structure to Petrarch's *canzone* to the Virgin: each verse in Morra's poem, apart from the final one, begins with the word *Signor*, an echo of the anaphoric construction in Petrarch's stanzas, which begin with the word *Vergine*. In poem XII, the poet asks for grace from Christ for her previous suffering, and for the ability to follow the path of virtue with the guidance of His

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[50] Appearing as 'caldo et gielo' in other sources, including Grignani's citation of the line (cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 67, n. to l. 13). It is also worth noting, nevertheless, that an exact match of this phrase can be found in the *Furioso*: 'che non ti può mai tor caldo né gielo' (*OF* XLIII, clxx, l. 4). The context is also similar to Morra's: lamenting Brandimarte's death, Orlando speaks of the new life in heaven that he has gained, where earthly fluxes cannot reach.

[51] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 74-82 and 82-89 respectively.

love.[52] She then proceeds to catalogue His divine 'beauties' in a type of Petrarchan blazon, normally reserved for the description of the (male) poet's beloved (forehead, eyes, lashes, hair, mouth, cheeks, body, hands and feet).[53] Morra brings out the 'functional' divine characteristics inherent in the bodily ones, with the tone verging on mystical rapture. The poem ends with Morra gently berating herself for attempting to enter 'nel mar de la beltà di Dio' (l. 68) when the divine mystery is in fact too vast for a mere mortal to comprehend. It is interesting to note the slight tone of bitterness at the beginning of the *canzone*, when Morra confirms that she has not known the delights of love or marriage ('spregiar m'hai fatto ogni beltà mortale', l. 3); her demand for knowledge of divine love ('fammi di tanto ben per grazia erede, / che sempre ami te sol con pura fede', ll. 4-5) is almost a demand for compensation in the light of her unhappy existence. Furthermore, her desire to become the 'fida amante' (l. 8) of Christ assumes Freudian overtones when the reader examines the remainder of the poem: Morra's depiction of Christ is one of a decidedly human form, considered in terms of the human body. The sensuality of this depiction has been noted by critics, who posit that the poet transfers her own frustrated desires onto this male figure, having no other outlet for her emotions.[54]

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[52] Unlike Petrarch, who simply renounces earthly for celestial love, Morra (in the apparent absence of earthly love) renounces all of 'questo mondo errante' (l. 9) with its 'procelloso mar pien di tempeste' (l. 11), in favour of divine contemplation. Compare nonetheless the similar line in Petrarch's *canzone* to the Virgin: 'di questo tempestoso mare stella' (*RVF* CCCLXVI, l. 67). The phrase 'mondo errante' is also Petrarchan: 'ch'a pena se n'accorse il mondo errante' (*RVF* CCCL, l. 11).

[53] She appears to confuse, or at least merge, the tonalities of purely divine love and religious worship with those of earthly, if perhaps platonic, love.

[54] For example, Adler states that 'images of Christ actually awaken her very earthly human passion and her sensuous rapture' (Adler, op. cit., p. 215). Caserta's introductory notes to poem XII in Cambria's edition of the *Rime* also comment on the sensuality invested in the poem: 'Inevitabile diventa il processo di proiezione delle tensioni e delle frustrazioni, ma anche dei desideri repressi della donna' (Cambria, op. cit., p. 79). Caserta goes on to mention a certain *fisicità* in Morra's description of all aspects of the anatomy of Christ (ibid). Bruno Rombi also comments that this process of 'transferral' of Morra's repressed desires 'libera la coscienza dal senso del peccato, sublimando il sentimento erotico attraverso l'estasi religiosa'; cf. Bruno Rombi, 'Isabella Morra a confronto', in *Isabella Morra e la poesia del Rinascimento europeo*, a cura di Neria De Giovanni (Alghero, Nemapress Editrice, 2001), pp. 41-49 [p. 48]. For a psychoanalytical approach to Morra, see Juliana Schiesari, 'The Gendering of Melancholia: Torquato Tasso and Isabella di Morra', in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender*

It is thus that Morra paints a picture of the 'bel volto umano' (l. 14)[55] in order, she claims, to find an outlet for her longings, pious or otherwise ('sol per disfogare i desir miei', l. 15). This type of 'envisioning' of the figure of Christ was common to the mystical movement in Christianity, and one seemingly employed by Morra in poem XII ('Questa grazia, Signor, mi sia concessa / ch'io mostri col mio stil te a me stessa', ll. 21-22); the poem also explores the emerging, almost pre-Baroque themes of reality, fiction and representation, drawing on the plastic arts (see, for example, line 17: 'ed iscolpirmi il tuo celeste velo') – again giving a very concrete and physical impression of the Christ envisaged by the poet.[56] Morra is not afraid, furthermore, to adopt the classical, pagan imagery of mythology in order to accentuate the divine qualities of Christ:

> O chiome uniche e sole,
> che, vibrando dal capo insino al collo,
> di nuova luce se ne adorna Apollo!(ll. 42-44)

The touches of sensuality in the poem are concealed in the mystical elements of this 'internal vision', which nevertheless incorporates the bodily image of Christ:

> corpo in cui si rinchiuse il Cielo e Dio,
> a te consacro il mio:
> la mente mia qual fu la tua statura
> con gli occhi interni già scorge e misura.(ll. 52-55)

Moreover, towards the end of the poem, Morra envies the (extremely sensual) gesture of Mary Magdalene, who used her own hair to dry Christ's feet ('Felice lei, che con l'aurate chiome / le cinse e si scarcò de l'aspre some!', ll. 65-66). The poem finally closes with Morra's reminder to herself of her foolish desire to know divine bliss ('sí

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and the Italian Renaissance, ed. & intro. Marilyn Migiel & Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 233-62.

[55] Compare Petrarch's 'bel viso umano' (*RVF* CCLXXVI, l. 11), which refers to his beloved, Laura.

[56] In devotional literature, the idea of identifying with the suffering Christ – including meditation on Christ's body – was common; amongst the many poems to Christ in Vittoria Colonna's *Rime spirituali*, for example, we find a sonnet of similar visualization ('Veggio in croce il Signor nudo e disteso, / coi piedi e man chiodate...', S1: 77, ll. 1-2; cf. Colonna, op. cit., p. 123). See Abigail Brundin, 'Vittoria Colonna and the Virgin Mary', *Modern Language Review* 96 (2001), pp. 61-81.

caldo desio', l. 69),[57] a phrase that only serves to heighten the sensual elements that suffuse the entire *canzone*. In this first religious poem, at least, Morra differs in tone from Petrarch's more solemn hymn to the Virgin, which itself concedes the following description to the figure of Christ: 'verace / omo e verace Dio' (*RVF* CCCLXVI, ll. 135-36).

Nonetheless, poem XII contains many overt references to Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, as has already been demonstrated; I shall briefly examine a few more linguistic correspondences. The first line of Morra's *canzone*, indeed ('Signor, che insino a qui, tua gran mercede'), with its later rhyme with *fede* of line five, can also be traced to Petrarch's *canzone* to the Virgin: here we find 'Vergine, s'a mercede' in the first stanza (*RVF* CCCLXVI, l. 9), which rhymes with *fede* in the previous line. In Petrarch's *canzone*, furthermore, lines 12-13 ('soccorri a la mia guerra, / ben ch' i' sia terra, e tu del ciel regina') are echoed in the second stanza of Morra's poem: 'scendesti ad abitar la bassa terra / ed a tor l'uom di guerra' (ll. 19-20). Although Morra's style in her *canzone* to Christ differs greatly from Petrarch's *canzone* to the Virgin, she appears to have taken certain linguistic precedents from the latter poem. In addition, Morra's line 38 ('O mia e tutte l'altre lingue mute') can be recognized as a clear reflection of Petrarch's model in *RVF* CCCXXV: 'Tutte lingue son mute / a dir di lei quel che tu sol [Amor] ne sai' (ll. 97-98). Finally, Morra's description of Christ's mouth in her blazon:

> Signor, da questa tua divina bocca
> di perle e di rubini escon di fore
> dolci parole ch'ogni afflitto core
> sgombran di duolo...(ll. 45-48)

takes as its point of departure the famous lines in Petrarch's sonnet CC ('la bella bocca angelica, di perle / piena e di rose e di dolci parole', ll. 10-11). These cross-

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[57] Compare Petrarch's 'caldo desire' (*RVF* CCXXXVI, l. 5) and 'caldi desiri' (*RVF* CCLXXXVI, l. 5).

references to Petrarch's *Canzoniere* would indeed appear indisputable, even though Morra has adapted them to the mystical context of the adoration of Christ in this *canzone*.

Poem XIII, which I shall dwell upon only briefly, intertwines praise of the Virgin Mary (who is in fact never named 'Virgin' for the entire duration of the poem) with episodes of the life of Christ, her son, seen within the context of a new day breaking over a notably idyllic landscape. Morra appears to see her surroundings in a new light, since the description is noticeably more lyrical, with gentle natural imagery common to poets of the pastoral tradition such as Sannazaro ('questo bosco ombroso', l. 15;[58] 'grotta felice', l. 91; 'Sinno veloce, chiare fonti e rivi', l. 93; and 'mie rimote e fortunate strate', l. 104).[59] Along with the bucolic tradition of the Quattrocento and contemporary southern poets such as Costanzo, the specifically Petrarchan models for this *canzone* have been noted by Grignani;[60] Morra, however, incorporates the pastoral elements into her encomium to the Virgin, which is permeated with a sense of joy that again differs from the more anxious tone of Petrarch's *canzone* to the Virgin. Morra's happy vision in poem XIII would appear to encompass her own hopes of redemption, with the figure of the Virgin as female 'saviour', to whom she addresses her words:

> a lei drizzo il mio stile
> e 'l fral mio vel di roze veste velo[61]
> e sol di servir lei,
> non d'altra cura, al cor mi giunge zelo...(ll. 25-28)

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[58] Compare Petrarch's line 'destando i fior' per questo ombroso bosco' (*RVF* CXCIV, l. 2).
[59] The traditional 'locus amoenus'. According to Adler, Morra's new religious feeling is the cause of the change in her perception of the landscape: her faith 'prompts nature's redemption' (Adler, op. cit., p. 210).
[60] She points to *RVF* L (the *canzone* 'Ne la stagion che 'l ciel rapido inchina'), CXXVI (the *canzone* 'Chiare fresche e dolci acque') and CCXXIII (the sonnet 'Quando 'l sol bagna in mar l'aurato carro') in particular.
[61] Compare Petrarch's lines 'Questo intendendo, dolcemente sciolto / in sua presenzia del mortal mio velo / e di questa noiosa e grave carne' (*RVF* CCCXXXI, ll. 55-57), where line 57 is also a precedent for Morra's line two of the *canzone* ('noiava questa mia gravosa salma').

The poet's depiction of the Virgin Mary, as the latter contemplates various stages in Christ's life ('ch'io la riveggio con la mente intensa / mirare il figlio in caritate accensa', ll. 36-37; 'e lei, per ch'io d'amor m'infiammo ed ardo, / versar dagli occhi, per letizia, pianto', ll. 52-53), is one of affection and admiration.[62] The climax of the poem revolves around this figure, bringing together the strands of nature and religion in a conclusion that continues the theme of light and brightness:

> Quanto discovre e scalda il chiaro sole,
> canzon, è nulla ad un guardo di lei,
> ch'è Reina del Ciel, Dea degli dei.(ll. 106-08)

Some further Petrarchan reminiscences within the *canzone*, in addition to the few outlined above, are worth commenting on. Morra's line 59 ('con le sue caste voglie e sante e pie') echoes Petrarch's line 'O che dolci accoglienze e caste e pie!' (*RVF* CCCXLIII, l. 9), whilst her 'gran pianeta' of line 62, meaning the sun, also comes from Petrarch: the exact phrase is in *RVF* L, line 30. Moreover, line 81 of Morra's *canzone* ('e co' leggiadri detti e gravi e belli') very probably takes its selection of adjectives from Petrarch's line 'santa, saggia, leggiadra, onesta e bella' (*RVF* CCXLVII, l. 4). These few individual examples stand amongst the much larger number of Petrarchan references evident within the poem, and it is clear that Morra was strongly influenced, as all other lyric poets of the Cinquecento, by Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Nonetheless, in her methods of adaptation of the Petrarchan canon, and in her inclusion of other themes within that code, she appears to push against the narrow confines of 'Petrarchism' proper and to force her way towards an authentic and individual form of expression, one that also encapsulates her female perspective. Indeed, the prevailing sense of bitterness regarding her particular situation may be

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[62] Adler claims that Morra's portrayal of the Virgin is 'the embodiment of maternal comfort in concrete, physical, sublimely human terms' (Adler, op. cit., p. 212); she goes on to say that the Madonna is 'a queen of light, as unorthodox and pagan as the arch-villain Fortuna whom she defeats, Isabella's persecuting queen of darkness' (p. 214).

said to transcend the more stylized Petrarchan code of expression. In the following section, I explore this idea in terms of the key issue of violence within her poetry, with the possibility of a linguistic precedent in Ariosto.

The Language of Violence: The Case for Ariosto

The idea of violence inherent in Morra's *Rime* – to which I have alluded in previous sections – may be explored on many levels. Since her small *canzoniere* may be considered largely autobiographical in nature, the factor of violence in the poet's own life and individual situation enters the equation, filtered as it is through the medium of literature. We can also clearly discern the elements of a thematics of violence, in the imagery employed throughout the *Rime* – something that can be easily recognized through sheer force of lexical argument. Lastly, the language of violence could be said to permeate the poems in terms of linguistic and stylistic effect, so that the phonetic impact of the language not only strikes the reader, but also conjures an effect of 'internal' violence within the actual written texts. In this section I shall attempt to show a possible link with the *Furioso* in terms of both thematic and linguistic violence, and to demonstrate that Morra's literary sphere of influence was not solely limited to Petrarch, but also included Ariosto.

It is worth noting that right from the beginning of the collection, the bitter invective against the figure of *Fortuna*, the malignant force presiding over Morra's life, is laid out as a motif that will then recur in almost all of the poems; as such, the poet's engagement with *Fortuna* constitutes the core of the thematic and linguistic violence within her *canzoniere*. Since Fortune is, in her eyes, the cause of her suffering, her verbal attack acts as retaliation against the perceived attack from forces beyond her control. It is thus that the first sonnet in the collection begins with the striking line depicting '[i] fieri assalti di crudel Fortuna', setting the author apart from

the tradition of love sonnets in which the reader is more likely to find the struggles of, or battle against, the writer's unrequited passion (compare, for example, in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*: 'Questo un soccorso trovo fra gli assalti / d'Amore', *RVF* CXLVIII, ll. 9-10). Later on in Morra's first poem, Fortune is personified in a series of three negative adjectives that hammers home, in its rhythm and onomatopoeia, the cruelty of this guiding force and the injustice of her situation ('spero ritrovar qualche pietate / malgrado de la cieca aspra importuna', ll. 7-8, where the overtly Petrarchan rhetorical construction of demanding the reader's pity is coupled with a much harsher delineation of Fortune than can be found in the *Canzoniere*, despite some similar individual references).

From the tone of this opening sonnet, the reader may already perceive a certain textual violence within Morra, revolving around the 'battle' against Fortune, and pointing to a certain extent to the motivating idea of catharsis behind her work.[63] The figure of Fortune, as we shall see, undergoes a process of subtle shifts in representation as the *canzoniere* progresses, but always remains the central point of reference for ideas of violence in Morra. Also important, nonetheless, is the description of the surrounding landscape, the wildness of which inspired horror in the poet, and which comes to assume, in her eyes, the metaphorical equivalent of a prison[64] or a hell.[65] In her description of the harsh countryside, Morra falls more in line with the poetic tradition of the south, and such poets as Sannazaro, Tansillo, Costanzo and Galeazzo di Tarsia;[66] however, I shall limit myself in this section to an

[63] Indeed, Grignani suggests in her Introduction that poetry was a means of compensation for Morra's otherwise unhappy situation ('affidare alla poesia il risarcimento di tanta separatezza geografica e psicologica'; cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 11).
[64] In poem IX: 'rotta avrò la prigione e sciolto il laccio' (l. 4); in poem XI: 'dal carcer duro il vel de l'alma stanca' (l. 30).
[65] In poem XI: 'in questo inferno solitario e strano' (l. 48).
[66] In the first sonnet, for example, Morra writes of the 'vili ed orride contrate' (l. 3) that constitute her home, and later names her geographical area as 'il denigrato sito' (poem III, l. 13). For a brief look at the southern literary context (particularly the Neapolitan school), including the textual history of the

exploration of Ariosto's influence on this area of thematic and linguistic violence in Morra, since the model of the *Furioso* has been less well explored in recent criticism. The figure of Fortune is in effect related to Morra's unpleasant surroundings as depicted in the poems, as the following analysis will attempt to show.

The idea of musing on Fortune – good, bad or changeable – was of course a common theme in Renaissance literature, including the *Furioso*. Ariosto appears preoccupied, and at times gently amused, by the thought that Fortune plays ironically with human life and follows no discernible set of rules.[67] The critic C. P. Brand claims that it is 'part of Ariosto's essentially down-to-earth and anti-humanistic frame of mind to see man not as the master of his circumstances but as their often very insignificant plaything'.[68] In Morra's *Rime*, the presiding attitude towards Fortune remains on the level of hatred and bitterness – as we have already seen in the implicit tragedy of poem III – and this is reflected in the violence of her poetic language. In the latter poem, she is clear in her allocation of blame for her situation ('Contra Fortuna alor spargo querela', l. 12);[69] indeed, the figure of Fortune seems to dominate over all the other 'real' figures, such as her father or Francis I, that are mentioned in the poems.[70]

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adjective *orrido*, see Grignani's account in Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 32-37; and her excellent notes and footnotes to poems VII (pp. 59-61), VIII (pp. 61-63) and XI (pp. 67-74) for more detailed analysis. Alongside Adler's comment on the southern literary influence (cf. Adler, op. cit., pp. 219-20, n. 17), see also Erika Louisa Milburn, *Lyric Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Naples: Luigi Tansillo (1510-1568)*, D.Phil Thesis (University of Oxford, 2000), especially her Chapter Two, 'Language Debate and Literary Practice: Tansillo's "Voci nuove"' (pp. 73-136), a comprehensive survey of lexical innovation in Cinquecento Naples which also considers natural imagery. Milburn's thesis is now available in book form, albeit with some modifications: cf. Erika Milburn, *Luigi Tansillo and Lyric Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Naples* (Leeds, Maney Publishing, 2003).

[67] See in particular the *proemio* to *canto* XLV of the *Furioso*, which explores the ambivalent relationship between Fortune and mankind (stanzas i-vi).

[68] C. P. Brand, *Ludovico Ariosto: A Preface to the 'Orlando Furioso'* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1974), p. 60.

[69] So much so that Adler claims: 'She thus molds [sic] her Fortuna into an external, omnipotent deity who relieves the poet of any sense of responsibility' (Adler, op. cit., p. 206).

[70] Adler also speaks of Morra's mother as 'a pale ghost-like peripheral presence' (Adler, op. cit., p. 206). The mother is mentioned only once in the *canzoniere*, in poem XI ('Baston i figli de la fral

In poem IV,[71] furthermore, we see a development in the depiction of the figure of Fortune, which moves from an unspecified, but female, entity or abstract trope to a personified figure with distinctly human characteristics – a type of evil 'divinity' that is recognizable in the figure of the wicked witch.[72] Morra continues to employ language (specifically adjectives) with a phonetic and stylistic impact, naming her enemy as 'l'acerba e cruda Diva, / ch'ogni or s'esalta del mio basso stato' (ll. 7-8). Here, the negative adjectives of line seven create a certain effect of dissonance within the line, which then leads to the supposedly sadistic attitude of Fortune herself in the following line. The use of a 'strong' poetic language also allows the poet to construct an undeniable self-portrait of victimization, since the contrast with her own modest demeanour is then accentuated. The linguistic models for these lines in poem IV are found in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*: 'e sol ne le mie piaghe acerbi e crudi' (*RVF* CXCIX, l. 6) and 'Crudele, acerba, inesorabil Morte' (*RVF* CCCXXXII, l. 7). However, certain models in the *Furioso* also exist, and may have influenced Morra, as for example 'Fortuna cruda' (*OF* XI, lv, l. 2), which refers to the Olimpia episode, and 'una fortuna acerba e fella' (*OF* XLIV, iii, l. 6), a general phrase. In addition, the madness of Orlando in the *Furioso* is attributed to 'sì acerbo caso e crudo' (*OF* XXXI, xlv, l. 6), a phrase which incorporates the two adjectives used in Morra in a similar semantic context. The 'basso stato' (l. 8) to which Morra has been subjected by Fortune is nonetheless a Petrarchan conceit ('O mia stella, o fortuna, o fato, o morte, / [...] / come m'avete in basso stato messo!', *RVF* CCXCVIII, ll. 12-14).

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vecchiezza / esser dovean di mia misera madre', ll. 56-57). This *canzone* (cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 67-74) is the most obviously autobiographical poem of the collection.

[71] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 52-55.

[72] We may here be reminded of the character of Alcina in the *Furioso*, the 'fata altiera' (*OF* VI, li, l. 8).

Poem VI,[73] meanwhile, constitutes a lament that directly addresses the figure of Fortune, in a tone reminiscent almost of a liturgical chant:

> Fortuna che sollevi in alto stato,
> ogni depresso ingegno, ogni vil core,
> or fai che 'l mio in lagrime e 'n dolore
> viva piú che altro afflitto e sconsolato.(ll. 1-4)

The sonnet as a whole forms an act of accusation against Fortune, owing to the latter's presumed role in the defeat of Francis I by Charles V in the war of 1542-44 (the fourth war that the French king had attempted against the Spanish emperor). Fortune is thus personified as an aggressive and unjust female figure, whose treacherous actions against Francis I in the military conflict also affect the life of the poet, who claims the king as her own ('Veggio il mio Re da te vinto e prostrato / sotto la rota tua, pieno d'orrore', ll. 5-6). In this violent and physical imagery, the adjective 'prostrato' is in fact not Petrarchan, but appears in the *Furioso*, albeit in a different context: 'Se gli saria per onorar prostrato; / ma si trovò sopra il ronzin legato' (*OF* XXIII, lxii, ll. 7-8), referring to the knight Zerbino. In this poem, it is interesting to note the lines in which Morra rebukes Fortune for having discredited the good name of women in general, purely because Fortune shares the same grammatical gender, i.e. that of the female sex:

> Son donna, e contra de le donne dico
> che tu, Fortuna, avendo il nome nostro,
> ogni ben nato cor hai per nemico.(ll. 9-11)[74]

Although Morra appears to join the ranks of other Renaissance writers who rail against either the injustice or the capricious nature of Fortune, she adds another

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[73] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 56-59.

[74] There has been some controversy over the meaning of these lines, but Caserta also shares my interpretation. In Cambria's edition of the *Rime*, Caserta comments on these lines in his introductory notes as follows: 'Le sembra [i.e. Morra] strano e contraddittorio [...] che si trovi a parlare contro la Fortuna, che è di genere femminile come lei; ma ancor più le sembra strano che una donna, cioè ancora una volta la Fortuna, possa avere in odio delle creature umane, contro ogni poetica tradizione di gentilezza e "finezza", generalmente attribuite alle figure femminili' (Cambria, op. cit., pp. 59-60).

dimension to the argument since she is a specifically female writer, and uses the gendered attack against Fortune as a way of actually defending women.

The sonnet ends with a type of maxim, again addressing Fortune: 'chi vuole esser tuo piú caro amico / sia degli uomini orrendo e raro mostro' (ll. 13-14). Grignani notes how the Petrarchan model ('o de le donne altero e raro mostro', *RVF* CCCXLVII, l. 5) is inverted by Morra 'con specularità perfetta'.[75] The phrase involving the *mostro* may well have been influenced by the *Furioso*, in which monsters are not uncommon; indeed, Ariosto's epic contains some pertinent linguistic models: 'l'orrendo mostro da l'infernal grotte' (*OF* XXXIII, cxi, l. 6) and 'poi con gran cor l'orribil mostro attese' (*OF* XI, xxxvi, l. 8), the latter referring to Orlando and the orc, i.e. again concerning the Olimpia episode. It is thus possible that Morra's stronger, more violent poetic language could have been influenced by the darker or more sinister passages in Ariosto's poem. Morra's *canzoniere* indeed represents a range of fluctuating psychological states, with possible reference to a multiplicity of literary sources.[76] Her particular language of violence, in its various expressions of lament or invective, may be explained at least in part by this convergence of autobiographical experiences and poetic models of reference.

In the seventh sonnet of the collection,[77] Morra's lament against Fortune is closely linked to a state of mind that encompasses an acute awareness of the harsh and solitary nature of her surrounding environment.[78] The linguistic violence in the poem

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[75] Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 57.
[76] As Grignani states in her Introduction, it is not 'il "romanzo amoroso" del Petrarca e dei petrarchisti piú giudiziosi, quale modello di economia sentimentale, ma semmai la "storia di un'anima", cioè la biografia idealizzata e la parabola di una seclusione' (Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 33).
[77] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 59-61.
[78] Grignani refers to Morra's 'paesaggio dal colorismo cupo' and goes on to state that '[il] senso orroroso della natura [...] è facilmente documentabile nella rimeria meridionale' (Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 59).

manifests itself through stylistic and phonetic mechanisms, aided by the rhythmical symmetry of caesura in the lines. This is seen from the beginning of the sonnet:

> Ecco ch'una altra volta, o valle inferna,
> o fiume alpestre, o ruinati sassi,
> o ignudi spirti di virtute e cassi,
> udrete il pianto e la mia doglia eterna.(ll. 1-4)

The dynamic first line immediately attracts the attention of the reader to the misfortune of the poet, even though in its entirety the poem addresses the elements of nature that form the subject of the apostrophes. The phrase 'valle inferna' (l. 1) is clearly derived from Dante, and can indeed be found in the *Commedia* ('che sempre nera fa la valle inferna', *Purg.* I, l. 45), even if it may also be seen in the *Furioso* ('Rivolge gli occhi a quella valle inferna', *OF* XV, v, l. 5, which refers to Rodomonte). This phrase, conspicuously placed at the end of the first line, not only establishes the tone of 'infernal' pain that pervades the sonnet – linked to the idea of eternity in the rhyme scheme, with 'doglia eterna' of line four – but also determines the insensitive or unheeding attitude of nature itself with regard to the poet's suffering. The first tercet of the poem in many ways echoes this first quatrain in terms of line structure and repetitive arrangement of phrases (apostrophe, caesura and commas, which create a mournful 'listing' effect). The anaphora of 'o' at the beginning of lines two, three, ten and eleven emphasizes the invocatory overtones of the sonnet, but it cannot disguise the bitter tone of the lament, which verges on anger. The latter emotion is perceived most strongly in the expression of the harsh landscape, and intensified by the phonetic effects of dissonance and sibilance ('alpestre', 'ruinati sassi', 'cassi', ll. 2-3). The phrase 'ruinati sassi' (l. 2) exists neither in Dante nor in

Petrarch, but paradoxically in Sannazaro's *Arcadia*;[79] nevertheless, a similar model also exists in Ariosto ('ruinosi sassi', *OF* II, lxi, l. 5).

The second quatrain continues the rhythmical composition of the poem with the repetition of *ogni* and *ovunque* in both halves of lines five and six, producing a universal effect: 'Ogni monte udirammi, ogni caverna, / ovunqu'io arresti, ovunqu'io mova i passi'. The tone of desperate insistence is linked both structurally and rhythmically to the cause of her suffering, introduced in the following lines: 'ché Fortuna, che mai salda non stassi, / cresce ogn'or il mio mal, ogn'or l'eterna' (ll. 7-8). In the chiastic construction of line eight, the phrase 'il mio mal', surrounded by temporal clauses, functions as the central point of existence of the poet – an existence controlled by the figure of malevolent Fortune, who occupies a key position in the poem, surrounded by the description of the countryside. Fortune appears inextricably linked both to her suffering and to the landscape in which she is isolated.

The listing of natural imagery is again seen in the apostrophes of the first tercet ('o fere, o sassi, o orride ruine, / o selve incolte, o solitarie grotte', ll. 10-11), where the harsh-sounding language also reveals the fear and hatred of the poet. A very similar landscape, which could have served as a model for Morra, is notably found in the *Furioso*: for example, 'caverne et orridi burroni' (*OF* VII, lvii, l. 3); 'scuri sassi e spaventose grotte' (*OF* VIII, xxxvii, l. 7); and 'ample e solitarie selve' (*OF* XXXIV, lxxii, l. 7). If we then read the final tercet of Morra's sonnet:

> ulule, e voi del mal nostro indovine,
> piangete meco a voci alte interrotte
> il mio piú d'altro miserando fine.(ll. 12-14)

we may note the ambiguous character of the phrase 'mal nostro' in line twelve, which could refer either to the suffering of mankind as a whole, as in the Christian tradition,

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[79] Compare 'trovammo sotto una pendente ripa, fra ruinati sassi una spelunca vecchissima e grande...', Prose X; cf. Iacopo Sannazaro, *Arcadia*, a cura di Francesco Erspamer (Milan, Mursia Editore, 1990), p. 166.

or to the suffering of contemporary women in a similar position to Morra (or even to the universal suffering of women throughout the ages). In any case, the possessive adjective in the first person plural (*nostro*) sits oddly with the distinctly individual key pervading the rest of the sonnet. In addition, the term *ulule* – of Virgilian register, and common in Quattrocento bucolic poetry – finds a distant echo in the *Furioso*, albeit in a slightly different form: 'Aspro concento, orribile armonia / d'alte querele, d'ululi e di strida' (*OF* XIV, cxxxiv, ll. 1-2). The number of adjectives in the final line of the sonnet produces a lengthening effect leading to the weighty climax of the noun at the end of the line, which places a decisive emphasis on the misery of the poet. The concrete natural imagery in the poem effectively conjures a scenario of almost gothic impact, which nevertheless convincingly communicates Morra's feelings of horror; and it is clear that the *Furioso* contributed to such a language of violence.

This seventh poem is closely connected to the following sonnet,[80] which also deals with Fortune and nature. The poetic voice directly addresses the river Siri, personified as the future bearer of a message to Morra's father, a message incorporating the unhappiness and eventual death of the poet. As Grignani notes, the poetic topos of the river as audience can be found in Petrarch (see his sonnet 'Rapido fiume, che d'alpestra vena', *RVF* CCVIII). In Morra's poem VIII, the figure of Fortune again appears as the dominant force in her life, and as a being who demands, and even claims, her death. On a par with the preceding sonnet, the poem is filled with the language of suffering: 'mio mal' (l. 1); 'il fin amaro' (l. 2); 'il mio duolo' (l. 3); 'esempio miserando e raro' (l. 7); and 'i fiumi [i.e. tears] d'Isabella' (l. 14). The relationship between Fortune and Morra's environment seems more and more closely

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[80] Poem VIII: cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 61-63.

intertwined, and both entities are presented in such a way as to appear to plot against the poet; the structure of the poem would also support this hypothesis. The stanzas of the sonnet constitute clear units in which references to harsh and insensitive nature are interwoven with pointers towards the figure of wicked Fortune, so that the '[torbido] Siri' (l. 1) goes hand in hand with the 'destino acerbo' (l. 4) of the first quatrain, 'l'aspra Fortuna' (l. 6) with the *onde* (l. 8) of the river in the second quatrain, and the 'sassosa riva' (l. 9) with the 'fiera stella' (l. 10) of the first tercet. The sense of bitterness and injustice on Morra's part, as an innocent victim of Fortune, is again revealed in the violent language employed in the poem, and especially in the choice of adjectives. Her lexis, as we have already seen, does not simply limit itself to the Petrarchan canon, but explores other possibilities for the expression of her suffering. Even if the influence of Petrarch seems indisputable (see, for example, the line 'Vedove l'erbe e torbide son l'acque', in *RVF* CCCXX, l. 6), one may also find other points of linguistic reference, especially when the sense requires a 'stronger' poetic language (see, for example, Ariosto's line 'de la misera vita al fine amaro', *OF* XXI, xlix, l. 4, which relates to Morra's line two, 'or ch'io sento da presso il fin amaro').

The verb *disacerbare* used in line five, moreover ('Dilli come, morendo, disacerbo / l'aspra Fortuna e lo mio fato avaro', ll. 5-6), is seen in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* ('perché cantando il duol si disacerba', *RVF* XXIII, l. 4) but also in the *Furioso*, in contexts that perhaps conform more fully to Morra's meaning, because the expression is more direct ('o forse disacerba i suoi martìri', *OF* XIII, xxxii, l. 6, which refers to the maiden Isabella; and 'sì che si sfoghi e disacerbi l'ira', *OF* XLV, lxxiv, l. 4, referring to Bradamante: again, the specifically female situations outlined here provide more relevant thematic models for Morra). Lines 5-6 of poem VIII also contain the idea of the 'necessity' of Morra's death in order to placate the anger and

cruelty of Fortune, something the poet seems to accept at this stage – albeit with some bitterness – as an unavoidable sacrifice. Furthermore, a possible linguistic model for Morra's phrase 'sassosa riva' (l. 9), with its adjective present neither in Dante, nor in Petrarch (although evident in the southern poetic tradition), could have been Ariosto's epic, where we find: 'presero la via, / che oltra che sassosa fosse e stretta...' (*OF* VII, viii, ll. 2-3). The language employed by Ariosto to describe the elements of nature at times appears more suited to the poetic needs of Morra than that of Petrarch. It is thus that the 'crudel procella' in line twelve of Morra's sonnet does not find an exact model in the Petrarchan *Canzoniere* ('terribil procella', *RVF* CCVI, l. 26), whilst the exact phrase may again be found in the *Furioso* ('ci spinge in terra la crudel procella', *OF* XIII, xvi, l. 6). Sara Adler observes that Morra 'fashions a consistently desolate wasteland',[81] a description that would appear to be corroborated by poems VII and VIII, and which, I would argue, could have been influenced by Ariosto's poem.

I shall now briefly consider the first *canzone* in Grignani's edition, poem XI,[82] which could be said to represent the culmination of Morra's invective against the figure of Fortune. The poem constitutes an emotional attack directed at Fortune herself – whom Morra addresses in the second person singular – and outlines the poet's life and misfortunes in roughly chronological order, ending with a plea to Fortune to convey her suffering to the ears of her 'saviour', the French king. I shall limit my analysis of Ariosto's linguistic influence to a few phrases in the *canzone*: for example, 'crudel Fortuna' of line two. This phrase is, perhaps surprisingly, not found in Petrarch, but is present in several passages in Ariosto: 'Ah, Fortuna crudel, Fortuna ingrata!' (*OF* I, xliv, l. 3, Sacripante's words); 'O Fortuna crudel, chi fia ch'il creda'

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[81] Adler, op. cit., p. 208.

[82] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., pp. 67-74. In her introductory notes, Grignani comments on the presence in this poem of the 'anticipazione di toni tasseschi e leopardiani per il sentimento di una vita oppressa' and of the 'precisi riferimenti autobiografici e familiari messi a contrasto con l'ostilità dell'ambiente' (p. 67).

(*OF* VIII, lxii, l. 3, the narrator's words); and 'Ah Fortuna crudel, quanto disegno / mi rompi!' (*OF* XLIII, clxiii, ll. 5-6, Fiordiligi's words). These examples of invective against Fortune, a recurring theme in the *Furioso*, provide an important literary model for Morra, and she may well have been aware of Angelica's famous speech in *canto* VIII, which accuses Fortune of mercilessly pursuing the maiden with unfavourable turns of event.[83]

Furthermore, the 'gente irrazional' described in line eight of the *canzone* – Morra's uncultured and ignorant family, namely her brothers – is another phrase of interest in the comparison with Ariosto. The language employed in this part of the poem is of a particularly bitter tone, since her family, also described as being 'priva d'ingegno' (l. 8), contributed greatly to the poet's unhappiness. According to Grignani, the dissonant adjective *irrazional* comes from the previous prose tradition, although its sources are not entirely clear; in any case, it does not exist in Dante or Petrarch.[84] The *Furioso* nevertheless contains a couple of examples ('al suo cieco appetito irrazionale', *OF* XXI, xxxv, l. 8; and 'di che debbo lamentarmi, ahi lassa, / fuor che del mio desire irrazionale?', *OF* XXXII, xxi, ll. 1-2, lines from Bradamante's lament). Morra's use of the adjective appears fairly original in this context, however, and as such increases the stylistic effect of violence within the text.

Meanwhile, the forceful listing of adjectives in lines 24-25 of poem XI may also find precedents in the adjectives of Ariosto's landscapes. I shall cite the relevant passage in Morra in its entirety:

Quella ch'è detta la fiorita etade,

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[83] Cf. *OF* VIII, xl-xliv. Angelica begins her lament with the words: 'Fortuna, che più a far ti resta / acciò di me ti sazii e ti disfami?' (*OF* VIII, xl, ll. 1-2). She too accuses Fortune of sadism: 'perché ti parve di voler più ancora / vedermi tormentar prima ch'io muora' (*OF* VIII, xl, ll. 7-8); cf. Morra's poem IV, ll. 7-8 ('malgrado de l'acerba e cruda Diva, / ch'ogni or s'esalta del mio basso stato'). Angelica also ponders her fate at the hands of Fortune: 'a che più doglia anco serbar mi vuoi?' (*OF* VIII, xliii, l. 8).

[84] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 71, n. to ll. 6-8.

secca ed oscura, solitaria ed erma[85]
tutta ho passata qui cieca ed inferma,
senza saper mai pregio di beltade.(ll. 23-26)

In Ariosto, we find pairs of adjectives in very similar combinations to the above lines: 'tratto nel bosco solitario e oscuro' (*OF* XLV, cxv, l. 6); 'quel loco aspro et ermo' (*OF* VIII, xlix, l. 4, with *infermo* rhyming in line six); and 'fuor di quel cespuglio oscuro e cieco' (*OF* I, lii, l. 1). It is possible that the *Furioso* had a 'cumulative' influence on Morra, particularly since the adjectives in Ariosto's landscapes carry an emotive resonance that would have been recognized and understood by the poet. Finally, of all the other phrases in this *canzone* that produce an effect of violence, both thematically and linguistically (her 'inferno solitario e strano', l. 48, is also original), I would like to consider the Latinate phrase of line 58 (Fortune's 'procelle inique ed adre'). The adjective *adro* or *atro* (meaning 'gloomy' or 'dark') recurs only in the middle of the line in Petrarch, as Grignani has noted,[86] even if it is seen variously in Dante's *Commedia* (including *Purgatorio* XXX, ll. 52-54, *atre* in rhyme with *matre*) and is also present in Sannazaro. Nonetheless, linguistic models also exist in Ariosto (including 'ma più de l'altre nubilose et atre / era la faccia del misero patre', *OF* XXIII, xlvi, ll. 7-8; 'tanti luoghi atri e mesti', *OF* XXVI, xxxvii, l. 4; and 'se non di sopraveste oscure et adre', *OF* XLI, xxxi, l. 4), which should certainly not be ignored.

In the examples cited above, which are all concerned with the strain of thematic and linguistic violence that runs through Morra's *canzoniere* and revolves around the twin poles of Fortune and nature, we see the harsh landscape of a 'personal hell' that the poet feared and hated in equal measure. It is something of a paradox that

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[85] Grignani notes, however, the similarity to Petrarch's line 'cercai per poggi solitari ed ermi' (*RVF* CCCIV, l. 4), itself also in rhyme with *'nfermi* (l. 8); and this passage in Morra's *canzone* contains further obvious echoes of Petrarch ('Tutta la mia fiorita e verde etade / passava...', *RVF* CCCXV, ll. 1-2).

[86] Cf. Morra, *Rime*, op. cit., p. 74, n. to l. 58.

such an unhappy scenario would ultimately elevate Morra's poetry above the paradigmatic, but often unoriginal, mode of Petrarchism. I hope to have shown in this section that for her own, often violent poetic expression, Morra's literary influences included the *Furioso*, alongside the more usual models of Dante, Petrarch and the writers of the southern tradition.

Conclusion

Isabella di Morra's poetry thus encompasses a number of different cultural and literary elements, including the topos of the abandoned woman, the tenets of Petrarchism, the violence of Ariosto and the southern poetic tradition, and her own isolated marginality. Despite the obvious influence of Petrarch, her poetic language seems to push against the confines of the precise Petrarchan canon, and in many ways seems to overtake them. Her uniquely isolated position appears in fact to have afforded her a greater degree of poetic freedom, and as such her *Rime* differ from the collections of other sixteenth-century women writers, who were perhaps more limited by the dominant intellectual trends that sought to standardize forms of linguistic expression, in both prose and poetry. Morra's work appears to embody the struggle of an individual poetic voice caught between the opposite extremes of freedom and constraint, encapsulating a mixture of originality and convention. Her invective against the figure of Fortune and her horror of the surrounding environment contribute greatly towards the creation of a 'strong' lexis suited to her poetry; as such, Morra appears to have required poetic models of a similar violence, even though critics have also identified resonances with the pastoral tradition, alongside a type of pre-Romantic melancholia. The harsh nature of the environment depicted seems perhaps more typical of the southern poets, but the influence of Ariosto would also appear

likely. Ariosto's linguistic models contain the suggestion of violence – both overt and subtle – that is willingly accepted and explored, so it would appear, in Morra's *Rime*.

Chapter Three

Laura Bacio Terracina and Feminist Discourse on the Epic

While Morra's reading of Ariosto appears implicit and indirect, this chapter will consider one of the most direct literary 'answers' to the *Orlando Furioso*, namely Laura Bacio Terracina's *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti d'Orlando Furioso* (1549). The chapter will look at the ways in which Terracina's commentary boldly appropriates the model of the *Furioso* for her own aims, both poetic and ideological. I situate Terracina's poem within the context of contemporary discourse, and outline its originality in terms of its deconstruction of the very lines contained within Ariosto's *proemi*, the preliminary stanzas at the beginning of each *canto*. I examine the 'gendered' issues that emerge as the defining thrust of the *Discorso*, and analyse the 'feminist' mantle that Terracina assumes as defender of women's interests. I lastly explore the 'literary' feminism promoted by Terracina, namely her exhortation to other women to study and to write, which marks her out as a pioneer in the early modern debate on the capability of the female sex; indeed, her *Discorso* constitutes one of the few female-authored replies to the contemporary *querelle des femmes*.

Laura Terracina: A Biographical Outline

The poet Laura Bacio Terracina was born c.1519 into a noble Neapolitan family with pro-Spanish leanings, the daughter of Paolo Terracina and Diana Anfora di Sorrento. She had two brothers, Mariano – who became an abbot in the town of Taranto – and Giacomo, and a sister named Dianora, to whom she dedicates various poems; indeed, most of the (little) factual information we know about Terracina's life

is gathered from her work.[1] Her extremely productive literary career encompassed a total of nine volumes of poetry between 1548 and her death in c.1577. The family had been given sovereignty over the territory of Vatio, or Bacio, near Naples, at the end of the fifteenth century, but Terracina does not employ her 'double' name in her writings. Instead, the titles of her published volumes often reflect the name assumed by the poet during her two-year membership of the Neapolitan Accademia degli Incogniti (1545-47), where she was known as 'Febea'.[2] Between the cultured environments of court and academy, she was able to cultivate social and literary contact with some of the leading Neapolitan writers and intellectuals of the time; and she corresponded with figures such as Galeazzo di Tarsia, Ercole Bentivoglio, Anton Francesco Doni, Luigi Tansillo, Lodovico Dolce and Lodovico Domenichi.[3] According to Montella, Terracina was at some point involved in 'un'intesa amorosa' with the patron and poet Giovanni Vincenzo Belprato, Conte d'Aversa.[4] Terracina later married – possibly around the age of forty – her relative Polidoro Terracina. She

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[1] Works containing biographical material on Terracina include (in chronological order): Benedetto Croce, 'La casa di una poetessa', in *Storie e leggende napoletane* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1948 [this piece written 1901]), pp. 275-89; Natalia Costa-Zalessow, 'Laura Bacio Terracina', in *Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo: testi e critica* (Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1982), pp. 79-84; Rinaldina Russell, 'Laura Terracina', in *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Chicago & London, St James Press, 1991), vol. II, pp. 1227-29 [although this piece contains some inaccuracies]; Luigi Montella, 'La Vita', in *Una poetessa del Rinascimento: Laura Terracina. Con le 'None Rime' inedite* (Salerno, Edisud, 1993), pp. 9-14; Nancy Dersofi, 'Laura Terracina (1519-c.1577)', in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (Westport, Connecticut & London, Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 423-30 [although this piece contains several errors]; and Laura Anna Stortoni, ed., 'Laura Bacio Terracina', in *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, trans. Laura Anna Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie (New York, Italica Press, 1997), pp. 104-13. For a discussion of the uncertainties surrounding Terracina's birth and death dates, see Montella, op. cit., p. 9, n. 1 and pp. 13-14, n. 11. Montella cites poems, or extracts from poems, to her father, brother Mariano and sister respectively (pp. 9-10, nn. 3-5). For an early study of Terracina's life and work, see Lina Maroi, *Laura Terracina: poetessa napoletana del secolo XVI* (Naples, Società Editrice Francesco Perrella e C., 1913), although her discussion of Terracina's poetry (pp. 33-70) mixes a highly romantic and personal commentary with biographical detail.

[2] According to Montella, 'il famoso epiteto attribuito a Diana perché apportatrice della luce lunare' (p. 12) could have been an affectionate nod to the poet's mother's name.

[3] On the (limited) participation of women in these literary academies, see Conor Fahy, 'Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 438-52.

[4] Montella, op. cit., p. 12.

dedicated many poems to her husband in subsequent years in an attempt to reassure his excessively jealous character. She appears to have lived in Rome between 1570 and 1572, and died in Naples c.1577.

Textual Transmission

The first volume of Terracina's poetry, entitled *Rime della Signora Laura Terracina*, was published in Venice by Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari in 1548, and enjoyed such success that it was reprinted several times in the years that followed.[5] The poems in this collection are largely of an encomiastic nature, in the Petrarchan idiom. However, apart from their obviously eulogistic content, the poems also display the self-consciousness of the female author, some feminist sentiment, and a fascination with the *Orlando Furioso* that can be seen in Terracina's manipulation of lines from Ariosto's epic, whether in incorporation into *ottave*, as she does for the *Discorso* of 1549 – indeed, versions of some of the *canti* in the latter can already be found in this volume – or in *lamenti* written in the voice of a specific character from the *Furioso* (Sacripante, Rodomonte, Isabella and Bradamante).[6] In 1549, a second

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[5] Stortoni rightly notes that it had 'great immediate success and gave her considerable renown as a wise and moral poet' (Stortoni, op. cit., p. 104).

[6] Croce ultimately dismisses Terracina as 'un precone di lodi' (Croce, op. cit., p. 285), whose 'opericciuole sull'*Orlando* sono anch'esse in parte encomiastiche, e nel resto, anzi nel tutto, insulse' (p. 287), a judgement with which I disagree: amongst other things, the collection already displays a marked interest in the potentially 'gendered' themes of the *Furioso*. In similar vein to the later discovery and championing of Isabella di Morra's *Rime*, these *Prime rime* by Terracina would appear to have received support and promotion from the Neapolitan bookseller Marcantonio Passero; indeed, the edition contains three poems dedicated to him. It seems that, just as Passero passed on the poems by Morra that he had found to be edited by Lodovico Dolce and published by Giolito in Venice (in a 1556 edition that, incidentally, contains poems by Terracina also recommended by him), so he also, years previously, recommended Terracina's volume to be edited by Lodovico Domenichi and then published, again by Giolito. According to Croce, Passero 'andava leggendo i versi di lei a questo e a quello, la metteva in relazione con letterati di grido, la incitava a scrivere sul tale o tal altro argomento, a lodare questo o quel signore' (Croce, op. cit., p. 282). Croce also quotes the beginning of a poem supposedly from Vittoria Colonna to Terracina ('Per esser donna anch'io, donna gentile, / s'io leggo i vostri versi / cosí leggiadri e tersi...') but I have been unable to identify this fragment: it does not appear in Alan Bullock's comprehensive edition of Colonna's *Rime* (Vittoria Colonna, *Rime*, a cura di Alan Bullock [Rome & Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1982]). The *Prime rime* contain two poems by Terracina to Colonna. Domenichi dedicates his foreword to none other than Giovanni Vincenzo Belprato, the protagonist of Terracina's supposed amorous liaison; and we may note that Belprato would also be the dedicatee of *canto* XXX of Terracina's *Discorso* of the following year (1549), a

volume of poems, entitled simply *Rime seconde*, was published in Florence by Lorenzo Torrentino, but enjoyed less success than the first work.[7] In the same year, a third volume containing her *Discorso sopra tutti i primi canti d'Orlando Furioso* was published by Giolito in Venice; this work, a commentary in *ottava rima* on the *proemi* at the beginning of each *canto* of Ariosto's epic poem, proved to be extremely popular, and was reprinted a considerable number of times, subsequently under the alternative title *Discorso sopra il principio di tutti i canti d'Orlando Furioso*.[8]

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canto dealing with the injustices of, and jealousies associated with, love. Her *proemio* to this *canto* plays on both their names ('Questa mia ghirlandetta di bel prato / Di lauro cinta, e di vivace mirto / Vorrei ne fosse il tuo bel capo ornato...', ll. 1-3), although the content of the *canto* leaves the reader in doubt as to the poet's state of mind: she claims not to have experienced the vicissitudes of love herself ('Io lo sò dir per detto di chi 'l prova; / Ma non che da me il sappia, o lo conosca', XXX, vi, ll. 1-2), yet reveals in the same stanza that she is prone to jealousy ('Pur dico, ch'al pensier tal'hora innova / Desio geloso una aspra pena, e fosca', XXX, vi, ll. 5-6). She finally calls for respite from both the *canto* and her own thoughts: 'Chieggio homai di fermar la penna, e il verso, / E riposare alquanto la mia mente, / Poi che m'è tanto il mio destino averso...' (XXX, vii, ll. 1-3).

[7] For an ample but by no means comprehensive catalogue of the various editions of Terracina's works – not always by the same publishers – see the 'Bibliografia di Laura Terracina' in Montella, op. cit., pp. 49-51.

[8] No modern editions exist of this *Discorso*, the subject of this chapter. I have therefore transcribed the relevant *canti* from the following early printed edition: DISCORSO / DELLA S. LAVRA / TERRACINA, / *Sopra il principio di tutti i Canti / d'Orlando furioso* (*In Vinegia, Appresso Domenico Farri.* 1 5 6 7). In an attempt to gain a greater degree of accuracy of transcription and understanding of Terracina's poetic aims, I have also closely consulted the following editions of her poem: DISCORSO / SOPRA TVTTI I / PRIMI CANTI D'ORLANDO / FVRIOSO. / FATTO PER LA S. LAVRA / TERRACINA: DETTA NELL'ACA- / DEMIA DEGL'INCOGNITI, / FEBBEA. / DA LA MEDESIMA RIVEDVTI, / DI NVOVO CON DILIGENZA RI- / STAMPATI ET CORRETTI (IN VINEGIA APPRESSO GABRIEL / GIOLITO DE FERRARI / E FRATELLI. / M D L); and DISCORSO / SOPRA IL PRINCIPIO / DI TVTTI I CANTI / D'ORLANDO FVRIOSO. / *FATTO PER LA S. L. TERRACINA*, / DETTA NELL'ACADEMIA DE / GL'INCOGNITI, FEBEA. / DI NVOVO RISTAMPATO, ET / CON DILIGENZA REVISTO (IN VINEGIA APPRESSO GABRIEL / GIOLITO DE' FERRARI. / M D L I X [contains portrait of author, f. i^{v}, reproduced in Montella]). In addition, I have consulted editions dating from 1554, 1598, c.1625 and 1698, although the seventeenth-century editions tend to manifest a certain typographical carelessness which casts doubt on their textual 'reliability'. From these editions I have been able to construct a 'final version' of the *Discorso*, from which I shall quote throughout this chapter; punctuation will be subject to minor alteration, in order to clarify the sense. Although I have not been able to consult the first 1549 edition, it is clear that as of 1550, and continuing into subsequent years, the *Discorso* contained two forewords, both dedicated to Giovanni Bernardino Bonifacio, Marchese d'Oria. The first (ff. ii^{r}-iii^{r}), dated Naples, 1st August 1550, displays the customary modesty seen in the work of many Renaissance women writers, along with a rather keen awareness of male intellectual hostility. The poet tells the story of how her work came to be published: 'Imperoché deliberando meco di fare uscire nel conspetto de gli huomini quella mia breve compositione [*dispositione* in post-1550 editions] sopra i canti di M. Lodovico Ariosto proposi nel mio animo (perché era da se roza, & debole a difendersi dal velenoso dente de' malvagi huomini, benché di naturale ingegno uscita) consacrarla a V. Illustriss. S. come quello, che ben la potea far sicura da ogni malvagità de' perversi, & porla sotto il saldo scudo della grandezza di quelle virtudi, che in singolar modo vi ornano...' The impression given is of a female writer still in need of a male protector; yet the reason for Terracina's wary tone appears to rest on an intriguing quarrel with the writer and editor Lodovico Dolce, as the remaining lines of the foreword reveal: 'La onde Illustrissimo

Montella comments thus on the influence of Ariosto on Terracina's poetic output: 'Interessata e appassionata lettrice dell'*Orlando Furioso*, poema in quel periodo popolare a Napoli come nelle altre città italiane, fu spinta a tentare l'esperienza poetica, affascinata dall'armonia ariostesca e dal bisogno di dare corpo alla sua sensibilità e alle sue idee'.[9] However, he later describes her as 'una poetessa poco originale sul piano linguistico, pur se molta fortuna ebbe, ai suoi tempi, l'interessante esercizio letterario realizzatosi nella composizione delle *Terze Rime*'.[10] As I shall attempt to show in this chapter, the value of the *Discorso* may be said to lie in its poetic manipulation of the *Furioso*, and in the 'gendered' conclusions that result.

Signore, volendola mandar fuori, desiderai che prima si bagnasse nel dolce fonte di Messer Lodovico, a tal che piu baldanzosamente, lasciata da canto la ruvidezza, non si havesse ad offerir cosi impolita, & mal composta, nel cospetto di V. S. Illustrissima, né mi riuscì il disegno; che oltra che stette in suo potere per spatio d'uno anno, non solamente, nulla gustò di dolcezza, ma bevette tanto d'amaro tosco, che ben è stata cagione ad altrui di pena, & a se stessa havria dato la morte, se non che l'hanno da quella difesa i fulgenti, & vivi raggi della vostra eterna gloria [...]. Ond'io generoso Signore ho voluto senza altrui correttione porla sotto la mia leggiera emenda, & solamente purgarla delli piu biasimevoli errori, ritrovandosi ella data in stampa & cosi la rimando a V. S. Illustrissima, qual non si sdegnerà, havendola prima di povera veste ornata con serena fronte ricevuta, hor d'alquanto piu migliore imbecillità accettarla...' Terracina appears to refer to a date some time before 1549, before the *Discorso* had been published, when she had asked for editorial advice from Dolce (the play on words with the 'dolce fonte' of 'Messer Lodovico' points to Dolce rather than Domenichi), who then frustrated her by keeping the poem for a year; the phrase 'amaro tosco' also hints at antagonism on his part. The Marquis's 'rescuing' of her work seems to indicate the first publication; the final sentence cited points to the second publication in 1550, after she herself had corrected any errors from the previous edition. The second foreword (ff. iv^{r}-iv^{v}), dated Naples, penultimate day of April, 1549, appears to be the original foreword of the first edition, and hints at some discontent on Terracina's part: 'Ho per molta esperienza conosciuto generosissimo Signor Marchese, quanto poco amor di virtude, & del pregio che d'Helicona s'acquista, ne gli animi d'alcuni Signori de' nostri tempi si trova...' She goes on to state: 'Potranno dunque queste basse, oscure, & incolte rime, inalzate co l'ali del favor vostro, illustrate co i vivi raggi del Sole delle vostre virtudi, et adornate co' vaghi fiori de' vostri istessi meriti, sicuramente comparere inanzi a' giudicii de gli huomini'. Although the dating of the 'polemic' with Dolce remains inexact, it is confirmed by the presence in this preamble to the *Discorso* of an *ottava* addressed to him: 'Ecco il Discorso, pur Dolce gentile, / In fretta da me visto, e non d'altrui, / E se la lingua mia fu si virile, / Perdon vi chieggio; e s'arrogante fui / Ch'io non sapea se 'l verso feminile / Fosse degno apparir dinanzi a vui...' (ll. 1-6, f. iii^{r}). On folio iii^{v} is a sonnet addressed to 'Virtù'. Another poetic tribute to Marcantonio Passero, meanwhile, is found at the end of the *Discorso*: 'Amico io so, che tu m'hai posta in voce, / Et a me, mi convien ponerti in cima, / E quanto posso con la debil voce / Alzarvi insino al ciel, con la mia rima...' (ll. 1-4, f. lxxiv^{r}). The printed illustrations (wood-engravings) accompanying each *canto* of the *Discorso* are mostly based on relevant episodes of the *Furioso*, with for example the illustration to *canto* X depicting the abandonment of Olimpia on one side, and the rescuing of Angelica from the orc, by Ruggiero on the hippogriff, on the other (reproduced as the hardback cover to the 1990 reprint of Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, a cura di Cesare Segre [Milan, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1976], where the provenance is noted as a 1556 edition of the *Furioso* by Bastiano di Bartolomeo Onorati in Lyon). The illustrations in the 1567 edition, however, are different from those of previous editions: they seem more loosely allegorical, and often repeat the same illustration for different *canti*. Later editions do not contain any illustrations.

[9] Montella, op. cit., p. 10.

[10] Montella, op. cit., p. 25.

Further collections of poetry, entitled *Quarte rime* (1550), *Quinte rime* (1552) and *Seste rime* (1558) were then published, the first two volumes in Venice by Giovanni Andrea Valvassori, the third by Vincenzo Busdrago in Lucca. These works mostly contained poems of an encomiastic or moralistic nature.[11] In 1561, her *Settime rime sovra tutte le donne vedove di questa nostra città di Napoli titolate et non titolate*, consisting of elegiac compositions focussing on the state of widowhood, were published in Naples by Mathias Cancer. Her last volume to be published – in Venice, by Valvassori – was a work that capitalized on the success of her first *Discorso* whilst failing to re-create it: the *Seconda parte de' discorsi sopra le seconde stanze de' canti d'Orlando Furioso* (1567).[12] This employed the same method as the first *Discorso* (explained fully in the following section) but with the second *ottava* of each of Ariosto's *canti*; however, the idea had by then lost its novel character, and the work was less successful.[13] The last collection of poems that she wrote – entitled *Sonetti al sommo Pontefice Gregorio Decimoterzo, et con sua Santità tutti li Cardinali, Rime spirituali...* – is dated 30th November 1577, and comprises religious, encomiastic and

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[11] Giovanna Rabitti comments that Terracina 'expanded the potential of occasional verse by fashioning volumes intended solely as flattering decoration to honour influential individuals'; cf. Giovanna Rabitti, 'Lyric Poetry, 1500-1650', trans. Abigail Brundin, in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza & Sharon Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 37-51 [p. 45]. It is interesting to note the presence, in many of the miscellaneous 'amorous' poems amongst Terracina's collective *Rime*, of a male persona/poetic voice, particularly in sonnets written from the male perspective to a female beloved. Apart from the possibility of stylistic exercise, these poems may have been written for male friends or colleagues to use as they wished, or even (as Croce suggests) for her future husband: 'nelle rime pubblicate tra 1549 e il 1560 [...] parecchi madrigali e sonetti amorosi per donne vi si leggono, composti da lei "ad istanza", "a preghiera" o "a compiacenza" del signor Polidoro, pei corteggiamenti dunque, a quanto sembra, del brav'uomo' (Croce, op. cit., p. 280). They are in fact evident from her first volume of *Rime* of 1548. Russell sees this poetic masquerade as being indicative of 'the degree of depersonalization present in the socialized applications of the lyric code' (Russell, op. cit., p. 1228). She adds that, given Terracina's low standing amongst critics of sixteenth-century poetry, it is 'a surprise to discover considerable facility and rhetorical skill in many of her verses' (ibid).

[12] According to Croce, this second *Discorso* was composed at the request of her husband.

[13] Although Croce claims that both *Discorsi* enjoyed success: 'Segnatamente i *Discorsi* andarono a ruba, aiutati dalla voga del poema ariosteo e dalle figure onde li ornò il Giolito' (Croce, op. cit., p. 284). It would therefore appear to be the publisher's choice of wood-cuts that serves as 'accompaniment' to the text, with Giolito having a 'stock' catalogue of images that were used for the *Furioso*. See Salvatore Bongi, *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari da Trino di Monferrato: stampatore in Venezia* (Rome, Bibliopola Vivarelli & Gulla, 1963), 2 vols.

moralistic compositions. This 'ninth book', with an epistolary preface dedicated to Cardinal Don Ferrante de' Medici, was never published, and it is likely that Terracina died shortly after its completion.[14]

Ariosto's 'proemi': Deconstruction and Appropriation

Terracina's 1549 *Discorso*, like Ariosto's epic, is composed of 46 *canti*, each containing one preliminary *ottava*, usually dedicated to a patron or important figure, followed by seven further *ottave*. The final lines of each of the seven *ottave* that follow the *proemio* correspond to the lines in the first *ottava* in each of Ariosto's *canti* – that is, the first six *ottave* in Terracina's commentary always end with a single line from Ariosto (those rhyming ABABAB in Ariosto's first *ottava*), whilst her final *ottava* ends with Ariosto's rhyming couplet (CC), so that all eight lines of Ariosto's opening *ottava* are reproduced within Terracina's seven *ottave*. Terracina thus appropriates Ariosto's lines for her own poem, incorporating them within the body of her commentary; indeed, Ariosto's *proemi* are in this way completely opened up and dissected, as if Terracina wishes to remove the frame that provides the 'order' of the *Furioso* and to disrupt it. In so doing, she also undermines the train of thought contained within each *proemio*, undoing the ideological bias suggested by Ariosto through his narrator; I shall examine the 'gendered' consequences of such intervention in the following section. It is also interesting to note that, in this way, the first lines of Ariosto's *ottave* become the last lines in Terracina's *ottave*, producing an

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[14] This volume, Ms. Palatino 229, is held in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Florence; see the description in Luigi Gentile, *Cataloghi dei manoscritti della R. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze: I codici palatini* (Rome, Presso i principali librai, 1889), vol. I, pp. 319-27. A further link back to Isabella di Morra can be discerned in this unpublished codex: Montella mentions that Terracina's mother is remembered in a sonnet dedicated to one 'Signora Isabella Morra di Caserta' and cites the first verse (Montella, op. cit., p. 12, n. 8), in which the mother appears to have tended the young Isabella ('Vostra baiola e serva fu mia madre / e del mio proprio latte vi nutrìo', ll. 1-2). It would appear likely that Terracina was in any case well aware of the tragic events of 1545/46 involving her 'sister' poet from the South, although it seems odd that her sonnet regarding Morra was not published in earlier collections of *rime*, in the years following Morra's death.

effect of deliberate inversion.[15] In her self-conscious manipulation of a work of literature that was already considered a classic,[16] Terracina invites speculation on the nature of the *proemio* itself, since her own re-formatting of Ariosto's lines effectively deconstructs their prefatory impact and allows for a 'shifting' of their meaning in the light of her own sentiment.[17] Her own *proemi* at the beginning of each *canto* nevertheless point to a conscious adherence to this by now formulaic 'introduction' to a work of literature, despite the potential for subversion.

The idea of the *Discorso* as commentary fits in with the Cinquecento obsession with literary analysis and interpretation, following on as it does from the re-discovery of the text of Aristotle's *Poetics*. To give some idea of the literary and theoretical context: Aristotle's text became available only at the very end of the fifteenth century, and widely known only towards the middle of the sixteenth, in contrast to the prevailing thought of Horace and Plato.[18] However, Aristotle was no

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[15] Indeed, Stortoni comments that 'both the form and the content of Ariosto's corresponding *ottavas* are reversed for the opposite effect, and Ariosto's opening verses are used as a startling and effective punch line for Bacio Terracina's statements' (Stortoni, op. cit., p. 105). She goes on to claim that the *Discorso* shows the author's 'remarkable ingenuity and technical skill' and that although such an exercise may appear stylistically artificial to the modern reader, 'we should remember that the Renaissance concept of originality greatly differed from ours, and that a poet was regarded as original for his or her capacity to twist and adapt recognized classics for his or her own ends' (ibid).

[16] Cf. Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of 'Orlando Furioso'* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991).

[17] Cf. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, forewd. Richard Macksey (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Seuils* was originally published in Paris by Editions du Seuil in 1987. Genette's chapter 9 ('The Functions of the Original Preface', pp. 196-236) suggests the idea of authorial manipulation through the preface before the reader has even got to the text, claiming that 'its location is introductory and therefore monitory (this is *why* and this is *how* you should read this book)' (p. 197). Genette queries whether the author's intention is outlined in the preface, and concedes that it may not always be sincere, but claims that 'in this respect the preface clearly constitutes one of the instruments of authorial control' (p. 222). Terracina's fragmentation of Ariosto's *proemi* thus seems to indicate a desire to expose the very act of authorial manipulation of the reader, as well as the ideology lying behind the statements in each *proemio*. The *proemio* itself was debated during the Renaissance as part of the discussions on rhetoric; for a contemporary example, see Francesco Sansovino's *La Retorica* (1543), in *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, a cura di Bernard Weinberg (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1970), vol. I, pp. 451-67, especially the section 'Del proemio' (pp. 455-57).

[18] The Quattrocento saw the first edition, in Venice, of Hermannus Alemanus' thirteenth-century Latin translation of the Averroës *Paraphrase*, a somewhat garbled twelfth-century commentary on the *Poetics* written in Arabic. This text appeared in 1481 under the title *Determinatio in poetria Aristotilis*. Giorgio Valla's Latin translation of the *Poetics* then appeared in 1498, followed ten years later by Aldus Manutius' first edition of the Greek texts of the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* (1508). Alessandro de'

longer considered a 'sacred' authority as in the medieval period, and the *Poetics* coincidentally appeared when he was frequently questioned and even openly attacked in other philosophical spheres. After the Latin translations of the *Poetics* had circulated more widely, Renaissance scholars were able to turn their attention to this text; and in 1541, Bartolomeo Lombardi gave the first public exposition of the *Poetics* in Padua. However, he then died, and his lectures were continued by Vincenzo Maggi, who would eventually publish, for himself and Lombardi, a Latin commentary on Aristotle's work entitled *In Aristotelis librum De poetica communes explanationes* (1550). Nevertheless, Maggi appears to have had a rival in Francesco Robortello, who published the first commentary on the *Poetics* in 1548 (the *In librum Aristotelis De arte poetica explicationes*, with a Latin text and commentary). The translation of the *Poetics* into the Italian vernacular, in Bernardo Segni's 1549 work *Rettorica et Poetica d'Aristotele*, was based heavily on Robortello's text. The second half of the Cinquecento saw a glut of Latin and vernacular commentaries on Aristotle's work, or treatises dealing with questions of poetics, emerge, since the *Poetics*, if not other Aristotelian texts, were held in high esteem. Terracina's *Discorso* on the *Furioso*, composed at exactly the same time, thus fits in with the contemporary context of commentary and discourse on literature, especially the epic.[19]

Pazzi also translated the *Poetics* into Latin in c.1524, and this text, considered more reliable than Valla's, was published posthumously in 1536. For a full and detailed treatment of contemporary discourse, see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961), 2 vols., especially chapters IX-XIII on 'The Tradition of Aristotle's *Poetics*' (pp. 349-714).

[19] Girolamo Muzio's vernacular treatise *Dell'arte poetica* (1551), divided into three books, is, unusually, composed in verse; most contemporary commentaries and discourses were in prose. The definition of *discorso* also implies prose, both in the idea of a (written or spoken) discussion of some length, and in the formal description of a well-ordered 'sermon' or 'dissertation' on a chosen subject. Both Terracina and Muzio are thus unusual in their choice of genre for an ostensibly prose-dominated tradition; Terracina's choice of title nonetheless indicates a desire to elevate her work to the 'serious' category of literary commentary. For some of the texts concerned, see Weinberg's edition of *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento* (Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1970 [vols. I & II], 1972 [vol. III] & 1974 [vol. IV]).

Other contemporary reference points include Machiavelli's *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, 'Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy', completed around 1518 (although this work is not a 'running commentary' on Livy's text, but a treatise on the state; however, Machiavelli also takes passages from Livy as the starting point for discussion on contemporary issues, followed by the deduction of a certain principle). Girolamo Benivieni wrote a *Discorso sopra la Comedia di Dante Alighieri* in c.1530; and it is also interesting to note Simone Fòrnari's four-volume work entitled *La spositione sopra l'Orlando furioso*, published in Florence in 1549/1550, in which key lines of each *canto* of the *Furioso* are picked out and accompanied by a prose commentary explaining meaning, sources, etc. In the same vein, Tasso would later produce his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* in the 1560s, re-writing and expanding them as the *Discorsi del poema eroico* in the 1580s. Terracina clearly fits into this tradition of re-examination of a given text; yet her radical fragmentation of the *Furioso* within her own poetic scheme is innovative, even if the Latin precedent of the *cento* or patchwork composition could also serve as a reference point.[20]

Nonetheless, the fact that Terracina's own adaptation of the *cento* method is limited to the opening *ottava* of each of Ariosto's *canti* poses various questions. The deliberately narrow scope of her poetic enterprise may indicate a degree of authorial modesty, or indeed a rejection of the depth expected of the epic form. It is certainly indicative of a desire to examine, and in many cases take issue with, the narratorial statements found in Ariosto's *proemi*. The following section will explore Terracina's uniquely 'gendered' response to the author of the *Furioso*, and the 'feminist' perspective that is seen to emerge.

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[20] The *cento* may be defined as a composition – usually poetic – formed by joining together scraps from other authors. It was championed by the Latin author Ausonius, who wrote a nuptial idyll composed from verses selected from Virgil, in the fourth century B.C.

Gender Issues: Commentary on the 'Furioso'

The deliberate focus on Ariosto's *proemi* in Terracina's *Discorso* provides her not only with the opportunity to comment on the plot-lines within the *Furioso*, but also with the potential to widen the scope of her reflections, like Ariosto, to include a consideration of contemporary issues in society as a whole. She appears particularly interested in the behaviour of both men and women, and their often fraught relationships with each other. In this ostensibly 'gendered' approach, the poet seems keen, with particular regard to the received views of women, to break down cultural stereotypes and to encourage a more egalitarian view of the much-debated conflicts between the sexes,[21] whether this manifests itself as the refutation of prejudices that tar all women with the same brush, or as the demand for recognition and confrontation of male hypocrisy in men's own dealings with the female sex.[22] Her

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[21] Previous literary works adding fuel to the debate in Italy around this time include Sperone Speroni's misleadingly titled dialogue *Della dignità delle donne* (1542), which has a woman argue that a woman's dignity is found in her natural condition of servitude; and Lodovico Dolce's restrictive *Dialogo della institution delle donne* (1545), which emphasizes the values of chastity and obedience in the education of all three estates of woman (unmarried, wives and widows). Dersofi notes that 'a new model for women in society was emerging in the 1540s that did not easily accommodate a woman's desire for public recognition', and places Terracina at the forefront of those women who challenged the social and sexual roles promoted by male writers on their behalf (Dersofi, op. cit., p. 427). However, as Marina Zancan has noted, the printing industry itself, particularly in Venice, was enabling – albeit slowly – more women writers to enter the literary, and therefore public, arena: 'Venezia [...], attraverso le proprie strutture editoriali, promuove e diffonde la figura e il modello della donna "nuova", una donna colta, che scrive e stampa testi letterari'; cf. Marina Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria italiana* (Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1998), p. 48 (see especially her section on 'Il secolo XVI: tra Rinascimento e Controriforma', pp. 31-63). Lodovico Domenichi himself recognizes Terracina as one of the women taking on the role of writer in his lengthy five-book dialogue entitled *La nobiltà delle donne*, which also appeared in 1549. Domenichi dedicates this work, like Terracina's *Prime rime*, to Giovanni Vincenzo Belprato, Conte d'Aversa. Terracina is mentioned in Book V through the voice of Faustina Sforza, who muses on the name Laura: 'Io non parlo hora della tanto celebrata Laura per le rime del Petrarcha, la quale viverà fin che dura il mondo, ma di infinite Laure: fra le quali singolarissima, & veramente phenice hoggi appare LAURA TERRACINA di Napoli' (cf. Lodovico Domenichi, *La nobiltà delle donne: corretta, & di nuovo ristampata* [Venice, Appresso Gabriel Giolito di Ferrarii e fratelli, 1551], p. 238^{v}; pagination is similar to foliation). Faustina goes on to declare that '[questa] rara & bella giovane non solo per le rime altrui è famosa et illustre, percioche i piu chiari intelletti dell'età nostra hoggi la cantano a prova; ma da se stessa, & co' propri inchiostri, si va acquistando gloriosa fama: come ella ha ben mostrato nelle prime & nelle seconde sue rime, le quali non sono l'ultime di merito & d'honore appresso quelle anchora di molti huomini savi' (pp. 238^{v}-239^{r}).

[22] Montella notes the poet's 'posizioni decise a favore delle donne e contro un ideale stereotipato dell'amore e della vita' (Montella, op. cit., p. 27); he later states that the value of her entire *corpus* lies not in poetic subtlety or lyrical mastery but rather in these very 'posizioni decise': 'Senza punte di alta

Discorso is at its most interesting and provocative when she either develops and expands an idea originally mentioned in the *Furioso*, or else diverges from it and registers her disagreement on a given subject. It is in this sense that, as critics like Montella have pointed out, her work may assume a rather 'moralistic' tone: in 'answering' the issues discussed in Ariosto's epic, the commentary enables the author to give full vent to her opinions.[23] Nonetheless, a genuine engagement with Ariosto's *proemi* is clearly discerned throughout the *Discorso*.[24]

Terracina's response to the *Furioso* is openly and unashamedly gender-biased: she actively sets herself up as a woman writer, writing not only for a male public, but also for a large female audience, on issues that both potentially and actually concern women. Indeed, many of the *canti* are dedicated to individual women, mainly contemporary figures of whom Terracina was aware either by reputation or personally (e.g. II, X, XII, XVI, XX, XXVI, XXVII, amongst others).[25] The entire *Discorso* is

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liricità, il sistema poetico di Laura denota una compiutezza di pensiero e, pur non prestandosi a perspicaci o sottili interpretazioni, riesce a interessare per i messaggi, i riferimenti, le vicende di cui è costellato' (pp. 45-46). For a brief look at the main (gendered) themes of the *Discorso*, see Deanna Shemek, 'Getting a Word in Edgewise: Laura Terracina's *Discorsi* on the *Orlando Furioso*', in *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham & London, Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 126-57, especially pp. 137-49; on Terracina's second *Discorso* of 1567, see pp. 150-56. Shemek indeed draws a comparison between the myth of Echo, who is doomed to repeat fragments of Narcissus' speech but infuses them with her own inflection and meaning, and the workings of Terracina's *Discorso*, which takes lines from the male narrator of the *Furioso* but succeeds in questioning the poetic model, often in a highly critical way (p. 129).

[23] To paraphrase Genette, the overwhelmingly serious tone found in Terracina's *Discorso* would appear to mark it out as a 'transposition', wherein the text being modified (in this case, Ariosto) is subject to a transformation in serious – even polemical – vein. Despite Terracina's curious manipulation of lines from the *Furioso*, the idea of parody may be largely discounted. It is also interesting to consider Genette's definition of 'metatextuality' – the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to the text it comments upon, without necessarily citing the text – in relation to Terracina: her *Discorso* would appear to be both metatextual and intertextual, as it comments on the *Furioso* but also extracts specific lines from it. See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky, forewd. Gerald Prince (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1997); *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* was originally published in Paris by Editions du Seuil in 1982.

[24] Dersofi notes that the *Discorso* was even used as a substitute for Ariosto's poem by school teachers keen to exploit its moralizing aspect (cf. Dersofi, op. cit., p. 428).

[25] Virginia Cox comments that the *Discorso* 'not only offers an exemplary moralizing reading of Ariosto's *proemi*, but, through its frequent addresses and allusions to other women readers, stages an entire circle of women as fellow-enthusiasts for Ariosto's work'; cf. Virginia Cox, 'Women as Readers and Writers of Chivalric Poetry in Early Modern Italy', in *Sguardi sull'Italia: Miscellanea dedicata a Francesco Villari dalla Society for Italian Studies*, a cura di Gino Bedani et al: Occasional Papers,

informed by a strong sense of justice as it relates to the female point of view: a 'feminist' agenda could thus be claimed as the underlying force of many of her declarations, linking Terracina to the so-called *querelle des femmes* that attempted to delineate, and in many cases limit, the role of women.[26] She nevertheless also reserves judgement for the faults of human nature in general, as can be found in *canto* IV, dedicated 'Agli amici traditori'.[27]

This *canto* takes Ariosto's *proemio* on the advantages of pretence[28] as its point of departure, although Terracina adopts a decidedly more damning stance on the subject of liars and deceivers. Her own *proemio* constitutes a lament on the state of the age in which she lives:

> Certo mi duol di questa etade d'hoggi,
> Poi ch'ella è si lasciva, e tanto finta:
> Raro è di cui ti fidi, e a cui t'appoggi,
> Che non habbia la faccia al fin dipinta.
> Hor tra le fraudi, hor tra gl'inganni alloggi,
> Anzi è nel mondo ogni virtude estinta;
> Tal ch'io molto diffido, e mi condoglio
> Veder mia[29] barca appresso si gran scoglio.(ll. 1-8)

In her second *ottava*, she appears more condemnatory in her judgement of the practice of deception than Ariosto ('Gli è il simular tra cari, & buon giuditii / Ripreso, e dà di mala mente inditii', IV, ii, ll. 7-8, using Ariosto's line as a definite statement in her *ottava*, away from its concessive position in the *Furioso*: 'Quantunque il simular sia le più volte / ripreso, e dia di mala mente indici...', *OF* IV, i, ll. 1-2). Despite affording a few lines towards the exploration of the more positive (if rather vague) idea of pretence as a means to end argument (IV, iii), she mostly constructs the *canto* around

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Number 3 (Leeds, Society for Italian Studies, 1997), pp. 134-45 [p. 135]. She also notes its 'obviously public, staged character' (p. 136).

[26] Stortoni describes the 'pugnacious feminist statements' that punctuate many of her *canti* (Stortoni, op. cit., p. 105).

[27] *Discorso*, ff. ix^{v}-x^{v}. I shall not give the folio numbers each time, in order not to clutter the text with references.

[28] Cf. *OF* IV, i, ll. 3-4: 'si truova pur in molte cose e molte / aver fatti evidenti benefici'.

[29] Although later editions contain the variant 'mai' here, the 1550 edition would seem to conform more to the sense of this *proemio*.

the image of a society lacking in charitable feeling and selfless action, where the tool of deception serves the purpose of furthering the individual's selfish aims ('Ogn'uno al ben d'altrui si lega, e stringe, / Ogn'un scherzando, dietro al fin t'offende', IV, v, ll. 2-3). The poet distances herself from this undesirable view of human nature ('Fuggo costoro, e di parlarli schivo', IV, vi, l. 3), ending the *canto* on a note of lament for a lost 'golden age':

> Ov'è quel ben perduto, e quello amore
> Di quella antica etade; e quel soggiorno
> Tanto sincero, e tanto pien d'honore,
> Che rendea di virtudi il mondo adorno?
> Et hor sol biasmi trovo, e dishonore:
> Et sol'inganni, e fraudi d'ogn'intorno,
> In questa assai piu oscura che serena
> Vita mortal tutta d'invidia piena.(IV, vii, ll. 1-8)

This, and other *canti* in the *Discorso*, deal with more general issues concerning the human character in all its weakness; yet Terracina is especially interested in situations that often have unfavourable consequences for women in particular, even if both sexes are included in the circumstances described. These potentially 'gendered' scenarios are what motivates her to react most strongly in the *Discorso*.

The unjust power of love is a case in point. A favourite topic in the *Furioso*, where the narrator often complains of his own amorous troubles, the discourse on love is taken up by Terracina and manipulated in such a way that a clear awareness of the female perspective emerges. In *canto* VIII, dedicated to Giovanni Bernardino Bonifacio, the poet comments on Ariosto's theme of deception in love.[30] She displays sympathy for those lovers who suffer a Dantesque 'living hell' of pain ('Miseri amanti, che per duolo immenso / Disperati a l'inferno in vita andate', VIII, ii, ll. 1-2), whilst berating Love – in the form of Cupid – for the misuse of his power ('O falso

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[30] Cf. *OF* VIII, i, ll. 1-2: 'Oh quante sono incantatrici, oh quanti / incantator tra noi, che non si sanno!' Taking his cue from Alcina's deception of Ruggiero, Ariosto briefly muses on those who deceive and then exploit the love-struck.

incantator del mondo oblio', VIII, iii, l. 6). However, she then deliberately picks out women as particular victims of love ('Quante donne tradir per questo insano / Amor, che tra le fibre intorno serpe', VIII, iv, ll. 5-6), thus implicitly suggesting greater male participation in the process of deception itself, even if Cupid, the god of love, has been the primary catalyst. The reference to women is slipped in between discussion of the effects of love and outright condemnation of Cupid as an irresponsible 'deity', leading his lambs to the slaughter ('Alhor tu falso Arcier, non con temenza, / Li conduci a morir, si lievi e vaghi', VIII, v, ll. 3-4); yet it stands out as a specifically gendered detail of the consequences of deception in love.

A similar detail can be seen in the following *canto*, dedicated to Ferrante Sanseverino, Prince of Salerno. The *proemio* of Ariosto's *canto* IX laments the power of love over Orlando, who neglects his duty to his leader in the search for Angelica:

> Che non può far d'un cor ch'abbia suggetto
> questo crudele e traditore Amore,
> poi ch'ad Orlando può levar del petto
> la tanta fé che debbe al suo signore?(*OF* IX, i, ll. 1-4)

Ariosto's lines emphasize Orlando's lack of allegiance to his lord, his religion and his own sense of self as a noble paladin ('or per un vano amor, poco del zio, / e di sé poco, e men cura di Dio', *OF* IX, i, ll. 7-8). Terracina's *canto* begins in similar vein ('Non è impossibil nulla a questo amore, / Tanta forz'ha in ogni fiorita guancia...', IX, i, ll. 1-2), but includes an important difference, namely the mention of Orlando's wife in the list of things he abandons because of love: 'Vedi, che 'l saggio Orlando Senatore / Per ciò abbandona la moglie, e la Francia' (IX, i, ll. 5-6). Terracina's awareness of the gender issues – and thus those affecting the female characters – within the plot-lines of the *Furioso* is revealed in small details such as the above comment; in effect, the existence of Orlando's wife is only mentioned very late in the

Furioso,[31] despite assumptions of reader awareness of the story from Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* and the previous characterization of Roland-Orlando in the epic tradition. In fiction as in reality, Terracina displays a consciously gendered reading of male-female relationships and situations. Her interpretation, and resulting commentary, focus principally on the female perspective.

This is also seen with regard to love in *canto* XXIV, dedicated to Giovanni Bernardino Spinello. Ariosto's *proemio* at this point pessimistically equates love with madness, following on as it does from the *canto* in which Orlando loses his senses and succumbs to fury, having seen the signs of Angelica's love for Medoro ('che non è in somma amor, se non insania, / a giudizio de' savi universale', *OF* XXIV, i, ll. 3-4). Terracina begins her *canto* with the intention of examining the nature of love ('Vorrei saper da' savii, e da' Dottori / Che cosa è Amor, dove ne viene, o nasce...', XXIV, i, ll. 1-2, wherein she appears to want to question Ariosto's so-called *savi*).[32] After some discussion of depictions of love by writers and painters, she turns her attention to the misogynistic prejudice that identifies women as the cause of all amorous torment:

> Dicono alcun, che de le Donne i frutti
> Sono sola cagion di tanto male;
> Anzi seme, principio...(XXIV, iv, ll. 1-3)

Her own, notably feminist, response is to ask why women have been blamed for all the problems associated with love, and to declare that both men and women are equally drawn to its fascinations ('Hor s'un desio a canto ci ha condutti, / Come le

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[31] Mention of Orlando's brother-in-law, Oliviero, is made in *OF* XXXIX, xxx, l. 5 ('Il cognato tra questi era del conte').

[32] Cf. Petrarch, *RVF* CXXXII, ll. 1-2: 'S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento? / ma s'egli è amor, per Dio, che cosa e quale?' Terracina's lines are also reminiscent of a sonnet by Guido Orlandi to Guido Cavalcanti asking about the nature of love: 'Onde si move, e donde nasce Amore?' (cf. Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*; con le *Rime* di Iacopo Cavalcanti, a cura di Domenico De Robertis [Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1986], no. XXVIIa, pp. 90-92). This is then answered by Cavalcanti in the *canzone* 'Donna me prega...' (no. XXVIIb, pp. 93-107).

Donne poi son si infernale', XXIV, iv, ll. 5-6). Furthermore, in an ironic twist of Ariosto's original line, she even makes the case for men's weakness as the source of their troubles in love ('Non le Donne, ma voi sete si frale, / A giudicio de' savii universale', XXIV, iv, ll. 7-8). Although the exact designations of *noi* and *voi* vary throughout the *Discorso*, the *voi* outlined here seemingly points to men alone, prompting the construction of a scenario wherein men are diametrically opposed to women (and in this case, morally inferior).

In these examples of authorial awareness of the female point of view, whether in the context of women as victims of love or those blamed for difficulties in love, the voice of commentary manifests a clear feminist agenda, as well as a clear knowledge of the misogynist tradition. The *Discorso*, taking its cue from Ariosto's *proemi*, is regularly punctuated by *canti* entirely concerned with male-female relationships, on topics dealt with in the *Furioso* such as violence (V, XV), chivalry (XIII), abandonment (X), lust (XI) and infidelity (XXVIII). Terracina is able to set out a specifically female answer to such questions, often calling for others to participate in what effectively becomes a 'defence' of her sex. Her stance inevitably focusses on the maltreatment or misrepresentation, either of women in general, or of the female characters in the *Furioso*; and her deliberate deconstruction of Ariosto's lines for the formulation and support of her own ideas – an apparently novel endeavour – lends credence to the notion that the *Discorso* was a consciously engineered response not only to the *Furioso*, but also to many of the issues being debated at the time.

Indeed, the *Discorso* is all the more remarkable in that it constitutes one of the few female literary 'replies' to the contemporary debate on women, the *querelle des femmes*. Two years previously, the courtesan and poet Tullia d'Aragona (c.1510-56) had published her *Dialogo della infinità d'amore* (1547), a dialogue on the ethics of

love which posits equality between the sexes as a given, and 'honourable' love as being based on both sensual and spiritual needs; it also declares that the professional courtesan alone could be a truly independent woman. Later on in the century, Lucrezia Marinella (1571-1653) would compose her treatise on *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti et mancamenti degli uomini* (1600 – the same year as Moderata Fonte's dialogue *Il merito delle donne* was published), in reply to the publication of various misogynistic works. Terracina's *Discorso* thus forms part of the small group of contemporary female-authored texts concerned with gender relations.[33]

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[33] For modern editions of these texts, see Tullia d'Aragona, *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, ed. & trans. Rinaldina Russell & Bruce Merry (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997); Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, a cura di Adriana Chemello (Venice, Editrice Eidos, 1988), alongside its English edition in Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women: Wherein is Clearly Revealed their Nobility and their Superiority to Men*, ed. & trans. Virginia Cox (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Lucrezia Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women, and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. & trans. Anne Dunhill, intro. Letizia Panizza (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1999), although an abridged Italian version can be found in Ginevra Conti Odorisio, *Donna e società nel Seicento*, intro. Ida Magli (Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 1979), pp. 114-57. The *querelle* mostly revolved around male writings – both defences of and attacks on women – from Boccaccio onwards, as mentioned in Chapter One of the thesis; see Stephen Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio: Writings on Famous Women in Renaissance Italy* (Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols Publishers, 2005), especially his fourth chapter, 'Arguing the Superiority of Women in Ferrara and Beyond: Bartolomeo Goggio, Galeazzo Flavio Capra, and Henricus Cornelius Agrippa' (pp. 171-224). On the origins of the *querelle*, see Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789', *Signs* 8 (1982), pp. 4-28; Kelly notes Marie de Romieu's first poetic work entitled *Brief Discours, que l'excellence de la femme surpasse celle de l'homme* (Paris, 1591). Terracina's poetic discourse thus acts as a precursor to this work, which was interestingly composed around the same time as Fonte's dialogue (full title: *Il merito delle donne, ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e più perfette de gli uomini*). See also Conor Fahy, 'Three Early Renaissance Treatises on Women', *Italian Studies* 11 (1956), pp. 30-55; Juliana Schiesari, 'In Praise of Virtuous Women? For a Genealogy of Gender Morals in Renaissance Italy', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 66-87; Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1991); Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Constance Jordan, 'Renaissance Women and the Question of Class', in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 90-106; and Marta Ajmar, 'Exemplary Women in Renaissance Italy: Ambivalent Models of Behaviour?', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 244-64. On the female answer to the 'woman question' in Italy, see in particular Adriana Chemello, 'La donna, il modello, l'immaginario: Moderata Fonte e Lucrezia Marinella', in *Nel cerchio della luna: figure di donna in alcuni testi del XVI secolo*, a cura di Marina Zancan (Venice, Marsilio Editori, 1983), pp. 95-170; Beatrice Collina, 'Moderata Fonte e *Il merito delle donne*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 142-64; Letizia Panizza, 'Polemical Prose Writing, 1500-1650', in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza & Sharon Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 65-78; and Adriana Chemello, 'The Rhetoric of Eulogy in Lucrezia Marinella's *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza*

The question of violence towards women is mainly addressed by Terracina in her *canto* V, entitled 'Chi nemico è di donna, in altro ha cura'. It is here that the 'defence' of women is seen in detail for the first time, and the tone of the *Discorso* set. The author deals specifically with the abuses carried out by men against women, in a register that comes close to that of invective. The *proemio* in the *Furioso*, following the introduction into the text of the assault on Dalinda, Ginevra's maid, considers the behaviour of male towards female in the animal kingdom, and concludes that gendered violence exists only in the realm of humanity, where it has deplorable consequences for women. Terracina's own *proemio* reveals a tone of barely-suppressed outrage:

> Vorrei parlar, ma l'ira il dir m'intoppa,
> Poi che sola difendo il nostro sesso.
> Gia il desiderio mio brama, e galoppa
> Di vendicarsi, e pur non m'è concesso,
> Contra costor, c'han si la mente zoppa
> Appo noi Donne; in darne oltraggi spesso:
> Ma spero, che dal ciel verrà saetta,
> Et credo che di noi farà vendetta.(ll. 1-8)

The situation described here is clearly one of men against women, emphasized by her use of 'il nostro sesso' and 'noi Donne' in opposition to 'costor'. The concluding lines express a desire for divine intervention as a means of changing male behaviour towards women; although the idea of human revenge is not permitted in the Christian tradition, Terracina appeals to the precedent of divine vengeance.

The body of the *canto* explores the 'phenomenon' of gendered violence, the first stanza addressing a general *voi* that suddenly changes to a specific *tu* from the second stanza onwards. Terracina freely employs various lines or fragments of lines from the *Furioso* in her verse, as seen from the beginning of her *canto*: her opening

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delle donne', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 463-77.

question ('Che pestifero mal, ch'ira del cielo / Rimorde i petti de l'humana gente?', V, i, ll. 1-2) is a clear reflection of Ariosto's query to the readers of his epic ('Ch'abominevol peste, che Megera / è venuta a turbar gli umani petti?', *OF* V, ii, ll. 1-2). Terracina goes on to explore the causes of this 'inexplicable' situation in the lines that follow: 'O sciocchi, e come d'ignoranza il velo / V'ingombra con furor la cieca mente?' (V, i, ll. 3-4). The basic cause of male misdemeanour is exposed as ignorance, whilst *furor* – rage, madness, and excessive emotion – lie at the heart of the ensuing problem of violence, as in the case of Orlando himself.[34] However, Terracina also broaches the idea of male envy of women in the same stanza, as a further category of the broad accusation of ignorance levelled against men ('Ben vi percuote il cor d'invidia il telo, / Che tenete le donne si vilmente', V, i, ll. 5-6). This idea is already present in Ariosto, as I shall discuss later, but is used here in the context of violence by Terracina, so that the suppression of female talent and achievement is suggested through actual physical oppression.

The poet then has recourse to Ariosto's examples of the animal kingdom, in order to convince an unspecified single male reader of the illogical nature of such behaviour:

> Mira un poco superbo, aspro, & altero
> Ne le fronzute selve, & erti monti,
> Ov'è l'Orso, la Tigre, o Leon fiero:
> Che a favorir la femina son pronti...(V, ii, ll. 1-4)

The implication here is that if wild animals such as bears, tigers and lions can live in 'gendered' harmony, then 'civilized' human beings should also be able to construct a society in which both sexes can flourish. Terracina condemns the 'pensier folle, e

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[34] The violence of Orlando, whose madness is outlined at the beginning of the *Furioso* ('che per amor venne in furore e matto', *OF* I, ii, l. 3), manifests itself in attacks on both animate and inanimate objects, whether in uprooting trees or dragging horses to their death. The term *furor* – much used in the classical Latin depiction of love, and especially in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where it is associated with both Dido and Aeneas – implies a lack of rationality or logic, which Terracina explores in relation to men's incomprehensible behaviour towards women.

leggiero' (V, ii, l. 5) that leads to violent actions, since it is not grounded in logic or considered argument. Furthermore, she denounces violence towards women as going against all divine and earthly laws:

> O nimico del cielo, e di natura,
> Come hai baldanza tu di por la mano
> Sopra di bella & giovenil figura?(V, iii, ll. 1-3)

These lines largely reflect those of Ariosto's narrator, in his commentary on those who resort to violence:

> Parmi non sol gran mal, ma che l'uom faccia
> contra natura e sia di Dio ribello,
> che s'induce a percuotere la faccia
> di bella donna...(*OF* V, iii, ll. 1-4)

Terracina's rhetorical apostrophe nevertheless addresses the (male) reader/perpetrator directly in the form of accusation, rather than indirect musing, as in the *Furioso*. She continues this address in the following stanza, which deals with weapons other than the hand used to inflict violence:

> Onde ti viene homai dominio tanto
> Di tor la spada ignuda, o un pugnal forsi?
> E far sanguigno de la terra il manto
> Con dargli colpi fieri, & aspri morsi?(V, iv, ll. 1-4)

Although Terracina's lines take their cue from the *Furioso*, which outlines poison, the noose and the knife as diabolical and deplorable ways of killing women (*OF* V, iii, ll. 5-8), the imagery here contains distinctly sexual overtones, thus hinting also at sexual violence towards women. The 'aspri morsi' of line four leads to the poet's equation of such men with wild animals, and yet, as she concludes, 'Quantunque di natura sia mordace, / A la femina il maschio non la face' (V, iv, ll. 7-8).

The tone of the *canto* changes at this point to one of reasonable argument, if not quite appeal, as the poet expounds the Christian perspective of male-female

relationships. She draws on the creation of Adam and Eve, dwelling on their harmony before the Fall:

> Ti fè de la tua costa il buon fattore
> Uscir la donna con si bel disegno,
> Acciò, che d'una fede, e d'uno amore
> Voi foste uniti in questo, & in quel regno.(V, v, ll. 1-4)

Having set out this ideal of peaceful gendered union to which men and women should aspire, Terracina appeals to the male sense of honour, although the fragmentation of Ariosto's lines at times imposes a somewhat artificial poetic structure on the *canto* (as we see in the lines: 'Deh vivi tu con la tua donna in pace: / La Leonessa appresso il Leon giace', V, vi, ll. 7-8). In the final stanza of this *canto*, Terracina appears to introduce a slightly different theme. In an ambiguous passage that comes after comment on the *trofei* – and thus implicitly female conquests – that men seek to accumulate during their earthly life, the poet reproaches her single reader for his supposed promiscuity ('Ma tu pensi cangiarne mille ogn'hora, / Né vedi il doppio mal, ch'oprando fai', V, vii, ll. 1-2). She goes on to enunciate what could be interpreted as criticism of the 'double standard' that exists with regard to male and female behaviour, namely the different 'rules' for either sex:

> Ma noi s'usciam un fil dal segno fuora,
> Mille morti aspettiamo, e mille guai;
> Non ugualmente la ragion lavora.(V, vii, ll. 3-5)

Although these lines continue the commentary on violence that has run throughout the *canto* (namely the dangers women face if they anger men in any way), they also hint at the discourse of Rinaldo at the end of *canto* IV in the *Furioso*, wherein the paladin objects to the condemnation of Ginevra for her apparent indulgence of her lover and highlights the inequality of the sexes where love, and in particular sexual conduct, are concerned. Terracina's *canto* thus moves from an outraged denunciation of an

illogical and ignorant male tendency to violence towards women, to a critique on the hypocrisy that informs received views of gendered behaviour.

She continues her exploration of the theme of violence towards women in *canto* XV, entitled 'A li crudeli, e sanguinosi Capitani'.[35] At this point in the *Furioso*, after description of the siege of Paris in the previous *canto*, Ariosto's *proemio* discusses the issue of warfare, and concludes that the least 'bloody' option in battle is the best ('gli è ver che la vittoria sanguinosa / spesso far suole il capitan men degno', *OF* XV, i, ll. 3-4). Terracina turns this topic around to encompass soldiers' violence towards the victims of war, namely women, again espousing a gendered reading of episodes within the *Furioso*, and indeed of the contemporary issue of methods of war. Her concern is that the 'blood-lust' of certain cruel military captains then translates to the men under their command, who display a propensity for sexual violence disguised by the so-called 'theatre of war'. Terracina's *proemio* appeals to all 'saggi Capitani almi e perfetti' (l. 1), albeit within the fiction of the *Furioso*, since she names these captains as having command over 'franchi soldati' (l. 2), i.e. Charlemagne's troops.

Her request is for captains to control their soldiers' impulses:

> Ponete il freno a' lor superbi petti,
> Acciò non sian contra di noi sfrenati,
> Poi che donzelle, vecchi, e poveretti
> Da lor con pari ingiuria son trattati...(ll. 3-6)

The *noi* of line four would appear to refer to the subsequent list of victims of war in the following line – women, the elderly, and the weak – yet Terracina's use elsewhere in the *Discorso* of the phrase 'sfrenato voler', meaning unbridled lust, suggests that the description of the soldiers as *sfrenati* contains overtones of sexual violence on their part.

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[35] In both the 1559 and 1567 editions of the *Discorso* that I consulted, the title rather unusually addresses 'li Cardinali, e sanguinosi Capitani'. However, since this is clearly inappropriate for the sense of the *canto*, it is most probably a typographical error, and I have therefore retained the 1550 edition's dedication.

In the body of the *canto*, the reason for this behaviour is alluded to in the poet's description of the 'giovenile esercito, e gagliardo' (XV, i, l. 2): impetuous youth may be to blame to some extent, and Terracina duly notes their particular kind of *furor* ('furor sanguinoso', XV, i, l. 4). However, she laments the state of heightened brutality during war with particular reference to women: 'Qual fia soldato pur ch'osservi legge / Che non sia contra Donne un leopardo?' (XV, i, ll. 5-6, with the use of animal imagery linking back to her previous comments in *canto* V). In the following stanza, she clarifies the victims of war ('Ma, che colpa di questo hanno i figliuoli, / E tanti vecchi, e tante afflitte donne...', XV, ii, ll. 1-2), although subsequent lines reveal a more sinister objective on the part of the marauding soldiers, who are afforded the *voi* in this case:

> Qual pensier è, che tanto vi disdonne,
> Che di noi fate i nostri padri soli
> Lasciando empii trofei di veste, e gonne?(XV, ii, ll. 4-6)

The idea of sexual violence towards women hinted at previously is clearly put across in these lines, as is the poet's tone of overt disapproval. Terracina also takes up Ariosto's idea of the rout as a way of achieving a 'bloodless' victory, leaving time for the enemy to flee (XV, iii-iv). However, her primary concern is for the consequences of gendered cruelty in war, and her commentary on this subject merges criticism of the fictional scenes created in the *Furioso* – albeit in the light of her own 'gender-biased' reading – with contemporary reality.[36]

According to Terracina, such maltreatment of women, whether as outright violence or sexual assault, arises from a lack of male chivalry, as discussed in her

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[36] The problem of anachronistic representation in the *Furioso* arises at this point, since although the action of the epic is said to be based on the legendary paladins of Charlemagne around the eighth and ninth centuries AD, much of its detail pertains to sixteenth-century Italy, albeit framed in the conventions of both courtly love literature and Arthurian romance. Terracina's commentary/criticism may be situated amongst these various levels of fiction and reality: although she may pick up the thread of a plot-line from the *Furioso*, her focus almost always widens to include a more general commentary on contemporary issues.

canto XIII. In this *canto*, the poet again laments an unspecified 'golden age' of chivalry, although it is not clear whether all the paladins of the *Furioso* are included in this idealized group of knights. At this point in Ariosto's epic, Orlando has come across Isabella in the grotto, and is about to hear her story; the *proemio* muses satirically on the luck of knights at that time, who were able to find 'true' female beauty amongst the wilds of nature, whilst it is now impossible to find such beauty even in the 'palazzi altieri' (*OF* XIII, i, l. 5) of contemporary court life. Terracina's *canto* discards this discussion of female beauty and instead examines the idea of lost gentility, and in particular noble male behaviour towards women, within the framework of this episode, which displays Orlando's chivalrous attitude towards Isabella. She turns around the discussion of the so-called rarity of female beauty into that of the rarity of male chivalry, deliberately employing the same lexis; thus in reply to Ariosto's lines ('trovavan quel che nei palazzi altieri / a pena or trovar puon giudici buoni', *OF* XIII, i, ll. 5-6), she proffers her own interpretation:

> Meritamente i cavallieri antiqui
> *Vedevan quel*, ch'*à forza hoggi* si crede,
> Perché non eran vitiosi, e iniqui:
> Come in tutto *hor si trovano*, e si vede,
> Anzi d'ogni virtù scarsi & obliqui...(XIII, i, ll. 1-5, my italics)

The implication is that female beauty is indeed still present in contemporary society, but the vices of the nobility obscure their perception of reality and taint their behaviour, sullying any form of beauty that does exist. Terracina laments the 'bel cortese ingegno' (XIII, ii, l. 4) of the 'cavallieri antiqui' and asks where such figures have gone ('Ove son giti i cavallier si boni / Ch'erano in quella età? che ne i valloni', XIII, ii, ll. 7-8; Ariosto's line has been manipulated into a question, if somewhat fragmented in the process, and the reader is forced to move on to the next stanza in order to complete the sense: 'Trovavan spesso cose mai vedute', XIII, iii, l. 1).

Later on in the *canto*, the poet reproves the contemporary equivalent of the knights of old, again using *voi* to designate this 'undesirable' category ('Che vedete hoggi, e come in quel v'oprate / Poi che inclini piu al mal sete, ch'al bene?', XIII, iv, ll. 3-4). She then moves the focus of her criticism to a specific point, naming their 'sfrenato voler' (XIII, v, l. 1) and 'instabile desire' (XIII, v, l. 3) as the basis of this lack of chivalry. This leads to a damning expression of doubt regarding the intentions of most male knights, or courtly figures, in her present day:

> Se a caso hor si trovasse una donzella
> Da un cavallier, d'un sporco, o d'un gentile:[37]
> Non dico in selve, in boschi, o in altra cella,
> O tra valloni ombrosi, o tra simile,
> Ma ne i palazzi, o a le cittadi bella;
> Lasciaran forsi l'honor feminile,
> No 'l crederei...(XIII, vi, ll. 1-7)

Terracina doubts that the ideal of chivalric behaviour would stand up well if tested in contemporary society, and she goes on to suggest that it is this factor that lies behind the tarring of female reputations, and ensuing debate on female virtue. In lines that virtually erase all blame from the history of female behaviour, she states that the fault lies with men: 'Sì, che contra del ciel non querelati, / Ma contra a voi, che la colpa è sol vostra' (XIII, vii, ll. 1-2). Moreover, she draws the *canto* to an end on a pessimistic note ('Gli antiqui cavallier tanto nomati / Non si vedranno piu ne l'età nostra', XIII, vii, ll. 3-4), which acts as a seal to her previous condemnation of male conduct. This view of male-female relationships has a decidedly feminist bias, in which the blame for maltreatment of women is laid squarely on the shoulders of men.

Such a lack of chivalry is also discussed by the poet in its manifestations of abandonment and lust, inter-relating topics in the *Furioso* due to their proximity (seen especially in *canti* X and XI, with the episodes involving Olimpia/Bireno and

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[37] A line that presumably differentiates between pagan (barbaric) and Christian (noble) knights.

Angelica/Ruggiero; both demonstrate reprehensible male behaviour through their protagonists, whilst Angelica's rescue from the orc by the lustful Ruggiero prefigures Olimpia's later rescue from the same predicament, albeit by the rather more honourable figure of Orlando). Terracina devotes her *canto* X to the commentary of the Olimpia story. Ariosto's *proemio* here is sympathetic to Olimpia, extolling her loyalty and virtue whilst condemning the feckless nature of youthful lovers (*OF* X, i-ix). Terracina's *Discorso* does not dwell on the nature of the male lover and the pros and cons of young and old suitors; rather, she comments on the character of Olimpia herself and the female reaction to such a situation.

Terracina's *proemio* is dedicated to Costanza d'Avalos, Duchess of Melfi, on whose name she plays for the frame of reference of loyalty and constancy in love, central to this story-line; she even includes the character of Olimpia herself in the delineation of her dedicatee's virtues, thus creating a kind of 'meta-literary' commentary:

> Per quanto io veggio, e la ragion mi muove,
> Non mi par cosa piu, che giusta sia,
> Che 'l gran fattor del ciel, l'eterno Giove
> De la fe' vera, a voi dominio dia,
> Come donna costante a tante prove,
> Ripiena di virtù, di cortesia;
> Talche né Olimpia, né Penelope anco
> Forse havranno appo voi riga di franco.(ll. 1-8)

The poet seems almost overwhelmed by emotion in the re-telling of this story, despite the stylized nature of the commentary. The concepts of *amor* and *fede* undergo a type of chiastic interchange in the first four lines of the first stanza:

> Di qual amor io sarò meglio udita,
> O di qual fede io sarò al dir commossa:
> Parlarò ben del vero, & infinita
> Fede, & amor d'Olimpia si percossa...(X, i, ll. 1-4)

After some conventional praise of the character of Olimpia, including her elevated status amongst the normal classical examples of lamenting or abandoned women – Penelope, Dido and Phyllis – and within the mythical realm of love ('Che nel regno di Venere, e Cupido / Né fu, né sarà mai donna a lei pare', X, ii, ll. 5-6), the poet turns her attention to Bireno. Her attack on the latter's character – in the form of a direct address – is more forthright than any passage in the *Furioso*, where Ariosto uses the mouthpiece of Olimpia to articulate any accusations of faithlessness and cruelty against Bireno (and even these are mostly subsumed in contemplation of her fate, as we see in the lines 'O perfido Bireno, o maladetto / giorno ch'al mondo generata fui!', *OF* X, xxvii, ll. 5-6). Terracina's attack encompasses that on the character of the 'abandoner' in general:

> O mancator di fede, empio Bireno,
> Inimico del cielo, e di natura;
> Come lasciasti con si fier veleno
> In quella spiaggia Olimpia mal sicura...(X, iii, ll. 1-4)

The abandoner is depicted as a type of human aberration, and the poet's tone of anger and disgust is clearly discernible ('Havevi il cor di caldi vitii pieno', X, iii, l. 5). The concluding lines of this stanza – incorporating Ariosto's line – seem a little contrived, and the overall sense is rather unclear, but the idea of Bireno as not being the first to deceive and abandon a damsel is suggested: 'Ma non fosti tu il primo, né il secondo / Fra quante o per dolente, o per giocondo' (X, iii, ll. 7-8).

Terracina then switches to a direct address to Olimpia, which continues until the end of the *canto*. The poet appears to re-tell the story to the character of Olimpia herself ('Quando ti festi Olimpia mia, nel letto / Desta, e teco non fu quel traditore...', X, iv, ll. 1-2), re-creating the scene and action of the abandonment ('O man crudele, hor come al viso, e al petto / Porgesti l'unghie, con si grieve ardore', X, iv, ll. 5-6, lines which echo Ariosto's description in the *Furioso* of the violence of Olimpia's

reaction).[38] The sympathy of the poet is entirely on the side of Olimpia, whose lament is described in the following stanza as an 'amorosa, giusta, e pia loquela' (X, v, l. 2), the adjective *pia* lending an element of sanctity to her expression of suffering. This stanza also re-creates the setting of the abandonment using the same lexis as that found in the *Furioso*:

> Non ti consola, ch'al vento porgeva
> Alhor l'ingorda sua fallace vela:
> Hor piangi, ch'al tuo duol non ti solleva.
> Odon sol l'acque, e scogli tua querela...(X, v, ll. 3-6)
>
> Che pensi far si sventurata, e sola
> In questi sassi, in questa odiata arena?(X, vi, ll. 1-2)[39]

It is interesting to note that Terracina introduces into this episode the mythical figures of Procne and Philomela ('Chiama pur teco Progne, e Filomena, / Né sperar ch'altro aiuto ti consola', X, vi, ll. 4-5). Although widely used as a frame of reference for the female lament,[40] they are not mentioned in Ariosto during the Olimpia episode, only appearing together once later on in the *Furioso* to qualify a lament by Bradamante (*OF* XLV, xxxix).[41] In her association of this myth with Olimpia, Terracina hints not only at the classical expression of female sorrow but also at the idea of the violation of women, in all its senses.

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[38] Cf. 'graffiandosi le gote' (*OF* X, xxii, l. 1); 'Si straccia i crini, e il petto si percuote' (*OF* X, xxii, l. 3).

[39] See previous chapter for a discussion of this lexis in relation to Isabella di Morra.

[40] Cf. also Petrarch, *RVF* CCCX, l. 3: 'e garrir Progne e pianger Filomena'. For a study of the use of this myth in contemporary female poets, see Ann Rosalind Jones, 'New Songs for the Swallow: Ovid's Philomela in Tullia d'Aragona and Gaspara Stampa', in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. & intro. Marilyn Migiel & Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 263-77.

[41] Although another Ovidian myth is mentioned in this episode, that of Alcyone and Ceyx ('e s'udîr le Alcïone alla marina / de l'antico infortunio lamentarse', *OF* X, xx, ll. 5-6). When her husband was drowned in a shipwreck, Alcyone threw herself into the sea out of grief; the gods then changed them both into birds, the halcyon and the ceyx (kingfisher and gannet). In the *Furioso*, the allusion comes just before Olimpia wakes to discover Bireno's rather more heartless abandonment of her; she will then attempt to drown herself ('la qual tre volte, a se stessa crudele, / per affogarsi si spiccò dal lido', *OF* X, xxvi, ll. 5-6). Nonetheless, Bireno's lust for his brother's young bride-to-be could be said to echo the Procne/Philomela story, in which Philomela is raped by her sister's husband, Tereus.

Indeed, the violation of Olimpia's trust by Bireno spurs the poet on to a discourse in the final stanza on woman's trusting character in love. It is here that the idea of commentary on Olimpia as a 'didactic' method of cautioning others, particularly concerning this aspect of female weakness, is developed further. Terracina's language in the final stanza indicates that in this case, the abandoned woman gave too much of herself – her love, trust and loyalty – to a fickle male figure who was not worthy of such a sacrifice. The insistent repetition of adverbial phrases that point to excess on both female and male parts, leading to an excess of unhappiness, acts as an inherent admonition to (female) readers who are inclined towards a similar emotional course:

> Il *troppo* amor, la *troppa* fe', che desti
> A Bireno *si* fragile, e *si* crudo,
> T'ha ricondotta in duoli *si* funesti
> E fatto il cor gia d'ogni bene ignudo...(X, vii, ll. 1-4, my italics)

Terracina goes on almost to remonstrate with Olimpia ('Hor piangi teco, poi ch'in van credesti / La tua vita salvar sotto il suo scudo', X, vii, ll. 5-6), hinting at the need for increased female independence, since reliance on the protection of men (the act of sheltering 'sotto lo scudo') can at times prove disastrous. Although the final lines of the stanza are a reiteration of Ariosto's lines ('Ben voglio dir, che fra gli antiqui, e nuovi, / Maggior de l'amor tuo non si ritrovi', X, vii, ll. 7-8; *suo* in Ariosto has been changed to *tuo* in order to continue the register of the direct address), the impression given is that such a great love, whilst admirable, is not always desirable, and can indeed result in potentially fatal consequences (as Olimpia's subsequent kidnap by pirates and near-death on the island of Ebuda, before her rescue by Orlando, goes to show).

As in other instances in the *Discorso*, the poet's concern lies with the female victims of such 'male-dominated' actions. The following *canto* deals with the

fundamental issue of male lust, the cause of many of the entangled plot-lines within the *Furioso*. Terracina writes in response to the episode involving Angelica and Ruggiero towards the end of *canto* X and the beginning of *canto* XI, where Ruggiero is overwhelmed by lust for the naked Angelica, whom he has rescued from the orc. In Ariosto's *proemio*, the narrator rather complacently discusses the power of lust ('raro è però che di ragione il morso / libidinosa furia a dietro volga', *OF* XI, i, ll. 3-4), using the analogy of the bear's fascination with and greed for honey. He goes on not only to affirm that Ruggiero practically cannot help himself ('Qual raggion fia che 'l buon Ruggier raffrene', *OF* XI, ii, l. 1), but that he would be mad not to take advantage of the situation ('pazzo è se questa [Angelica] ancor non prezza e stima', *OF* XI, ii, l. 8). Terracina's *canto*, entitled 'A gl'insatiabili libidinosi', again focusses on the female perspective in the discussion of the effects of lust in male-female relationships, although it is made clear that the *libidinosi* in question are undoubtedly male.

Her own *proemio* describes the Dantesque 'stuol si brutto' (l. 4) of the lustful, who are, she claims, 'Cagion di guerra, anzi di morte ogn'hora' (l. 5). She thus constructs a framework for the *canto* wherein the potential dangers of lust are outlined. The poet claims to be driven to respond to this particular topic: 'Sappia ogn'un ch'a dir ciò la mente è schiva; / Ma il mio soggetto a forza vuol ch'io scriva' (ll. 7-8). She claims to be forced, almost despite herself, to broach the subject, and to transpose her objections into writing. The leitmotif of 'sfrenato voler' is in evidence in this *canto* right from the outset, as Terracina launches into a tirade against the noxious effects of lust:

> O sfrenato voler malvagio, e ingordo,
> O desiderio stolto, o voglie vane:
> Quanto mal voi causate, e infame, e lordo,
> Quant'odii, quante risse, e quante strane

Guerre crudel; ch'udendole m'assordo
Da le libidinose furie insane...(XI, i, ll. 1-6)

The phrase 'libidinose furie' of line six is plucked straight from Ariosto, as quoted above; yet the emphasis in this stanza is on the conflict that can result from lust, rather than its supposedly all-encompassing power. Terracina's concern is for the women that this behaviour affects, and it is interesting to note that she makes no distinction between class or status as regards the consequences of lust, thus subverting its received associations with prostitution and the lower classes:

Quante matrone, e quante rie donzelle
Le conducete svergognate a morte,
Quante innocenti, e pure verginelle
Vanno dolenti a ritrovar la sorte...(XI, iii, ll. 1-4)

Again, the *voi* employed here indicates the male perpetrators of this conduct, and the poet is not sparing in her tone of absolute disapproval: she condemns their lust as 'vostro desio si folle e forte' (XI, iii, l. 6). The following stanza draws attention to the fact that all are guilty of this sin, in a stylized 'questioning' that highlights her own status as a female writer involved in this issue of contemporary debate:

Di chi farà primier mia penna moto?
Di giovani? di vecchi? d'attempati?
Certo non sò dove compir mio voto
Poi che ugualmente han lor questi peccati...(XI, iv, ll. 1-4)

The final lines of this stanza turn Ariosto's self-indulgent statement regarding the inability of reason to prevent the damaging consequences of lust (*OF* XI, i, ll. 3-4, as quoted above) into a question that looks forward to an end to such irrational behaviour ('Quando sarà quel dì, che si disciolga / Libidinosa furia, e a dietro volga?', XI, iv, ll. 7-8; Terracina inserts the *e* of line eight and ends the line with a question mark, neither of which are present in Ariosto).

At this point in the *canto*, Terracina introduces an unusual mixture of abhorrence for her subject and mockery of the men concerned. The following stanza

alternates between a professed sense of horror at men's irresponsible actions and a satirical disdain for their weakness, especially since they become impotent with time:

> Io tacerò, che a dirlo m'abhorrisco,
> Anzi mi rido di vostre magagne;
> Quanto piu penso al ver, via piu perisco,
> Miseri vostre forze il tempo fragne...(XI, v, ll. 1-4)

These lines, with their overtly 'anti-male' register, expose the flaws or defects (*magagne*) of men in the context of sexual behaviour, and do not exclude a caustic jab at male impotence in later life, bringing to mind the earlier episode in the *Furioso* where Angelica is drugged by an elderly hermit, who is then unable to satisfy his lust for her.[42] Some understanding is afforded by Terracina to the vagaries of youthful impetus ('E piu scusabil pur la verde etate, / Che con qualche dover fanno assai cose', XI, vi, ll. 1-2), whilst Ariosto is less indulgent of young lovers.[43] However, unlike Ariosto, she seems particularly wary of older men, appearing to suggest that their capacity for malicious conduct is ultimately more harmful than the reckless behaviour of youth:

> Ma voi vecchi homai fuor di libertate
> E con le forze incline, e perigliose,
> Come del mondo le miserie amate
> Per far le lingue nel mal dir bramose?(XI, vi, ll. 3-6)

She points to the damage that can be inflicted on women, and the female reputation, through the more calculated action of slander, designed for women's downfall; and to the fact that older men may well be acting in such a way out of jealousy of younger men ('I gioveni tenete in gelosia, / E voi senza ragion date al diletto', XI, vii, ll. 3-4). She implies that older men's weakness for lust springs from an irrational ('senza

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[42] Cf. *OF* VIII, xlviii-l, in which Ariosto makes full use of euphemistic horse imagery ('Ma ne l'incontro il suo destrier trabocca; / ch'al disio non risponde il corpo infermo...', *OF* VIII, xlix, ll. 5-6).
[43] Cf. *OF* X, vii-ix, in which the narrator warns against liaisons with younger men precisely because their attentions are fleeting, being governed by lust ('Guardatevi da questi che sul fiore / de' lor begli anni il viso han sì polito; / che presto nasce in loro e presto muore, / quasi un foco di paglia, ogni appetito', *OF* X, vii, ll. 1-4).

ragion') desire to compete with younger lovers. The *canto* then ends with an elaboration on Ariosto's image of the bear, in order to reproduce the final couplet. Terracina's concern in this *canto* revolves around the twin poles of female oppression and male aggression, and although some attempt is made to clarify the reasons underlying the latter dynamic, the poet is less tolerant of those in thrall to lust than Ariosto's narrator would appear to be.

Terracina also deals with accusations concerning solely women in her *Discorso*, namely the misogynistic prejudices of the female sex as wicked, vain, fickle, unfaithful and lustful. Three *canti* in particular (XXII, XXVIII and XXVI) address these issues. In *canto* XXII, enigmatically entitled 'Alle maligne donne, si come il seme si raccoglie il frutto', Terracina purports to examine the 'undesirable' side of the female character in the light of male accusations. Ariosto's *proemio* at this point in the *Furioso* also deals with the subject of 'wicked women', with the narrator apologizing to female readers for his treatment of Gabrina in the previous *canto*, nonetheless including a verbal swipe at the perceived rarity of female loyalty:

> Cortesi donne e grate al vostro amante,
> voi che d'un solo amor sète contente,
> come che certo sia, fra tante e tante,
> che rarissime siate in questa mente;
> non vi dispiaccia quel ch'io dissi inante,
> quando contra Gabrina fui sì ardente...(*OF* XXII, i, ll. 1-6)

The narrator promises instead to praise one hundred women for each woman exposed as worthy of blame ('Per una che biasmar cantando ardisco / [...] / lodarne cento incontra m'offerisco', *OF* XXII, iii, ll. 1-3), although the reader of the *Furioso* has by now become wary of such narratorial professions of faith. Terracina's *proemio* addresses those women who cannot be placed in the same category as 'wicked women', creating a divide that will run throughout the *canto*, although this is later subject to some ambiguity:

Donne gentil, magnanime, e costante,
Non date orecchia al mio parlar si brosco,
Che 'l canto mi fa il cor duro diamante,
E la man pigra, e lo mio ingegno fosco;
Né il desio vuol, ch'a dir piu vada inante
Per biasmar Donne; io questo ben conosco:
Ma non mi sforzerà tanto la rima,
Che giù le buone, & le vil ponga in cima.(ll. 1-8)

In these lines, the poet anticipates objections both to her style and her subject matter from noble and constant women, who do not fit into the mould shaped by Ariosto. She blames the *canto* (l. 3) of the *Furioso* that has caused her to have to deal with this subject, albeit with some confusion: her heart has been hardened, perhaps with anger, in readiness for a response, yet her hand is slow to pick up a pen in reply and her mind befuddled. Her own art is nevertheless consciously dictated by Ariosto's work, to which she refers again in line seven ('la rima'). Although her will rebels against the idea of blaming and reproaching women (ll. 5-6), she promises fairness in her treatment of the topic (ll. 7-8, which again delineate the categories of 'good' and 'bad' women).

In what at first appears to be a condemnation of female vice, the poet adopts the same tone of outrage as in *canto* V, albeit directed apparently towards her own sex. The body of the *canto* opens with a series of set rhetorical questions ('Chi mi darà la voce, e le parole? / Chi tanta forza a la mia lingua spira?', XXII, i, ll. 1-2),[44] leading to the establishment of the motivation behind her outburst ('Poi che 'l canto mi spinge e il dover vuole, / C'habbia col sesso mio da pormi in ira', XXII, i, ll. 3-4). Not only is she goaded to a response by Ariosto's *canto*, but she also feels it her duty to berate her own sex for wrong-doing. In this first stanza, the division between virtuous and wicked is made clear, in verse that nonetheless subtly manipulates the

[44] Terracina borrows the line 'Chi mi darà la voce e le parole' from an earlier *canto* in Ariosto (*OF* III, i, l. 1).

line from the *Furioso* via punctuation, so that an emphasis exists on the fact that virtue does not appear to exclude the indulgence of one's lover:

> Benché non parlerà mia roca lira
> Contra l'honeste, saggie, alme, e costante
> Cortesi Donne; e grate al vostro amante.[45](XXII, i, ll. 6-8)

The following stanza continues the theme of self-deprecation and anxiety over offending readers, but also contains an idea crucial to the whole *canto*, namely that of action on behalf of the 'good' category of women, whose reputation is sullied by those of a less honourable disposition, and who then risk being tainted by association ('Ma l'honor de l'honeste mi sublima / L'ingegno; ch'al dir male unque non usa', XXII, ii, ll. 5-6).

Terracina then changes tack and devotes the central section of the *canto* to an exploration of the female character, in an attempt to understand the accusations levelled against women by men. She appears to concede some ground to the misogynist movement, with an appraisal of female traits that somewhat modifies, if not completely contradicts, her earlier assertions in *canto* XIII, where the fault for the supposed lack of female virtue lay entirely with men's lack of chivalry. Her third stanza picks out the traits of pride and vanity as the potential basis for women's downfall, although she also suggests that the female love of flattery has been exacerbated by social circumstance:

> Questa malvagia vanagloria spesso
> Riduce il seme feminile a noia;
> Perché l'ingegno l'è inclinato e messo
> In quest'esser lodato, in questa gioia...(XXII, iii, ll. 1-4)

A reputation for fickleness and lust then follows, even if these accusations are unjust; and Terracina paints a duly negative outlook in her fourth stanza:

> Qual Donna fia, che con un solo amante

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[45] There is no semi-colon in this line in the *Furioso*.

Stia lieta, stia beata, e stia contenta?
Chi vuol, chi sprezza, e chi si fa incostante,
Ogni picciol desio tosto l'ha spenta:
Da i crini insino a i piè tutt'è vacante,
E ne vorria cambiare il giorno trenta...(XXII, iv, ll. 1-6)

Although this stanza could be interpreted as being straightforwardly moralizing in tone, the onslaught against the female character assumes an overtone of theatricality particularly when contrasted with the final two lines, which undercut the melodramatic angle in a neat reversal of Ariosto's sentiment. In the *Furioso*, the narrator had declared his scepticism over the existence of many 'good' women (*OF* XXII, i, ll. 3-4, quoted earlier), whilst Terracina reformats the line to complete her statement that it is the 'undesirable' women outlined above who are not, in fact, very common: 'Bench'io tengo per fermo: nel presente / Che rarissime siete in questa mente' (XXII, iv, ll. 7-8).

The fifth stanza also provides a slightly ambiguous take on the issue of 'wicked women'. Continuing the portrayal of received male views, the poet launches into another list of undesirable characteristics associated with women, such as faithlessness and deception:

Non si trova con noi fe', né speranza,
Né ad alcun nostro dir s'have a dar fede.
Tristo è colui che di noi faccia stanza;
De la chiara bugia già semo herede.
Né regna in noi fermezza, né costanza,
Questa con mille si conosce, & vede...(XXII, v, ll. 1-6)

It is interesting to note the poet's appropriation of the first person plural in the first five lines of this stanza, specifically with the repetition of *noi*. Despite the distancing effect created by line six, the 'we' portrayed seems to encompass all women, even though the poet clearly does not bracket herself with the wicked women she is so keen to reproach. Although the possibility of satire within the stanza can only be mooted tentatively, given the poet's predilection for a moral stance elsewhere in the *Discorso*,

the generalization within these lines may hint at the subversion of male prejudices, even if it does not indulge in outright ridicule of them. However, the final two lines of this stanza then revert to the separation of 'good' and 'bad' women, as if Terracina is conscious of having caused offence with her generalization ('Però Donne gentili, alme, e festante, / Non vi dispiaccia quel ch'io diss'inante', XXII, v, ll. 7-8), although Ariosto's line again carries a hint of irony when used in this context, as if the poet recognizes the rather ambivalent attitude of the narrator of the *Furioso*.

The stanza that follows constitutes a return to a more serious tone, with its exploration of the potentially fatal consequences of this 'bad' female behaviour. A note of authorial sympathy for such 'fallen women' can even be discerned, since their lives are effectively ruined ('Ma quante errando per il mondo vanno, / Et quante in li spitai si veggon strutte', XXII, vi, ll. 1-2). This stanza sits uneasily between an understanding of the wider view, in which help is needed for all women, or all will be damned as stereotypes ('Non pensamo nel fin, del nostro danno: / Corremo cieche al precipitio tutte', XXII, vi, ll. 3-4), and a conscious authorial distancing from female weakness, which is criticized ('Hor d'un breve voler, si lungo affanno;[46] / Peggio è dipoi, che siam nomate putte', XXII, vi, ll. 5-6; depending on the specific attribution of *siam*, these lines could be interpreted either as criticizing the fact that all women are damned for one woman's lapse, or as criticizing the fact that women are unfairly tainted with the name of prostitute after just one moment of weakness, although the former seems more likely).

However, the final stanza proves to be similarly open to interpretation, especially since textual transmission, in terms of typographical continuity, is problematic for one particular phrase, which then influences the remainder of the

[46] Apart from the religious connotations of sin and punishment associated with the 'lungo affanno' of line 5, the phrase may also refer to the physical consequences of the 'breve voler', i.e. conception, birth etc.

stanza. Terracina appears once again to be differentiating between the categories of virtuous and wicked women at the beginning of the stanza, but then makes a more subtle point if a certain 'thread' of textual transmission can be relied upon:

> Come vi ho detto, dico, e dirò puro,
> Non parlo io già di queste donne tale,
> C'hanno l'ingegno lor tutto maturo,
> Ma contra a le cagion di tanto male;
> Che pongono, & han posto in loco oscuro
> Il nostro honor, con le lor voglie frale...(XXII, vii, ll. 1-6)

The 1550 edition contains an interesting variant in line four, with 'elle' appearing instead of 'a le', but the phrase 'contra a le cagion' is unchanging in later editions. This would result in at least two possible readings.[47] With 'elle', the separation of virtuous and wicked women is again emphasized in the stanza, and the poet clarifies in lines 1-3 that she does not mean to reproach those women who have their minds set on things of a higher nature. The 'elle' (wicked women) of line four then constitute the reason for 'tanto male', the tainted reputation of the female sex, since their 'voglie frale' have obscured the honour of the virtuous (and *nostro* here implies this group of women, including the poet herself). However, if the phrase is taken as 'a le cagion', the *donne* of line two assumes a more general meaning, and the poet implies that she does not wish to berate them as such, but rather the reasons for their behaviour ('le cagion di tanto male'). Since the lines that follow (5-6) suggest actual individuals with 'voglie frale', the *cagion* in question could be interpreted as being men themselves, which would indeed fit in with the sentiment of *canto* XIII. The *nostro* of line six would then refer to women in general, whose reputation is ruined by male lust.

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[47] The two possibilities can be translated as follows: 'contra elle cagion di tanto male' would mean 'against those women, the cause of so much evil', whilst 'contra a le cagion di tanto male' would mean 'against the reasons for [or cause of] so much evil'.

Given the textual evidence, the case for the second scenario is plausible, and indicates that Terracina was aware of the bigger picture behind the so-called 'bad behaviour' of certain women, namely the role played by men themselves, which could lead to prostitution, poverty and illness amongst other things. The final lines of this stanza, from the *Furioso*, are again tacked a little artificially onto the end ('Et s'anchor son per spendervi alcun verso, / Di lei biasmando l'animo perverso', XXII, vii, ll. 7-8): they refer to the narrator's hatred for Gabrina, and whilst the latter is not specifically discussed by Terracina, her wickedness provides the basis for a wider examination of the female character, and for a reflection on the reasons why certain women act the way they do, along with the subsequent consequences for all women. As I have discussed, Terracina's *canto* XXII does not endorse an outright condemnation of wicked women; instead, it puts forward a vision of female wrong-doing that delves beneath the surface of standard rhetoric and allows for the expression of ambiguity in male-female relationships. There is nonetheless a defiantly feminist edge to her writings, and the defence of her sex is never far from her poetic agenda in the *Discorso*.

This can be seen to full effect in *canto* XXVIII, entitled 'A gli huomini nimici delle donne'. This *canto* is written in outraged response to the corresponding *canto* in the *Furioso*, which contains the bawdy tale told by the innkeeper to Rodomonte – who in the previous *canto* gave vent to his rage against women in a particularly misogynistic passage, having been discarded by Doralice for Mandricardo[48] – detailing the adventures of Astolfo, King of the Lombards, and Iocondo, in their discovery of their wives' respective infidelities, and in their subsequent attempt to

[48] Although Rodomonte's misogyny turns out to be misplaced, as mentioned in Chapter One: his prejudices against women are overturned not only by the wise old man in the inn and the narrator of the *Furioso*, but also by Rodomonte himself, as he promptly falls in love with the supremely virtuous Isabella at the end of *canto* XXVIII/beginning of *canto* XXIX.

chart various instances of female inconstancy. These culminate in the story of Fiammetta, who manages to entertain a third lover, whilst simultaneously lying in bed between Astolfo and Iocondo (*OF* XXVIII, iv-lxxiv). The innkeeper's tale is balanced out in the *Furioso* by the objections of 'un uom d'età, ch'avea più retta / opinïon degli altri, e ingegno e ardire' (*OF* XXVIII, lxxvi, ll. 1-2), who is afforded a small speech in the defence of women (*OF* XXVIII, lxxvi-lxxxiii). In the *proemio* itself, Ariosto's narrator coyly appeals to his women readers to skip the *canto*, for fear that it will offend them ('Donne, e voi che le donne avete in pregio, / per Dio, non date a questa istoria orecchia', *OF* XXVIII, i, ll. 1-2; 'Lasciate questo canto, che senza esso / può star l'istoria, e non sarà men chiara', *OF* XXVIII, ii, ll. 1-2), although he claims that the uneducated male voice relating the tale cannot in any way harm the female reputation ('ben che né macchia vi può dar né fregio / lingua sì vile', *OF* XXVIII, i, ll. 5-6). His own protestations of love and respect for the female sex are also in evidence (*OF* XXVIII, ii, ll. 5-8), although their sincerity is, characteristically, somewhat dubious.

Terracina's *canto* adopts some of the tenets of the older man's speech in the *Furioso*, although there is some vacillation between *voi* and *tu*, at times making the meaning a little obscure. This is seen in her own *proemio*, which condemns men's apparently sadistic desire to debase women; the poet begins with a general second person plural which inexplicably changes in the third line to second person singular, and then changes back again:

> Che sdegno è il vostro, e che superbo amore,
> Che spesso contra a noi l'animo agogna?
> Non credi tu, che non puo tor l'odore
> A mille altri animai una carogna;
> Per una, o due che v'han sdegnato il core,
> Date a cento dipoi biasmo, e vergogna.
> Mille gemme d'un peso, e d'un colore
> Non seranno però sotto un valore.(ll. 1-8)

Her central concern here is the danger of generalization, as seen in *canto* XXII; one or two wicked women cause men unjustly to tar all women with the same brush, as she points out in two two-line 'proverbial' statements designed to undermine this generalized view (ll. 3-4 and 7-8 above). Lines 5-6 echo the response to the innkeeper in the *Furioso*, in which the older man claims that the originator of such a tale is misguided in his labelling of all women as inconstant ('L'avere ad una o due malivolenza, / fa ch'odia e biasma l'altre oltre all'onesto', *OF* XXVIII, lxxvii, ll. 5-6) and that the proportion of 'good' to 'bad' women is in favour of the former category ('di cento potrà dir degne d'onore / verso una trista che biasmar si debbe', *OF* XXVIII, lxxviii, ll. 3-4).

Terracina, in her *proemio*, again attempts to break down stereotypical views of women, including the categories into which they are thrust; it is this element of the innkeeper's tale – the seemingly inevitable and almost pre-determined aspect of female infidelity – that she finds most disturbing, and to which she reacts most strongly. Her own *canto* begins with the refutation of all 'truths' claimed by the innkeeper, and with an implicit accusation aimed at Ariosto as author of the whole *canto* ('Il canto, e questo hostier falso, e bugiardo / Gridan ch'io scriva, e dica contra a noi...', XXVIII, i, ll. 1-2). However, she refuses to let her own art be entirely dictated by the precedent of the *Furioso*, and declares that the story is not worthy of her attention ('Ma, perché è vile, indegno del mio sguardo, / Non bisogna altrimente oprarmi in voi', XXVIII, i, ll. 3-4, although the exact designation of *voi* is left unclear). In this first stanza, Ariosto's line is used to complete both the poet's retort to the innkeeper and the command to her readers to ignore his sentiments, in an ironic take on the narrator's words ('Tenete dunque lui a vil dispregio / Donne; e voi che le Donne havete in pregio', XXVIII, i, ll. 7-8).

The second stanza revolves around a 'call to arms', as the poet asks who will come forward and defend women, despite her own passionate involvement in their defence:

> Chi sarà mai si dolce, e si gentile,
> Et c'habbia alcun veder, fama, & honore,
> Che spieghi l'ali de l'ingegno al vile
> Mormorar de l'altrui fama, & valore
> Contra le donne...(XXVIII, ii, ll. 1-5)

The recurrence of the adjective *vile*, with its multiple meanings (cowardly, base, wicked, humble) again points to the uneducated nature of this view of women, as seen in the source text (the innkeeper's 'lingua sì vile', *OF* XXVIII, i, l. 6). Just as Terracina suggested in earlier *canti* that maltreatment of women is based on a lack of logic and reasoning, so she posits that it can also be due to a lack of education and understanding. Since the dissemination of such misogynistic views is, however, highly damaging to women, her concern is to influence readers to the extent that they do not form negative impressions in the first place, in a studied 'correction' of Ariosto's text. The third stanza appears to deviate slightly from the general thrust of the *canto*, opening with a description that could refer to the 'unenlightened' innkeeper himself ('Colui ch'è si nel duol, convien disfarlo, / Che quanto l'è piu vil, piu si lamenta', XXVIII, iii, ll. 1-2); the final lines return nonetheless to the poet's exhortation to her readers not to believe his tale ('Però non date a questa historia pregio, / A questa che l'hostier dire [sic] in dispregio', XXVIII, iii, ll. 7-8).

The remainder of the *canto* alternates between a confusing mixture of *voi* and *tu*, the first of which refers to men in general, and the second of which refers supposedly to the innkeeper. In stanzas that are at times difficult to analyse owing to the opaque use of certain grammatical constructions, Terracina claims that the telling of such tales only reflects badly on the speaker:

C'honor perdio, che fama ricevete
In dir male di cui ne ode, ne sente?
Che ne portate al fin? che pur n'havete
Sol biasmo, sol vergogna, e fuoco ardente...(XXVIII, iv, ll. 1-4)

Indeed, in a re-working of the older man's defence in the *Furioso*, she demands an equality of position on the subject, so that those men who accuse are forced to look at themselves before passing judgement on women.[49] At this point she appears to aim particularly at the innkeeper himself:

Quando tu nel mal dir ti poni al ballo,
Fa pria che 'l dishonor da te sia pianto,
A ciò che nel parlar non facci fallo
E quel dicesti, te fia doglia in tanto...(XXVIII, v, ll. 3-6)

although she comments on the 'lingue serpentine' (XXVIII, v, l. 7) who propagate such myths in the same stanza. In an attempt to dissuade future detractors of women from slanderous acts, the poet emphasizes that current behaviour is an indicator of future fortunes, employing the image of reaping what one sows ('Non scorgi tu, che come spargi il seme, / Cosi ricogli, e cosi havrai lo frutto?', XXVIII, vi, ll. 1-2). She concludes that ignominious behaviour from disreputable figures only serves to cast doubt on the veracity of their arguments and their own authority and credibility ('Dunque chi è vil da se parlar non può, / Né dare honor, né toglierne ad alcuno', XXVIII, vii, ll. 1-2), ultimately dismissing the innkeeper's tale as bearing no relation to reality, and thus re-affirming the largely unblemished nature of the female reputation.

If the dangers of generalization and gender stereotyping are at the forefront of Terracina's poetic response to the *Furioso* in these *canti*, she is in no doubt as to the potential of 'good' women. Her *canto* XXVI acts as a verbal antidote to negative images of women, despite a degree of adherence to the received view of the past as

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[49] Terracina nonetheless displays a certain disingenuousness in her adoption of the defence that the old man had already started in the *Furioso*: she appears to claim for herself what Ariosto had already tried to do, whilst still pretending to 'correct' him.

idealized golden age. The latter idea is seen in Ariosto's *proemio*, which mourns the apparent loss of women who strive for virtue, not material gain:

> Cortesi donne ebbe l'antiqua etade,
> che le virtù, non le richezze, amaro:
> al tempo nostro si ritrovan rade
> a cui, più del guadagno, altro sia caro.(*OF* XXVI, i, ll. 1-4)

The narrator celebrates Bradamante in particular as being worthy of eternal glory, since she loves neither the *tesor* nor the *impero* (*OF* XXVI, ii, l. 2) of Ruggiero, instead favouring his virtue and nobility; this then reflects back onto her own standing. Terracina dedicates her *canto* to two women, Vittoria and Geronima Colonna, already indicating the undisputed existence of contemporary virtuous women. Their excellence is equated with that of women in the past, in a *proemio* that differentiates between Terracina's *stile* and their own:

> Magnanime Signore io son ben certa,
> Che non sarà l'ingegno al dir si pronto
> Di tanto lodar voi quanto si merta;
> Ma, perché al vostro stil tosto m'ha gionto,
> Farà la rima, la mia lingua esperta,
> Poscia che di lodarvi ha tolto assonto:
> Ma s'io perdendo al fin vo mie fatiche
> Colpa è di voi, c'havete stil d'antiche.(ll. 1-8)

The poet compares her own literary style to that of the two women, to unfavourable effect; yet the point she makes is that these contemporary writers do indeed stand up to the *antiche* of the past.

In the body of the *canto*, she launches into a celebration of the glory of women from the 'antiqua etade', focussing on female warriors:

> O famose Donzelle, o Donne altere,
> O fama eterna che nel ciel rimbomba,
> O magnanimo seme, alme guerriere
> Del tempo antico; o risonante tromba...(XXVI, i, ll. 1-4)

Again, the 'seed' mentioned in line three indicates that these early women of note laid down the foundations for the blossoming of female achievement in similar spheres in

later times. The poet exalts the fame of these women ('Il nome sparso in l'uno, e l'altro polo / Gia ne fa fede; & arme, e lancie, e spade', XXVI, ii, ll. 1-2), especially since it provides defenders of the female sex with a basis of exemplary behaviour to which they can refer when challenged ('Tal, che del sesso nostro unico, e solo / Fian chiara luce in ogni cieca etade', XXVI, ii, ll. 3-4). The central section of the *canto*, however, moves into more ambiguous territory: Terracina firstly seems to cast some doubt on the widespread prevalence of women of worth, and then lingers on the presence of women who desire material gain rather than virtue. In the third stanza, she appears to suggest that fate conspires against women in the process of achievement of their due recognition, again manipulating Ariosto's line (quoted above) to include this explanation of the so-called lack of female virtue:

> Bench'io non dissi, né dirò giamai,
> Che non siano hoggi qui donne piu accorte:
> Ma, perché il giusto honor nostro, piu assai
> Di giorno in giorno vien crescendo forte,
> Non possiamo da noi meno hoggimai
> Oprar l'ingegno a prevaler la sorte;
> Et però[50] di vertù le vere strade
> Al tempo nostro si ritrovan rade.(XXVI, iii, ll. 1-8)

She goes on to state that all women are not born equal, in terms of both material wealth and spiritual qualities ('non son generale / Le gratie, di cui il ciel n'è tanto avaro', XXVI, iv, ll. 3-4), introducing a sense of pessimism into her evaluation of the female character at this point ('Ch'io pur ne veggio d'ingegno si frale, / Ch'ogni picciol desio li fa riparo', XXVI, iv, ll. 5-6). The following stanza also bemoans the 'cecità di core' (XXVI, v, l. 1) in certain women who are too attached to earthly riches; yet Terracina again turns around the sentiment of Ariosto's narrator in the defence of her sex, contriving a deliberately positive ending to the sixth stanza ('Ma

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[50] The meaning of *perciò* can be understood in this context; I include this note for clarification of this particular stanza, since Terracina is not always consistent in the Renaissance use of *però*.

pur fra quelle d'hoggi ch'io preparo / Non seguon de le piu lo stile avaro', XXVI, vi, ll. 7-8). Ariosto's line intended 'de le piu' to mean the majority of women who are indeed materialistic ('Ma quelle che per lor vera bontade / non seguon de le più lo stile avaro', *OF* XXVI, i, ll. 5-6), whilst Terracina manipulates it so that it encompasses the majority of 'good' women.[51]

In these three *canti* dealing with accusations against the female character, the poet is careful to balance her concessions towards a realistic portrayal of the female sex – which includes unfavourable judgements – with a positive final view of women, often re-formatting Ariosto's lines so that they ultimately carry a different meaning. Frequently revealing a distinctly feminist edge to her writings in the process, she is quick to combat the negative or misogynistic opinions both of the narrator of the *Furioso* and of characters within it. In her discussion of the plot-lines within the *Furioso*, she displays a marked awareness of the implications of the various fictional incidents on female characters, using these episodes as a template for further commentary on the wider gender issues raised by them.

She explores the multi-faceted nature of male-female relationships with particular emphasis on the 'female' consequences of 'male' actions such as cruelty and violence; indeed, the maltreatment of women constitutes a major focus of her *Discorso*, with the poet lingering on the subjects of lust, abandonment and lack of chivalry in men. She suggests reasons for the perception of female behaviour in certain situations, always declaring that the majority of women cannot be included in the misogynistic stereotyping of the time, and often pointing towards men as the actual source of female misconduct. The *Discorso* can thus be considered an early

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[51] Regarding Ariosto's line 'Non seguon de le più lo stile avaro', as with 'Che rarissime siete in questa mente' of *canto* XXII, Cox comments that Terracina 'mitigates Ariosto's attack by pointedly inverting his estimates of the proportions of the corrupt and the virtuous' (Cox, 'Women as Readers...', op. cit., p. 136, n. 7).

and significant feminist response not only to the fictional workings of the *Furioso*, incorporating Ariosto's complex presentation of gender issues, but also to the contemporary debate on women, the *querelle des femmes*. Her *Discorso* may be seen as taking part in the movement for the defence of women, with an authorial bias that self-consciously attempts to engage with gendered readings both of a recognized literary text, and of behavioural patterns within contemporary society itself.

The Feminist Message of the 'Discorso': The Pen as Weapon

One of the most original and interesting aspects of Terracina's *Discorso* is its form of 'literary' feminist thought: as a woman writer, she not only appeals to but positively commands her women readers to break out of the confines of traditional female roles – such as the keeper of the household, enshrined in domesticity – and to embrace the virtues of study and scholarship, that they may then be judged on the same footing as men in the pursuit of intellectual excellence.[52] These concerns surface in several parts of the *Discorso*, and collectively constitute a kind of 'apologia for the woman writing'.[53] As has already been demonstrated, the poet is clearly aware of gender issues within the *Furioso*, taking numerous opportunities to discuss the intricacies of male-female relationships, whether in the fiction of Ariosto's epic or in the wider reality of sixteenth-century Italy; yet she is particularly innovative in her exhortation to women readers of the *Discorso* to follow her own example and take up the pen as a means of expression and retaliation against the male-dominated literary sphere.

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[52] For an interesting look at the 'pictorial propaganda' used to promote certain ideas of female behaviour, see Sara F. Matthews Grieco, 'Persuasive Pictures: Didactic Prints and the Construction of the Social Identity of Women in Sixteenth-Century Italy', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 285-314.

[53] I here allude to the feminist-tinged 1641 essay 'Apology for the Woman Writing' by Marie le Jars de Gournay (1565-1645); cf. Marie le Jars de Gournay, *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*, ed. & trans. Richard Hillman & Colette Quesnel (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 107-54.

Indeed, beneath the conventions of modesty regarding the poet's *stile* (literary style) and *ingegno* (intellectual capacity or ability) lies a self-conscious anxiety that nonetheless succeeds in drawing attention to Terracina's very status as a female writer. This anxiety is discernible in several parts of the *Discorso*, and Terracina exploits the nature of the commentary to expose not only her own 'act' of writing but also the potential literary output of women in general, whom she champions. Her *canto* III, taking its cue from Ariosto's *proemio*,[54] is entirely devoted to the difficulties associated with writing adequately for a 'lofty' subject matter, and incorporates the poet's worries over her own ability to complete her self-appointed task, along with a meditation on the actual process of writing. The *canto* is dedicated to Don Garcia Toledo, and centres around Terracina's concern that she will not be able to praise him in a fitting manner, as seen in her own *proemio*:

> Come potrò inalzar queste basse ale
> Tanto nel ciel; che l'aspra lingua mia
> Possa la virtù vostra, alta, e immortale
> Narar in parte in ciascun loco u' sia...(ll. 3-6)

In this necessarily self-reflexive context, the poet draws attention to her need for 'divine inspiration' in the correlation of desire to write well with ability to write well ('Hor qual gratia dal ciel, mi darà ingegno / Pari al desio, c'ho di lodar costui?', III, i, ll. 1-2). In the set of rhetorical questions that follows these lines, the poet's modesty is expressed in her reliance on the support of others for her own literary representation:

> E chi poi mi sarà guida, e sostegno
> Ch'io non manchi fra tanti gesti sui;
> Chi mi concederà stil raro e degno,
> Che poggi il verso, ov'è 'l ben far di lui?
> Et di por la sua fama sopra il Sole,
> Chi mi darà la voce, e le parole?(III, i, ll. 3-8)

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[54] Cf. 'Chi mi darà la voce e le parole / convenïenti a sì nobil suggetto? / chi l'ale al verso presterà, che vole / tanto ch'arrivi all'alto mio concetto? / Molto maggior di quel furor che suole, / ben or convien che mi riscaldi il petto...' (*OF* III, i, ll. 1-6).

Yet this stylized opening to the *canto* also allows her to state her own claim for recognition as the author of the *Discorso*: despite the *voce* and *parole* of Ariosto's line here – and of his epic poem as Terracina's linguistic and thematic 'model' in general – the poet exercises her own freedom over the manipulation of the *Furioso*, and the poetic voice that results is ultimately her own.

She goes on to place her own 'gendered' stamp on the *canto* by the use of adjectives that reveal her sex ('Temo si forte dar principio a questo, / Sol per non rimaner nel fin pentita', III, ii, ll. 1-2; 'quasi di mia mente uscita', III, ii, l. 6). These devices, masked by the conventions of authorial modesty, serve surreptitiously to underline the fact that the *Discorso* is the product of a female *ingegno*; and Terracina even appropriates the Petrarchan idiom in the expression of her desire to write in an elevated style:

> Voglia mi stringe, e il non poter mi morde,
> Il desio vuole, e l'ignoranza nega,
> L'animo cresce, e son le forze sorde,
> L'ardir contra al timor l'ingegno spiega;
> E con la penna è il mio voler discorde...(III, iii, ll. 1-5)

In adapting the male canon of love poetry for her own ends, the poet displays her self-confidence, despite the fact that her poetic sentiment here is intended to showcase an overt anxiety regarding her literary inadequacy. This conspicuous self-deprecation can be seen in the poet's description of her 'basso ingegno' (III, iv, l. 3) and in her attack on the Muses for their lack of guidance in her poetic journey[55] ('E meco ha ben di ciò la Musa il torto, / Che non mi dà lo stil leggiadro, e altero', III, v, ll. 5-6), culminating in the suspension of writing itself ('Onde la man si ferma, e l'alma geme, / E di caldo timor il cor mi trema', III, vi, ll. 5-6). The actual process of inspiration, followed by the act of writing, is thus alluded to in this stanza, with the poet ending

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[55] Terracina also employs Ariosto's metaphor of the boat as poetic impetus in her own *canto* ('Perché la barca mia fuor è del porto / Con aspro vento...', III, v, ll. 1-2).

on a positive note that neatly incorporates Ariosto's line ('Alhor dico io, destando il bel concetto, / Ben'hor convien, che mi riscaldi il petto', III, vi, ll. 7-8).

It would appear at this point that the poet has succeeded in harnessing the poetic energy with which she is attempting to engage; yet the final stanza of this *canto* casts some doubt over the positive assertion cited above. She returns to her previous fears of inadequate expression of her dedicatee's qualities, exhorting the latter to articulate them himself ('Dunque, se non poss'io dir quel che sete, / Cantate voi, poi che 'l timor m'assale', III, vii, ll. 1-2). However, she does not entirely rule out the possibility of completing her task, and hints at a latent desire for immortality through the production of such literary works, albeit with a dedicatee as 'catalyst' for her own standing ('Et se per gratia almen me 'l concedete, / Fatemi voi, ch'altri non puo, immortale', III, vii, ll. 3-4). This *canto*, which revolves around the difficulties of writing owing to a supposed lack of *ingegno*, nevertheless exhibits an accomplished grasp of both literary conventions and poetic forms, simultaneously drawing attention to and reinforcing the status of the author as female writer.

The same anxiety over her *ingegno* can be seen in *canto* XVIII, in which the poet wonders how to describe the qualities of Don Pedro de Toledo, Viceroy of Naples. She again laments the imperfect nature of her literary style:

> Conosco chiaramente, che 'l mio stile
> Non è si altero, né cosi perfetto,
> (Dico Don Pietro mio saggio, e gentile)
> Ch'incitar possa il basso mio intelletto,
> Che vaglia dir, del dolce, signorile
> Vostro governo...(XVIII, i, ll. 1-6)

This manifestation of modesty also includes an awareness of her audience, and the potential reception of her literary output ('Certo ch'io temo incominciar l'impresa / Acciò ch'a me non resti infamia molta', XVIII, ii, ll. 1-2, lines which confirm the position of the *Discorso* as a work of literature requiring possible justification of the

author's point of view, or as opening debate on a certain subject). After threatening to withdraw entirely from her proposed task – again drawing attention to the very act of writing – Terracina then praises her dedicatee's virtue, and eventually entrusts her *stile* to him in the hope of immortality ('Inchino in voi mio stile, in voi l'ascondo, / Et da voi si farà tutto immortale', XVIII, vii, ll. 3-4). Despite assuming a deferential position in relation to these (male) dedicatees, Terracina clearly hopes for a literary legacy that will rival those of her male contemporaries; as a female writer, her quest for poetic glory is doubly significant. Furthermore, in *canto* XX, which in many ways acts as an antidote to *canto* XXII, the poet responds to male critics by sketching a manifesto of 'Renaissance woman', inspired by the qualities of her dedicatee, Isabella Colonna. Ariosto's *proemio* at this point in the *Furioso* is also concerned with the matter of the worth of women in arms and letters (*OF* XX, i-iii). The narrator declares that women have already proven their ability in both fields, but that the envy and ignorance of male writers have suppressed their fame ('forse ascosi han lor debiti onori / l'invidia o il non saper degli scrittori', *OF* XX, ii, ll. 7-8, and we may note the rather barbed insertion of *forse*); however, he claims to see the talent of many contemporary women, who will re-dress the current imbalance and whose renown will be recorded in literature for years to come. Although Terracina does not examine the complex relationship between female achievement and male envy in this *canto*, she broaches the subject in *canto* V, and goes some way towards answering the question in later *canti*, as I shall demonstrate.

Meanwhile, her *canto* XX, which again displays modesty in the assessment of her *stile* and *lingua* (poetic language), uses the example of Isabella Colonna for a subtle readjustment of negative male attitudes towards women. An idea of her subject is given in Terracina's *proemio*, which mentions the existence of 'Donne famose in

arme & in costumi' (l. 2), and which extols the virtues of Isabella Colonna in particular. The poet begins her *canto* on a self-deprecating note, unsure that due praise of the female sex will raise her level of writing to an equally high standard:

> Non crediate perciò, ch'io Donna sono
> Che purgar possa, né far piu virile
> La roca lingua mia, con piu bel suono
> In esaltare il sesso feminile,
> Per benché a tutti quel vetato dono
> Il ciel non porge, né ci fa simile...(XX, i, ll. 1-6)

I shall discuss the notion of *virile* as 'better' in terms of writing, and 'gendered' writing itself, further on in this section; the point of interest in these lines is the idea that an exalted subject – in this case, the female sex – may engender an improvement in the actual style of writing. Terracina expects criticism of her *stile* ('Ma biasmo piu che honor da molti aspetto', XX, ii, l. 2), perhaps also hinting at the struggle that women writers face in comparison to their male counterparts; yet the qualities of Isabella Colonna appear to raise her level of writing to a standard that can implicitly compete with men ('Pur la tanta virtù, qual date a noi / Fa lo mio stil piu dolce, e piu perfetto', XX, ii, ll. 5-6). Furthermore, the poet claims that Colonna's virtues bring the whole of the female sex into renown, in a deliberate inversion of previous negative generalizations concerning women. Her third stanza opens with lines that hammer home her point in a rhythmical structure of alternating anaphora:

> Voi sol fregiate il bel nome Colonna,
> Per voi s'honora il sesso feminile,
> Voi sola sete in questa etade Donna,
> Per voi si purga ogni indurato stile...(XX, iii, ll. 1-4)

Again, the idea of an exalted subject as being able to inspire a 'high' literary style is suggested; and Terracina includes herself amongst those who benefit from this example of female excellence.

The stanza that follows describes Colonna's achievements in all spheres, and lays out a type of manifesto for contemporary women to follow:

> Voi l'arme oprate ogn'hora, e la scrittura
> Come le donne antique opravan spesso;
> Voi sete con virtù tutta sicura
> Che la natura, e il ciel ve l'ha concesso.
> Voi presta sete a odir, nel parlar dura,
> Come conviene a si famoso sesso,
> E col vostro voler, e con le muse
> Gran nome in tutto il mondo si diffuse.(XX, iv, ll. 1-8)

Although Ariosto's 'donne antique' are mentioned as the paragon to be emulated,[56] the poet is keen to list the accomplishments of a contemporary female figure, placing the action of *scrittura* in a prominent position. Indeed, she ends the *canto* with the desire to focus on Colonna alone ('Lasciamo di parlar di queste antique, / E di voi sol, dica la rima mia', XX, vii, ll. 1-2), in lines that both draw attention to her own act of writing and successfully immortalize her female subject. In these three *canti* (III, XVIII and XX) concerning the poet's worries over her own *ingegno*, *stile* and *lingua*, any expression of doubt over her ability, whether sincere or stylized, is ultimately transcended by Terracina's desire to write itself – a desire clearly aided by an 'elevating' subject that, when female, seems to be particularly effective. The poet's awareness of gender issues extends to the relationship of women with literature, and her *Discorso* raises the questions both of 'gendered' writing, and of the place of women within the literary canon, to which I shall now turn.

The idea of writing as having a 'gendered' subtext, whether through its authorial presence, in its subject matter or its literary genre, enters into the equation even before the *Discorso* itself begins. In the preamble to Terracina's work, her poem to Lodovico Dolce raises the issue of 'masculine' and 'feminine' writing:

> Ecco il Discorso, pur Dolce gentile,

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[56] Cf. 'Le donne antique hanno mirabil cose / fatto ne l'arme e ne le sacre muse...' (*OF* XX, i, ll. 1-2).

In fretta da me visto, e non d'altrui,
E se la lingua mia fu si virile,
Perdon vi chieggio; e s'arrogante fui
Ch'io non sapea se 'l verso feminile
Fosse degno apparir dinanzi a vui.(ll. 1-6)

The poet appears to want to excuse her work for the 'masculine' (*virile*) nature of its poetic language, and thus implicitly its poetic subject, which we may take to mean the material of the *Furioso* in its capacity as epic poem, i.e. knights, heroes and warfare in general; indeed, the genre of epic poem was from antiquity traditionally associated with male authors. However, this is tempered by Terracina's description of her verse as *feminile*, and thus already belonging to a certain category of writing associated with women. The early impression gained by the reader is that the author of the *Discorso* is intent on enjoying the best of both worlds: her commentary may deal with an apparently 'male' subject matter but reserves the right to examine it in a 'female' key, thus upholding an ostensibly gendered approach.[57]

In any case, Terracina clearly appropriates the 'masculine' form of the epic in *ottava rima* and places it within the context of 'poesia femminile', as if she would like to widen the boundaries for women writers; up until this point, female literary production had remained largely within the parameters of Petrarchism, with poets such as Veronica Gambara (1485-1550), Vittoria Colonna (c.1490-1547) and Gaspara Stampa (1523-54) conforming, albeit to varying degrees, to received poetic practices. Indeed, the same women writers who challenge received misogynistic views by the publication of dialogues and treatises in defence of women (d'Aragona, Fonte and Marinella, as noted earlier) are also exponents of this appropriation of the *ottava* in the mode of the epic poem: d'Aragona with *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino* (1560), Fonte with her *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581) and Marinella with an epic

[57] Although the association attached to *feminile* here may also be interpreted as pertaining to love poetry, i.e. in the form of the sonnet; Terracina may thus be excusing her own sonnet production as being unworthy of Dolce's gaze, instead offering him her *Discorso* in *ottava rima*.

celebrating Venice, entitled *L'Enrico overo Bisanzio Riacquistato* (1635).[58] Terracina may thus be considered an important forerunner to these women writers, who all demonstrate a similar desire to engage with the male-dominated literary genres of dialogue and epic.

The opening of the *Discorso* also raises interesting questions as to the stated purpose of Terracina's work, and to the possible subversion of the epic genre itself. The commentary opens under the 'authority' of the Spanish emperor Charles V, to whom the first *canto* is dedicated. The language of Terracina's *proemio* contrives a parallel with the emperor Charlemagne of the *Furioso*, with its listing of positive qualities:

> S'invitto Imperator, se giusto, e saggio[59]
> Fu mai nel mondo, e di valor ripieno,
> Sete voi Carlo sol d'un bel coraggio,
> Magnanimo, gentile, alto, e sereno...(ll. 1-4)

After such a grandiose beginning – revolving around a male figure – the reader is primed to expect description of the valiant deeds of male knights in particular. However, Terracina undermines this expectation by opening her first stanza with a strong negative construction that overtly rejects description of male military leaders or heroes, at least from the past, as the subject of the *Discorso* – even though her poetic method forces her to reproduce Ariosto's exact line as the final one in her stanza:

> Non farò stanza qui di Scipione,
> Né di Cesare primo, né d'Achille,
> Né de l'empio, crudele, fier Nerone,

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[58] We may also note the poet Margherita Sarrocchi (c.1560-1618), whose epic poem *La Scanderbeide*, modelled on Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, and published in full in 1623, celebrates the Albanian hero George Scanderbeg, who fought against the Turks. On these authors and texts, see Cox, op. cit., in particular pp. 137-38 and 141-44; see also Chapter Four of the thesis. For an idea of manipulation of the tenets of Petrarchism in the Cinquecento, see Sara Maria Adler, 'Veronica Franco's Petrarchan *Terze Rime*: Subverting the Master's Plan', *Italica* 65 (1988), pp. 213-33; and Robert J. Rodini, 'Post-Petrarchism and Language(s) of Desire', in *Gendered Contexts: New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. Laura Benedetti, Julia L. Hairston & Silvia M. Ross (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1996), pp. 69-77; Rodini discusses Vittoria Colonna, Gaspara Stampa, Chiara Matraini and Michelangelo.

[59] Charlemagne is named a 'savio imperator' at the beginning of the *Furioso* (*OF* I, vii, l. 7).

Né d'Enea, né di Theseo, né di Tille,
Né de l'accorto, e saggio Salomone,
Né d'altre historie antique, che son mille;
Ma dirò quel, che fer con varii ardori,
Le Donne, i Cavalier, l'Arme e gli Amori.(I, i, ll. 1-8)[60]

Although the effect is one of distancing from these 'historie antique', it is also one of distancing from the 'prototype' male hero. Ariosto's narrator, on the other hand, is keen to emphasize the heroic exploits of his male protagonists ('Voi sentirete fra i più degni eroi, / che nominar con laude m'apparecchio', *OF* I, iv, ll. 1-2). Terracina's announcement in lines 7-8 of the nature of her subject matter gives the impression that she is about to embark on her own epic, and not simply a commentary on the *Furioso*; and this first *canto* focusses mainly on the question of the position of the writer – in this case the female writer – in relation to her subject matter.

Terracina states her claim to follow those who have already attained poetic glory, and lingers on those women in particular who have done so:

Potria largo imitar huomini, e donne,
Ch'in tante parti han posto lor Trofeo,
E di quei c'han lasciate e perle, e gonne,
Et ornato di lauro il crin febeo...(I, ii, ll. 1-4)[61]

The poet concedes here that the symbols of femininity – *perle* and *gonne* – are perhaps too defining or limiting to the female sex in the sphere of literature, and that female trappings must be left behind on the path to literary recognition. However, she is in no doubt as to her own desire to take on the intellectual challenge ('E per desio d'esercitarmi alquanto / Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto', I, ii, ll. 7-8), although this is inevitably linked to an expression of modesty ('Sovente aggiunto al basso pensier mio / Di ragionar di questi, & hor di quelli...', I, iii, ll. 1-2). The remainder of

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[60] Cf. *OF* I, i, ll. 1-2: 'Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto'.
[61] Alongside the more obvious device of self-naming in the word *lauro*, Terracina's description of 'il crin febeo' in line four may also be a subtle allusion to her own poetic name, Febea. See Fiora A. Bassanese, 'What's in a Name? Self-Naming and Renaissance Women Poets', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 104-15; Bassanese considers Gaspara Stampa, Tullia d'Aragona and Veronica Franco.

the *canto* embodies the poet's own visualization of the scenes of battle between Christians and Saracens in the *Furioso* ('Ma il pianto, il grido, il sparso sangue pio / Di Francia, dammi al cor duri flagelli', I, iii, ll. 3-4). As a female writer, Terracina displays awareness of the 'masculine' nature of her subject matter, and purports to be horrified by its violent aspects, especially since she has a prior knowledge of the events described in Ariosto's text ('Io ch'antiveggio il danno, e lo conosco, / Mi sgomento di tante vele horrende', I, iv, ll. 5-6). Despite the fact that Terracina does not ultimately dwell in any detail on specific scenes from the *Furioso* in her commentary, this *canto* raises the point of 'gendered' writing in terms of the relation of a certain subject matter to either male or female authorship, and this is explored further in *canto* XIV.

This *canto*, dedicated to the pontiff Julius III, takes the strand from Ariosto's *proemio* of the bloody nature of battle, and questions whether such material is fitting for a female writer. Her opening stanza appears to differentiate between 'masculine' and 'feminine' writing, based on subject matter and ensuing style, and also raises the issue of whether the female *ingegno* can effectively understand the ideas of battle and death, in order to write about them:

> A che condutto è 'l mio amoroso stile,
> A parlar d'ira, e ragionar di morte:
> Come potrà l'ingegno feminile
> Seguir di Marte il fier camin si forte?
> Sarà la penna mia tanto virile,
> Che voglia a ciò resister senza scorte?
> Veggio, c'havranno ugual pena e dispitti
> Ne i molti assalti, e 'n si crudel conflitti.[62](XIV, i, ll. 1-8)

The poet is uncertain that her so-called 'amoroso stile', which defines her as a female writer, is appropriate for the depiction of the 'masculine' subjects of anger and death

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[62] This is a minor change to Ariosto's line, which reads 'Nei molti assalti e nei crudel conflitti' (*OF* XIV, i, l. 1).

(*ira* and *morte*), which are linked by the idea of violence. She also wonders in lines 3-4 whether either her own, or a more general 'ingegno feminile', is equipped to deal with the realistic portrayal of battle – employing Mars, the god of war, as her point of reference – and in this way opens debate on the necessity of experience, as opposed to imagination, for the successful representation of events in the medium of fiction. Her use of the adjective *virile* to describe her pen in line five nonetheless clearly indicates the separation of 'male' and 'female' subject matters, and the poet then seems rather unsure of her poetic enterprise: lines 7-8 suggest that she will be forced to adopt a register to which she is not accustomed (the plural verb *havranno* pertaining to her *stile*, *ingegno* and *penna*, which must depict the brutality of *assalti* and *conflitti*).

However, the *canto* then continues in the vein of visualization of the very scene of battle that causes the poet anxiety. Terracina signals this visualization through the use of verbs of hearing and seeing ('Mi par d'udir Parigi in grido, e in pianto / Per l'Africano esercito, e in gran duolo', XIV, ii, ll. 1-2; 'Veggio in Parigi fuoco di grand'arte, / Ch'abbrucia, e infiamma, e di sera, e mattina', XIV, iii, ll. 5-6). Not only does she appear to champion the ability of the imagination over actual experience – despite having the text of the *Furioso* itself as her guide – but in her engagement with the 'masculine' domain of battle in the epic mode, she also implicitly refutes the notion of limiting female writers to 'feminine' subject matter, i.e. amorous or spiritual topics, usually expressed in the form of the Petrarchan sonnet. In the final stanza of the *canto*, Terracina modestly acknowledges her limitations as a female writer in this particular sphere of literature, but recognizes her need to placate the desire to write:

> Io temo d'essequir tanta aspra impresa,
> Che 'l sesso feminil d'arme non sente,
> E credo, che nel fin rimarrò offesa,
> Poi che il desio, né l'esser non consente;

Questo dirò, per non far piu contesa,
Et acquietar la mia superba mente.(XIV, vii, ll. 1-6)

In this *canto*, the poet raises the seemingly problematic issue of 'gendered' writing in the domain of the chivalric epic, only to prove her ability to master both the form and the content of the latter. Despite overt anxiety regarding her *ingegno* and *stile*, her introduction of gender issues into this context may indeed subvert traditional notions of the epic genre, whilst her engagement with Ariosto's work paves the way for future women writers to compose their own epic poems in *ottava rima*. As such, her *Discorso* proves to be an important landmark in the appropriation by women of literary subjects and forms traditionally considered to be exclusively 'masculine'.

I shall conclude this section on the feminist message of the *Discorso* with an examination of Terracina's desire to expose and denounce the suppression of the female voice (XXVII) and her subsequent appeal to women to write for themselves (XXXVII). The second of these two *canti* constitutes an answer to the first, as the poet determines her own solution to women's enforced silence. Her *canto* XXVII, dedicated to Isabella Villamarina, Princess of Salerno, reacts to the rather back-handed compliment given to women by Ariosto's narrator in the corresponding *proemio* of the *Furioso*, in which he declares that women's advice is sometimes best proffered without serious reflection, whilst men tend to think more before imparting wisdom:

Molti consigli de le donne sono
meglio improviso, ch'a pensarvi, usciti;
che questo è speziale e proprio dono
fra tanti e tanti lor dal ciel largiti.
Ma può mal quel degli uomini esser buono,
che maturo discorso non aiti...(*OF* XXVII, i, ll. 1-6)

Terracina's own *proemio* reacts with marked sarcasm to this declaration:

Han questi dotti, e saggi posto un vieto,
Illustrissima mia Donna Isabella,

Ch'un consiglio, un parer chiaro, o secreto,
Pur che di donna sia, non si favella...(ll. 1-4)

She refutes the idea that women are incapable of a deeper level of thought, contradicting the so-called *dotti* ('Molto fallano certo...', l. 5) and extolling the virtues of her dedicatee's considered opinions ('Vostro parer, egual con l'esser bella, / È si giusto, purgato, e si superno...', ll. 6-7).

In the body of the *canto*, the poet launches into the damaging consequences of this negative male attitude, citing men's diffusion of erroneous judgements as the cause of the misrepresentation of women:

Quanti giudicii d'huomini impensati
Si danno; e si daran contra dovere,
Che cagion di grande odio sono stati,
E fatti mille, e mille al fin dolere...(XXVII, i, ll. 1-4)

Terracina appropriates Ariosto's line at the end of the stanza in a direct attempt to re-contextualize contemporary thought on women's opinion, which has suffered through male wrong-doing ('Cosi cantati per contrario tuono / Molti consigli de le donne sono', XXVII, i, ll. 7-8). Indeed, the poet suggests that the female *ingegno* as a whole has been undermined by the fact that women's opinion is not afforded its due *gravitas* ('Che nessun stimi, né che prezzi manco / Questo parer di donna...', XXVII, ii, ll. 1-2), and that any male praise of the latter is false, thus denouncing the narrator's compliment as a mockery of women ('E se gliè pur lodato [questo parer]; si fa stanco / Gia l'uno, e l'altro orecchio, né si crede', XXVII, ii, ll. 3-4). The *canto* continues with an insulting attack on the men who hold women's opinion in such low regard, with the poet blaming their own lack of *ingegno* ('Questo s'ode da quei, che poco, o manco / Hanno discorso in se, n'ingegno alcuno', XXVII, iii, ll. 1-2). Her own *Discorso*, with its connotations of rational thought and lucid commentary, would act as the obvious and direct refutation of men's lack of *discorso* as seen in these lines.

The poet outlines the context of social oppression which has led to the suppression of the female intellect and female voice, again employing a *voi/noi* dynamic that divides the sexes:

> Voi ci vedete donne, e perché semo
> Suggette, e ci convien cedervi spesso,
> Pensate che tener di senno scemo
> Il parer nostro ogn'hor vi sia permesso;
> Ma questo è un'odio, & un gran vitio estremo,
> Ch'a voi parlare, e a noi non è concesso.(XXVII, iv, ll. 1-6)

The full force of her outrage, and her underlying feminist sentiment, can be discerned in this stanza; the following stanza picks up on Ariosto's premise of 'female advice', and declares that the female wisdom inherent in these *consigli* has in fact benefited others for many years ('Che mille anni s'è visto il lor profitto', XXVII, v, l. 4). Terracina is even prepared for accusations of gender bias on her part ('Mi potrete ben dire, hor tu sei Donna / E però esalti il sesso feminile', XXVII, vi, ll. 1-2), but dismisses them on the grounds of stating her claim to the truth; and as a woman, she is even closer to the reality ('Io dico il vero, e se mi cuopre gonna / So ben di noi le ciance, e il dolce stile', XXVII, vi, ll. 3-4). She is clear on the point that women are not fulfilling their potential in the literary sphere, owing to male oppression ('Ma, perché il vostro ardire, il nostro indonna, / Tacemo alquanto, in farne ogn'hor piu vile', XXVII, vi, ll. 5-6). The *canto* ends, somewhat disappointingly, on the note of a final appeal to men, since their influence is ultimately more powerful ('Ma, se bramate pur vincer mai sempre, / Non fate mal, poi che sete maggiori', XXVII, vii, ll. 1-2); the poet appears to ask for a peaceful accord with male intellectuals, that allows for the expression of the female *ingegno* and female opinion, if not complete parity.

A more concrete, and distinctly authoritarian, answer to this suppression of the female voice is seen in *canto* XXXVII, which develops the poet's response from 'passive' commentary to 'active' command.

This *canto* is dedicated to the poet Veronica Gambara, in a response to Ariosto's *canto*, in which he picks out Vittoria Colonna as the greatest female writer of the time.[63] At this point in the *Furioso*, the narrator's *proemio* expands into a mini-discourse lasting 23 stanzas, in which the narrator outlines the problems faced by women in the realm of arts and letters. To summarize: he states that women have already produced works of literature that are worthy of note, but that the envy and resentment of male writers in the past have meant that their voice has always been suppressed, in a form of active male criticism. Female renown would perhaps even outshine existing male glory if women writers were allowed to flourish, and this has brought about conspiracies between men instead to expose the 'undesirable' side of women. Examples of female achievement in arms and virtue do exist from antiquity, but have again been suppressed by envious male writers. However, the narrator lists contemporary male protectors and promoters of women to whom the latter should look for encouragement; and he claims that women can devote themselves to letters if they wish, relinquishing the realm of domesticity. After praising Vittoria Colonna as the epitome of poetic virtue, he concludes that although male writers have suppressed the renown of many female figures in the past, women can now write their own legacy and ensure their own immortality.

Terracina's *proemio*, with reference to the contemporary *querelle des femmes*, expresses the desire for more women to follow the example set by Gambara and to prove their worth in the domain of literature, since male writers appear intent on discrediting them:

Deh fosser molte al mondo come voi,

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[63] On the significance of this change, see Cox, op. cit., p. 137: since Gambara is exemplified as an exponent of literary *virtù* in particular, '[where] Ariosto represents the "new woman" [Colonna] of his age as a Bradamante, empowered yet happily absorbed into the patriarchal order, Terracina's [Gambara] approximates more to the model of Marfisa, defined by her *virtù* alone'.

Donne che à gli Scrittor mettesser freno,[64]
Ch'a tutta briglia vergan contra noi
Scritti crudeli, e colmi di veleno;[65]
Che forsi andrebbe infino a i liti Eoi[66]
Il nome nostro, e 'l grido d'honor pieno;[67]
Ma, perché contra à lor nulla si mostra,
Però tengono vil la fama nostra.(ll. 1-8)

The sigh inherent in the interjection *Deh* at the beginning of the *proemio* contains a note of despair, as if the poet realizes the impossibility of her task; yet she is clear as to what may happen with a continued lack of reaction to the current situation (ll. 7-8), and it is this that galvanizes her unique response.

She begins with a careful assessment of 'gli Scrittor, che in carte / Han scritto in biasmo nostro, e in poca lode' (XXXVII, i, ll. 1-2), and re-formats the first of several lines taken from Ariosto's mini-discourse – not simply the eight lines from his first stanza – for her own denunciation of the perverse wickedness of male writers ('Poi c'hanno posto il ben nostro da parte, / E in mal quanto si puo per tutto s'ode', XXXVII, i, ll. 5-6; these lines are a clear reflection of Ariosto's lines: 'che 'l ben che ne puon dir, spesso è taciuto, / e 'l mal, quanto ne san, per tutto s'ode', *OF* XXXVII, ii, ll. 5-6). Terracina's second stanza also borrows largely from the second *ottava* of Ariosto's *canto*, both thematically and linguistically. In this stanza, like Ariosto, she proposes independent scholarship for women, with less reliance on male backing – in other words, a call for better female education and increased female confidence in the field of literature:

Che se da lor medesime potuto
Havessero le Donne scriver molto,
Li Scrittor forse non havrian taciuto
Quel, c'hor tacendo, han piu che infamia occolto;
Ma, perché è uopo mendicare aiuto

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[64] In the 1550 edition of the *Discorso* that I consulted, this line reads 'Che desser freno a gli scrittor superbi'.
[65] The 1550 variant, as above, is 'Prose crudeli, e duri versi, e acerbi'.
[66] As above: 'Che forsi morti, in fino ai liti Eoi'.
[67] As above: 'Andriano i gridi, alteri e disacerbi'.

A gli Scrittor, per nostro viver stolto,
Però si fan si caldi in lor scrittura...(XXXVII, ii, ll. 1-7)

These lines echo both the sentiment and the structure of Ariosto's second stanza:

e che per se medesime potuto
avesson dar memoria alle sue lode,
non mendicar dagli scrittori aiuto,
ai quali astio et invidia il cor sì rode,
che 'l ben che ne puon dir, spesso è taciuto...(*OF* XXXVII, ii, ll. 1-5)

Terracina has up until this point employed a register that divides the sexes into *noi* (women) and *loro* (men), but with some indirect reference to women, also in the third person plural; the central part of the *canto* sees her slowly move away from the more distant indirect form, in a mixing of registers, and eventually embrace the imperative mode, speaking directly to women.

The poet effectively constructs a 'call to arms' in this central section, encouraging women to take up the pen instead of the needle and to write, thus proving their worth and silencing their male critics. In a 'feminized' version of the debate on action vs. contemplation, Terracina sets herself up as both exponent and proponent of the value of the life of the mind and of study over the life of practical domesticity – the spheres potentially open to women.[68] The third stanza again opens with *Deh*, giving some idea of the impassioned tone of the poet in her desire to change society as she sees it:

Deh, se lasciasser l'ago, il filo, il panno,
E de lo studio togliesser la soma,
Credo ch'a voi Scrittor farebbon danno...(XXXVII, iii, ll. 1-3)

She again takes her cue from Ariosto, whose narrator mentions the women 'lasciando l'ago e 'l panno' (*OF* XXXVII, xiv, l. 4) in the search for poetic glory; however, Terracina is less optimistic as to how many women are actually involved in

[68] In the *proemio* to this *canto* in the *Furioso*, Ariosto also sets up exempla of the active and contemplative life in his praise of Isabella and Vittoria Colonna; the former is indeed celebrated as a model for 'Renaissance woman' in Terracina's *canto* XX (see above).

intellectual matters, and blames this imbalance for the lack of recognition of the female *ingegno* ('Ma, perché poche son, che questo fanno, / Poca fama circonda nostra chioma', XXXVII, iii, ll. 5-6). Indeed, she manipulates Ariosto's line at the end of the stanza to include her pessimistic take on this state of affairs ('Non molte Donne al scriver, qual ragiono, / Affaticate notte, e dì si sono', XXXVII, iii, ll. 7-8).

The ending of the third stanza appears to stimulate the poet into a direct exhortation to women to write. She embarks upon a series of imperatives in the fourth stanza, which constitutes a key moment in the exposition of her feminist message:

> Non restate per ciò Donne ingegniose
> Di por la barca di virtude al scoglio:
> Lasciate l'ago, fatevi bramose
> Sovente in operar la penna, e il foglio...(XXXVII, iv, ll. 1-4)

The beginning of the stanza again echoes a construction in Ariosto ('Non restate però, donne...', *OF* XXXVII, vii, l. 1), but the poet's insistent tone transcends the 'reluctant feminism' of the narrator of the *Furioso*. Terracina has no doubt that women will equal men's fame in the literary sphere ('Che non men vi farete gloriose / Di questi tai, di cui molto mi doglio', XXXVII, iv, ll. 5-6), but returns to the importance of study in order to achieve this ('Hor state adunque attente in la lettura, / Con somma diligenza e lunga cura', XXXVII, iv, ll. 7-8), neatly incorporating Ariosto's line for the purposes of encouragement of her female readers.

She is adamant that inaction on the female part ('il tacer nostro', XXXVII, vi, l. 1) will only serve to promote underhand male dealings, such as false praise, and ends the *canto* with a final appeal to women in the first person plural, including herself in the group that will challenge male prejudices and overturn their misogynistic literature, as well as demanding a forum for the female voice:

> Hor diamoci talmente alla vertute,

E diasi luoco à queste lingue oscure;
Che non saran le nostre cosi mute,
Che non bastino a vincer lor scritture.
Uscemo homai da questa servitute
In seguitar le sante, alme letture;
Cosi si fosser poste a quelli studi,
Ch'immortal fanno le mortai virtudi.(XXXVII, vii, ll. 1-8)

The forceful nature of her feeling comes across in the striking image of the 'battle' against men, and of the *servitute* suffered by women in the past, owing to poor education; according to Terracina, the study of letters provides the way out of such oppression, and towards an equality with men.

This direct exhortation to women to write, coming from a female writer herself, is unprecedented in the Italian literary tradition, and marks out Terracina as a pioneer in the ongoing struggle for the recognition of the female *ingegno* and *lingua*, and for intellectual parity with men.[69] Despite the stylistic shortcomings of her *Discorso*, it stands out as an important female-authored contribution to the contemporary *querelle des femmes*; and it contains a feminist message that not only incorporates the poet's self-conscious desire for a literary legacy, but also encourages other women to seek their own literary glory by following her example. Terracina's *Discorso* serves in itself as an answer to Ariosto's declaration that women can, and must, create their own fame in writing.

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[69] The humanist writer Laura Cereta (1469-99) argues in favour of the female right to higher education, and bemoans female apathy in the study of letters, thus acting as a forerunner to Terracina; cf. Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, transc., trans. & ed. Diana Robin (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997), especially Letters XVIII ('In Defense [sic] of a Liberal Education for Women') and XIX ('Against Women who Disparage Educated Women'), pp. 72-82. See also Diana Robin, 'Humanism and Feminism in Laura Cereta's Public Letters', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 368-84, especially pp. 377-80. To my knowledge, however, Terracina is still the first female author to incite other women to write in such a direct and forceful manner. The writings of Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-52) would later be seen to share the concerns of Terracina's *Discorso*: the suppression of the female voice, the lack of access to schooling and study, and the subsequent inability of women to defend the female intellect; cf. Daniela De Bellis, 'Attacking Sumptuary Laws in Seicento Venice: Arcangela Tarabotti', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 227-42. Her work *Tirannia paterna* is now available in a modern edition: cf. Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. & trans. Letizia Panizza (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2004), especially pp. 97-99; she indeed makes mention of Terracina alongside Marinella and Sarrocchi, amongst other paragons of female excellence (p. 106).

Conclusion: The 'Worth' of the 'Discorso'

With her *Discorso*, the poet achieves two aims that could be broadly summarized under 'form' and 'content'. Firstly, she goes some way towards an appropriation of the 'masculine' form of the epic in *ottava rima*, placing it within the context of 'poesia femminile', and necessarily widening the boundaries for sixteenth-century women writers; up until this point, the prevailing school of *petrarchismo* had dominated female literary production, despite efforts on the part of contemporary women to adapt its tenets to the expression of their (often original) poetic voice. Terracina's poetic commentary, though itself not an epic, nonetheless exploits the form of *ottava rima* that was associated with various types of narrative poetry (such as Poliziano's *Stanze*) – again mostly bound to masculine expression. The *Discorso* thus occupies a unique place in mid-Cinquecento writing, opening up possibilities for later writers such as Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella to enter the arena of the epic genre. The complex form of re-writing seen in the *Discorso* also demonstrates a more literal appropriation of the *ottave* in Ariosto's epic; indeed, Terracina's bold fragmentation of the pivotal *proemi* of the *Furioso* indicates a desire to deconstruct the ideological manipulations of the author – through the mouthpiece of his narrator – and to question both their motivation and the so-called 'truths' contained within them.

This leads on to the second ostensible aim of Terracina's poem, revolving around its place within the *querelle des femmes*: the *Discorso* in fact constitutes a reply not only to the *Furioso*, but also to the wider contemporary debate on women's role in all spheres of society, especially the literary domain. Her overtly moralistic reflections on male-female relationships and other gender issues provide, at the very least, a contemporary female – and indeed feminist – voice of commentary that acts in retaliation to the misogynistic accusations of the time. However, Terracina is most

innovative in her encouragement of other women both to follow the intellectual path of scholarship and to prove their worth in works of literature, actively creating their own literary history and their own rewards of glory to equal those of men. It is in this sense that the true 'worth' of the *Discorso* lies.

Chapter Four

The Re-Writing of the Chivalric Tradition: Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti del Floridoro*

This chapter will consider Moderata Fonte's relatively unknown chivalric epic entitled *Tredici canti del Floridoro* (1581), particularly in its relation to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, with which it has several parallels. I look at the poem in terms of both thematic and structural similarities with the *Furioso*, highlighting the ways in which Fonte creates a specifically 'feminized' version of this genre, and opens up possibilities for subverting the stock scenarios and characters of the romance tradition. During the course of such analysis, I also outline the ways in which the author diverges from the precedent laid down by Ariosto, revealing the 'feminist' agenda that lies behind much of Fonte's work. I examine the treatment of both male and female characters in the *Floridoro*, and evaluate the ways in which the author undermines masculine heroic ideals, whilst constructing – and promoting – various female identities that move away from romance conventions; indeed, Fonte deliberately re-writes many of the existing literary preconceptions concerning certain female figures. She is innovative not only in her appropriation of the 'masculine' genre of the chivalric epic, but also in the creation of characters that bear the hallmark of her uniquely feminist perspective.

Moderata Fonte: A Biographical Outline

Moderata Fonte, pseudonym of Modesta Pozzo, was born in 1555 into an upper class Venetian family, the second of two children. Much of the material that we have on Fonte's life is provided by her relative and mentor, Giovanni Nicolò Doglioni, who wrote a seven-page biography after her death that was then included in

the posthumous publication of Fonte's dialogue *Il merito delle donne* (1600).[1] Both of her parents died in 1556, and Fonte and her brother Leonardo were placed in the care of her grandmother and her second husband, Prospero Saraceni. Fonte was schooled for a few years in the convent of Santa Marta, where she quickly became known and admired for her learning ability and her powers of memory. However, having returned to her grandmother's house aged about nine, she would also exploit Leonardo's access to grammar school as much as she could, asking him what he had learned at the end of every day, and apparently profiting from such exchanges more than her brother. She was particularly encouraged by Saraceni, who would provide her with books from his library and point her towards different areas of study. Fonte appears to have excelled in multifarious activities, including writing, drawing, playing the harpsichord and lute, singing, sewing and embroidery.

After Doglioni married Saraceni's daughter, he invited Fonte to come and live with his family; Doglioni would also prove to be a supportive patron of her studies, encouraging her to write and helping her to publish her early works. He claims to have been the first to make the world aware of her unique and rare talent. He also arranged her marriage, in 1582, to Filippo de' Zorzi, an important official responsible

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[1] Cf. VITA DELLA SIG.RA / MODESTA POZZO, / D'I ZORZI. / Nominata / MODERATA FONTE. / DESCRITTA DA GIO. / NICOLO DOGLIONI. / L'ANNO M.D.XCIII. This is reproduced in full in the modern edition of Fonte's dialogue (pp. 3-10), for which see reference in n. 4. Doglioni's account provides the basis for all subsequent biographical sketches of Fonte, including (in chronological order): Valeria Finucci, 'Modesta Pozzo', in *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Chicago & London, St James Press, 1991), vol. II, pp. 1004-06 [although this piece contains several inaccuracies, and rather surprisingly claims that 'In 1581 some of Modesta Pozzo's madrigals and sonnets were published under the title *Tredici canti del Floridoro*', p. 1005]; Paola Malpezzi Price, 'Moderata Fonte (1555-1592)', in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (Westport, Connecticut & London, Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 128-37; Laura Anna Stortoni, ed., 'Moderata Fonte', in *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, trans. Laura Anna Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie (New York, Italica Press, 1997), pp. 209-19; and Paola Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte: Women and Life in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Madison & Teaneck, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London, Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 27-39. A modified version of the fourth chapter in the latter ('The Myth of Venice and Sixteenth-Century Women', pp. 85-98) may be found in Paola Malpezzi Price, '*Venetia Figurata* and Women in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Moderata Fonte's Writings', in *Italian Women and the City: Essays*, ed. Janet Levarie Smarr & Daria Valentini (Madison & Teaneck, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London, Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 18-34.

for water management in the Venetian Republic. Fonte bore him four children – two boys and two girls – and died giving birth to the last child in 1592, at the age of thirty-seven; according to Doglioni, she had completed work on *Il merito delle donne* only the day before.

Textual Transmission

The decade of Fonte's marriage appears to have slowed down her literary production, with the flurry of publications in the early 1580s apparently followed by a lull until the early 1590s. One of her first known works is a musical drama in verse entitled *Le Feste*, which was performed before the Doge Nicolò da Ponte on St. Stephen's Day in 1581, and published in the same year by Domenico and Giovanni Battista Guerra. It incorporates praise of Venice, the Doge and civic virtues with mythological allegories. In the same year, her chivalric epic entitled *Tredici canti del Floridoro* was published by the Rampazetti press.[2] This work, composed of thirteen

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[2] Cf. TREDICI CANTI / DEL FLORIDORO, / Di Mad. Moderata Fonte. / ALLI SERENISS. GRAN DVCA, ET / GRAN DVCHESSA DI THOSCANA (In Venetia, Nella Stamparia de' Rampazetti, M. D. LXXXI). The edition contains dedicatory sonnets by Fonte to both Francesco de' Medici (f. ii^{r}) and his consort Bianca Capello (f. ii^{v}), although it is interesting to note that in the sonnet to the male patron, the focus is diverted away from the standard description of his qualities, and moves towards the poet herself, in a meditation on her poetic ability ('Io, che d'entrar fra li sentier diversi, / E fra l'immense vie bramo, & ardisco, / Per quale hor deggio incaminar miei versi? / Scopriran li tuoi merti?...', ll. 9-12). This is not seen in the sonnet to Bianca. The edition also contains sonnets dedicated to Fonte by Cesare Simonetti (f. iii^{r}), who overtly brackets Fonte with Ariosto ('Nobil Cigno del Pò sovrana gloria / Cantò Ruggier con bellicosi carmi, / Sì ch'eterna via più che bronzi, e marmi / Del sangue Estense il Mondo havrà memoria. / Nobil Sirena [e se per lei si gloria / La Regina del Mar, ben giusto parmi] / L'amor di Floridor cantando, e l'armi / Tesse al gran Duce Thosco illustre Istoria', ll. 1-8); Bartolomeo Malombra (f. iii^{v}); and Doglioni himself (f. iv^{r}), who marvels at the thought that such a 'non esperta verginella, / Stando rinchiusa in fra l'anguste mura' (ll. 9-10) is able to write so well on subjects that she cannot have experienced, namely arms and love ('Di tutto ciò perfettamente canti', l. 11). A short *argomento* consisting of one *ottava* appears at the beginning of each *canto*, alongside a small illustration, which does not always have much correlation to the episodes described within the *canto*. The prefatory poems in the 1581 edition are not reproduced in the modern edition of the text, for which see Moderata Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, a cura di Valeria Finucci (Modena, Mucchi Editore. 1995). The latter contains a useful introductory piece ('Moderata Fonte e il romanzo cavalleresco al femminile', pp. IX-XXXIX), a version of which also appeared as an article: cf. Valeria Finucci, 'La scrittura epico-cavalleresca al femminile: Moderata Fonte e *Tredici canti del Floridoro*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 12 (1994), pp. 203-31. Very little critical attention has been given to Fonte's epic, as opposed to her later dialogue; Malpezzi Price's 2003 study does, however, include brief considerations of the female knight of the poem, Risamante, and the witch Circetta (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., pp. 101-12 ['The Woman Warrior'] & 113-21 ['The Enchantress or the Rewriting of the Myth of Circe']; both chapters evaluate the literary background to these female figures and give an

canti in the mould of Ariosto, relates the adventures of various knights and ladies; yet despite the presence of the titular hero Floridoro, female figures tend to dominate the text. In 1582, Fonte published – also through the Guerra brothers – the first of two long religious poems in *ottava rima*, *La Passione di Cristo*, which relates the last hours of Christ until the crucifixion. A gap of ten years then followed, before the companion piece to *La Passione*, entitled *La Resurrezione di Gesù Cristo nostro Signore*, was published by Giovanni Domenico Imberti in 1592.[3] Fonte's final work, a dialogue between seven female characters entitled *Il merito delle donne*, was published posthumously by Domenico Imberti in 1600;[4] this was apparently in response to Giuseppe Passi's highly misogynistic text *I donneschi difetti*, published in

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outline of Fonte's 'feminist' revision of such male-authored creations). See also Stephen Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti del Floridoro*: Women in a Man's Genre', *Rivista di studi italiani* 17 (1999), pp. 165-84, although this piece is stylistically a little uneven, and misquotes the text on more than one occasion. Kolsky reads the text as a precursor to *Il merito delle donne* ('*Floridoro* can be interestingly read as an anticipation of Fonte's later ideas on women', p. 170) and concentrates on the characterization of Circetta, with some consideration of Risamante and the story of the major 'damsel in distress' of the text, Raggidora.

[3] On the less well known works by Fonte, see Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., pp. 30-31 & 34-35; and idem, 'Moderata Fonte (1555-1592)', op. cit., pp. 129-31.

[4] Cf. IL / MERITO DELLE / DONNE, / Scritto / DA MODERATA FONTE / In due giornate. / *Ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne, / e più perfette de gli huomini* (IN VENETIA, Presso Domenico Imberti, M. D C.) On ff. ii^{r}-iii^{r} is a dedication by Fonte's daughter, Cicilia de' Zorzi, to her patron, Livia Feltria della Rovere, Duchess of Urbino, dated 10th November 1600. Cicilia is aware of the hostility that the content of such a publication could provoke in its male readers, and is suitably grateful for her patron's protection ('sapendosi quanto haveranno questi [uomini] a male un tal concetto; egli è ben giusto destinare a sua difesa Donna tale, al cui sol cenno si sgomentino questi detrattori, & nimici della Donnesca virtù, & non ardiscano far parola in contrario', ff. ii^{r}-ii^{v}). She also confirms that Fonte finished the dialogue the day before her death ('di parto morì poi la seguente mattina, senza poterla pur nè anco riveder una fiata', f. ii^{v}). On f. iii^{r} she mentions that out of the Zorzi family, only she and her brother Pietro have lived to see the publication. Two sonnets by Pietro then follow (ff. iii^{v} & iv^{r}), praising the worth of women in general and his mother in particular ('Ecco, che sovra d'ogni human pensiero / Donna è, che al sesso suo torna ogni honore, / E con la penna, e 'l stil l'alza a le stelle', ll. 9-11 [f. iii^{v}]). A portrait of Fonte is found on f. iv^{v}, with the inscription 'VERA MODERATAE FONTIS EFFIGIES, / AETATIS SVAE ANNO XXXIIII'. Doglioni's *Vita* of 1593 then follows (pp. 1-7 of the edition). Out of this prefatory material, only the portrait and the *Vita* are reproduced in the modern edition of the dialogue, for which see Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, a cura di Adriana Chemello (Venice, Editrice Eidos, 1988). The latter also contains an introductory piece ('Gioco e dissimulazione in Moderata Fonte', pp. IX-LXIII) which examines the deceptively playful rhetorical strategies within the dialogue. See also Virginia Cox's English translation of the text, in Moderata Fonte, *The Worth of Women: Wherein is Clearly Revealed their Nobility and their Superiority to Men*, ed. & trans. Virginia Cox (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997); the latter also includes an English translation of the entire preamble to the dialogue – and transcriptions of both of Pietro's sonnets – alongside an informative introduction, 'Moderata Fonte and *The Worth of Women*' (pp. 1-23).

1599, also in Venice.[5] Fonte's dialogue, divided into two days and thus two parts, follows the conversation of the group of women as they discuss the (numerous) deficiencies discernible in all aspects of men's conduct towards women. The tone varies from playful to serious, and the dialogue itself is interspersed with lyrics and other short passages of quotations and anecdotes, all designed to support the underlying argument for female excellence. The second part of the conversation allows the characters to display their knowledge of various topics, including astrology, botany, medicine and zoology, thus indirectly refuting the usual accusations of women's intellectual inferiority. The conclusion arising from the dialogue is that the best state for women to pursue an independent path of study and scholarship is freedom from domestic responsibilities and duties, and thus freedom from men.

What links all of Fonte's literary works is a strong awareness of the unprivileged position of women in contemporary society, as well as universally in myth and history; and a desire to elevate both the status and the 'worth' of women within these frameworks. As Malpezzi Price notes, the exact models or texts that influenced Fonte's increasingly feminist stance remain unclear;[6] yet her promotion of female ability in all spheres indicates a need to challenge existing prejudices regarding women's standing. In *Le Feste*, for example, the dispute between two male philosophers is ended, and compromise reached, by the intervention of a female figure, the Erythraean Sibyl; and in Fonte's two long religious poems, the focus is again on women: detailed description is given of the emotional reactions of both the Virgin and Mary Magdalene to Christ's death and resurrection. The *Floridoro* may

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[5] After the furore caused by Passi's contribution to the *querelle des femmes*, Doglioni 'capitalized on this literary interest and published Fonte's forgotten manuscript after adding lyrics and a dedication by two of her children' (Malpezzi Price, 'Moderata Fonte [1555-1592]', op. cit., p. 132).
[6] Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 19.

also be considered a feminocentric text, as I discuss later in the chapter; whilst *Il merito delle donne* constitutes the most obvious expression of concern over the status of women.[7] Fonte is innovative, furthermore, in her full appropriation of the *ottava* for her literary output, particularly with the chivalric epic, traditionally seen as a 'masculine' genre. With her *Floridoro*, the subject of this chapter, she contrives a creative appropriation of the model laid down by previous male authors, and in particular by Ariosto. In the course of this chapter, I shall examine some of the ways in which Fonte adapts this model for her own, often subversive, purposes.

To place the *Floridoro* in context: as I concluded in the previous chapter, Terracina's *Discorso* of 1549 assumed a uniquely transitional role, enabling future

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[7] Most of the critical commentary on Fonte has focussed on her contribution, alongside that of her Venetian compatriot Lucrezia Marinella (1571-1653), to the 'woman question' in Italy (as mentioned in the previous chapter). For detailed studies of these and other authors' feminist answer to the *querelle*, and of the socio-cultural background in Venice, see (in chronological order): Ginevra Conti Odorisio, *Donna e società nel Seicento*, intro. Ida Magli (Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 1979); Patricia H. Labalme's two essays, 'Women's Roles in Early Modern Venice: An Exceptional Case', in *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York, New York University Press, 1980), pp. 129-52, and 'Venetian Women on Women: Three Early Modern Feminists', *Archivio veneto* 117 (1981), pp. 81-109; Adriana Chemello, 'La donna, il modello, l'immaginario: Moderata Fonte e Lucrezia Marinella', in *Nel cerchio della luna: figure di donna in alcuni testi del XVI secolo*, a cura di Marina Zancan (Venice, Marsilio Editori, 1983), pp. 95-170; Beatrice Collina, 'Moderata Fonte e *Il merito delle donne*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 142-64; Paola Malpezzi Price, 'A Woman's Discourse in the Italian Renaissance: Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne*', *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989), pp. 165-81; Bodo Guthmüller, 'Non taceremo più a lungo: sul dialogo *Il merito delle donne* di Moderata Fonte', *Filologia e critica* 17 (1992), pp. 258-79; Stephen D. Kolsky, 'Wells of Knowledge: Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne*', *The Italianist* 13 (1993), pp. 57-96; Margaret F. Rosenthal, 'Venetian Women Writers and their Discontents', in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 107-32; Virginia Cox, 'The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice', *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995), pp. 513-81; Janet Levarie Smarr, 'The Uses of Conversation: Moderata Fonte and Edmund Tilney', *Comparative Literature Studies* 32 (1995), pp. 1-25; Constance Jordan, 'Renaissance Women Defending Women: Arguments against Patriarchy', in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present: Revising the Canon*, ed. & intro. Maria Ornella Marotti (University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 55-67; Adriana Chemello, 'The Rhetoric of Eulogy in Lucrezia Marinella's *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne*', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 463-77; Virginia Cox, 'Seen but not Heard: The Role of Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogue', in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford, Legenda, 2000), pp. 385-400; and Stephen Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Giuseppe Passi: An Early Seventeenth-Century Feminist Controversy', *Modern Language Review* 96 (2001), pp. 973-89. For a more historical look at women's standing and role in Venetian society, see Stanley Chojnacki, 'Patrician Women in Early Renaissance Venice', *Studies in the Renaissance* 21 (1974), pp. 176-203; and idem, '"The Most Serious Duty": Motherhood, Gender, and Patrician Culture in Renaissance Venice', in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. & intro. Marilyn Migiel & Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 133-54.

women writers to appropriate the *ottava* rather than the Petrarchan love lyric and to produce their own works of narrative poetry in the form of the chivalric epic. To this end, a decade or so after Terracina's pivotal work, the courtesan-poet Tullia d'Aragona's romance *Il Meschino, altramente detto il Guerrino* was published in Venice (1560); however, as Finucci notes, it was in fact 'una rielaborazione in 36 canti del *Guerin Meschino*, ma con uno sviluppo più morale'.[8] Fonte's *Floridoro* of 1581 is thus perhaps the first 'original' chivalric fiction to be written and published by a woman. Going into the seventeenth century, the historical epics of Margherita Sarrocchi (*La Scanderbeide*, published in full – in 23 *canti* – in 1623) and Lucrezia Marinella (*L'Enrico overo Bisanzio Riacquistato*, a poem of 27 *canti* published in 1635) continue the strand of appropriation by female authors of this poetic genre;[9] yet Fonte stands out as a particularly innovative figure among them, not only in the composition of her own chivalric epic, but also in her later feminist dialogue, with its all-female cast of characters. The overt feminist slant of these two works may be seen as a (literary) response to contemporary misogynistic prejudices; and with the *Floridoro*, Fonte seems keen to re-write the chivalric epic of the previous tradition in a particularly feminine key – often to the detriment of the masculine identities

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[8] Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XI; n. 8 outlines d'Aragona's source as being the popular prose romance of the Florentine author Andrea da Barberino (c.1370-1431/33) entitled *Guerrin meschino* (composed 1409, but published 1473). In this work, the male protagonist is distracted by various adventures whilst on a quest to find his parents. D'Aragona's romance, itself a re-working of a previous text, is not considered here since it is not an obvious response to Ariosto.

[9] On these women writers, see Virginia Cox, 'Women as Readers and Writers of Chivalric Poetry in Early Modern Italy', in *Sguardi sull'Italia: Miscellanea dedicata a Francesco Villari dalla Society for Italian Studies*, a cura di Gino Bedani et al: Occasional Papers, Number 3 (Leeds, Society for Italian Studies, 1997), pp. 134-45; & idem, 'Fiction, 1560-1650', in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza & Sharon Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 52-64, particularly her section on chivalric romance and epic (pp. 57-61). As Kolsky notes, Marinella 'knew the *Floridoro*, but did not take it up as a model for her own foray into the genre, preferring to imitate the *Gerusalemme liberata*' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 166); Marinella nonetheless quotes the *proemio* to Fonte's feminist *canto* IV – which I mention later in the chapter – at the beginning of her treatise on women (*La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti et mancamenti degli uomini*, published 1600).

contained within this tradition, as I hope will emerge from the analysis that now follows.[10]

The Failure of the Masculine Identity: Undermining the Male Hero

One of the major problems associated with the *Floridoro* is its status as an apparently unfinished work. Despite its publication in 1581, the title of the poem suggests the completion of thirteen *canti* with potentially many more to come, and any commentary on existing/unfinished story-lines within the text must necessarily take this into account.[11] With this proviso, what is most striking as the reader of the *Floridoro* advances through the text, however, is the idea of the male knights described therein as 'non-heroes', or failed masculine identities. Fonte contrives a subtly cumulative impression of failure, with various knights and other male characters often striving to carry out, but in fact rarely succeeding in accomplishing, a number of heroic actions or duties. Despite the (often multiple) flaws of many of the male characters within Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the three major male knights of the poem – Orlando, Rinaldo and Ruggiero – are on numerous occasions seen to act according to the expected chivalric code of honour, both in terms of military commitment on the battlefield and in terms of courtly behaviour.[12] The reader of the

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[10] Finucci notes a link to the character of Floridoro in Bernardo Tasso's unfinished narrative poem *Floridante*, re-worked by Torquato and published in 1587: 'Qui Floridoro è uno dei dieci baroni che cercano Floridante d'accordo con il padre di lui' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XVIII, n. 26). She also notes similarities with Bernardo Tasso's *Amadigi* (1560) and Lodovico Dolce's *Sacripante* (1535-36); the latter text not only contains a witch named Circe but also a blond sixteen-year-old boy named Selannio, alongside the description of a garden guarded by a snake. These are all echoed in the *Floridoro*, as I shall explore later in the chapter; however, I shall limit my study to the influence of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* on Fonte's poem, as it provides a wider frame of reference. All quotations from the *Floridoro* will be from Finucci's edition of the poem (cited earlier).

[11] Finucci pessimistically equates the author's impending marriage with her seeming inability to complete the text (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XVIII). Kolsky rather patronizingly speculates that it 'may also denote a lack of commitment to the genre, a loss of interest in the intricacies of the plot necessary for such fiction, a realization of the fundamentally "male" properties of the epic poem' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 169).

[12] Orlando comes to Olimpia's aid not once but twice (IX, XI), saves Isabella from the fate of being sold by bandits (XIII), and is heavily involved, once his senses have been restored, in the military campaign against the Moors in North Africa, culminating in the battle of the 'three versus three' on the

Furioso, whilst aware of the shortcomings of these three male characters – and indeed of the authorial ploy designed to make the reader question the very notion of 'the heroic' on many occasions – is nonetheless mostly satisfied in his/her expectations of tales of great knights and noble deeds, in compliance with the chivalric tradition.

Fonte's male characters, on the other hand, are seen to fail in various ways, from those who are defeated in challenges of honour, to those who do not even attempt such challenges, to those who are indecisive in their heroic actions or fail before the heroic archetype. This is seen from the very first *canto* of the *Floridoro*, in which the Athenian court of King Cleardo – the action of the poem being situated in a pre-Christian mythical Greek setting – is interrupted by the arrival of a giant named Macandro, who has come to challenge the fabled beauty of the king's daughter, Celsidea, who supposedly puts all other women to shame. In what is essentially set up as a beauty contest between Celsidea and Macandro's queen, Biondaura (whom we later learn is the 'evil' twin sister of Risamante, the female knight of the poem), the male knights of the realm step forward to defend Celsidea's honour in a joust, only to be defeated one by one in a series of humiliating encounters, upon which the narrator – who later reveals her identity as being female[13] – appears to linger (I, xxvi-xlix). Macandro will in fact only be beaten by Risamante herself, in the following *canto*.

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island of Lipadusa, where he kills both Agramante and Gradasso (XLI-XLII). Rinaldo intervenes in the case of Ginevra, another damsel in distress (V-VI), leads troops in the siege of Paris whilst also displaying considerable solo skill in battle (XVI, XVIII), and is involved in many other skirmishes and duels. Ruggiero, despite his pagan status and dalliances with both Alcina and Angelica, also proves his worth in other 'just causes', such as the freeing of Ricciardetto (XXV) and the liberation of the women under the tyrannical reign of Marganorre (XXXVII), as well as in his own allegiance to his lord, Agramante, whose honour he does not wish to bring into disrepute. All three knights may also be said to enjoy 'happy endings' in the *Furioso*.

[13] Cf. 'Ma fra quei pochi [the few, and grudging, defenders of the weak and innocent] ho da lodar il cielo / Ben io di tai che non di questi sono, / I quai cercan con fede e amico zelo / Di sollevarmi ove sì oppressa sono' (III, iv, ll. 1-4). According to Malpezzi Price, the *proemio* to this *canto* in the *Floridoro* refers to the author's own difficult family circumstances when she and her brother were orphaned ('Doglioni omits relating the fight by the two sides of the family over the care and inheritance of the two children [...]. At the beginning of the third canto, Fonte mentions the great number of orphans who are unable to enjoy their parents' inheritance for lack of people acting in their favor. She follows this complaint by directly thanking those who helped her when she found herself in such a situation'; Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 28).

Ironically, the same knights who lost against Macandro appear later on in the poem as participants in the joust that Cleardo announces in celebration of Macandro's defeat (V, lii-lv); the superlatives surrounding the narrator's descriptions of them ring somewhat false, however, in light of their previous failures.

Furthermore, in another change to the pattern of adventures seen in the *Furioso*, the *Floridoro* also contains examples of male characters who are forced to ask for help in situations of crisis or rescue. The scenarios in Ariosto's epic that are reserved for damsels in distress, or even whole groups of women, are not generally accompanied by impotent male figures who are trying, but failing, to resolve the situation; Fonte, however, is not afraid to include male characters who are dependent on others – both male and female – for the undertaking of the necessary heroic deeds. At the end of *canto* V, the nobleman Nicobaldo[14] recognizes Risamante as the warrior predicted to help him in his quest to free his lady, Lucimena:

> ...spero che tu sii colei,
> Che m'ha da liberar da quella noia
> In che son visso il più dei giorni miei...(V, lxx, ll. 2-4)

Risamante's courage and enthusiasm are contrasted with Nicobaldo's sighs and tears, although he is quick to re-assert his ailing masculinity in the following *canto*, by defining the logic for crying:

> - Fiera cagion, rispose il cavalliero,
> Che rende i giorni miei turbati e mesti,
> Sendomi ritornata or nel pensiero
> Sforzommi a lagrimar come vedesti...(VI, iv, ll. 1-4)

Nonetheless, it transpires that he has been told to wait for the arrival of a female 'saviour' who will resolve his predicament ('una regia fanciulla illustre e bella / Ch'armata andrà come guerriero in sella', VI, lxxix, ll. 7-8); I shall discuss the salient

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[14] As Finucci comments in her edition, the name is clearly ironic: 'c'è Nicobaldo, che di baldo si trova ad avere ben poco' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXV).

points of this episode elsewhere in the chapter. Another helpless male character appears in the form of the unnamed dwarf king, who seeks a warrior amongst the court at Byzantium to defend his beloved Raggidora, unjustly accused of murdering her uncle, the king of Egypt. The dwarf king is entirely dependent on the generosity of the knight Risardo, son of the Byzantine emperor, described in glowing terms ('d'ogni virtute adorno, / D'ogn'alma dote e d'ogni nobil arte', II, lv, ll. 5-6); however, this dependence proves to be less than satisfactory.

Risardo, in effect, constantly deviates from his original heroic enterprise, incurring the wrath of the dwarf as he does so. The narrator of the *Floridoro* is again quite happy to point out the shortcomings of the knight in question: at the beginning of *canto* III, after a nostalgic discussion of the 'golden age' of chivalry, the narrator highlights Risardo's nobility ('Gentil guerrier fu il principe Risardo / Che si mostrò de tal bontade allora', III, vii, ll. 1-2), although the prominent position in the line of the temporal indicator 'allora' already hints at a later change in behaviour. The narrator then proceeds entirely to undercut Risardo's noble intentions in the second half of the octave:

> E se ben poscia il giovene gagliardo
> A novello cammin volse la prora,
> Come vi narrerò, non l'incolpo io
> Che pur a questo fin di corte uscio.(III, vii, ll. 5-8)

Despite an unwillingness to blame Risardo for his abandonment of the dwarf's cause, the narrator still points it out quite markedly in these lines, priming the reader to expect the failure of this particular heroic enterprise. In fact, Risardo is distracted not once but three times: twice in *canto* IV, and once in *canto* X.[15] His indecisiveness revolves mostly around 'distracting' female figures, causing an inability to fix on one

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[15] Kolsky claims that '[such] a lack of resolve is part of the ethos of his society where public glory is more important than acts of social salvation and commitment to justice' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 180); yet I would posit that it indicates Risardo's personal failure to adhere to a more general chivalric ideal of 'noble' behaviour.

action, and in this respect invokes a comparison with the character of Ruggiero in the *Furioso*.[16] Risardo is first tempted away from his original purpose by the thought of the tournament held in Celsidea's honour, and particularly by the helmsman's description of Celsidea herself. His 'voglia novella' (IV, xvii, l. 4) swiftly obliterates his initial plan, an idea introduced in deliberately blunt terms by the narrator ('Come Risardo ha inteso il suo concetto, / Più d'ir non cura in Alessandria bella', IV, xvii, ll. 5-6).[17] Once on Greek soil, he is sidetracked for a second time by the appearance of the maiden Odoria, who is bound for the oracle at Delphi. Risardo, enchanted by her beauty, then decides to follow her ('Come la donna a questo punto arriva, / Pensa Risardo anch'ei di gir al tempio', IV, xli, ll. 1-2), with the aim of asking the oracle whether or not he will reap the benefit of this new-found love. His placatory words to the dwarf king sound increasingly empty ('Risardo lo conforta e gli promette / Di far presto per lui quanto far deve', IV, xlvii, ll. 1-2), and the narrator again lingers on the effects of this failure to keep to the heroic path of action:

> Poi che prego non val, pianto o lamento
> Perché Risardo altro cammin non prenda,
> Partesi il nano irato e mal contento
> E fa che la sua ingiuria ognun intenda,
> Per trovar uom più fido al suo talento
> Che l'innocente giovane defenda...(IV, xlviii, ll. 1-6)

The dwarf's anger appears justified, since Risardo shows no sign later on in the poem of fulfilling his promise to go to Alexandria: after the oracle at Delphi has confirmed his hopes of union with Odoria, he sets off on another mission to Armenia (X, xlvii).

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[16] In terms of nomenclature, Risardo could be described as a comical version of Ariosto's Rinaldo, with the two parts of his name – *riso* and *ardo*, from *ardire* – apparently cancelling each other out. Fonte's fondness for names beginning with *Ris-* is also seen in Risamante, which I discuss elsewhere; this particular 'prefix' for names does not, however, appear in the *Furioso*. It may also be considered indicative of Fonte's gentle de-bunking of the whole genre.

[17] The comparison with Ruggiero is heightened by a similarity in the syntax used to define the moment of forgetting one's duty, be it to one's beloved or to a noble cause. Ruggiero forgets Bradamante after rescuing the naked Angelica from the orc ('Di Bradamante più non gli soviene, / che tanto aver solea fissa nel petto', *OF* XI, ii, ll. 5-6).

The lasting impression given by Risardo is of a knight errant who seems happy to abandon his primary task and to be distracted by any number of other events, and particularly by different female figures. The major focus of the three main knights for much of the *Furioso* – the figure of Angelica – could be described as a 'constant', albeit one that leads to continual distraction and narrative deviation: as the object of their desire, she unites their actions in a perpetual quest. This is the case neither for Risardo, nor for other male characters in the *Floridoro*: although the Athenian king Cleardo's daughter, Celsidea, is set up as a potential figure for amorous interest, and indeed inspires the international joust that takes place later on, she is never the object of pursuit by male knights, and remains a stationary presence. There is no textual equivalent for Angelica within the *Floridoro* in terms of a female character who constantly flees male attentions; Fonte appears to prefer her female figures to be as much in control of the situations in which they find themselves as possible.

Amongst other male characters who fail before the heroic archetype are the Italian prince Silano and his companion Clarido, sailing to the joust in Athens. As they run into a ferocious storm, the narrator is careful to emphasize their strength and courage:

> Solo non perde il cor fra tanti e tanti
> Né sa un minimo usar di viltà segno,
> Silano invitto e 'l suo fedel consorte,
> C'hanno il cor saldo, el volto ardito e forte.(II, xlix, ll. 5-8)

However, such bravery is undermined a few stanzas later by the description of both men appropriating the small side boat and refusing to allow any other men aboard, effectively saving only themselves:

> Volean molti seguir l'esempio loro,
> Ma questi lo vietar col brando nudo,
> E dal legno si sciolsero e da loro,

Che restar preda al mar vorace e crudo.(II, lii, ll. 1-4)

The reader is thus conscious of this precedent when judging future deeds of a noble or heroic nature. Indeed, their courage is again subtly undermined later on in the poem, when they are faced with a throng of beasts before entering the palace belonging to the appropriately named Circetta, daughter of Circe and Ulysses, herself the witch figure of the *Floridoro*. This episode has a clear parallel in the throng of monstrous beings that Ruggiero confronts in the *Furioso* before his eventual entrance into Alcina's palace (*OF* VI, lx-lxx), although Fonte's 'stuolo orrendo' (V, xxxvii, l. 1) appears to be made up of actual animals ('Orsi, tigri, leon, lupi e serpenti, / Dell'aspetto viril crudi nemici', V, xxxvi, ll. 1-2) rather than Ariosto's fabulous creatures ('Non fu veduta mai più strana torma, / più monstruosi volti e peggio fatti', *OF* VI, lxi, ll. 1-2); however, a similar lexis is employed in both authors to describe them ('l'inimico stuolo', *OF* VI, lxv, l. 6, and 'lo stuol villano', *OF* VI, lxx, l. 2).

Furthermore, in one of many reversals of Ariostan myth contrived by Fonte, Silano and his companion fight the throng in order to continue their access to the palace, which has been encouraged by Circetta; whilst in the *Furioso*, Ruggiero is ordered by one of the monstrous creatures to enter Alcina's abode, and battle ensues following his refusal to do so. In the *Floridoro*, however, Silano and Clarido's efforts are ultimately rendered pointless by Circetta's deployment of her magic ('Con la virtù d'una parola sola / Tutta placò quella ferina scola', V, xxxvi, ll. 7-8). The incident is over within the space of barely three stanzas, and the reader is again left with the impression of the knights' inadequacy, as if their 'courage' is in fact unnecessary and can easily be disposed of or replaced. The narrator describes the aftermath of the incident with knowing reference to the knights' feelings:

Per diverso sentier lo stuolo orrendo
Tutto di qua di là si fu diviso,

E i cavallier d'un atto sì stupendo
Lasciò con basso e vergognoso viso.(V, xxxvii, ll. 1-4)

As if aware of such wounded male pride, Circetta takes both their hands in hers and laughs about the episode (V, xxxvii, ll. 6-8). The fray in the *Furioso* is likewise broken up by the appearance of two of Alcina's maidens who also extend their hands to Ruggiero ('Tutta la turba si levò da lato; / e quelle al cavallier porser la mano', *OF* VI, lxx, ll. 3-4);[18] yet the end of the battle, with Ruggiero's meek acquiescence to the damsels ('tinto in viso di color rosato, / le donne ringraziò de l'atto umano', *OF* VI, lxx, ll. 5-6), forms part of the ongoing story of Ruggiero's experiences of temptation by various female characters before his acceptance of his 'Christian' role of husband and protector, and as such differs from the anti-climactic end to Silano and Clarido's encounter. Fonte thus adds to her catalogue of unsatisfactory actions by male characters within the framework of the epic, and allows them no later redemption.

Nonetheless, most problematic of all is the questionable status of the titular 'hero', Floridoro. This particular male character creates difficulties on many levels with regard to the notion of the heroic, since his masculine identity is fundamentally flawed by his age and resultant immaturity. Introduced only in *canto* V, he is from the outset described as a 'minor': at sixteen years old, he has been brought to the tournament in Athens only as a companion to his father, the king of Mycenae, and is not expected to take part. Indeed, he has never taken up arms ('Il damigello ancor non s'era mai / Nell'imprese di Marte esercitato', V, xlvii, ll. 1-2), although, as if in compensation for this, the narrator is swift to point out his natural aptitude for such endeavours ('Ma per natura era gagliardo assai, / Di gran destrezza e d'animo dotato', V, xlvii, ll. 3-4). Incidentally, the word 'damigello' used to describe Floridoro is

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[18] We may again note a reversal in Fonte of the male-female ratio in Ariosto's episode: in the *Floridoro*, two male knights are saved by a female sorceress; whilst in the *Furioso*, two female characters intervene in the case of one male knight.

relatively unusual, and is normally seen in its feminine form of 'damigella', meaning young woman, or damsel. I shall explore the idea of 'feminized' male characters – with particular emphasis on Floridoro – and the relationships that the latter character inspires, elsewhere in the chapter; however, aside from a certain mental association with femininity, 'damigello' also has connotations of a fairly low social rank: it is used only once in the *Furioso*, to denote a servant or stable boy (*OF* XXXV, lxiii, l. 5). The character of Floridoro is thus linked to the attributes of both effeminacy and tenuous 'heroic' status almost immediately after he has first been introduced into the text: hardly the robust heroic archetype that the reader of the poem has been expecting. Further highlighting the fact that Floridoro has not been cast from a previously recognizable heroic mould, his subsequent conduct also smacks of immaturity, even childishness: this, coupled with his lack of experience in matters of battle and conflict, contributes to the picture of a hero whose chivalric standing is clearly in the making, if at all (and here, the unfinished nature of the text precludes any definite conclusions). In this section, I shall concentrate on this aspect of the failure of his masculine identity.

When Floridoro reappears in the poem, in *canto* VII, it becomes evident that his potential 'hero' status is not only being undermined by his own petulant behaviour, but also subtly undervalued by both the characters around him and the narrator. His desire to compete in the tournament quickly translates into a childish tantrum ('Ardea negli occhi e in faccia era vermiglio', VII, viii, l. 5); indeed, his 'giovenil furore' (VII, ix, l. 2), with its distant echo of the passionate *furor* that takes over Orlando, is dismissed by the Athenian king ('Che s'armi e giostri il re non gli concede, / Ch'in sì tenera età valor non crede', VII, ix, ll. 7-8). Floridoro's reaction again betrays his immaturity ('Tutto arrabbia di sdegno e di dolore', VII, xii, l. 3).

After his friend Filardo has secretly helped him obtain a horse and armour for the joust – Floridoro having neither the demeanour nor the accessories of a warrior hero – he sees Celsidea and predictably falls in love with her; yet he is then associated with vaguely ridiculous antics, losing control of his horse as he gazes at the young woman and only narrowly avoiding the mockery of the assembled crowd ('E mancò poco a non uscir d'arcione, / Così rimase il giovane smarrito', VII, xliv, ll. 1-2).[19] In effect, the horse runs off with Floridoro, leaving the narrator to draw a comparison with the somewhat more self-possessed attitude of his companion Filardo, who also contemplates Celsidea ('E vede ancor quella fanciulla altera, / Ma con mente più sana e più sincera', VII, xliv, ll. 7-8). The narrator in these lines also contributes to the undermining of Floridoro as 'hero' of the story, even if the suggestion that Filardo would be a better match for Celsidea is only hinted at.

In the following *canto*, Floridoro's reaction to this new love is documented, but his immaturity is also emphasized ('Cresce la pena ogni or, cresce l'affetto / Nel semplicetto e ancor tenero petto', VIII, liv, ll. 7-8).[20] Despite his 'noble' suffering and copious tears, his first words on the subject appear to classify this emotion as something that disturbs his normally peaceful existence:

> - Lasso, che disusati, alti desiri
> Disturban la mia pace e 'l mio contento,
> Che novo duol, che novo affanno è questo,
> Onde sì afflitto e travagliato resto?(VIII, lvii, ll. 5-8)

It is interesting to note, furthermore, that after he has worked through a realization of his predicament, in full Petrarchan idiom, he declares himself unworthy of the object

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[19] Finucci draws a parallel in the *Furioso* between the lack of control over one's horse and male sexual inadequacy; cf. Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 112.

[20] These lines bear a certain resemblance to a sonnet of Isabella di Morra, of whom Fonte may or may not have been aware: 'ché Fortuna, che mai salda non stassi, / cresce ogn'or il mio mal, ogn'or l'eterna' (poem VII, ll. 7-8); cf. Isabella Morra, *Rime*, a cura di Maria Antonietta Grignani (Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2000), pp. 59-61.

of his desire, contrasting the 'soggetto così raro' (VIII, lix, l. 6), Celsidea, with his 'voglia sì insana' (VIII, lx, l. 2). Floridoro himself seems to cast doubt over his very ability to assume the required masculine chivalric identity. It is rare, by contrast, for male characters in the *Furioso* to think of themselves as anything less than deserving of their beloved's attentions.

Indeed, a constant tension between the youthful, slightly soft demeanour of the adolescent Floridoro and his elevated heroic aspirations runs throughout the text, and both narrator and reader appear to have some difficulty in reconciling the two aspects. After Filardo has comforted and reassured him, Floridoro is once again hopeful of participating successfully in the joust ('Gli cresce il cor, gli torna il primo affetto, / Che di gloria acquistar gli accendea il petto', IX, xxxi, ll. 7-8); however, he is still described by the narrator in terms that are very far from the glory-seeking warrior hero:

> Come fior languidetto ch'abbia il crine
> Tenuto chin sotto una lunga pioggia
> All'apparir del sol le pellegrine
> Foglie rasciuga e 'l ciel mirando poggia,
> Così fer le bellezze alme e divine
> Di Floridoro...(IX, xxxii, ll. 1-6)

The simile of the delicate flower sits oddly with the previous build-up towards the idea of Floridoro showing his worth as a true knight in the tournament.[21] The following stanza also creates an uneven dynamic between softness and strength, that appears to be combined within Floridoro himself:

> Quella dolce speranza ebbe tal forza
> Nel giovenil pensier d'amor acceso

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[21] Cf. also one of the most famous similes in the *Furioso*, 'Come purpureo fior languendo muore, / che 'l vomere al passar tagliato lassa; / o come carco di superchio umore / il papaver ne l'orto il capo abbassa...' (*OF* XVIII, cliii, ll. 1-4). A linguistic model for Floridoro's attitude can be found, amongst others in the *Furioso*, in Medoro's near-death state ('languir ferito', *OF* XIX, xx, l. 2) and in both the dying Zerbino ('languidi occhi', *OF* XXIV, lxxvii, l. 5) and his beloved Isabella ('languidetta come rosa', *OF* XXIV, lxxx, l. 4). Links with the Zerbino/Medoro story-line in the *Furioso*, on which I shall comment in the following section, are thus already laid down.

Che nel petto il vigor cresce e rinforza
E 'l dolce viso ai primi onori è reso.(IX, xxxiii, ll. 1-4)

Here, the adjective *dolce* pervades a passage in which nouns of a certain power and weight (*forza*, *vigor* and *onor*) are given expression, to unsettling effect.

The tournament scene itself is also disconcerting: from a narrative point of view, Floridoro must assume the requisite qualities to defeat the monstrous knight Sfidamarte – roughly equivalent to Rodomonte in the *Furioso* – in order to rouse the interest of Celsidea; yet his portrayal so far has consistently indicated flaws that would realistically ensure his failure at this point. The narrator is forced to adopt the strategy of simply telling the reader that he has become sufficiently heroic to take on such a task, as we see in the following *canto*. The scene is built up so that all hope rests with Floridoro, the other knights having been beaten one by one ('Restava a Floridor l'ultima prova / Contra costui ch'ogn'altro in terra stese', X, lx, ll. 1-2). Just before the joust begins, the narrator is at pains to tell the reader that Floridoro now embodies the heroic ideal, even though the reader may feel that such a transformation is rather sudden:

Ben parve in atto, ai gesti, al movimento
Superbo, al grave, eroico, e fier sembiante
Esser il fior degli altri, e d'ardimento
Gire e di forza a tutti gli altri inante.(X, lxi, ll. 1-4)

The insistence on Floridoro's superiority to all others is accentuated by the listing effect of both nouns and adjectives, aided by *enjambement*.

However, the scene is again imbued with a slightly comical element, as the narrator reveals Floridoro's secret weapon to be love's inspirational flame – but also a good horse:

Grande è il vantaggio suo, ch'oltra il valore
C'ha per natura, amor gli accresce lena,
E di più sotto ha sì buon corridore
Ch'un altro tal porria trovarsi a pena.(X, lxii, ll. 1-4)

His opponent is also measured in love and horses, and is found to be lacking ('Sfidamarte, ch'ancor non sente amore / E ch'a un debil destrier preme la schena...', X, lxii, ll. 5-6). Needless to say, Floridoro defeats Sfidamarte and all those who subsequently challenge him, yet his victory remains somewhat contrived.[22] As if to remind the reader of Floridoro's normally immature stance, the narrator also depicts his reaction to the king's questioning of the hero of the tournament and his companion: 'Floridor trema alla real presenza / E confuso non parla e non ragiona' (X, lxxiv, ll. 3-4). It is left to Filardo to concoct an elaborate lie, involving false identities for both of them and excuses for a prompt departure, in order to conceal the fact that Floridoro has disobeyed the royal wishes by participating in the joust. At the end of the *canto*, the reader is left with the impression that this distinctly unsophisticated protagonist has somehow managed to assume the necessary heroic identity for the completion of the task, but does not entirely merit his success.

In *canto* XI, the last in which he is seen, Floridoro has another chance to assert his ailing masculine credentials in a more typical chivalric scenario, that of the damsel in distress. Having left Athens with Filardo, he has secretly returned to the royal palace alone in search of Celsidea, who has by now also fallen in love with him. The *canto* consists largely of Floridoro's angst at seeing the king of Persia's attentions towards Celsidea, as he spies on the dancing and feasting from a hidden vantage point, and his rage and jealousy are deftly and realistically portrayed. As he flees despairing through the palace, he becomes lost and stumbles upon Celsidea's chambers, where he leaves an anonymous note expressing his love for her. He then leaves, Romeo-like, by the balcony and hides in the bushes below. It is interesting to

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[22] Kolsky does not appear to question this rather unconvincing strand of the narrative, noting Floridoro's adolescent stance but ultimately accepting his characterization as a hero ('one cannot forget that he is also a skilled knight who defeats other more experienced men to win Cleardo's tournament'; Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 179).

note the narrative techniques employed in this *canto*: for example, once Floridoro is ensconced in the bushes, his thoughts turn firstly to Celsidea, and then to the Persian king, whose rival ardour fills him with contempt (XI, xxxi). The poem then cuts to Celsidea, in an almost cinematic movement, and the following stanza begins with her thoughts: 'Intanto Celsidea, c'ha in mente fiso / Di Biancador [Floridoro's alias] l'aspetto e i bei sembianti...' (XI, xxxii, ll. 1-2).

Her reaction to Floridoro's note is again deftly related, and she waits until her maid has left the room before giving vent to her emotions. Here, the narrative slips seamlessly into a form of *style indirect libre*, as pure description of Celsidea's thoughts becomes the thoughts themselves:

> Sopra tutte le cose la tormenta
> Che 'l cavallier ne sia sì tosto gito,
> Che se è ver che per lei tal pena senta
> Come del re non accettò l'invito?
> Come esser può ch'uom di lasciar consenta
> L'amato ben quando può starvi unito?
> Doveva ei procurar di starle a lato
> E non partirsi essendone pregato.(XI, xliii, ll. 1-8)

In this stanza, the questions and final statement are clearly written in the voice of Celsidea herself. She is then afforded a section of direct speech in which she laments his sudden departure; her musings are brought to an end by the sound of a commotion outside her window, but as she cannot see anything in the obscurity, she returns to her bed. There is then another shift in the narrative time-frame, as the poem moves back to the origin of the commotion, guided by the narrator's voice:

> La cagion di quel strepito ch'udio
> La bella figlia nel giardin fu questa:
> Giaceva Floridor tra i fior, com'io
> Dissi, con quel pensier che 'l cor gl'infesta...(XI, li, ll. 1-4)

Floridoro in fact overhears a plot of virtual sexual assault by the king of Persia,

Acreonte, and his brother Marcane, who are about to climb up to the balcony when

Floridoro intervenes. In this confrontation, Floridoro's opportunity for individual heroic action – saving his beloved from potential rape – is also undercut: the main villain of the piece, Acreonte, is accidentally slain by his brother in the confusion of the half-light. Floridoro is left to look on helplessly as Marcane, still confused, leaves the scene thinking Floridoro is his brother. When the truth is revealed in the dénouement, a second occasion for heroic combat is interrupted by the arrival of Filardo, who effectively scares off Marcane. Denied the chance of success at what is more or less a chivalric set-piece, Floridoro fades from the *canto* and indeed the poem.

What, then, is Fonte's purpose in seemingly undermining her major male character, the titular 'hero' of the poem? As we have seen, Floridoro not only joins the ranks of other male characters who fail before the heroic archetype as knights or noblemen: he is highlighted as a character who poses particular, and apparently insurmountable, problems. Both his 'feminization' – which I shall discuss in the next section – and his immaturity contribute to the picture of a protagonist whose masculine identity is evidently very far removed from received notions of the warrior hero. In many ways, Fonte's characterization could be seen as having satirical purposes, with a movement from the flawed heroic capacities of the knights of the *Furioso* to a further extreme: the immature, effeminate young boy as hero.[23] However, Fonte herself appears to have come across inescapable difficulties in the construction of Floridoro as a valid hero, especially under the pressures of narrative conventions such as the testing of courage or strength in combat, and realistic

[23] Although Orlando is also a flawed titular hero, he is 'redeemed' by the end of Ariosto's poem through the restoration of his senses and the realization of his Christian responsibilities.

amorous interests: the *arme* and *amori* of Ariosto's epic.[24] Her point may therefore be a more general desire to undermine the 'macho' male as hero/saviour, especially since Floridoro does not dominate the text to any lasting effect. His failure at full masculine identity is also compounded by the trappings of an effeminate persona, in terms not only of physical description but also of demeanour and of relationships with other male characters. I shall turn to these questions, and to the possibilities of 'homosocial' bonding within the text, in the following section.

Feminizing the Male: The Case of Floridoro

The depiction of many of the male characters in the *Floridoro* as 'non-heroes' is augmented by a certain strain of effeminacy that serves further to undermine the notions of chivalric masculinity that would normally be associated with such a poem. Along with Floridoro himself, other examples of effeminate males can be found particularly at the beginning of the text, and as such set the tone for a rather different exploration and presentation of masculinity. The description of the dwarf king, for instance, is striking in that it emphasizes his elegance and beauty, and as a consequence his effect on those around him at the court of Byzantium. The reader of the *Furioso* would be primed to expect a negative portrait of Fonte's dwarf king, given the precedent in Ariosto: in one anecdote of deliberately unflattering female infidelity, the qualities of ugliness and wickedness are highlighted in the dwarf who manages to seduce a queen.[25]

The 'picciol nano' (II, lviii, l. 7) who appears in Fonte's poem, however, proves to be the epitome of refinement and, above all, beauty:

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[24] Finucci sums up Floridoro's psychological maturity thus: 'il suo comportamento di fronte sia all'amore sia all'amicizia è tutt'al più adolescenziale' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXII).

[25] Cf. *OF* XXVIII, xxxiv-xlvii; the witness to this event, Iocondo, brands the dwarf 'uno sgrignuto mostro' (*OF* XXVIII, xxxv, l. 5) whilst the narrator later describes him as a 'bruttissimo omiciuolo' (*OF* XXVIII, xliii, l. 6).

Di sì rara bellezza è 'l nano adorno,
Che me' Cupido alcun pittor non finge,
Di tutti il guardo a sé tira d'intorno
Quel bel color che 'l viso orna e dipinge.(II, lix, ll. 1-4)[26]

Fonte thus contrives another reversal of Ariostan myth; yet the dwarf king's portrayal as tormented and ultimately helpless lover is imbued with curiously effeminate traits which seem to underline his inability to act for himself. Indeed, not only is his beauty constantly remarked upon by the narrator, but he himself also assumes the role of damsel in distress through his behaviour, whilst relating the story of the real damsel in distress, Raggidora ('Mancò la voce a questo, e crebbe il pianto / Al bel nano, che s'ange, e lagna, e plora', II, lxv, ll. 5-6). After Risardo has promised to free Raggidora, the dwarf appears placated ('Di tal promessa il nano consolato / Asciuga da begli occhi il tristo umore', II, lxix, ll. 1-2, again allowing the narrator a quick reference to his beauty); he is then invited to tell the story in full by the emperor. His demeanour is again distinctly effeminate, with both voice ('con la voce angelica e divina', II, lxxii, l. 3) and expression ('Con via più lieto e grazioso viso', II, lxxii, l. 4) rendered in terms normally reserved for female characters.[27] This unusual portrait of a male character provides the basis for a further exploration by Fonte of tenuous forms of masculinity in the poem.

This is continued in *canto* III by the presentation of another androgynous figure, the twelve-year-old boy whom Risamante finds living in an underground cavern with his mother. I shall comment later in the chapter on both the symbolism and the structural similarities with the *Furioso* contained in this episode, which culminates in the revelation of a future lineage to Risamante by a sorceress figure; the

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[26] These lines are a parody of the set-piece description of Alcina in the *Furioso*: 'Di persona era tanto ben formata, / quanto me' finger san pittori industri' (*OF* VII, xi, ll. 1-2).
[27] Kolsky rightly notes that 'Fonte appears to be rewriting the dwarf's part in her own poem' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 177) but does not develop his analysis of the 'emotionalism' of the dwarf to include the idea of effeminacy ('[the dwarf's] notion of self is such that for love he is willing to play the part of a servant in an act of self-abasement', p. 178).

young boy, meanwhile, is again depicted in sexually ambiguous terms. Introduced as 'un bel garzone' (III, xxi, l. 8), he quickly assumes the qualities of something not yet fully formed, but inherently beautiful:

> Il giovenetto non giungeva ancora
> Ai tredici anni, e era fresco e bello
> Come giglio ch'al nascer dell'aurora
> Apra le foglie e spiri odor novello.(III, xxii, ll. 1-4)

It is worth noting at this point the striking resemblance with the passage from the *Furioso* that describes the young girl whom the treacherous Bireno prefers to Olimpia. Both themes and syntax are mirrored in Fonte's lines; only the sex of the subject is reversed:

> La damigella non passava ancora
> quattordici anni, et era bella e fresca,
> come rosa che spunti alora alora
> fuor de la buccia e col sol nuovo cresca.(*OF* X, xi, ll. 1-4)

This textual link only serves to highlight the effeminate nature of Fonte's young boy, who is effectively described as a maiden would be. The emphasis here is on whiteness and purity – traditionally female features that are also associated with the character of Floridoro later in the poem – and the narrator lingers on the boy's *delicatezza*, likening him to a painting: 'Par proprio che dipinte abbia le membra, / E tanto è bianco che di neve sembra' (III, xxii, ll. 7-8).

The stanza that follows is even more indicative of the ambiguous sexual identity of the boy, as it could easily describe an Ariostan heroine:

> Biondissima ha la chioma e inanellata,
> E 'l ricco vel che 'l suo bel corpo ornava
> E' d'una seta bianca delicata,
> Ch'un'estrema lascivia dimostrava...(III, xxiii, ll. 1-4)[28]

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[28] The depiction of Alcina in the *Furioso* is again worthy of comparison here. The link to painting is also evident: 'Di persona era tanto ben formata, / quanto me' finger san pittori industri; / con bionda chioma lunga et annodata: / oro non è che più risplenda e lustri' (*OF* VII, xi, ll. 1-4). The delicate white silk clothing of Fonte's young boy echoes Alcina's attire as she seduces Ruggiero: 'venne avolta in un leggier zendado / che sopra una camicia ella si messe, / bianca e suttil nel più escellente grado'

The boy's effect on others, again in peculiarly feminine key, is also mentioned ('Negli occhi è d'aria poi sì dolce e grata / Che a chi lo mira il cor del petto cava', III, xxiii, ll. 5-6); the narrator sums up his presence as being 'tutto amore e leggiadria' (III, xxiii, l. 8). Later on in the *canto*, the sorceress who appears to Risamante speaks of the boy as 'Questo garzon dove si vede accolta / Una sì rara angelica beltade' (III, lxx, ll. 6-7); the phrase 'angelica beltade' was in fact used to describe the damsel Raggidora in the previous *canto* (II, lxi, l. 5) and is also found in the *Furioso* with reference to Angelica herself (*OF* VIII, lxv, l. 6). Such allusions may contribute to the notion of a degree of fluidity in the construction of gendered identities within the poem, and in particular that of the masculine persona. The young boy of *canto* III could to a certain extent be seen as a forerunner to Floridoro himself; I shall now turn to the 'feminization' of the latter.

Floridoro's entrance into the text is similarly shrouded in images of beauty and grace. He is noted by the narrator as the 'bellissimo figlio' (V, xlv, l. 2) of the king of Mycenae, and inspires a similar form of adoration in all who see him as does the twelve-year-old boy:

> L'aer del suo bel viso era sì grato,
> Sì vago lo splendor de' bei crin d'oro,
> E la sembianza avea tanto divina
> Ch'ad amarlo ogni cor ben ch'aspro inchina.(V, xlv, ll. 5-8)[29]

This ostensibly effeminate portrait of Floridoro is thus framed by the idea that 'ogni cor' – a universal phrase potentially incorporating both male and female – could love him in some way. Both appearance and demeanour are undeniably feminine ('un vestir delizioso e vago', V, xlvi, l. 2; 'Amor ridea nel suo tranquillo ciglio', V, xlvi, l.

(*OF* VII, xxviii, ll. 2-4); her 'vel suttile e rado' (*OF* VII, xxviii, l. 6) is also mentioned. The idea of the boy's apparent *lascivia*, unusual in this instance, also creates a link to Alcina.

[29] Here the lexis is in distinctly feminine key: his 'bei crin d'oro' would normally adorn female figures, and the stilnovistic effect of his appearance ('ogni cor ben ch'aspro inchina'), like that of the twelve-year-old boy, is always associated with women.

3), and he is even openly compared to a young girl: 'Ogni sua parte fuor che la favella / Par d'una giovenetta illustre e bella' (V, xlvi, ll. 7-8).[30] This seemingly open 'gender confusion' also gives rise to interesting reactions from those around Floridoro, namely the king Cleardo. Stanza xlvii outlines Floridoro's love of tournaments and his desire to accompany his father to Athens; stanza xlviii, which is worth citing in its entirety, turns to their meeting with the king:

> Appresentarsi inanzi al re Cleardo
> Che con benigna fronte li raccolse,
> E rivolgendo al dolce viso il guardo
> Così gli piacque e in tanta grazia il tolse,
> Che fin ch'Amor col suo pungente dardo
> A farli ingiuria il bel garzon non volse
> Con disonor del regio sangue greco,
> Sempre l'amò da figlio e 'l tenne seco.(V, xlviii, ll. 1-8)

The second half of the stanza proves highly ambiguous owing to a certain syntactic confusion and a shifting of subject in lines 5-7; yet the idea of Cupid (Amor) denying the Athenian king a non-platonic attachment to the boy since it would bring shame on the royal house, and instead preserving a 'familial' relationship between the two, seems a valid interpretation.[31]

A similarly ambiguous reaction to a beautiful youth characterizes the meeting in *canto* XIX of the *Furioso* between the Scottish knight Zerbino and the pagan foot soldier Medoro. Zerbino cannot bring himself to kill the young man – who, incidentally, also has a 'chioma d'oro' (*OF* XIX, x, l. 5) – and appears similarly struck by his beauty ('ma come gli occhi a quel bel volto mise / gli ne venne pietade, e non l'uccise', *OF* XIX, x, ll. 7-8). After Medoro has spoken movingly of his desire

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[30] Cf. also the transformation of Ruggiero into an effeminate slave of Alcina in the *Furioso*, which employs a similar lexis: 'Il suo vestir delizïoso e molle / tutto era d'ozio e di lascivia pieno' (*OF* VII, liii, ll. 5-6).

[31] A second, slightly less grammatically correct interpretation posits the king's desire to protect the boy by preventing him from participating in the joust ('keeping him with him', in line 8) – both out of paternal affection and from an awareness that injury to the boy would bring shame onto the royal house. Nonetheless, the idea of 'Greek love' in this context seems to require a careful interpretation.

to bury his dead lord, Zerbino's reaction is even more ambiguous: 'e sì commosso già Zerbino avea, / che d'amor tutto e di pietade ardea' (*OF* XIX, xii, ll. 7-8). The Ariostan precedent for such behaviour may inform Fonte's take on this particular male-male relationship, even if the textual echo is not as immediate; yet the effeminacy of Medoro is itself an influential model for Fonte's Floridoro, as I shall discuss later. It is worth noting, however, that any 'feminization' of male characters in Ariosto is generally seen as a temporary lapse, with characters eventually resuming their masculine characteristics or roles. Ruggiero's feminine 'aberration' at the hands of Alcina constitutes a minor interlude, since he is destined to take on the role of husband to Bradamante and creator of an illustrious lineage; whilst Medoro, despite his effeminate looks, goes on to fulfil the traditional masculine trajectory of marriage to a beloved (Angelica).[32] Even Ricciardetto, Bradamante's twin brother, only assumes the disguise of a woman to gain access to the maiden Fiordispina, of which conquest he boasts to Ruggiero. By contrast, Fonte's feminized male characters tend to remain within the parameters of gendered ambiguity and do not overtly return to the chivalric 'norm' of masculine depictions and behaviour. Fonte's presentation of Floridoro thus remains consistent in terms not only of his immaturity but also of his effeminacy; and the association with the feminine is continued later in the poem, again with language normally employed in the description of female characters ('non può raffrenar dagli occhi il pianto / Che 'l bel viso rigando in sen gli cade', VII, xxi, ll. 3-4, where *petto* would normally be seen in place of the more female *seno*, despite the obvious metrical difficulties; 'con voce dolcissima e soave', VII, xxiii, l. 2).

As I have previously discussed, the reader sees little progression in the development of Floridoro into a full 'hero' figure; in addition, the portrayal of his

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[32] On the feminine elements in the character of Medoro, cf. Maggie Günsberg, '"Donna liberata"? The Portrayal of Women in the Italian Renaissance Epic', *The Italianist* 7 (1987), pp. 7-35, especially pp. 16-20.

relationships with other male characters does little to detract from the image of effeminacy that also contributes to the undermining of his heroic status. Thus, also in *canto* VII, the narrator returns to the relationship between Floridoro and the Athenian king Cleardo, who has denied him the chance to participate in the jousting. Whilst the king's concern for Floridoro's well-being comes across more strongly at this point than before, it is still balanced against a certain emphasis on his love for the boy that does not rule out an overtone of ambiguity:

> L'ama da figlio, e ha per conseguente
> Timor di lui che non patisca oltraggio,
> E quanto più lo prega ei men consente,
> Che vol goder più tempo il suo bel raggio.(VII, x, ll. 1-4)

The king's supposed 'love' for him becomes something of a motif ('Poi che ritienlo il re che tanto l'ama', VII, xii, l. 4); indeed, Floridoro appears to be the object of much male attention, despite the narrator's high-minded protestations of propriety: the reader is informed of his friend Filardo, 'suo caro compagno' (VII, xiii, l. 1), who also loves him ('d'un amor l'amava intero e santo', VII, xiii, l. 3). The dynamic between Floridoro and Filardo echoes that of Medoro and Cloridano in the *Furioso*; yet the former relationship comes to assume more disturbing reflections of male-male bonding, including possessiveness and jealousy, with the apparent transformation of Floridoro into the effeminate object of affection of Filardo.

The closeness of their relationship is seen in this same *canto*, when Floridoro meets his friend in the woods outside Athens; Filardo has contrived Floridoro's departure from the court in order to facilitate the latter's transformation into a contender at the joust. Their emotional reunion is reminiscent of the lover-beloved relationship often seen in the *Furioso*, although the narrator is careful to stress the idea of friendship between the two characters: after Floridoro recognizes his friend ('Conobbe il suo dolcissimo Filardo', VII, xxvi, l. 8), their embrace is seen as purely

platonic ('Il caro suo compagno abbracciò stretto / Qual si richiede a una amicizia vera', VII, xxvii, ll. 3-4). Nonetheless, this 'tight embrace' appears somewhat lengthy, judging by the following line ('Satisfatto in gran parte al loro affetto...', VII, xxvii, l. 5), where the emphasis on 'satisfaction' may also have sexual overtones. Floridoro's reaction to his friend's efforts – i.e. the procuration of a horse and armour for him – is again suggestive of an ambiguous relationship between the two characters. Fonte contrives a type of gender inversion, so that Floridoro's stance is one of (feminine) gratitude and dependence on a male hero figure ('Floridor lieto a questo annunzio ch'ode, / Dir non potrei quanto 'l ringrazii e lode', VII, xxviii, ll. 7-8), whilst his reported verbal response is reminiscent of words spoken by a female beloved to her male suitor in the romance tradition:

> E di novo abbracciandolo gli dice:
> - Caro Filardo mio, tu sol sei quello
> Ch'al mondo mi puoi far lieto e felice,
> E tal per te, senza alcun par, m'appello. -(VII, xxix, ll. 1-4)

In this unusual exchange, Floridoro assumes a distinctly feminine persona in his reaction to his friend; and this is merely reinforced in his so-called transformation into a warrior hero.

In the shelter of a 'secreto ostello' (VII, xxix, l. 6), Filardo helps to dress Floridoro in the armour he has obtained ('Gli le aiutò col paggio a porre intorno', VII, xxx, l. 4), yet all appears white and pure and delicate: the armour itself is brilliant white, as is the cloak – again made of delicate silk ('Poi d'un manto di seta delicato, / Candido anch'ei, ne 'l fé parer più adorno', VII, xxx, ll. 5-6).[33] His steed is also of a brilliant white colour. This emphasis on white – with its associations with female purity, virginity and chastity – not only serves to underline Floridoro's inherent

[33] Cf. also Bradamante's first appearance in the *Furioso*: 'candido come nieve è il suo vestire, / un bianco pennoncello ha per cimiero' (*OF* I, lx, ll. 3-4).

effeminacy but also creates an ambiguous dynamic between Floridoro and Filardo in this scene, Floridoro assuming an almost bridal aspect. A few stanzas later, however, the vision of dazzling white created by Floridoro could also be said to complement the light imagery surrounding Celsidea, and the two are indeed juxtaposed (VII, xxxix-xl). Nonetheless, the preceding scene between Floridoro and Filardo somewhat overshadows Floridoro's first glimpse of Celsidea and his subsequent experience of love at first sight.

In the following *canto*, a further insight is given into the nature of the relationship between Floridoro and Filardo. Filardo arrives at the spot in the woods where Floridoro has sought amorous refuge after his horse bolted from the scene of the tournament; yet tellingly, the narrator's description at this point not only indicates Filardo's concern for his friend, but also hints at a darker sub-text of possessiveness:

> Il caro amico suo [Filardo] dubbio e geloso
> Di lui ch'era il suo bene, il suo tesoro,
> Sopragiungendo in fretta a suoi tormenti,
> Gli interrompe le lagrime e i lamenti.(VIII, lxi, ll. 5-8)

Again, the lexis employed here to describe Floridoro (*bene*, *tesoro*) places him firmly in the category of the female beloved. Floridoro refuses to reveal the exact cause of his torment, but claims that suicide is now his only option, although it pains him that death will separate him from his friend:

> ...Ma sol mi aggrava il cor che sia possente
> Morte a partir tanta amicizia vera,
> E sia diviso il nostro amor interno
> Ch'io mi credea ch'esser dovesse eterno. -(VIII, lxviii, ll. 5-8)

Similarly, the topos of eternal love is more usually associated with male-female relationships in the courtly love and romance traditions than with male-male relationships in the context of chivalric alliances. The *canto* ends on this movement

towards *amor*, after the recognition of an established *amicizia*; the thread is then taken up again in *canto* IX.

The *proemio* to this *canto* lingers on the joys of close friendship, apparently focussing on that between men; yet it could also be read as an elaborate explanation for the previous display of 'gendered' intimacy between Filardo and Floridoro. The narrator seems unsure of how else to categorize this 'love':

> D'un amor sì possente e sì gagliardo,
> L'un verso l'altro d'animo sì pio,
> Ben in quel tempo esser dovea Filardo
> E Floridor di cui seguir desio.(IX, vi, ll. 1-4)

The two friends nonetheless continue to follow patterns of speech and behaviour more usually associated with the conventional lover-beloved relationship. Filardo's response – which again draws on their mutual love – is akin to that of a lover bemoaning his beloved's behaviour: '- Dunque, li dice, il nostro amor non dura / Almeno infino all'ultimo martire?' (IX, viii, ll. 5-6). Filardo believes that Floridoro is in some way worried about the tournament, and is offended by his friend's silence and apparent lack of trust; his mini-discourse encouraging Floridoro to reveal his woes (IX, viii-xiv) ends with the passionate expression of a friendship identified by twin likes and dislikes, and hinting at a curious assimilation of souls:

> Sai pur Floridor mio ch'apprezzo e amo
> Tutto ciò ch'egualmente ami e apprezzi,
> E quel solo accarezzo, adoro e bramo,
> Ch'io so che brami, adori e accarezzi;
> E per contrario a morte odio e difamo
> Ciò che difami a morte, odi e disprezzi;
> Del tuo ben rido e del tuo mal mi doglio,
> E in ogni caso accompagnar ti voglio. -(IX, xiv, ll. 1-8)

In this stanza, with its lilting symmetry of phrases, Filardo outlines his emotional dependence on Floridoro; yet the lines also betray a certain loss of personal identity, as if Filardo is living through or even for Floridoro. The closeness of their

relationship appears to assume a rather ambiguous character at this point in the poem, since Filardo's professed status as 'follower' of Floridoro also implies a bond verging on the amorous.

Filardo's subsequent reaction to Floridoro's revelation of his love for Celsidea is also unusual. After Floridoro has again burst into tears, the narrator depicts Filardo's apparent displeasure at the news:

> Resta Filardo attonito e scontento
> Di lui non meno al fero annunzio ch'ode,
> Quanto sa che né ingegno né ardimento
> Può al gran desio giovar che 'l cor gli rode.(IX, xviii, ll. 1-4)

Filardo's primary function here appears to be twofold: firstly, to act as the voice of reason and to ensure that Floridoro does not act purely out of uncontrolled desire; and secondly, having established the purity of his affection, to encourage him to win his lady's heart by acts of virtue and valour. However, the stanzas that follow (particularly Filardo's actual reply, xx-xxix) exhibit a certain strain of jealousy on Filardo's part, including a subtle trivializing of his friend's suffering in love, and an emphasis on the ill effects of this emotion. Interestingly, Filardo also appears deeply upset by this turn of events, although he hides this from Floridoro ('Come ch'avesse più di pianger voglia, / Sforzò 'l suo cor per non gli dar più pena', IX, xx, ll. 1-2).

Filardo claims to have experienced the power of love many times, but dwells on the pain it can cause ('Che mille volte io n'ho fatto la prova / E so quanto mal fa chi se n'intrica', IX, xxi, ll. 3-4). His chief concern is to curb any unbridled passion that Floridoro may have; yet he appears almost dismissive in his advice, as if he doubts the strength of Floridoro's (juvenile) feelings:

> Se ben amor non vol udir ragione
> Vuo' che le ragion mie con pace ascolti,
> Scaccia un poco dal cor la passione
> E comincia a pensar dove ti volti.
> Vedrai c'hai sciocca e vana opinione,

C'hai fallaci pensier nel petto accolti,
L'amar senza speranza è cosa vana,
E ben sai quanto ell'è da te lontana.(IX, xxiii, ll. 1-8)

In this decidedly odd response, Filardo seems to belittle Floridoro's love, and at the same time attempts to turn him away from it. The following stanza posits that the best state is in fact one without love – again considered an extremely negative phenomenon – and that Floridoro should 'test' his heart in order to make sure the emotion is genuine ('Tenta un poco il tuo cor poi ch'anco il piede / Non v'ha fermato ben l'empia radice', IX, xxiv, ll. 1-2); only then should he allow himself to entertain the idea of achieving his amorous aim, as this is preferable to death.

Nonetheless, the latter conclusion is reached with a tone of barely suppressed reluctance on Filardo's part:

E poi se amore imperioso siede,
Né discacciarlo alla tua mente lice,
Tenta ogni via per arrivarne al segno
Prima che di morir facci disegno.(IX, xxiv, ll. 5-8)

The emphasis throughout his speech so far has been on the idea of ridding oneself of the pest of love, and the verb *scacciare* (or *discacciare*) appears more than once. At no point does he celebrate the elevating or joyous effects of love in order to turn Floridoro away from thoughts of death; nor does he praise the lady in question. Instead, he launches into an extraordinary catalogue of Floridoro's virtues as a way of convincing him not to choose death, since these virtues may – but only *may* – persuade Celsidea to look favourably upon him. Fonte again inverts an Ariostan commonplace, that of the blazon of female beauty proclaimed by a male onlooker, namely the 'filter' of the male narrator of the *Furioso*. In Fonte's poem, a male character is seen to enumerate the virtues of another male character, and even to

reproduce the coy aside normally reserved in Ariosto for the (sexualized) beauty of the female character whose body is under scrutiny.[34]

The blazon begins with a series of superlatives that firmly places the subject in the realm of the ideal; and it is interesting to note that Filardo turns first of all to Floridoro's physical attributes, before outlining his other qualities:

> Tu se' il più bello, il più leggiadro amante
> Che si possa trovar dall'Indo al Moro,
> Più valoroso spirto e più prestante
> Non si può immaginar di Floridoro.(IX, xxv, ll. 1-4)

He then mentions Floridoro's 'grazie [...] celesti e sante' (IX, xxv, l. 5) before noting his material wealth: according to Filardo, although Floridoro is master of neither empire nor kingdom, his status is on a par with other leaders ('Almen ne sei quanto alcun altro degno', IX, xxv, l. 8). The fact that Filardo is at this very moment counselling a distraught adolescent who is considering suicide somewhat belies this assertion. The second stanza of the eulogy repeats the themes of the first, returning to Floridoro's beauty, grace and courage. In this stanza, Filardo lists the attributes of the ideal chivalric figure and identifies them in Floridoro; yet the description is imbued with a sense of admiration for his youth and beauty that seems to outweigh the more usual nods to knightly courtesy and courage.

The list then spirals towards a moment of coy ambiguity in line four:

> La tua florida età, la tua bellezza,
> La grazia, la virtù, l'ardir, e l'arte,
> La cortesia, il valor, la gentilezza,
> E ogni altra degna tua lodata parte,
> Potrà forse in colei che 'l tuo cor prezza,
> Sì ch'otterrai della sua grazia parte;
> Non parlar di morir, Floridor, senza
> Far della tua fortuna esperienza.(IX, xxvi, ll. 1-8)

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[34] Günsberg claims that in the *Furioso*, 'there is never a detailed description of the beautiful male character, as there is of the beautiful female character' (Günsberg, art. cit., p. 17), although she then appears to contradict herself when evaluating Medoro: 'here we have a male character who is described, in detail, in the stock terms usually used of the ideal beauty of the Renaissance woman' (ibid).

The inclusion of 'ogni altra degna [...] lodata parte' may be considered a subversive wink to the tradition found in Ariosto: instead of the *parti* of the naked female heroine that are named but then left to the imagination in the *Furioso*, the (potentially sexual) *parte* mentioned here by Filardo refers to a male character.[35] The *forse* of line five is also telling, as if Filardo is forced grudgingly to admit that this overwhelmingly positive portrait of the young man may indeed win over Celsidea. However, he lingers on the concept of hypothesis, and the adverb *forse* again serves to tone down the idea of success in a later stanza:

> Forse che la tua fama eccelsa e diva,
> Pervenendo all'orecchie illustri e altere,
> Desterà in lei qualche scintilla viva
> Di desio di conoscerti e vedere.(IX, xxviii, ll. 1-4)

Filardo's response appears to lend Celsidea the characteristics of the Petrarchan lady – somewhat haughty and distant – and plays down all notions of the happy union of souls engendered by love, which is largely regarded as a negative construct.

The reader of these declarations may thus begin to suspect that Filardo is in fact jealous of Celsidea's privileged position in Floridoro's affections; and this is seemingly corroborated by snapshots of behaviour in subsequent stanzas of the *canto*. As they return to the scene of the tournament in Athens, the narrator notes that Filardo's cheerful demeanour is effectively a façade hiding deeper concerns:

> Rimontaro a caval contenti e lieti
> Ma più Filardo in faccia che nel core
> (Ch'era un de più prudenti e più discreti
> Giovani e temea il fin di questo amore).(IX, xxxiv, ll. 1-4)

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[35] In the *Furioso*, the narrator plays on the idea of seeing and not seeing with reference to these *parti*; this is done with Alcina ('Non potria l'altre parti veder Argo: / ben si può giudicar che corrisponde / a quel ch'appar di fuor quel che s'asconde', *OF* VII, xiv, ll. 6-8) as well as with Angelica ('di sé vedendo quelle parte ignude, / ch'ancor che belle sian, vergogna chiude', *OF* X, xcviii, ll. 7-8) and with Olimpia, whose blazon gives special consideration to the beauty of these normally unseen parts ('le parti che solea coprir la stola, / fur di tanta escellenzia...', *OF* XI, lxvii, ll. 6-7; and 'Di quelle parti debbovi dir anche, / che pur celare ella bramava invano?', *OF* XI, lxix, ll. 5-6).

Although the parenthesis appears to explain away the strain of jealousy previously manifested by Filardo, the continued emphasis on the latter's circumspection and apparent lack of enthusiasm regarding Floridoro's amorous hopes seems indicative of a certain bond of possessiveness over the titular hero. Furthermore, as the two characters survey the scene, Filardo is keen to distract Floridoro from the contemplation of Celsidea, to whom he is irresistibly drawn ('Ma 'l compagno al suo onor ministro fido / Dal dolce oggetto suo l'invola e svia', IX, xxxvii, ll. 1-2). In the examples above, such behaviour would seem to denote a level of closeness that includes both jealousy and possessiveness, with Filardo assuming a role that goes beyond the figure of the protective friend.

In this section, I have attempted to demonstrate that Fonte consistently puts forward an image of masculinity that is very far removed from the chivalric norm. Her depictions of the dwarf king and of the young boy of *canto* III explore the less usual territory of inherent effeminacy, wherein the male characters take on – and do not relinquish – the traits of femininity, in both appearance and behaviour. This is particularly evident in the characterization of Floridoro himself, and thus particularly problematic from the point of view of narrative function: as a less than masculine male, Floridoro does not appear to fulfil the criteria both for the typical chivalric figure and for the eponymous hero of the poem – unlike the 'masculine' Orlando – and, as a consequence, is subtly discredited as hero/saviour in various parts of the text. He is even likened to the (female) beloved in the dynamic of his friendship with Filardo. Fonte's purpose in the depiction of these forms of masculinity points towards satire, and it certainly serves to undermine received ideas of masculine identity and

the 'macho' male hero.[36] Although the more immediately ironic tone of the narrator of the *Furioso* is less easily discerned in the *Floridoro*, the cumulative effect of failure of Fonte's male characters is undeniably and sometimes humorously subversive. One natural effect of this treatment of male characters in the *Floridoro* is to heighten the profile of the female figures in the poem; I shall now turn to the issues surrounding their characterization, focussing first of all on Risamante.

The Female Solution: A Feminocentric Text?

In subtly undermining Floridoro and various other male characters in the poem, Fonte appears to point towards an alternative force, which finds its natural focus in the figure of the female knight Risamante. Clearly deriving her name from her predecessor, Ariosto's Bradamante, she is the only active female knight of the poem.[37] Given the relative failure of many of the *Floridoro*'s male characters, the reader may well expect a female counter-figure who is capable of taking on chivalric endeavours and carrying them through to a satisfactory conclusion; and Fonte herself would also have been aware of the contemporary expectation of parallels to be drawn with Ariosto's great heroine. A careful reading of the *Floridoro* reveals both the symmetries and the subtle differences in the presentation of this particular female figure. I shall then widen my focus briefly to examine whether the poem could be considered a 'feminocentric' text, i.e. one in which the female characters take centre stage, before a more detailed appraisal of female typology within the poem in the

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[36] I thus take issue with Kolsky, whose interpretation of the effeminate elements in Fonte's male characterization seems unable to allow for the possibility of satire or subversion. Indeed, he claims that '[the] males who have not completely repressed their feminine qualities are the ones who seem to have the approval of the poet' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 178), whilst Floridoro's experience of love merely 'reveals the "feminine" side of his character' (p. 179). Kolsky later affirms that 'Floridoro, the eponymous hero, represents all that might be considered positive in chivalric society, though not without a strong dose of ambiguity' (p. 182); however, such a statement again ignores the subversive thrust of Fonte's characterization, despite the difficulties involved in 'proving' that a text has satirical elements.

[37] Risamante's very name may also point towards the idea of satire.

three sections that follow ('The Case of the Identical Twins', 'The "Wicked Witch" Problematic' and 'Abandoned Women, Prize Women').

Risamante quickly establishes herself as a dynamic and active presence, simultaneously driving the plot forward and undermining the masculine chivalric ideal as she does so, since she usurps the male knight's status as 'indispensable' problem-solver on more than one occasion.[38] She first appears in *canto* II, introduced by the narrator as a typical male knight ('Un cavallier ch'alla ventura andava, / Ornato riccamente egli e 'l cavallo', II, iv, ll. 5-6). In this deliberate gender confusion, Risamante's external identity is considered according to the received 'masculine' chivalric code ('Il cavallier parea gagliardo e franco / Alla presenza, e sopra ogn'altro ardito', II, v, ll. 1-2); yet the insignia on her shield – a white lily on a green background, again indicative of purity – hints at the possibility of female identity through its recognized symbolism.[39] She immediately offers to fight the giant Macandro, a gesture couched by the narrator in the chivalric terms of courtesy and valour ('Com'uom cortese e d'animoso core', II, vi, l. 2). After a distinctly bloody battle (II, ix-xxii), Risamante kills Macandro, a feat that none of the preceding (male) contenders had been able to accomplish. In the defeat of a male enemy, Risamante's entrance into the text has clear parallels with that of Bradamante in the *Furioso*, although the latter's challenge to the pagan knight Sacripante is a fleeting incident in her pursuit of Ruggiero, lasting only three stanzas (*OF* I, lxi-lxiii). Risamante's victory, on the other hand, has tangible results, setting up as it does the tournament

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[38] Finucci notes that this is helped by the fact that Risamante is not yet burdened by emotional ties ('Risamante non è innamorata, e quindi ha ancora occasione di mostrare il suo lato militare'; Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXVII).

[39] Cf. also the strong similarities with the first description of Bradamante in the *Furioso*, particularly in the set of adjectives: 'Ecco pel bosco un cavallier venire, / il cui sembiante è d'uom gagliardo e fiero' (*OF* I, lx, ll. 1-2); Bradamante is also dressed in white, symbolizing her purity.

celebrating this successful defence of Celsidea's honour – a tournament, furthermore, around which the supposedly major plot-line is based.[40]

Parallels with Bradamante are also drawn in the moment of revelation of a female identity: as Risamante takes off her helmet, she reveals that the male warrior hero in this incident is in fact a noble maiden ('E mostrò che 'l guerrier sì forte in sella / Era una gentilissima donzella', II, xxv, ll. 7-8). The similarity to the messenger's words to Sacripante in the *Furioso*, telling him that he has been beaten by a woman, is reinforced in terms of both lexis and rhyme: 'tu déi saper che ti levò di sella / l'alto valor d'una gentil donzella' (*OF* I, lxix, ll. 7-8). Bradamante's physical revelation of her female identity in a 'public' setting comes only much later in the *Furioso*, in the Rocca di Tristano episode of *canto* XXXII; whilst in the *Floridoro*, Risamante is duly described by the narrator as soon as she removes her helmet ('Si tolse l'elmo e discoprì le bionde / Chiome dell'or più terse e luminose', II, xxvi, ll. 1-2).[41] However, the 'bodily' description of Risamante finds more similarities with that of Alcina in the *Furioso* rather than Bradamante, an issue I shall discuss in the following section. Fonte appears to be making the point that the two extremes of warrior and maiden can co-exist, and that outer clothing is symbolic of these two functions. Risamante is thus given 'feminine' clothing by the queen of Athens and Celsidea, once her knightly or 'masculine' duties are over ('in una stanza l'arme li spogliaro, / E di femminile l'abito l'ornaro', II, xxxviii, ll. 7-8). She is honoured at the court of Athens, and the distinction is made between the two aspects of her 'dual' personality:

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[40] Kolsky notes that the tournament 'has a similar function to the siege of Paris in *Orlando furioso*' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 168).

[41] The impact of Bradamante's hair is depicted by the narrator of the *Furioso* in the equivalent scene: 'La donna, cominciando a disarmarsi, / s'avea lo scudo e dipoi l'elmo tratto; / quando una cuffia d'oro, in che celarsi / soleano i capei lunghi e star di piatto, / uscì con l'elmo; onde caderon sparsi / giù per le spalle...' (*OF* XXXII, lxxix, ll. 1-6).

Lascio di dir la festa e l'allegrezza
Con l'onor che fu fatto alla donzella,
Che come donna avea tanta bellezza
Quanto valor come guerrier in sella.(II, xxxix, ll. 1-4)

However, the qualities of beauty and valour appear mutually compatible, as indeed they are claimed to be so in her counterpart Bradamante ('la feron [i capelli] conoscer per donzella, / non men che fiera in arme, in viso bella', *OF* XXXII, lxxix, ll. 7-8).

Risamante goes on to prove her worth again in the following *canto* of the *Floridoro*, to which I now turn.

This *canto* is important in its structural and thematic similarities with the corresponding *canto* III of the *Furioso*, particularly concerning the revelation of a future lineage to Risamante; however, Fonte's methods differ from those of Ariosto. Risamante finds herself in a pleasant woodland scene ('D'acanto, gelsomin, narciso e croco, / E d'ogni altro bel fior vago e adorno', III, x, ll. 5-6)[42] and is soon involved in another chivalrous undertaking. She is confronted by a monstrous creature in the form of a snake which she then proceeds to fight, only later discovering its symbolic value: the snake has been guarding (but effectively imprisoning) the effeminate young boy and his mother in the underground cavern, owing to certain events that I shall discuss in a later section. Despite her terror at the sight of the snake, Risamante engages in battle with it and manages to pierce its open mouth with her lance. In a re-working of the battle with the orc in Ariosto, wherein both Ruggiero and then Orlando are confronted with the (female) sea monster's gaping mouth (and its Freudian overtones of female sexuality), Fonte constructs a scene in which the female knight slays an ostensibly female beast:

L'ingorda fiera con aperta bocca
Le corre sopra, e corla già non puote;

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[42] Cf. a similar listing of plants/flowers in Ariosto: 'Serpillo e persa e rose e gigli e croco / spargon da l'odorifero terreno / tanta suavità...' (*OF* XVIII, cxxxviii, ll. 5-7); Fonte's stanza also takes the rhyme scheme of *poco-loco-croco* (lines 1, 3, 5) from this stanza in Ariosto.

Ma 'l ferro incauta della lancia imbocca,
Che oppon la donna, e sé fora e percote.
La donna sempre più la punta imbrocca,
E fa che 'l drago invan s'aggiri e ruote.(III, xv, ll. 1-6)[43]

The battle is likened by the narrator to that of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes in Greek mythology ('Simil battaglia in quella antica etade / Cadmo fé già col drago orrendo e diro', III, xvi, ll. 1-2).[44] Risamante's skill and courage are also compared favourably to the attributes of this male hero. Having forced the snake backwards until it falls down the hole from which it first appeared, Risamante narrowly avoids falling down the gap herself ('Poco men che non cadde la donzella / Che venia dietro in quella tomba scura', III, xviii, ll. 1-2).

It is worth noting at this point the similarities with the episode in the *Furioso* in which Rinaldo comes upon a monstrous serpentine figure in the woods. He has learned of Angelica's betrothal to Medoro, and is wandering alone and distraught. The figure that confronts the paladin is symbolic of Jealousy – in this case Rinaldo's jealousy of Medoro owing to his own obsessive love for Angelica – and is depicted in negative terms that also relate, unflatteringly, to the female sex: '[vide] uscir fuor d'una caverna oscura / un strano mostro in feminil figura' (*OF* XLII, xlvi, ll. 7-8). The monster is depicted as a strange half-breed between the mythical hundred-eyed giant Argus ('Mill'occhi in capo avea senza palpèbre', *OF* XLII, xlvii, l. 1) and one of the Furies, or Medusa ('avea in loco de crin serpi a gran torma', *OF* XLII, xlvii, l. 4); nonetheless, its snake-like aspect is augmented by its tail ('Un fiero e maggior serpe

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[43] Elements of male sexuality are nonetheless present in the snake – which is also described more than once as 'il drago' – with the phallic symbolism of its tail; yet this is further complicated by the phallic impact of the lance wielded by Risamante, herself a female knight. The sequence thus produces a deliberate confusion of gendered identities in the recognized battle between knight and monster.
[44] Cadmus, son of Agenor, king of Tyre in Phoenicia, slew a dragon who guarded a sacred well. He sowed its teeth in the ground, from which emerged several armed men intent on killing him. Instructed by the goddess Athena, Cadmus threw a precious stone amongst them, initiating a battle for its ownership. The five warriors who survived helped him build the city and became the ancestors of the Thebans. Alongside the echoes of dragon-slaying, it is an appropriate myth on which to draw, since Risamante is about to learn of her illustrious descendants.

ha per la coda', *OF* XLII, xlvii, l. 7: here the use of 'serpe' or 'serpente' appears to refer solely to the tail). Just as Fonte's snake weaves its way towards Risamante ('La velenosa coda in giro mena', III, xiii, l. 6), so the monster prepares to use its weapon against Rinaldo ('vibra il serpente venenoso in alto', *OF* XLII, xlix, l. 3), but unlike Risamante, Rinaldo seems unable to defeat the creature in the struggle that ensues. He is instead rescued by a knight symbolizing 'Noble Disdain', who chases the monster back into its hole and then guides Rinaldo to the fountain that inspires hate rather than love, thus 'curing' him of his unhealthy passion for Angelica.[45] Fonte's parallel to this incident twists the 'personal demon' of Jealousy, caused by a woman and itself painted as a curiously female monstrosity, into a creature that is not only restricting the freedom of a mother and son – and thus an entity to be challenged within the framework of the chivalric ethos – but also the product of a husband's jealousy. This sub-plot, which is not entirely clear-cut in its themes of sin and blame, will be discussed, as I have mentioned, in a later section.

Fonte also contrives differences in the events of this equivalent *canto* to the *Furioso* in the fact that Risamante does not fall down into the underground cavern. She loses her lance as the snake falls into the hole, but leaves them both there and begins instead to look for her horse. It is only on instruction from a disembodied voice, echoing the spirit of Merlin in the *Furioso*, that she actively clambers down into the cavern. Her entrance into the 'tomba scura' (III, xviii, l. 2) is also couched by the voice in terms of reward and benefit, after the noble deed just accomplished:

> ...quindi in guiderdon del serpe ucciso
> Col premio uscirai fuor ricca e altiera.
> Entra pur là dove la serpe orrenda
> Cadde, se vuoi veder cosa stupenda. -(III, xix, ll. 5-8)

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[45] Finucci links the killing of threatening (female) monsters in the *Furioso* to sadistic male sexual urges: 'Orlando kills with a phallic instrument, an anchor attached to a rope he places in the monster's mouth; Rinaldo kills with the help of a patriarchal father, Indignation, wielding another phallic instrument, a flaming torch' (Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes...*, op. cit., p. 138).

Risamante's entrance is thus shrouded in the idea of positive action, unlike Bradamante's slightly comical fall. Bradamante is tricked by the traitor Pinabello, who hopes to kill her, at the end of the second *canto* of the *Furioso*, and the narrator re-joins her 'tutta stordita' (*OF* III, vi, l. 5) in the cave at the beginning of the third. Risamante, on the other hand, climbs down the hole after careful consideration ('la giovene gagliarda / Con man s'attacca all'orlo e i piedi cala', III, xx, ll. 6-7).

Although, like Bradamante, she is shortly to be shown her destiny, there is a suggestion that she is a little more in control of events than her Ariostan counterpart;[46] indeed, the first part of her name (*riso*) would appear to denote a degree of confidence, if not obvious humour, attached to her characterization.

Having heard the story of the mother and son, whom she has effectively liberated, Risamante is then greeted by the Melissa figure of the *Floridoro*, the nameless 'gentil fata' (III, xxxvii, l. 5) who appears before them. Fonte again takes recognizable elements of the plot-line of the *Furioso* and changes them to suit her purposes, so that in this case the fairy figure gives a magic ring directly to Risamante, rather than advising her on how to procure one for a future endeavour.[47] In the *Floridoro*, the ring is explicitly seen as a self-contained reward for Risamante's courage, as outlined by the fairy ('questo annel che tal rende splendore / Ti dono in premio del tuo gran valore', III, xxxviii, ll. 7-8). The ring is endowed, as expected, with the power to protect the wearer from evil spirits and charms. The fairy then moves to the next stage of her duty, the showing of progeny to Risamante, which takes the form of looking at figures in a mirror rather than the *spirti* who process

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[46] Malpezzi Price notes the similarities with the Garden of Eden in the scenery and the appearance of the snake, and comments that the whole episode 'seems to be a rewriting of the Genesis scene with [the] emphasis on women and their effort to gain control of their lives' (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 107).

[47] In Ariosto's poem, Melissa advises Bradamante to kill the pagan Brunello and to obtain a magic ring in his possession, which will enable her to free Ruggiero from the clutches of the wizard Atlante (*OF* III, lxvi-lxxiv).

around the circle containing Bradamante in the *Furioso*. However, the idea of a demonic presence is common to both scenarios: Risamante is met with but protected by the ring against 'Molte ombre rie' (III, xli, l. 6) in the dark inner chamber to which she is conducted by the fairy, whilst the spirits surrounding Bradamante are of infernal origin, but have been summoned by Melissa in order to perform the specific function allocated to them. After the listing of Risamante's descendants, with its conventional linking to the patron of the work,[48] the fairy disappears; Risamante, who has yet to be afforded direct speech in the poem, then leaves the mother and son in search of new adventures.

The first instance of direct speech will in fact appear in *canto* V of the *Floridoro*, in relation to the next enterprise that she undertakes, concerning the nobleman Nicobaldo:

> Disse la donna: - Allor ch'io trovo il modo
> D'espormi a qualche impresa perigliosa,
> Non mi ritiro indietro, anzi più godo
> Quando si tien per impossibil cosa.
> Che di disciorre ogni intricato nodo
> Deve aver l'alma pronta e desiosa
> Ogni buon cavallier quando alla gente
> Giova, come fu questo del serpente. -(V, lxxi, ll. 1-8)

In these lines, Risamante displays both her readiness for a challenge and her courage as a knight, projecting the idea of a problem-solver in the imagery of the knot in lines 5-8. Yet after Nicobaldo's lengthy explanation of his predicament in *canto* VI, this sub-plot is never completed, and we re-join Risamante only in the final *canto*. She is at this point involved in a battle to re-claim her territory from her 'evil' twin sister Biondaura, a battle reduced to a duel between herself and her sister's delegated champion, the king of Babylon. The confrontation is again described in bloody terms,

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[48] Finucci notes the difficulties faced by Fonte regarding the conventions of the genre: a lineage or dynasty must be outlined in order to facilitate the praise of the patron, and thus the marriage of the female protagonist is necessary (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., pp. XXX-XXXI).

yet the narrator is careful to accentuate Risamante's humanity as well as her ferocity and bravery in battle. Her 'feminine' attributes of softness and compassion are used to counter any notion of monstrousness that such a woman warrior could be accused of conveying, so that when the king falls after a particularly heavy final blow, Risamante rushes over to tend to him:

> La guerriera, c'ha 'l cor molle e umano,
> Vistosi il meglio aver di quella briga
> Gli corre sopra, e con pietosa mano
> Dell'elmo sanguinoso il capo sbriga...(XIII, lxiii, ll. 3-6)

As well as being the only character involved in real, satisfactory duels in the poem, she is depicted as being beyond reproach in her chivalric behaviour, embodying the heroic ideal more than any of the male characters.[49] Fonte appears to point to Risamante as the alternative to the failed masculine model in the text, whilst also subtly indicating the supremacy of the female sex in other areas, which I shall now explore.

There is evidence, first of all, to support the idea that the *Floridoro* is in effect a feminocentric text. An emphasis on female patronage frames the poem: the work is dedicated to both the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Tuscany, Francesco de' Medici and Bianca Capello, but Fonte lingers on the female half of the couple in her praise of her patrons. At the beginning of the first *canto*, with its nod to the famous *proemio* in Ariosto,[50] the author balances her writer's concerns against the ray of inspiration emanating from her patrons ('Mentre al raggio purissimo e divino /

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[49] Although Malpezzi Price argues that Fonte 'finds it impossible to bring her construct of the woman warrior to a closure acceptable both to her conservative audience and to the basic tenets of her work', so that ultimately 'this unresolved conflict may be one of the reasons behind the incompleteness of [the] poem' (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 103).

[50] Ariosto's lines ('Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto', *OF* I, i, ll. 1-2) are re-modelled in Fonte's second stanza, in which she addresses her personal Muse ('Canta l'inclite imprese e i dolci affetti / De' cavallieri e delle donne illustri', I, ii, ll. 1-2); a similar ambiguity exists in the bracketing together of the sexes with the subject matter of arms and love. The latter themes are also evident in her first stanza ('canta / Li spogliati trofei, gli incendi spenti / Dal tempo, ond'ancor Marte e Amor si vanta', I, i, ll. 2-4).

D'un'alma coppia il rude ingegno affino', I, ii, ll. 7-8). She then devotes two stanzas to Francesco and Bianca respectively, offsetting his 'generoso core' (I, iv, l. 5) and 'virtù via più ch'umana' (I, iv, l. 6) with her 'casto [...] e maritale affetto' (I, v, l. 2) and 'grazie alte e supreme' (I, v, l. 3). In *canto* III of the poem, meanwhile, Bianca assumes a prominent position in the fairy's listing of Risamante's descendants, which contrives a jump from Greece to Italy and to the Medici of Florence; she is said to provide the perfect complement to Francesco's already admirable qualities.[51]

Yet Bianca is also celebrated as a woman in her own right, as the fairy's epilogue to the list reveals. In an additional passage of seven stanzas, praise of Bianca, whose origins were in the Venetian nobility, is enmeshed with praise of the city of Venice: 'Nascerà questa [Bianca] in grembo alla marina, / Di stirpe generosa e pellegrina' (III, lxii, ll. 7-8). The fairy goes on to inscribe the city within the annals of history: 'VENEZIA il nome sia chiaro e giocondo / Che durerà fin alla fin del mondo' (III, lxiii, ll. 7-8). After a stanza focussing on the noble inhabitants of the city, the fairy picks out the Capello family as worthy of praise, and places Bianca in its centre:

> D'una delle cui case illustri e degne
> Che dei CAPPELLI è la famiglia eletta,
> Verrà costei dalle regali insegne
> Col tempo in luce, e sarà BIANCA detta.
> Ella per sua virtù d'ogni altro spegne
> La gloria della sua stirpe perfetta,
> Anzi più accrescer dee col suo valore
> Degli avi eccelsi suoi l'alto splendore.(III, lxv, ll. 1-8)

Bianca's exceptional qualities not only enable her to eclipse the glory of her ancestors, but to a certain extent also lessen the superlatives previously afforded to her consort Francesco. The fairy seems keen, furthermore, to note her cerebral qualities as well as the more conventional feminine attributes of beauty and kindness ('questa

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[51] Following a catalogue of Francesco's virtues, Fonte's rhyming couplet sums up his excellence ('O felice Francesco senza fine / Per doti sì mirabili e divine', III, lx, ll. 7-8); yet her next stanza suggests that a woman makes him even better ('Ma più felice e fortunato assai / Poi che per grazia di benigna sorte / Donna la più gentil che fusse mai / T'è dal ciel destinata per consorte', III, lxi, ll. 1-4).

gentil, cortese e bella / Donna, di senno albergo e d'eloquenza', III, lxvi, ll. 1-2). The eulogy then widens to encompass the Capello family members who come both before and after Bianca, but she remains the pivotal point of reference.

Fonte reprises the thread of praise towards the end of the poem, in *canto* XII; here, the witch Circetta elucidates the series of allegorical carvings in her abode, created by her mother Circe, to Silano and Clarido, in another eulogy of Venice.[52] Circetta speaks of Bianca Capello as being 'onor del suo sesso e del suo tempo' (XII, vii, l. 8), whilst the description of her attributes is conveyed in even more forceful terms:

> Di questa altera e gloriosa donna
> Prevedendo l'ingegno alto e sottile,
> E come vestirà sì chiara gonna
> Di bei costumi e d'ogn'atto gentile,
> E che fia di virtù salda colonna
> Sì che null'altra a lei sarà simile,
> Tanto mia madre amor li pose sopra
> Ch'a gloria sua fé sì mirabil opra.(XII, viii, ll. 1-8)[53]

The idea of beauty has in fact been omitted from this stanza, and as such makes way for strength of character and intellect. In this passage of praise, Francesco de' Medici is mentioned merely in passing, as the 'almo eroe' (XII, ix, l. 3) whom she will marry,

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[52] Malpezzi Price notes the parallel between the sympathetic view of Circe in the poem and the celebration of Fonte's somewhat unconventional female patron, Bianca Capello (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., pp. 119-20). According to the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, the life of Bianca Capello – the daughter of Bartolomeo Capello and Pellegrina Morosini, two of the most illustrious and ancient Venetian families – was not without controversy. At the age of fifteen, Bianca eloped with the young Florentine merchant Pietro Bonaventuri, displeasing her father with her marriage (1563). She was then taken under the wing of Francesco de' Medici, who subsequently started a relationship with her, apparently with Bonaventuri's full knowledge and despite Francesco's own marriage to Giovanna d'Austria in 1565. In 1572, Bonaventuri was assassinated, allegedly at the behest of Francesco. Giovanna d'Austria died in April 1578; only two months later, Bianca and Francesco were married in inappropriately grandiose style. The marriage was repeated more solemnly on 12th October 1579, accompanied by their coronation as Grand Duke and Duchess. Bianca is said to have surrounded herself with court intrigues and gossip; she died in 1587, having failed to bear Francesco a male heir. Given her colourful life, Fonte's admiration of her seems somewhat unusual (cf. *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, dir. Alberto M. Ghisalberti [Rome, Società Grafica Romana, 1968], vol. 10, pp. 15-16).

[53] Cf. the description of Isabella Colonna, who married Luigi Gonzaga, in the preamble to *canto* XXXVII of the *Furioso*: 'Et è ben degno che sì ricca donna, / ricca di tutto quel valor che possa / esser fra quante al mondo portin gonna, / mai non si sia di sua constanzia mossa; / e sia stata per lui vera colonna, / sprezzando di Fortuna ogni percossa...' (*OF* XXXVII, xi, ll. 1-6). Fonte again adopts the (significant) rhyme scheme of *donna-gonna-colonna* (lines 1, 3, 5) from Ariosto's stanza.

and her name is this time proclaimed before his (XII, ix, ll. 7-8). In the final *canto* of the *Floridoro*, Circetta returns to the praise of both *ingegno* and *beltà* (XIII, xxxii, l. 6) in Bianca, and again lingers on her future, immortal glory. Bianca's marriage to Francesco, seen by Finucci as the climax in Circetta's eulogy,[54] is nonetheless depicted as the culmination of factors that celebrate Bianca's individual merits:

> E poi che fia per tanta patria degna,
> Per stirpe e ancor per sé, com'ho detto ora,
> Qual è stupor se sia in moglier diletta
> Dal gran duca toscan fra mille eletta?(XIII, xxxiii, ll. 5-8)

The figure of Bianca thus becomes intertwined with the symbol of Venice, creating a tapestry of imagery revolving around the idea of the excellence of the female sex. The poem is in this way lent a feminocentric outer frame, which serves to enhance the status and prominence of the female characters within the fictional construct contained by it.

In effect, female figures of various types dominate the *Floridoro*, from the woman warrior Risamante and her elusive twin sister Biondaura, to the king's daughter Celsidea and the witch Circetta. The poem begins and ends, more or less, with the movements of Risamante, who assumes the mantle of dynamic problem-solver for several of the sub-plots. The movements of the majority of male characters are in large part dictated by female figures in various situations, whether predicaments or positions of note (although the latter may depend, Fonte concedes, on the stimulus of beauty). It is also interesting to note the initially feminocentric slant of the vision of Risamante's progeny in *canto* III: in contrast to Bradamante in the *Furioso*, Risamante is predicted a daughter, not a son ('Del re di Cipro sia da te concetta / Unica figlia, Salarisa detta', III, xliv, ll. 7-8). The daughter – whose beauty, intellect

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[54] Finucci comments that '[l'autrice] fa coincidere la fine del suo *excursus* storico encomiastico su Venezia con l'anno 1579, l'anno appunto in cui la Capello diventava granduchessa' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXI).

and courage are said to overtake the equivalent attributes of her mother, as well as all of her contemporaries – takes part of her name from Risamante rather than her father, who is indeed left unnamed and does not appear to dominate the marriage.[55] This is in stark contrast to *canto* III of the *Furioso*, in which a son is foretold to Bradamante by the sorceress Melissa:

> Vedi quel primo che ti rassimiglia
> ne' bei sembianti e nel giocondo aspetto:
> capo in Italia fia di tua famiglia,
> del seme di Ruggiero in te concetto.(*OF* III, xxiv, ll. 1-4)

The son will in fact be named Ruggiero, or Ruggierino, thus taking his formal identity solely from the father's side. It is in this intertextual counterpoint with the *Furioso* that Fonte appears to promote both her fictional female characters and the female sex in general; I shall now turn to a more specific exploration of female typology within the poem, beginning with the twin sisters.

The Case of the Identical Twins: Innovation within the Genre

The presence of specifically female twins in a romance epic is undoubtedly innovative, and allows the author to examine different aspects of the female psyche, with the potential for connection as well as opposition between them. A mirroring motif is evident in the thread of plot concerning Risamante and Biondaura, highlighting their superficial similarity but also inviting commentary both on their differences and on the composition of the female 'self' in general. There are clear parallels with the *Furioso* in Fonte's construction of the story-line concerning the twins, with the idea of usurped territory common to both poems. In the *Furioso*, the wicked witch Alcina has usurped most of the island on which she lives from her 'good' sister Logistilla, who was herself the legitimate heir to her father's territory;

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[55] Indeed, Kolsky notes that '[the] "threat" of marriage is so far away that, given the incomplete nature of the poem, the female characters act with even more liberty of action' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 169).

Logistilla occupies only a small part of the island, to which Alcina and her equally evil (twin) sister Morgana lay perpetual siege (*OF* VI, xliii-xlv). In the *Floridoro*, Risamante's quest is to gain possession of her territory from Biondaura, who refuses to acknowledge her twin's equal right to their father's kingdom; Risamante was taken away from the family as a child and brought up as a skilled warrior by the wizard Celidante, so that her father was forced to leave the royal lands to Biondaura alone (II, xxx-xxxvi).[56] Fonte once more contrives a reversal of the Ariostan precedent: in her poem, the territory has been assigned primarily to the 'bad' sister, leaving the 'good' sister an active role in the attempt to claim it back. In Ariosto's plot-line, any action carried out is by the evil Alcina, whilst Logistilla's position is somewhat passive.[57] Nonetheless, the latter two female figures clearly provide the basis for Fonte's version of territorial conflict between sisters.[58]

The presentation of the female twins in the *Floridoro* is layered with a deliberately confusing mechanism of symmetrical 'mirroring' and playing on double images, as shown in *canto* II, in which Risamante's identity is revealed. Having defeated the giant Macandro, she takes off her helmet and reveals her face to the crowd of Athenians; they, however, believe her to be Macandro's mistress Biondaura, as they have seen a portrait of the latter that Macandro carried with him. Thus, added

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[56] I feel that Kolsky gives a rather misdirected emphasis to the fact that Risamante was hidden away from 'civilization' in order to be trained by the wizard, which the narrator explains in *canto* II ('Stette gran tempo seco ella celata / Dentro una rocca in mezzo il mar fondata', II, xxxii, ll. 7-8). Kolsky tries to highlight the supposed paradox here: '[the] point is certainly being made that "imprisonment" can release a woman from the roles and duties imposed on her by society' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 176). This idea of 'imprisonment' is not, I believe, intended by Fonte as the crux of the story, which instead focusses on the development of the woman's potential in an environment free from distractions or, as Kolsky himself notes, fixed gender roles.

[57] Significantly, Fonte gives Risamante the role of warrior heroine and therefore the option to fight for rule over her own territory. The right to one's own territory, for a woman, may be more widely interpreted as being symbolic of the need for a female 'territory' of social, economic and intellectual freedom, an issue raised in Fonte's later dialogue.

[58] Alongside the fairy duos of Alcina-Logistilla and Alcina-Morgana, a further Ariostan model for Fonte's twins may be Bradamante and her brother Ricciardetto, who are said to be outwardly indistinguishable when Bradamante has short hair. As mentioned previously, Ricciardetto also masquerades as a woman at one point, thus temporarily transforming this duo into a same-sex combination.

to the confusion of gender identity surrounding the unknown 'male' knight is that of the seemingly inexplicable identity of the female figure concealed by the armour – the mistress whose honour Macandro was supposed to be defending. Ironically, his killer proves to be her twin sister. The 'mirroring' of Risamante and Biondaura is explored first in terms of reality and reflection in an actual mirror (stanza xxviii), then in terms of the physical reality of Risamante and the image of Biondaura in the portrait (stanza xxix). Both are seen to correlate exactly:

> Come chi fosse alla presenza quando
> Tiensi donna talor lo specchio inante,
> E ora il viso natural mirando
> Venisse, ora in quel vetro il suo sembiante,
> Non saprebbe ogni parte esaminando
> Qual cosa fusse in lor dissimigliante,
> Così parve costei del re de' Parthi
> L'amata in tutte assimigliar le parti.(II, xxviii, ll. 1-8)
>
> Volse che si portasse ivi il ritratto
> Il re, ch'ancor giacea sopra il terreno,
> E il pinto e il ver parve ad un modo fatto
> Quando propinqui fur né più né meno.(II, xxix, ll. 1-4)

This examination of reflection, appearance and reality confirms the superficial similarity between the sisters; however, the narrator then goes on to enumerate the 'gendered' differences between them ('[...] una è molle e delicata / E l'altra va come guerriero armata', II, xxx, ll. 7-8). These differences are classed in terms of gendered behaviour: one is overtly feminine, whilst the other is masculine since she dresses and acts like a male knight. With the starting point of the identical appearance of the two female characters, Fonte seems to be making the point that they are not conditioned by their sex, and that, dependent on the correct instruction, they are equally capable of either the active or the contemplative life in the guise that each requires.

This is reinforced by the narrator's summary of Risamante's early life at this point in the *canto*: although she was already destined for greatness at birth ('le stelle /

La inclinavano ad opre alte e leggiadre', II, xxxi, ll. 1-2), she had to be nurtured by Celidante, who was aware of her *arte* and *valore*, in order to achieve this (II, xxxii). However, the twins must necessarily be diametrically opposed in order for the narrative device of Risamante's quest to function; as such, Risamante is filled with righteous indignation at her twin's refusal to recognize their kinship ('Per questa aspra risposta Risamante / Sdegnossi contra lei di giusto sdegno', II, xxxvi, ll. 1-2, lines full of alliterative sibilants) and roams the land in search of armies to help her conquer Biondaura's kingdom. Her adherence to the chivalric code of ethical conduct – in the undertaking of noble deeds – is thus tailored to suit her personal needs, as such activity furthers her aim of gaining powerful allies. Killing the giant Macandro ties in with this aim on two levels: not only is he linked directly to her sister, but his demise at her hands also ingratiates her to the Athenian king. In this way, the twins are set up as 'good' and 'evil' from an early stage in the poem; yet as Finucci notes, Fonte appears to find this categorization problematic.

In effect, the play on mirroring and double identity, along with a shared desire for rule over their kingdom, seems to forge a link between the sisters that goes beyond the fact of their twin birth. Finucci's psychoanalytical interpretation suggests that the identification between Risamante and Biondaura occurs at a much deeper level, with the potential joining of masculine (Risamante) and feminine (Biondaura) characteristics.[59] Risamante would in any case appear to find a part of herself in Biondaura, leading to complications in the dénouement of her conflict with her twin. The mirroring effect is further heightened by the fact that Biondaura is never physically present in the text, leaving her twin to assume the incarnation of her being,

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[59] 'Quello che Risamante e Biondaura vogliono è chiaramente la stessa cosa, ma è soltanto litigando per conquistarsela che esse possono identificarsi in maniera narcisistica l'una con l'altra e riunire, per così dire simbioticamente, la loro parte maschile e femminile' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXII).

to the confusion of all who see her. There is in fact no real confrontation between the two sisters in the final *canto* of the poem: having defeated Biondaura's delegated champion, Risamante is simply crowned the victor, whilst word is given of Biondaura's reaction ('Spargeva intanto un lagrimoso rivo / Biondaura, avendo la novella udita', XIII, lxiv, ll. 5-6). The logical narrative conclusion – elimination of one's enemy, i.e. Biondaura herself – is thus avoided. There is even a final emphasis on the 'oneness' of the twins in the defeated champion's confusion over the identity of his challenger: Risamante is again mistaken for the lady supposedly being defended.[60] According to Finucci, the lack of resolution in the plot-line concerning the twin sisters leads to a narrative impasse that prescribes the abrupt ending of the entire poem.[61] In effect, Risamante cannot bring herself to kill her double, as she recognizes a part of herself within her. Fonte's point here is perhaps that the two sisters are less antithetical than they first appear, and that the divide between 'good' and 'evil' is not as clear-cut as it is in the *Furioso*. The merging of the twins' identities suggests a grey area of personality in which the so-called two halves of good and evil can co-exist in the female self, although one may ultimately dominate the other.

This is reinforced by the presence of connections in the text between both Risamante and Biondaura and more than one female character in the *Furioso*, creating a level of intertextuality that does not limit the female figures of the *Floridoro* to one fixed counterpart – good or evil – in Ariosto's poem. Risamante is linked to both

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[60] Fonte here includes a subtle comment on female capability going beyond beauty in the speech assigned to the bewildered king, in which he praises the strength and courage of his adversary ('Ma presso la bellezza onde m'avinse / Non credea che valor tanto pregiato / Regnasse in lei...', XIII, lxvii, ll. 5-7).

[61] 'Il motivo per il quale il *Floridoro* finisce senza spiegazioni proprio al punto in cui, avendo sconfitto la sorella, la *quête* è finita e Risamante si trova davanti all'unica scelta tematicamente saggia, quella di eliminarla [...], è un'indicazione forse del fatto che siamo arrivati a un'*impasse*: quello che sembra indispensabile da un punto di vista narrativo la Fonte lo trova improponibile da un punto di vista psicologico' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXII).

Bradamante and Logistilla in the *Furioso*, and thus to ostensibly 'good' characters. However, parallels are also drawn with Alcina and Angelica, blurring the boundary that would normally delineate the status of the noble female knight. This is achieved firstly in the description of Risamante in *canto* II of the *Floridoro*, which is closer to that of Alcina than to any of the other female characters in the *Furioso*, both in terms of the 'top-down' order of body parts described and in analogies made. Thus we find Risamante's 'bionde / Chiome dell'or più terse e luminose' (II, xxvi, ll. 1-2) correspond to Alcina's 'bionda chioma lunga et annodata: / oro non è che più risplenda e lustri' (*OF* VII, xi, ll. 3-4). The light imagery associated with Risamante's eyes ('due stelle apparir tanto gioconde / Che per invidia il sol nel mar s'ascose', II, xxvi, ll. 3-4) is also matched by Alcina's 'duo negri occhi, anzi duo chiari soli' (*OF* VII, xii, l. 2). The description of Risamante's cheeks ('Movean le guancie fresche e rubiconde / Invidia ai gigli e alle purpuree rose', II, xxvi, ll. 5-6) takes part of its imagery from the *Furioso* ('Spargeasi per la guancia delicata / misto color di rose e di ligustri', *OF* VII, xi, ll. 5-6),[62] whilst her hand ('La man, che disarmata anco tenea, / La neve di candor vincer parea', II, xxvi, ll. 7-8) is paralleled by Alcina's 'candida man' (*OF* VII, xv, l. 2). Although the imagery used here is commonplace in the Petrarchan school of poetry, Fonte appears to follow the model of Alcina from the *Furioso* in the laying out of her own description of Risamante.

In addition, Risamante is likened to Angelica in *canto* III of the *Floridoro*, when she comes across the pleasant woodland scene and is overcome by a desire to lie down and sleep. This is clearly an echo of the scene in *canto* I of the *Furioso*, where the fleeing Angelica stops to sleep in a secluded area of the countryside. The lexis employed is also similar: Fonte's 'bel boschetto ombroso / Di vermigli rosai

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[62] The idea of envy is also present in the description of Alcina, with the personification of Invidia: cf. 'quindi il naso per mezzo il viso scende, / che non truova l'Invidia ove l'emende' (*OF* VII, xii, ll. 7-8).

fioriti e belli' (III, xi, ll. 1-2) is a reflection of Ariosto's 'boschetto adorno' (*OF* I, xxxv, l. 3) with its 'bel cespuglio [...] / di prun fioriti e di vermiglie rose' (*OF* I, xxxvii, ll. 1-2). Both Risamante and Angelica are enchanted by their surroundings and stop to rest, but are then rudely awakened by noise ('Ma non è appena acconcia in sull'erbetta / Ch'un gran romor sente dentro il roseto', III, xii, ll. 3-4; 'Ma non per lungo spazio così stette, / che un calpestio le par che venir senta', *OF* I, xxxviii, ll. 5-6). These intertextual links highlight the deliberate construction of a more fluid female characterization by Fonte, and her desire to take from the *Furioso* those passages which best serve her purpose of creating a recognizable, yet different, female typology.

Furthermore, although Risamante's twin Biondaura is not transformed into a 'good' sister by the end of *canto* XIII, she is never demonized to the extent that Alcina is in the *Furioso*, and in fact bears a greater resemblance to the character of Angelica in her beauty and her ability to manipulate male characters.[63] This is seen especially in *canto* I of the *Floridoro*, in which mention is first made of the female ruler of the Armenian kingdom, Macandro's mistress. The likeness to Angelica is introduced by the description of Macandro's relationship with Biondaura: we are told by the narrator that, just like Orlando with Angelica, Macandro has come close to losing his senses out of love for her ('De' cui begli occhi avendo il cor ferito, / Venuto era per lei presso che insano', I, x, ll. 5-6).[64] The likeness is then continued by the narrator's damning response to Macandro's delusion that he is favoured above all

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[63] As Finucci notes, 'Fonte si rifiuta di creare in Biondaura un'altra Alcina "iniqua e scelerata"' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXI).

[64] I therefore disagree with Kolsky's assertion that in the *Floridoro*, 'the theme of madness is completely absent' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 168). Both Macandro and the knight Lideo – discussed later in the chapter – are linked to madness through their experiences of love; whilst Floridoro's 'giovenil furore' (VII, ix, l. 2) is provoked by the age restriction in force at the tournament.

others in Biondaura's eyes. She is exposed as a capable manipulator of her own sexuality in order to further her personal causes:

> Non che l'amasse la gentil donzella,
> Ch'era amante per lei disconcio troppo,
> Ma perché lite avea con la sorella
> E temea ognor di qualche strano intoppo,
> Con lieta vista e con dolce favella
> Lo tenea stretto all'amoroso groppo...(I, xi, ll. 1-6)

The stanza ends with a rhyming couplet that does little to dispel the image of Biondaura as astute manipulator of men, and even carries a certain ambiguity ('E l'avea un tempo in corte intertenuto, / Perché al bisogno suo le desse aiuto', I, xi, ll. 7-8). This snapshot of Biondaura's behaviour is extremely similar to that of Angelica in the first *canto* of the *Furioso*, when she hears Sacripante's lament and schemes to use him as a protective guide back to her kingdom. Angelica also intends to employ her sexual wiles in order to manipulate Sacripante, and these are similarly denounced by the narrator as insincere:

> Ma non però disegna de l'affanno
> che lo distrugge alleggierir chi l'ama,
> e ristorar d'ogni passato danno
> con quel piacer ch'ogni amator più brama:
> ma alcuna finzïone, alcuno inganno
> di tenerlo in speranza ordisce e trama;
> tanto ch'a quel bisogno se ne serva,
> poi torni all'uso suo dura e proterva.(*OF* I, li, ll. 1-8)

In both cases, the female characters are only concerned with their own *bisogno*, and exploit their sexuality as a means of achieving their aim of protection. Fonte's model for this behaviour is again found in the *Furioso*, but is adapted for use in the portrayal of the so-called 'evil' female character of Biondaura. In this way, the boundaries are again blurred in the allocation of fixed counterparts in Ariosto's poem to the female figures of the *Floridoro*.

In this first *canto* of Fonte's poem, the absent Biondaura is pitted against the Athenian king's daughter Celsidea, whose beauty is supposedly an affront to Macandro's sensibilities concerning his mistress. Celsidea's goodness and purity stand in contrast to the manipulative nature just outlined by the narrator with regard to Biondaura; yet these two female characters are themselves linked by the method of figurative representation at different points in the text, and are both – paradoxically – depicted as noble. Macandro carries a small portrait of Biondaura with him which he hangs on a tree before the start of the jousting with Celsidea's defenders:

> Appeso a un ramo avea del sacro olivo
> Un'effigie di donna alma e gentile,
> D'un aspetto sì nobile e sì divo
> Che raro alcun se gli trovò simile.(I, xxxii, ll. 1-4)

This image acts in direct contrast to the idea of Biondaura conjured a few stanzas before; and its similarity to the reality of the lady in question ('questo che parea non finto, vivo, / Sì lo ritrasse un diligente stile', I, xxxii, ll. 5-6) lends a veneer of truth to her new, 'noble' personality. Celsidea is later represented figuratively in her chambers at the palace, when Floridoro accidentally comes upon her room:

> Nel mezzo una bellissima figura
> Giace sul fregio alla gran porta in faccia,
> E sta con sì mirabil prospettiva
> Ch'a tutti par natural forma e viva.(XI, xxii, ll. 5-8)

Her nobility is again emphasized ('L'imagine di donna illustre e rara, / Anzi di vaga e ben ornata dea...', XI, xxiii, ll. 1-2), although the more general theme of appearance/reality also invites the reader to question the presentation of such characters and to allow for the possibility of multiple interpretations, in this case of the female 'self'.

The connection between Biondaura and Celsidea is once more indicative of a shifting scale of female typology within the *Floridoro*, from the 'mirroring' of

Risamante and Biondaura to the various textual resonances with female figures in the *Furioso*. The above examples are all attempts by Fonte at an exploration of the multi-faceted female psyche, for which there is no easy system of categorization. Her female characters have inter-resemblances as well as differences, and do not simply parallel their so-called 'counterparts' in Ariosto's poem. Fonte's characterization plays with the idea of fluid identities as opposed to fixed personality traits from the previous chivalric tradition; and in her merging of characters from the *Furioso*, she ultimately makes them her own. However, as Finucci has rather schematically noted,[65] Fonte appears to struggle with the idea of creating female characters that are engaged purely in acts of wickedness: her Biondaura is no Alcina, but rather closer in personality to Angelica. Fonte is similarly troubled by the characterization of her own 'wicked witch' figure, Circetta, to which I now turn.

The 'Wicked Witch' Problematic

As Virginia Cox has noted, the *Floridoro* is not the only example of a female-authored chivalric epic: yet it is the first in which the treatment of the pivotal witch figure is unusually sympathetic.[66] In the presentation of her Circetta, Fonte retains many of the topoi surrounding the characterization of Alcina in Boiardo and Ariosto, including her island paradise habitat; however, much like the depiction of Biondaura in the *Floridoro*, Circetta is never demonized, and in many ways comes to resemble the fairy figure of *canto* III who advises Risamante on her future progeny. Fonte again appears inclined to re-write the romance tradition of wicked or fickle female characters, transforming the negative portrayal of the lustful and scheming witch into a more neutral depiction of a young woman with inherited magical powers, who is in

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[65] 'Fonte, donna, trova improponibile creare donne che si buttano via o sono buttate via con *nonchalance*' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXII).
[66] See Cox, 'Women as Readers...', op. cit., pp. 141-44.

fact herself vulnerable to male deception. The characterization of Circetta is ultimately positive, with the reader's expectations of her deceitfulness instead being re-directed towards the male figure involved, the Italian prince Silano. Fonte incorporates recognized elements of the Alcina episode in the *Furioso* into her own sub-plot; yet she again manipulates the Ariostan precedent so that certain associations are made with Circetta, as a careful reading of the *Floridoro* shows.

This is seen firstly in the scene-setting before the introduction of Circetta into the text, in *canto* V. The 'vaga e bella isola' (V, vii, l. 8) on which Silano and Clarido finally land is described in terms of a pastoral idyll:

> ...per lieti e verdeggianti prati,
> Per quel bel piano a camminar si diero.
> Veggon de' fiori i bei campi stellati
> Dove più d'un capriol scorrea leggiero...(V, ix, ll. 3-6)[67]

The description continues with further echoes of the parallel scene in the *Furioso*:

> Nel boschetto di lauri e di ginepri
> Veggion tra due fontane intatte e dolci
> Caro e secreto albergo a damme e a lepri,
> Che da fere gli asconde e da bifolci.(V, x, ll. 1-4)[68]

In such a highly charged *locus amoenus*, the reader is primed to expect signs of magic or artifice, and this is indeed the case in the *Floridoro*: the two knights can hardly believe the perfect appearance of the fruit on the trees ('Quai d'oro e quai di color d'ostro pinte, / Che dall'arte parean ritratte e finte', V, xiv, ll. 7-8). The narrator then alerts the reader more openly to the disturbing secrets inside this 'paradise', outlining the central wooded area as a place of uncertainty and even death (V, xvi). A textual pointer to the previous tradition is also included with the mention of Venus's symbol,

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[67] The equivalent landscape of the *Furioso* has 'culte pianure e delicati colli, / chiare acque, ombrose ripe e prati molli' (*OF* VI, xx, ll. 7-8), in which 'saltano i daini e i capri isnelli e destri, / che sono in copia in quei luoghi campestri' (*OF* VI, xxii, ll. 7-8).

[68] Cf. 'Vaghi boschetti di soavi allori, / di palme e d'amenissime mortelle' (*OF* VI, xxi, ll. 1-2) and 'sicuri si vedean lepri e conigli, / e cervi con la fronte alta e superba, / senza temer ch'alcun gli uccida o pigli, / pascano o stiansi rominando l'erba' (*OF* VI, xxii, ll. 3-6).

the myrtle bush ('all'odorifer'ombra / S'assidon poi d'un amoroso mirto', V, xvii, ll. 3-4), again priming the reader to expect a similar outcome to that of Astolfo in the *Furioso*: he became the *amoroso* of Alcina and suffered the fate of being transformed into a myrtle bush once she had tired of him.

Fonte has up until this point remained within the broad parameters of the Alcina episode in the *Furioso*, employing mechanisms to ensure the reader's awareness of connections to the previous tradition; yet her build-up to the interaction between Circetta and the two knights contains subtle indications of a desire to re-write the formula laid down by Ariosto and others. Silano and Clarido, alerted by a sudden noise, come upon the boundary walls of Circetta's abode; yet unlike the golden walls surrounding Alcina's palace,[69] they are made of a substance that flashes and sparkles more brightly than a diamond. The narrator appears to linger on the description of these walls:

> Affermar non si può che la muraglia
> Di pario marmo o d'alabastro sia,
> Perch'è di splendor tal ch'ogn'occhio abbaglia,
> Quantunque saldo e che lontan ne stia.
> A sì mirabil passo non s'agguaglia
> Diamante alcun che simil luce dia;
> Di carbonchio non è né di cristallo
> D'argento no, né del più fin metallo.(V, xix, ll. 1-8)

The walls in fact bear a resemblance to those surrounding the domain of Logistilla, the 'good' fairy of the *Furioso*.[70] Circetta is thus already distanced from the 'wicked

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[69] Cf. 'Lontan si vide una muraglia lunga / che gira intorno, e gran paese serra; / e par che la sua altezza al ciel s'aggiunga, / e d'oro sia da l'alta cima a terra' (*OF* VI, lix, ll. 1-4).

[70] Logistilla's *rocca* is described by the narrator as follows: 'Né la più forte ancor né la più bella / mai vide occhio mortal prima né dopo. / Son di più prezzo le mura di quella, / che se diamante fossino o piropo. / Di tai gemme qua giù non si favella...' (*OF* X, lviii, ll. 1-5). Later on in the *Floridoro*, the interior of Circetta's abode is described in similar terms ('L'ultima faccia il muro di diamante / Tre usci comportian d'avorio schietto. / Sono le soglie e i cardini d'argento, / E di vivi rubini il pavimento', VIII, xxxvi, ll. 5-8; 'la gran sala dia / Mirabile splendor di gemme e d'oro', VIII, xxxviii, ll. 1-2). Mention should also be made of the similarity in the depiction of Circetta's island dwelling with that of Venus' kingdom in Poliziano's *Stanze*: cf. Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze / Fabula di Orfeo*, a cura di Stefano Carrai (Milan, Mursia Editore, 1988), especially the surrounding landscape of Cyprus, one of the seats of Venus, in Book I, 70-73 (pp. 79-81) and the description of the palace in Book I, 95-119

witch' image that the reader had been expecting to find. Furthermore, on entering the interior *caverna* of Circetta's dwelling, the knights are surprised to find, instead of a dark and ominous grotto, a place of light:

> Creduto avria ch'in loco oscuro e cieco
> Lo avesse a trar del re latino il figlio,
> E se n'andò timidamente seco
> Com'uom che per onor segue il periglio.
> Ma come fu nel sotterraneo speco
> Col buon Clarido ambi inarcaro il ciglio,
> Colmi di maraviglia, che maggiore
> Dentro era che di fuor luce e splendore.(VII, xlvii, ll. 1-8)

This description again harks back to Merlin's underground cavern in *canto* III of the *Furioso*,[71] and the textual resonance importantly associates Circetta with the wise sorceress Melissa, who appears before Bradamante in this scene.[72] The framework surrounding the characterization of Circetta thus already places her in a more positive category, away from the stereotype of the wicked witch figure.

Fonte's presentation of Circetta herself is also interesting, as it again indicates a desire to revise existing portrayals of the personality attached to this character. Silano and Clarido first see Circetta escorting a knight, whom she has taken prisoner, out of her abode: as Cox has noted, the first impression of her is thus somewhat threatening.[73] However, the subsequent physical description of Circetta given by the

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(pp. 93-107); the palace is also built from diamonds and gemstones, and contains a series of carvings of mythical scenes, including the birth of Venus.

[71] Cf. 'Surgea nel mezzo un ben locato altare, / ch'avea dinanzi una lampada accesa; / e quella di splendente e chiaro foco / rendea gran lume all'uno e all'altro loco' (*OF* III, vii, ll. 5-8).

[72] Circetta is also likened to Melissa in *canto* XII of the *Floridoro*, where she explains the meaning of the allegorical carvings in her abode to Silano and Clarido. This explanatory function supersedes the witch's normal attribute of 'wickedness'. Finucci has here noted the structural reversal of the Rocca di Tristano episode in *canto* XXXIII of the *Furioso*, in which the male host explains the meaning of his frescoes to two women, Bradamante and Ullania; in *canto* XII of the *Floridoro*, the female host Circetta explains the meaning of the sculptures in her dwelling to two men (cf. Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXI). Kolsky somewhat inexplicably states that it is 'the mutual incommunicability of the pair on which the text focuses' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 174).

[73] See Cox, 'Women as Readers...', op. cit., p. 142.

narrator dispels any illusion of menace by its correspondence to the Dantesque 'donna angelicata':

> Costei il suo biondo inanellato crine
> Parte tenea sopra 'l bel collo sparso,
> Parte raccolto in treccia era al confine
> De' vaghi orecchi, e in fronte era più scarso.
> Le belle luci angeliche e divine
> Avriano ogni cor d'aspe e di tigre arso,
> Lo sguardo era vivace, accorto, e ladro,
> E 'l viso in ogni parte almo e leggiadro.(V, xxiii, ll. 1-8)

It is interesting to note the carefully orchestrated effect of modesty in lines 1-4, in which Circetta's hair – a powerful tool in the deployment of sexual wiles – is not left completely free, but is partly tied back and thus 'controlled' to a certain extent. The overall impression of an almost divine beauty and loveliness is only mildly counteracted by one concession to the traditional witch figure, the 'roguish' look found in line seven ('Lo sguardo [...] ladro'). Nonetheless, the idea of a good-natured and honest young maiden is promoted in the preliminary moments of this meeting between Circetta and the two knights ('ella con sembiante almo e gentile / Gli risaluta e tuttavia camina', V, xxv, ll. 3-4).

Such a favourable impression is in danger of being eroded, however, by Circetta's subsequent actions, and the prisoner is duly turned into a tree ('Il cavallier lasciando il carnal panno / Divenne tronco a un semplice scongiuro', V, xxvii, ll. 5-6). At this point in the text, the reader may well expect events to unfold in similar vein to Astolfo's tale in *canto* VI of the *Furioso*, with the witch figure taking a liking to one or both of the knights and tricking them into entering her abode. This would indeed appear initially to be the case, as Circetta encourages Silano and Clarido to accompany her back to her dwelling ('Venite, cavallieri avventurosi, / E non temete alcun periglio strano', V, xxx, ll. 1-2). Yet the narrator then intervenes with a

sentiment that entirely contradicts traditional expectations, appearing instead to be afraid for Circetta's own safety and well-being:

> Ah, misera, tu cerchi i tuoi riposi
> Abbreviar, e 'l cor ferir c'hai sano.
> Quanto meglio saria se con ritrosi
> Accenti e con parlar fiero e villano
> Da te scacciasti i cavallieri arditi,
> Che con sì care parolette inviti.(V, xxx, ll. 3-8)[74]

Expectations are further undercut by Circetta's claim that she is herself a victim of circumstances that effectively make her a prisoner ('anch'io son sottoposta a sorte dura / E ne spargo di lagrime le gote', V, xxxi, ll. 5-6). Her brief explanation at this point outlines the need for a knight who will liberate her from the island by defeating the as yet unseen monsters. Her characterization has therefore gradually undergone a

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[74] These lines constitute a prototype for the later feminist thought of Fonte's dialogue, whose female characters conclude that the best state for women who want to study and write is freedom from men – both financial and emotional. The *proemio* to *canto* IV of the *Floridoro* also contains an impassioned argument for the equality of the sexes, refuting any notions of female 'biological' inferiority ('Le donne in ogni età fur da natura / Di gran giudizio e d'animo dotate, / Né men atte a mostrar con studio e cura / Senno e valor degli uomini son nate', IV, i, ll. 1-4). These lines echo the pro-feminist sentiment of the *proemio* to *canto* XX of the *Furioso* ('Le donne son venute in eccellenza / di ciascun'arte ove hanno posto cura...', *OF* XX, ii, ll. 1-2). Fonte's narrator, like Ariosto's in the long *proemio* to his *canto* XXXVII, even goes so far as to declare that women can overtake men's achievements in arms and letters if they put their minds to it: 'Sempre s'è visto e vede (pur ch'alcuna / Donna v'abbia voluto il pensier porre) / Nella milizia riuscir più d'una, / E 'l pregio e 'l grido a molti uomini torre; / E così nelle lettere e in ciascuna / Impresa che l'uom pratica e discorre...' (IV, ii, ll. 1-6). She closes her mini-discourse on the subject with a comment on the importance of female education that reflects the struggles of Fonte's own upbringing ('Se quando nasce una figliola il padre / La ponesse col figlio a un'opra eguale, / Non saria nelle imprese alte e leggiadre / Al frate inferior né disuguale', IV, iv, ll. 1-4). The narrator pessimistically concludes that the idea of education for young girls is belittled ('Ma perché in altri affar viene allevata / Per l'educazion poco è stimata', IV, iv, ll. 7-8). Similar concerns are raised in the work of the later writer and actress Isabella Andreini (1562-1604), who was born in Padua but came from the Venetian Canali family. Her *Lettere*, which appeared in 1607 in Venice, comprise 150 epistolary compositions, reflections and musings on various subjects, including defences of women. Her letter entitled 'Del nascimento della donna' – addressed to a father disappointed at the birth of a daughter instead of a son – is an eloquent defence of the female sex, and expresses concerns over women's lowly position in the society of her time; cf. LETTERE / D'ISABELLA / ANDREINI / PADOVANA, / COMICA GELOSA, / ET ACADEMICA INTENTA; / NOMINATA L'ACCESA. / *Dedicate* / AL SERENISSIMO DON CARLO EMANVEL / DVCA DI SAVOIA, &c. (IN VENETIA, appresso Sebastiano Combi, MDCXII), pp. 18^{v}-20^{r} (the 1612 edition begins a system of pagination similar to foliation after its preliminary folios). On Andreini, see Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1989), especially pp. 257-78; Laura Anna Stortoni, ed., 'Isabella Andreini', in *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, trans. Laura Anna Stortoni & Mary Prentice Lillie (New York, Italica Press, 1997), pp. 221-49 [this piece contains a transcription and translation of the letter mentioned above, pp. 226-31]; and Maria Luisa Doglio, 'Letter Writing, 1350-1650', trans. Jennifer Lorch, in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza & Sharon Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 13-24, especially pp. 22-24.

metamorphosis, passing from 'wicked witch', through 'good fairy/sorceress', and finally reaching 'damsel in distress'.

Circetta's speech is enough to reassure the two knights, and is even afforded the *gravitas* of religious overtones, again distancing her from the image of the wicked witch ('i cavallier rassicurati alquanto / Prestaron fede al parlar dolce e santo', V, xxxii, ll. 7-8). Once inside the boundary walls, the knights are met by the throng of beasts, an incident commented on earlier in the chapter; and it is after this that Circetta is explicitly described as virginal ('La dolcissima vergine ridendo...', V, xxxvii, l. 5), another quality not normally associated with the witch. Cox has noted the 'desexualization' of the *maga* in both Fonte and Marinella, calculated to deflect any accusations of moral reprehensibility.[75] Her honesty and modesty are in fact continually emphasized, as seen in her reaction to the flirtatious compliments addressed to her by Silano:

> Chinò la donna i lumi onesti e santi
> A quel parlar che non le fu già grave,
> E 'l viso ornò del bel color che suole
> Scoprir la rosa al matutino sole.(V, xxxix, ll. 5-8)

This *canto* thus sees the introduction and presentation of Circetta in a distinctly positive light, with Fonte re-writing the chivalric tradition to suit her feminist aims, namely the revision of pre-conceived ideas surrounding the construction of certain female identities.

The presentation of Circetta is framed by the re-interpretation, again in positive mode, of the story of Circe, the sorceress of classical Greek mythology.[76]

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[75] See Cox, 'Women as Readers...', op. cit., p. 143; she comments on 'the pressure of authorial modesty, inevitably a factor in the women's writing of this period' (ibid).

[76] Circe was famous particularly for her magic potions, and would change all men who landed on the island where she dwelt into pigs by having them drink the contents of her magic cup. When Ulysses and his companions were cast upon her island, all but Ulysses were transformed into swine; he had been given a protective herb by Hermes which rendered him immune to her spell. He is said to have remained at least a year with Circe, and they had a son, Telegonus, who became the founder of

Circetta is her appropriately named daughter in the *Floridoro*, and the narrator claims that she has inherited her 'good' characteristics from her mother:

> Era costei di quella Circe figlia
> Che fu sì dotta e sì perfetta maga,
> Giovene onesta e saggia a maraviglia,
> Di bellissimo gesto, accorta, e vaga...(VII, lii, ll. 1-4)

Line two, describing Circe, emphasizes her more learned qualities, focussing on the 'wise woman' aspect of her knowledge of the magic arts. The revision of the Circe myth is continued even more explicitly, and to a 'feminist' end, in the following *canto*, the *proemio* of which contains a damning evaluation of the male psyche. The narrator again appears to want to highlight the learned nature of Circe's art, which has been all but forgotten ('Circe già in virtù d'erbe e di parole, / Con alto studio oggi a nissuno espresso...', VIII, i, ll. 1-2). However, the narrator cannot understand why Circe expended her energy in transforming men into animals ('Mi par sì lieve ch'io stupisco invero / Ch'ella degnasse in ciò porre il pensiero', VIII, ii, ll. 7-8) when they are, she ironically claims, so close in nature.

In the lines that follow, she provides a sharp comment both on men's innate brutality and boorishness, and on their facility for self-transformation and deception of others:

> Poco mi par che fesse ella cangiando
> Gli umani corpi in orsi, in lupi, in tori,
> Quando alla nostra età gli uomini errando
> Di lor medesmi son trasformatori;
> E con tal facilità girsi mutando
> Gli veggio senza oprar versi o liquori,
> Che poco [sic] stima in ciò fo di quell'arte
> Poi che 'l secol di noi n'ha tanta parte.(VIII, iii, ll. 1-8)

Tusculum in Italy. Malpezzi Price notes that 'Fonte's reading of Circe's story exemplifies a woman's interpretation of this legend, since hers is a conscious rejection of the portrayal of this character as it is handed down by the canonical literary tradition' (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 116; see her pp. 113-16 for a summary of the literary background to Circe).

Nonetheless, these pronunciations also tone down the ostensibly 'wicked' side of Circe's actions, the reasoning being that since the men she transformed were brutish anyway, she was not changing their situation to a great extent. It is also interesting to note the response to the narrator of the *Furioso* at this point: the structure of his generalizations on the so-called majority of avaricious women in the *proemio* to *canto* XXVI ('Ma quelle che per lor vera bontade / non seguon de le più lo stile avaro...', *OF* XXVI, i, ll. 5-6) is echoed in Fonte's declaration of a majority of men involved in deception, as voiced by her female narrator ('Di tutti no, ma ben del più ragiono, / A cui piace parer quel che non sono', VIII, iv, ll. 7-8). Just as Terracina engages with such 'gendered' statements in her *Discorso*, so too does Fonte in the narratorial interventions within the *Floridoro*.

The revision of Circe's personality continues through the eyes of Circetta, with the latter's narration of her mother's meeting with Ulysses. Circe's behaviour is presented as being entirely beyond reproach ('Circe la bella e virtuosa fata / Si mostrò a Ulisse e a suoi compagni grata', VIII, xii, ll. 7-8); and Circetta even goes so far as to deny the accepted version of events regarding her mother's actions towards men:

> E taccia pur chi dice ingiustamente
> Che trasformasse i suoi consorti in fiere,
> Che mai non fé, se non sforzatamente,
> A chi la volse offender dispiacere.(VIII, xiii, ll. 1-4)

In this positive 'spin' on the story, Circe is said to have transformed men into animals only when forced to do so. Her union with Ulysses resulted in the birth of Circetta, and as the latter notes ('del nome di lei nacqui Circetta', VIII, xiii, l. 8), she takes her name from her mother's side alone, much like the daughter predicted for Risamante in *canto* III. In her relation of her mother's supposed betrayal and abandonment by Ulysses, Circetta leaves her listeners in no doubt as to the culpability of the male protagonist ('con l'astuzie ond'era esperto e dotto / Un dì se l'involò senza far motto',

VIII, xiv, ll. 7-8), re-casting Circe in the roles of abandoned woman and blameless victim, in which all notions of wickedness are omitted. Her classical pose of grief ('sparge un rio di pianto amaro', VIII, xv, l. 6) likens her to other abandoned women of myth such as Dido and Ariadne, and to Olimpia in the *Furioso*.

Throughout Circetta's narration, Circe is seen as the epitome of the self-sacrificing woman in love, although there is a hint of criticism at Circe's excess of generosity to Ulysses: she was unable to pursue her abandoner because she foolishly taught him her magic, which he then used against her ('Fece all'amante ogni scienza espressa / E per gradir altrui nocque a se stessa', VIII, xvi, ll. 7-8).[77] Although revenge is mentioned, it is not in fact directed against Ulysses:

> Chiuse il dolor nell'affannata mente
> E aspettò che 'l cavallier morisse,
> Per far sopra quest'isola vendetta
> Che la vista di lui l'avea interdetta.(VIII, xvii, ll. 5-8)

Rather unusually, her revenge – according to Circetta – takes the form of a slaughter of the inhabitants of Ulysses's native island of Ithaca, by the beasts with which Silano and Clarido were faced; although the cause of this cruelty is given as her spurned love ('Quella gran crudeltà nata d'amore', VIII, xx, l. 2). However, her attitude towards Ulysses remains one of devoted remembrance: she constructs a temple in his honour with the aim of immortalizing his name, and places inside both his ashes and Achilles' armour, for which Ulysses competed. In similar vein to Rodomonte's pious construction of a mausoleum for the dead Isabella in the *Furioso*,[78] the story of Circe's mourning for Ulysses tends ultimately to detract from any preconceptions of wicked or ignoble behaviour on her part. Fonte's radical re-interpretation of the Circe

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[77] Malpezzi Price notes that 'Fonte will further develop this theme of women's naive behavior and share of guilt in their oppression in her dialogue *Il merito delle donne*' (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 118).

[78] Cf. *OF* XXIX, xxxi-xxxix: Rodomonte challenges all who try to cross the bridge leading to the mausoleum to a duel, and hangs the spoils of his victories over pagan knights – whose lives he spares – above the tomb.

myth, through the eyes of her daughter, re-writes her character as one who is actively abandoned, but who charitably abstains from outright revenge.[79] She serves as a further example of a witch figure who defies traditional categorization.

Circetta's role in the aftermath of this event appears complex. Whilst acting as a comfort to her mother in the absence of her lover, and participating in lessons in (good) magic, she is nonetheless effectively trapped in the system later imposed by Circe on the island of Ithaca (described by Circetta herself as 'questo incanto reo', VIII, xxvii, l. 4).[80] Her age is also magically fixed at the time of this 'entrapment', so that unlike Alcina, who is revealed in *canto* VII of the *Furioso* as an ugly old hag, Circetta is deliberately and perennially youthful, with no hidden ugly side ('da indi in qua tanti anni sono / Corsi, e pur fresca e giovanetta sono', VIII, xxvii, ll. 7-8). She may be freed from this 'imprisonment' by a warrior who equals Ulysses in strength and courage, and who is able to overcome a series of challenges in order to gain possession both of the armour and of the island itself – but not, importantly, of her: Fonte does not allow her witch figure to become the 'prize woman' so often seen in Ariosto.[81] In her explanation of this set-up, Circetta also reveals quite a different motivation behind the transformation of her own prisoners into trees: since no warrior may enter the temple unless he is the equal of Ulysses, the transformation constitutes

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[79] In most classical accounts, the time eventually came when Ulysses wanted to resume his voyage, and although unhappy at losing him, Circe advised him on the best way to proceed back home. The tale of deception and abandonment would appear to be an invention by Fonte. Kolsky notes that '[by] upsetting the various male versions of the story Fonte emphasises the fictionality of such myths and their openness to interpretation, so that they can be challenged, and perhaps eventually replaced by a female version' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 171).

[80] Kolsky notes that 'Circetta is literally the hostage of her mother's misfortunes', although he also rather vaguely states that she is 'the product of social choices and female inequality' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 172).

[81] Kolsky believes this to be a crucial female response to the gender relations of the genre as a whole, claiming that 'Fonte makes seemingly minor variations within the structure that leaves [sic] an ambiguous space for deconstructing the fundamental commonplaces of the romance epic' (Kolsky, 'Moderata Fonte's *Tredici canti...*', art. cit., p. 173).

a punishment either for unwanted transgression, or for failure to complete the allotted task:

> ...quando audace alcun di poco merto
> Nelle mura infernal d'entrar si sforza,
> Così punito vien che 'l tempo incerto
> Vive dell'età sua sotto altra scorza.(VIII, xxx, ll. 1-4)

Alcina's precedent of seduction and female fickleness is thus completely removed from the equation: in this scenario, Circetta merely acts as the superintendent of her mother's wishes.[82] The narrator later reveals that this task is by no means enjoyed by Circetta, again distancing her from the callous actions of Alcina.[83]

However, it is in Circetta's interaction with Silano, above all, that the negative image associated with the witch figure of a rapacious sexuality is most obviously dispelled. She has eyes only for Silano when the knights take off their helmets, but her modest bearing is again emphasized:

> ...Silano più bello il cor le accende
> E par che più le piaccia e le diletti,
> Non però ch'in mirar l'alta presenza
> Desse a begli occhi suoi troppo licenza.(VII, liv, ll. 5-8)

Silano is unable to love anyone but Celsidea, whose beauty has been impressed upon his mind; yet he is well aware of his effect on Circetta, and is happy to manipulate her emotions for his own ends ('senza aver da lei grazia e consiglio / Giunger non spera al destinato segno', VIII, xxxiv, ll. 5-6). Fonte reverses Silano's predicament, so that from potential victim of an enchantress, he becomes the deceiver ('La mira, la vagheggia, e con ingegno / Le mostra ognor qualch'amoroso segno', XI, xciii, ll. 7-8).

Circetta is secretly pleased by this show of affection, prompting the protective

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[82] Cox notes that 'the figure who performs the structural role of the obstructive *maga* is scrupulously absolved of any moral culpability for her obstructiveness', since 'Circetta is herself the victim of an enchantment that compels her to this form of antisocial behaviour' and 'Circe's own culpability is in turn deflected and mitigated by her daughter's sympathetic narration of her seduction and abandonment by Ulysses' (Cox, 'Women as Readers...', op. cit., p. 142).

[83] Cf. 'Quando ciascun che di sì gran contesa / Resta perdente ella per forza incanta, / E se ben di tal opra assai si duole, / È costretta voler quel che non vole' (XIII, xxxix, ll. 5-8).

narrator to embark on a short invective against Love's ability to go hand in hand with deception ('Ahi, falso amor, come sovente il vero / Nascondi...', XI, xciv, ll. 5-6).[84]

In the final *canto* of the poem, the narrator again exposes Silano's crafty manoeuvres in contrast to Circetta's blindness in love, underlining this reversal of roles. Circetta's fears for Silano's safety during the challenge ultimately lead her to risk her own well-being, as her plot to safeguard him defies her mother's magical set-up:

> Alfin risolta per miglior consiglio
> Vol l'incanto ingannar con questo frodo:
> Pensa invisibil farlo e vol che vada
> Sin al tempio fatal senza oprar spada.(XIII, xl, ll. 5-8)

Her gesture to Silano, which puts herself in danger, is the final moment in this strand of the story-line, which remains unfinished; yet this culmination in the characterization of Circetta serves to highlight the paradox of her inherent 'goodness', contriving an unusually sympathetic portrait of the major witch figure of the text.

Fonte's desire to re-write the existing tradition of the wicked witch of romance also extends to her revision of the Circe myth, which acts as a frame to the Circetta story. Moreover, other (minor) witch figures in the poem tend to repent of earlier, apparently 'wicked' actions, and become 'helper' figures.[85] The reader of the

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[84] Cf. 'Ingiustissimo Amor, perché sì raro / corrispondenti fai nostri desiri?' (*OF* II, i, ll. 1-2). Malpezzi Price claims that such 'authorial warnings against Circetta's love encounters testify to Fonte's pessimistic attitude toward the ability of women to learn from past experiences [i.e. Circetta from her mother's] about the dangers of love and its deceits' (Malpezzi Price, *Moderata Fonte...*, op. cit., p. 120).

[85] In *canto* VI of the poem, Nicobaldo tells Risamante how he was deceived by the female assistant of an (absent) witch figure, both of whom are presented as wicked ('Era costei d'un'empia incantatrice / Damigella', VI, lv, ll. 1-2; 'questa iniqua donna sua servente', VI, lvi, l. 5). The assistant is employed to trick all passers-by – both knights and maidens – into entering the confines of the 'Castello della Paura', where they are suddenly paralysed by fear and taken prisoner, and eventually killed; again, the tool of seduction has been entirely removed from this set-up. I shall comment on the salient points of this episode in the following section; the position of the assistant is interesting, however, since she assumes a role similar to that of Alcina, but is then 'redeemed'. She is presented as being in love with Nicobaldo, but forced to obey the *maga* and to see her beloved being tortured – itself quite unusual for the romance tradition. In this curious position, the assistant blames her trickery on Love ('Confessando il suo fallo Amore accusa / Che l'iniquo pensier le pose in mente', VI, lxvii, ll. 3-4) and then offers to free Nicobaldo, provided that he turn his affections to her. What follows Nicobaldo's rejection of her

Floridoro is decidedly aware of a feminist impulse at work in this characterization, which not only seems determined to revise existing stereotypes of the witch figure in particular, but which also challenges fixed views of female typology in general. This is seen in many other strands of the poem, in story-lines that either subtly alter the reader's expectations of gender roles, or gently de-bunk the conventions of the romance tradition as a whole, as I shall now explore.

Abandoned Women, Prize Women: Playing with Convention

As I hope to have shown in the preceding analysis, Fonte appears to take pleasure in constructing a chivalric epic that deliberately sets out to subvert certain elements of the previous tradition, and in particular the template provided by the *Furioso*. In this final section, I shall examine a few examples in the *Floridoro* of this type of textual 'appropriation', particularly with regard to the idea of a 'passive' female presence; such examples provide an illuminating insight into the author's desire to re-write this genre in feminine key, and with specifically feminist aims. She appears keen to adapt episodes containing 'damsels in distress' or other 'dispensable' female characters of the romance tradition to her own ethos of predominantly positive femininity. In effect, 'abandoned women' are virtually non-existent in the *Floridoro*, with the exception of Circe's story; unlike Ariosto's Olimpia and Alcina, Fonte's female characters are left only temporarily, mostly because their hapless male suitors

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advances is not so much a seduction but a scene of unrequited love ('Ella mi prega, e supplicando trova / D'umiltà tutti i termini che puote', VI, lxx, ll. 1-2). When her tears fail to move him, the assistant's speech moves towards religious terminology, in a cycle of recognition and repentance ('Grande fu l'error mio, conosco e veggio / Che non dovea pensar nonchè far questo, / Ma quel ch'è fatto io non so come deggio / Disfar, se ben pentita assai ne resto...', VI, lxxiii, ll. 1-4). She resolves, like Circetta with Silano, to put her own life at risk not only by helping Nicobaldo to escape, thus contriving a complete reversal of the original situation, but also by promising to try to save his lady, Lucimena, who has been imprisoned as well. In this example, the assistant assumes a greater role than her witch mistress; yet her behaviour is inextricably linked to the witch figure, and thus acts as a further agent in the overturning of preconceived ideas concerning this type of female characterization.

are incapable of taking charge of the given situation, be it predicament or potential courtship.[86]

Furthermore, the 'prize women' normally considered the passive object of male desire – according to the chivalric norm – are viewed in a different light in the *Floridoro*, and are afforded a greater degree of autonomy. Celsidea and Biondaura, who would both be expected to perform a function similar to that of the elusive Angelica in the *Furioso*, are characterized in terms of their relative power and independence, setting them apart from the idea of the woman as reward for, or play-thing of, the (male) knights within the patriarchal chivalric code. Although Celsidea and Biondaura are set up as rivals in the 'beauty contest' of *canto* I, it is their respective honour, and not their person, that is fought over in the joust that ensues, and neither woman is offered up as the 'prize' in this chivalric endeavour. As if to ensure this outcome, Fonte has a female knight, Risamante, defeat the giant in question. This stands in contrast to the first *canto* of the *Furioso*, in which the reader learns that Angelica had been explicitly set aside as the 'prize' in a rivalry between Orlando and Rinaldo: having sensed Angelica's capacity to sow discord amongst his paladins, the emperor Charlemagne had promised her to the knight who killed the most pagans.[87]

Moreover, both Celsidea and Biondaura are presented as being subjects in their own right, with qualities that go beyond the usual female attributes of beauty and virtue: Celsidea's intelligence is stated immediately after the affirmation of her beauty

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[86] As I have mentioned in previous sections, these include the dwarf king's search for a champion to prove the innocence of his beloved, Raggidora (II); Nicobaldo's dependence on Risamante to free his lady, Lucimena (V-VI), to whom he is – unusually for a male character in such situations – determined to remain faithful ('Io ch'avea sol di Lucimena cura / Né altra sarà mai ch'adori e brami...', VI, lxviii, ll. 5-6); and Floridoro's swift – but unwilling – departure following the royal tournament (X), although he later returns in secret and leaves Celsidea a note expressing his love for her: this prompts her to lament his apparent 'abandonment' of her ('Deh, perche mi ti sei sì presto ascoso? / Che fretta era la tua di lasciar noi?', XI, xlv, ll. 5-6).

[87] Cf. 'in premio promettendola a quel d'essi / ch'in quel conflitto, in quella gran giornata, / degli infideli più copia uccidessi, / e di sua man prestassi opra più grata' (*OF* I, ix, ll. 1-4).

('[...] ebbe sopra le belle il pregio e 'l grido, / E fu dotata d'eccellente ingegno', I, vii, ll. 6-7). She is also highly involved in the set-up of the court itself, which is exposed as a feminocentric environment despite the presence of the king:

> Soleva il re per suo contento il giorno
> Farsi seder questa fanciulla a lato
> Con la regina e più donzelle intorno,
> Ch'eran le più gentil del greco stato.(I, ix, ll. 1-4)

In this scenario, the Athenian king appears happy to be surrounded by women, instead of a crowd of male advisors. Celsidea is also named as the heir to the Greek throne ('quell'eccelsa figlia / Ch'erede esser dovea del greco impero', I, xiv, ll. 3-4) and is thus inscribed into the text at an early stage as a potentially powerful female figure. The same is true of Biondaura, who is described as being a female ruler 'of marriageable age', but who nonetheless rules her country alone ('Una giovene bella da marito, / Che di quel regno avea lo scettro in mano', I, x, ll. 3-4). Meanwhile, the tournament celebrating the successful defence of Celsidea's honour is not ostensibly based around the premise of the king's daughter as the 'prize' for the victorious knight: the helmsman who informs Risardo of the event merely alludes to the eagerness of the knights who have travelled great distances in the hope that they might be looked upon favourably as potential suitors ('speran che la faccia il re consorte / A quel di lor ch'è più gagliardo e forte', IV, xi, ll. 7-8). In this situation, the knights may compete for Celsidea's affections, but she will not automatically be handed over to the winner.[88] Her particular role in the unfolding of the tournament is specified later in the poem: she will award the actual prize – a crown made of gold and jewels – to the winner ('La nobil Celsidea di propria mano / Devea quel pregio

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[88] Compare Charlemagne's almost literal handling of Angelica in the *Furioso*: 'questa donzella [...] / tolse, e diè in mano al duca di Bavera' (*OF* I, viii, ll. 7-8).

dar superbo e strano', VII, v, ll. 7-8). The object of desire is thus transformed into a physical artefact, rather than the fetishized body of the female character in question.[89]

Fonte does not altogether stray from the romance topos of the 'damsel in distress', however: as mentioned previously, both Raggidora (the dwarf king's beloved) and Lucimena (Nicobaldo's spouse) are examples of female characters in need of a 'saviour'. Notwithstanding this, in neither case is the 'saviour' male, given Risardo's repeated failure to fulfil his promise to the dwarf king, and Risamante's projected (female) intervention in the plight of Lucimena. The former story-line is one of several in the poem to appear to adhere to romance conventions, whilst also introducing elements that either complicate or add depth to the psychological realism of the gender politics involved. Raggidora has been unjustly accused of murdering her uncle, the king of Egypt, who has been found dead in the royal palace. The dwarf presents his case at the court of Byzantium, employing the accepted terminology of such a predicament in his plea for help ('Per salvar una angelica beltade / Dalle tiranne man crude e rapaci', II, lxi, ll. 5-6). Following the dwarf's exposition of the situation in *canto* II, the thread of the story is taken up by the narrator of the poem in *canto* IV, allowing for a greater psychological insight into the motivations of the characters. As Finucci notes, Raggidora's situation is similar to that of Ginevra in the *Furioso*: she has been accused by a vindictive knight, Lideo – who was himself spurned in his love for her – and is consequently in need of a champion to prove her

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[89] Although a concession is made by Fonte to the more voyeuristic depictions of Ariostan heroines in the helmsman's fuller description of Celsidea, which lists bodily parts – including her '[...] ampio sodo e delicato petto' (IV, xv, l. 3) – but which stops short of detailing the female *parti* referred to on more than one occasion by the narrator of the *Furioso* (as discussed previously). The helmsman's description also focusses on Celsidea's eyes – rather than on any other part of her body – as the pinnacle of her beauty ('Ma lo splendor degli occhi e la vaghezza / Vince poi tutto il resto di bellezza', IV, xv, ll. 7-8). Finucci is nonetheless a little optimistic when she claims that 'Quando queste donne sono descritte fisicamente, inoltre, il rendimento non è voyeuristico' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXIII).

innocence.[90] The narrator gives the background of Lideo's love for Raggidora, assuming a surprisingly male point of view in the description of the woman's supposed cruelty in the lack of reciprocity of this love:

> La giovene crudel non ebbe mai
> Pietà di lui che gli avea dato il core,
> Non mai ver lui drizzò cortesi i rai,
> Non mai gli fece un minimo favore...(IV, lii, ll. 1-4)

The strong negatives in these lines appear to lay the blame firmly with Raggidora. The narrator even hints at sadism on her part with regard to Lideo's suffering ('Poi che più d'aspe sorda e più che scoglio / Dura costei godea del suo cordoglio', IV, lii, ll. 7-8). Raggidora's 'heartlessness' prompts Lideo to carry out the murder of the king and to convince the people of Egypt that she is guilty of the crime; he then usurps the crown and has Raggidora imprisoned. She is threatened with death if a champion does not come forward to defend her successfully within the year.

In an interesting twist to the Ginevra-Polinesso sub-plot of the *Furioso*, however, Fonte retains the love that Lideo feels for Raggidora at this point in the story-line, transforming him into a figure resembling the doomed male lover, not without elements of masochism:

> Egli che l'ama e che l'ha offesa tanto
> Sol per l'ingratitudine di lei
> Si conduce a mirar quel viso santo
> Non una volta al dì, ma cinque e sei...(IV, lix, ll. 1-4)

In this perverse love-hate scenario, the male character attempts to woo the female character whom he has deliberately set out to hurt, revealing a psychological mind-set of some complexity. The presentation of Lideo even takes on overtones of nobility

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[90] See Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXVI. In the Ginevra story-line of the *Furioso*, which spans three *canti* (IV-VI), the daughter of the Scottish king is accused of entertaining a lover on her balcony, and condemned to death unless a champion comes forward to defend her. Rinaldo learns the truth of the story from Ginevra's maid Dalinda, who had masqueraded, somewhat masochistically, as her mistress for her lover Polinesso; the latter had been rejected by Ginevra, and sought revenge by implicating her in the above scenario. Rinaldo challenges Polinesso, kills him, and paves the way for the happy union of Ginevra and her lover Ariodante.

through the very fact of his unrequited love, and his murderous actions are all but forgotten: he removes Raggidora from the prison, and lavishes her with gifts in a luxurious dwelling ('E come fosse la regina propia, / Le fa d'ogni tesor, d'ogni ben copia', IV, lxi, ll. 7-8).[91] The dynamic between the characters here is far from clear-cut, with Raggidora's supposed cruelty played off against Lideo's tortured, but previously evil, demeanour; and the reader's sympathies are constantly manipulated by the narrator, who describes Lideo as both 'innamorato re' (IV, lx, l. 1) and 'tiranno ingiusto e reo' (IV, lxiii, l. 3). The final twist in the tale comes with the news that Lideo has asked his own brother to come and defend her, despite the fact that her fate has all along been contrived by Lideo himself:

> Il re, ch'ordito avea l'ingiusta trama
> E sentiva per lei tanto martire,
> Per onor suo non men che per la doglia
> Vol che di ciò 'l fratel l'impresa toglia.(IV, lxv, ll. 5-8)

The *canto* ends on this note of paradox, which itself sums up the complexity of the gender relations displayed throughout the story. Fonte appears to take a recognized template from the romance tradition and to enrich it with layers of 'sexual politics', enhancing its quality of multi-dimensional, even contradictory, representation, and lending it an air of psychological realism.

It is then no surprise that the *proemio* to the following *canto* reacts to the Raggidora-Lideo episode, with the narrator's attempt to evaluate the (often negative) effects of the real tyrant of the story, Love ('Ahi, che non può quel rio tiranno Amore...', V, i, l. 1). The frame of reference of the *Furioso* is evident in the lexis employed here ('Altri per sua cagione entra in furore / E è sforzato oprar contra il

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[91] Compare perhaps the pagan knight Rodomonte's transformation in the *Furioso* from vicious warrior to solitary figure musing on the nature of love and fidelity, after Doralice has preferred Mandricardo to him. Despite the fact that his musings are tempered by a heavy dose of misogynist sentiment, he appears almost noble in his attitude of silent contemplation: 'Di pensiero in pensiero andò vagando / da se stesso lontano il pagan molto, / col viso a terra chino, né levando / sì gli occhi mai...' (*OF* XXVII, cxxxiii, ll. 1-4).

dovere...', V, i, ll. 5-6). The narrator is highly doubtful of the so-called benefits of love, particularly with regard to the male sex; and she appears implicitly to defend Raggidora's stance, claiming that if men are resisted, they quickly become vindictive, and their 'love' then turns to hate:

> E se la donna al lor desire ardente
> Non si dimostra al primo tratto umile,
> Se non si rende a prieghi empi e molesti
> Eccoli agli odi, alle vendette presti.(V, ii, ll. 5-8)

The narrator ends her appraisal of the episode by claiming that the male sex is in any case unworthy of female affection, and women should flee the entrapments of love as a fate worse than sin or even death:

> Fuggan le donne pur più che 'l peccato,
> Più che 'l morir l'officio dell'amare,
> C'han la più parte il cor gli uomini ingrato
> Per quel ch'io leggo e spesso odo contare...(V, iii, ll. 1-4)

The *proemio* here provides a feminist afterthought to the Raggidora story, which is never concluded; and although the narrator blames the entity of Love as the independent cause of the unhappy entanglements between the sexes, her bias in this instance is explicitly against the male sex. The conventional 'damsel in distress' account developed in *canto* IV is thus furnished with more disturbing elements pertaining to the unsettling web of human emotion; and it is also commented on by the narrator, to feminist effect, in the following *canto*.

Fonte continues to play with conventional romance topoi in other parts of the *Floridoro*, particularly in the detail of sub-plots. This is seen again in *canto* IV, with the story of Risardo's meeting with the maiden Odoria. Risardo and his companions are confronted by three knights in the woods outside the city of Athens. Risardo challenges them to a joust and defeats two out of three; the third comes forward and speaks to him, and is revealed through her voice as a woman, although her first words

wilfully disguise her sex ('Deh, cavallier, fammi contento, / Ch'io sappi in chi tal pregio il ciel nasconda...', IV, xxxii, ll. 5-6). Any conflict between them is in fact elegantly side-stepped: after her identity has been formally established, she does not enter the fray, as her sheer beauty conquers Risardo without recourse to jousting. The narrator lingers on the word-play of conqueror and conquered in this reversal of fortunes:

> Sì stupido riman, sì trema e pave
> E ne divien sì attonito e conquiso,
> Che 'l nome più di vincitor non gode
> E ne riporta Amor tutta la lode.(IV, xxxvi, ll. 5-8)

Most interesting, however, is the narrator's explanation of Odoria's decision to wear armour when travelling:

> Andava così armata la donzella
> Non perché fusse in lei forza né core,
> Ma per non dar a quei che gìan con ella
> Spesso materia onde mostrar valore;
> Che per esser fanciulla e tanto bella
> Potrian venire per lei spesso a rumore,
> Potrian più d'un guerrier trovar per via
> Che per suo amor all'arme ne verria.(IV, xliii, ll. 1-8)

It would appear that the armour performs a practical function, hiding her from the gaze of amorous male knights, and thus preventing delays in travel whilst she is fought over. Her masquerade constitutes a more convenient solution to this problem, removing the 'prize woman' aspect from the gender politics of such interludes.

The narrator's ironic awareness of this chivalric commonplace, alongside its playful solution, de-bunks the sexual tensions inherent in the entire romance genre – although in this case, the 'solution' may be said to have failed: Odoria and her companions are challenged by Risardo before he is aware of the presence of a woman in the group. In effect, the opposite strategy is used by Odoria to resolve the situation, i.e. the revelation of the 'prize' maiden, even though she is not ultimately claimed as a

prize. Fonte may here be seen to play with conventional gender politics in the epic, largely to suit the purposes of her female characters. It is nonetheless interesting to note that although Odoria puts her helmet back on as they continue the journey to Delphi – despite Risardo's efforts to dissuade her – she is ultimately forced to renounce her 'masculine' clothing after the oracle confirms her eventual union with Risardo ('E da quel giorno in poi volse Risardo / Ch'ella lasciasse l'abito bugiardo', X, xlv, ll. 7-8). In this instance at least, the female character is made to conform to feminine codes of dress, as befits a future bride, and to relinquish the relative independence that the wearing of armour had procured for her.

Fonte also plays with romance conventions in the background story of Nicobaldo and his beloved Lucimena, particularly in reversals of gendered behaviour. The story of the two young lovers is related by Nicobaldo in *canto* VI, and is set to follow the Olimpia-Bireno plot-line of the *Furioso*; yet despite the similarly ambiguous suggestion of de-flowering of the female character, Nicobaldo is in no way eager to abandon her.[92] The language employed to describe their particular circumstances also implies a greater degree of female control of the sexual politics involved:

> Tal grazia e sol favor largo n'ottenni
> (Poi ch'ella mai mi si mostrò ribella),
> Che seco a par lamenti onesti venni,
> Dove tanto cortese quanto bella
> La ritrovo, e propizia alle mie voglie,
> Pur ch'io disposto sia farla mia moglie.(VI, xiii, ll. 3-8)

The crucial conjunction of line eight ('Pur che') suggests that Lucimena is determined to lay down the condition of marriage in such a liaison. Nicobaldo is in any case quick to protest his good intentions to this end, distancing himself from the image of

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[92] Cf. 'indi con lui, là dove in loco ameno / teso era un padiglione, entrò nel letto' (*OF* X, xvii, ll. 5-6). See also Chapters One and Two of the thesis for discussion of the Olimpia episode.

the treacherous male: 'Io ch'altro non ricerco e non disegno / (Che questo è il fin d'ogni amator discreto)...' (VI, xiv, ll. 1-2). Fonte contrives a further inversion of gender roles when Nicobaldo learns of his father's plans to wed him to an unknown maiden. His disagreement on the subject causes his father's wrath, and his subsequent escape to seek comfort from Lucimena ('Io dall'ira paterna mi nascondo / E corro alla mia dea pien di dolore', VI, xxi, ll. 5-6) inverts the usual episode of the daughter who runs away from an irate father.[93] Nicobaldo's later plea to his father to halt the plans for the wedding ('Ma non val ch'io lo supplichi e gli nieghi, / Che vol che donna al mio dispetto tolga...', VI, xxix, ll. 5-6) is also more likely to be voiced by a female character in the romance tradition, as the father figure would be less likely to assume the position of dominance over another male character in questions of marriage. Alongside his failed masculine identity, therefore, Nicobaldo may also be seen to assume the roles normally reserved for female characters in traditional chivalric fictions, and although he does not wish to abandon his lady, his conduct in their struggle for union smacks of the feminine. This inversion of gender roles is again indicative of Fonte's desire to subvert the very tradition in which she is working.

Later in the same *canto*, the author again makes conscious changes to the 'gendered' detail related to the 'Castello della Paura' incident. The chivalric enterprise fabricated by the witch's assistant in order to entice Nicobaldo and Lucimena – who, happily, were unwittingly destined for each other by their respective parents – is based largely on sexual stereotyping, but contains an important difference to the Rocca di Tristano episode in the *Furioso*, with which it has similarities. The task is to free a mermaid who has been tied to a tree with a golden rope; only the most

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[93] Compare the Saracen princess Isabella's experience, related in *canto* XIII of the *Furioso*: she is forced to flee Spain and her family in order to be reunited with her lover, the Christian knight Zerbino.

faithful knight, together with the most beautiful maiden, will be able to undo the noose that keeps her captive (VI, lviii-lix). Although the attribute assigned to the female figure is unsurprising, it is interesting that Fonte chooses faithfulness or loyalty, rather than the more usual bravery or courage, for the male character. In the scene at the Rocca di Tristano, only the most valorous knight and the most beautiful maiden may stay at the inn.[94] Fonte's change to the latter set-up may hint at an authorial view on the most important quality in the male sex, especially since the idea of loyalty already features in the Nicobaldo-Lucimena story-line. The outcome for the victorious couple nonetheless plays on stereotypes: the knight will be given the golden rope, which will then ensure that his lady is never unfaithful to him. In this way, the manipulative thrust of the enterprise remains within the parameters of conventional romance story-telling.

However, Fonte also plays with conventions to a more overtly feminist end, particularly in the sub-plot of *canto* III that involves the effeminate young boy and his mother in the underground cavern. The mother tells her background story to Risamante, revealing an interesting slant on the figure of the faithless wife. Despite the mother's infidelity to her absent husband – which results in the birth of the young boy – her narration inspires sympathy in the reader rather than condemnation, and Love is again blamed as the overriding factor in such events:

> Sanno i dèi quel ch'io feci per levarmi
> La nova passion dal fragil core,
> Ma non ebbi poter di ripararmi
> Contra le troppo invitte arme d'Amore.(III, xxxi, ll. 1-4)

She openly confesses her actions to Risamante, yet her astonishingly frank lack of regret also lends her words an air of feminist defiance:

> Confesso ch'io dovea prima privarmi

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[94] Cf. *OF* XXXII, lxv-lxviii, in which a passing shepherd outlines the criteria for entry to Bradamante.

Di vita che far mai sì grande errore,
Ma quando poi questo bel frutto guardo
Che di ciò nacque, anco a pentirmi tardo.(III, xxxi, ll. 5-8)

The mother tells of how she fled to the cavern and gave birth, after her husband had returned from war and threatened to kill her. Despite her 'amoroso inganno' (III, xxxiii, l. 3), any trace of blame is again removed, as she notes how a fairy took pity on her and advised her to stay hidden in the cavern; the fairy also conjures a snake to guard its entrance, and tells the mother not to move until the snake is defeated by a female knight who will come to her aid. The irate husband is in effect equated with the monster, as the fairy's words to the mother reveal:

...in quell'ora, in quell'istesso punto
Ch'essendo ucciso sparirà il dragone,
Sarà rimasto il tuo signor defunto
E tu sciolta sarai della pregione...(III, xxxvi, ll. 1-4)

What emerges from this episode is a vision of a feminist fantasy, with the unfaithful wife able to produce a child with her lover, whilst her husband is neatly disposed of. Although the mother and child are shut away in shame in the dark, they are liberated by a female knight who symbolically defeats the monstrous creature that is effectively imprisoning them.[95] The entire story is also 'sanctioned' by the fairy, the Melissa figure of the *Floridoro*, who then appears before them all and speaks to Risamante. With this episode, Fonte provides an anti-Lidia figure, i.e. a female character who does accede to her lover's desires, with the requisite humility.[96] It is one of the most unusual sub-plots of the *Floridoro*, given its daring stance on female fidelity. Fonte appears unafraid, at least in this instance, to push the boundaries of gendered behaviour within the romance framework.

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[95] The snake may here symbolize the husband's jealousy, just as the serpentine figure that Rinaldo comes upon in *canto* XLII of the *Furioso* symbolizes his 'personal demon' of jealousy (as mentioned in the section 'The Female Solution: A Feminocentric Text?')

[96] In *canto* XXXIV of the *Furioso*, Astolfo comes upon a dark and smoky grotto which he realizes is the entrance to hell; there he speaks to the shade of Lidia, who tells the story of her arrogance towards a young knight who fell in love with her, and ultimately died of a broken heart (*OF* XXXIV, v-xliv).

Conclusion

With the *Floridoro*, Fonte makes a brief, yet distinct, mark on the 'masculine' literary domain of the chivalric epic. She is overt in her appropriation of the model of the *Furioso* – as close textual analysis has revealed – but clearly adapts it to her feminist aims. Criticism of the work as a whole must necessarily take into account the unfinished nature of the poem;[97] yet Fonte's feminist impulse is clearly discernible in the plot-lines that are laid down. The failed masculine identities of the *Floridoro* are balanced out by a female typology in which positive characterization is constantly emphasized, and which also challenges fixed (male) prejudices concerning women. The satirical thread running through the poem is always attached to male characters, both in their inability to act in the accepted heroic fashion, and even in their effeminacy, which goes against the chivalric norms of masculine behaviour and appearance. The feminocentric aspect of the *Floridoro* pre-figures Fonte's later dialogue, with its cast of seven female characters; furthermore, the idea of a self-sufficient way of life, free from the emotional ties and burdens associated with men, is hinted at in more than one part of the poem. Fonte also plays with the conventions of gendered behaviour within the context of romance, to subtle but unusual effect. She incorporates subversive elements into her feminist vision of the chivalric world, which is also intended to provide a commentary on contemporary gender politics.

The *Floridoro* may thus be seen as a literary appropriation of the model of the chivalric epic as laid down by Ariosto, but as an appropriation that also successfully retains its distinctly female-authored feel. In the thirteen substantial *canti* that she did write, Fonte has provided a romance epic that subverts every element of the genre to

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[97] For example, Finucci comments that 'Fonte dimostra di aver capito perfettamente la tecnica dell'*entrelacement* e il meccanismo della *quête* ariostesca, ma non crea un blocco formale con relazioni simmetriche o speculari' (Fonte, *Tredici canti del Floridoro*, op. cit., p. XXXVI); yet the truncated form of the text surely precludes any satisfactory answer to this objection.

her feminist perspective: from the main characters to the episodes, and even down to individual motifs of witches and islands, not to mention the *proemi*. Despite her assertion that the poem is worthy of scrutiny, Virginia Cox has classed the *Floridoro* as something of a 'throwback' to Ariosto, given its lack of concern with Aristotelian unities or with Counter-Reformation religiosity.[98] Margaret L. King has noted the considerable feminist sentiment in the *proemio* to *canto* IV of the *Floridoro*, but claims that it is 'a verse romance otherwise quite unrevolutionary'.[99] I hope to have shown through the preceding analysis that Fonte's epic is deserving both of greater praise, and of greater understanding of its unique position in the history of Italian women's writing.

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[98] See Cox, 'Fiction, 1560-1650', op. cit., pp. 59-60.
[99] See Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 177.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to elucidate the role of Ariosto in the development of the female literary canon into other areas not strictly related to the lyrical paradigm of Petrarchism. The poetic model of the *Furioso* was taken up and taken on by the three preceding women writers in a variety of ways, ranging from the adaptation of linguistic and thematic templates to a personal feminine register, especially regarding the expression of grief on the part of the abandoned woman (Morra); the deconstruction of epic conventions on both an ideological and a poetic level, incorporating a specifically feminist agenda into a commentary on Ariosto (Terracina); and the re-writing of the epic genre in feminine – and feminist – key, with the ultimate aim of subverting chivalric notions of gender and of promoting a non-stereotypical view of the female character in all its complexity (Fonte). All three female poets variously engage with both the form and the content of Ariosto's poem, using the *Furioso* as a 'springboard' for their own poetic production; the poetic voice that emerges from all three is nonetheless uniquely feminine in perspective, as I hope to have shown.

Indeed, previous chapters have outlined how all three women are linked by the passionate desire to express personal concerns – whether through an apparently autobiographical voice or through fictional characters/narrators – which also relate to the wider view of the *querelle des femmes*: abandonment and women's lot, the need for education, the 'correcting' or re-writing of opinion on women's abilities, the encouragement of the female *ingegno*, and ultimately the full appropriation of the 'masculine' domain of literature, particularly (for Terracina and Fonte) the chivalric

epic in the form of *ottava rima*. The 'pro-feminist' nature of Ariosto's poem is seen to provide the ideal stimulus for the expression of such concerns, given its notoriously complex stance regarding questions of gender; yet the *Furioso* also provides a very detailed linguistic model for all three women, as close textual analysis has revealed. The preceding study of Morra's *Rime* has shown that, despite its many Petrarchan features, her *canzoniere* also displays the influence of Ariosto, not only in the poet's own identification with the abandoned heroines of the *Furioso*, but also in the description of her harsh surroundings and her unfortunate circumstances. The bitter lyricism of her poetry seems to find a certain linguistic resonance with situations of a similar intensity depicted in Ariosto's epic.

Terracina's *Discorso* is perhaps most obviously dependent on the linguistic model of the *Furioso*, since the deliberate textual fragmentation of the latter – not always successful – provides the starting-point for Terracina's poetic commentary, which aims to deconstruct the ideologies put forward by Ariosto's narrator in his *proemi*. Terracina's engagement with the *Furioso* is thus inextricably linked to, and guided by, the text itself; yet the constraint of structuring her mini-*canto*s around the eight lines of Ariosto's 46 opening *ottave* is turned into something liberating, as Terracina prises open her predecessor's eight lines and inserts a feminist gloss on them. The *Discorso* also stands apart in its own right as a forum for the author's own views on gender inequalities and the place of the woman writer/intellectual in contemporary society.

Fonte's epic poem, meanwhile, contains several thematic and structural parallels with the *Furioso* – including passages of a striking textual similarity – but also succeeds in creating a unique place in the tradition of mostly male-authored romance narratives, with its distinctly feminist subtext and its departures from

chivalric norms. In all three cases, therefore, Ariosto's poem serves as a useful tool for the furthering of female literacy and the development of the female literary canon, ultimately enabling the three women writers to achieve a degree of literary renown – if not in their lifetimes (especially in the case of Isabella di Morra), then in the centuries to come. Despite the presence in Ariosto of a strain of misogynistic thought, his chivalric epic would paradoxically prove extremely fruitful for the advancement of women's writing in sixteenth-century Italy.

Furthermore, the examination of all three female poets in the light of Ariosto's poem reveals the links between each of them within their own subject matter, particularly with regard to the topos of the abandoned woman. In her *Rime*, Morra considers the topos in terms of a very real and physical actuality, her own plight forming the inspiration for and basis of her poetic production. Terracina's *Discorso* in many ways explores the theoretical angle of abandonment, nonetheless adding a feminist judgement to the consideration of how and why such situations come about in male-female relationships. Fonte's *Floridoro* lastly moves away from the idea of female predicament and towards a new-found independence, with fictional characters that are rarely completely abandoned; and when necessary, rescue is usually effected by a female rather than a male character. The figure of Olimpia – whose timeless story, tinted with classical overtones, features so prominently in the final version of the *Furioso* – appears to have touched each of the women, and to have strongly influenced their subsequent literary output.

The thread of feminism combined with poetry running through the lives of all three women writers may also be said to assume a certain impetus. Morra's poetic voice was firstly isolated, then abandoned and finally silenced, after her brutal murder cut short both her life and her creativity. Terracina, who appears to have been aware

of her southern 'sister' poet, may well have known of the circumstances surrounding Morra's death – namely the suspicion of the liaison between Morra and Sandoval, which was never proved – and includes more than one invective in her *Discorso* against the malicious rumours deliberately spread by men to the detriment of women's reputation. Terracina also asserts the female right to recognition of literary merit, encouraging other women to take up the pen and seek their own fame – perhaps mindful of the damage that can be done through silence, whether voluntary or enforced. Fonte appears to take up her 'call to arms', producing the first original chivalric fiction to be written by a woman, in a full appropriation of the 'masculine' genre of the epic poem. A development of sorts can thus be perceived in the arc of poetic production between Morra and Fonte.

In the creation of their own literary legacy, all three female poets betray a self-conscious desire to prove their worth in the literary domain; and all three are not afraid to manipulate or otherwise adapt the model of Ariosto to suit their individual poetic aims. Their engagement with the *Furioso* may be seen to function on many levels; and the imaginative thrust of Ariosto's poem would appear to provide a compelling alternative to the more usual source of Petrarch. Although highly influenced by the latter, the works of Morra, Terracina and Fonte dealt with in this thesis appear to transcend the boundaries of the accepted female literary production of the time. The ground-breaking nature of their poetic achievements not only marks them out as pioneers within the field of female literary history, but is also indicative of their desire to engage with the male canon on an equal footing. As such, their early modern feminist vision would prove crucial for the development of women's writing in the centuries that followed.

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