

FRANCESCA MARIA MAGNABOSCO

ST EDMUND HALL

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**UNFADING WONDER:
'MERAVIGLIA' AS A PATH TO POETIC
KNOWLEDGE IN DANTE'S *COMMEDIA*
AND ARIOSTO'S *ORLANDO FURIOSO***

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Francesca Maria Magnabosco

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LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis originates in my perception of a loss of conceptual complexity in the modern term *meraviglia*. The modern Italian word for 'wonder' has, over centuries, lost its original inquisitive charge. The aim of the present research is to retrieve not only nuances in terminology that have been dispersed in the modern era but also the mental state closely linked to *meraviglia*. In order to do so, I chose to pursue wonder in two poems, Dante's *Commedia* and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, which I believe to be most representative of the different manifestations of a wonder strictly linked to the gnoseological field. This is an area of inquiry which has not yet been fully developed, especially in literary criticism. Here lies the originality of my research.

In my Introduction I trace wonder's early formulations in order to unveil its foundational strain. The ancient Greek and Latin verbs equivalent for 'to wonder' (*meravigliarsi*), *thaumazo* and *miror* respectively, bore an inquisitive nuance that made Plato and Aristotle consider wonder as the beginning of philosophy. Classical wonder embraced two dimensions: one active and effective, and one passive and affective. The interweaving of the two characterizes the experience of knowing, that is, what connects man to the surrounding world. I strongly believe in the importance of linking wonder to speculation and in the need of reassessing the areas of wonder and the marvellous in literature. I chose to apply my investigation on wonder to the *Commedia* and the *Furioso* because I felt that their marvellous elements needed to be considered not as ends in themselves, as many a critic has already done, but in relation to the poems' cognitive implications. Through the analysis of the relationship between *meraviglia* and *meraviglioso* in the two poems, I present the speculative and the aesthetic dimensions as part of one

discourse. The advantages of such a comparative and diachronic analysis consist of, on the one hand, retrieving the richness of wonder through its occurrences in different periods and cultures, and on the other hand, of challenging the ideas that are formed in one culture by testing their strength against another's. The resulting picture helps to clarify the meaning of wonder in the abstract, casting a fresh look on the texts observed.

As I suggest in the Introduction, the semantic area of wonder is complex. It is therefore necessary to disentangle and define the various components of wonder together with its neighbouring terms. I highlight that *meraviglia*, *stupore*, and *ammirazione*, have different connotations, which need to be borne in mind when reflecting on wonder; these nuances should not be used indifferently as they are mostly today in criticism and everyday speech. These words are in my thesis indicative of reactions to the encounter with the external world: they are all qualified by different intensities and carry different consequences. Both in the chapter on Dante and in that on Ariosto, moments connected to each of these reactions emerge, and are treated to enhance their singularity. Especially, it is essential to distinguish the area of *meraviglia*, which denotes the subject inquiring, from the area of the *meraviglioso*, which rather reveals effects, and denotes an object. Their relationship is fertile in literature since the former represents the author's space of inquiry, and the latter is the product of such inquiry, that is, the text as a response to external circumstances.

The first chapter of the thesis considers the fields of *meraviglia* and *meraviglioso* initially as found in Plato and Aristotle, then as surfacing in medieval debates, and finally as they appear in the Renaissance. This section aims to provide a background capable of embedding the discussion of Dante's and Ariosto's poems in their relationship with tradition and innovation. I present the social value of medieval *mirabilia* and *admiratio*, quoting examples from theologians and writers like Albertus Magnus, Ramon Lull and Gervase of Tilbury. I show how some aspects of these concepts were developed in the Renaissance, so that we may understand the changes occurring between Dante and Ariosto, focussing especially on the growing role attributed to the terrestrial dimension as opposed to the divine dimension. Drawing on occurrences of wonder selected from Marco Polo's *Il milione* and Petrarch's letters, this part of my thesis casts light on the cultural process which led to the descent of wonder from the divine sphere to the human. I find the *Orlando furioso* to be the peak of a 'liberation' of wonder from medieval theological constrictions, and the utmost celebration of a human marvellous; it is an expression of a new conception of knowledge let loose from dominant philosophical tenets. The route of such a process can be followed through the appearance of wonder under different guises in several Renaissance texts, among which I isolate Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and Girolamo Fracastoro's *Syphilis*. I finally take Francesco Patrizi's late Cinquecento definition of *meraviglia* as a synthesis of my discourse. Patrizi likens wonder to the Euripus, a tract of the Aegean sea that is run through with irregular tidal currents; this illustrates eloquently wonder's movements as an oscillation between passions and intellect while interrogating what we perceive reality to be.

Having set the borders of the field within which we are moving, I proceed with my analysis of Dante. In chapter two I show how Dante's representation of

wonder bridges the classical and the Christian conceptions. Firstly, I take into consideration Dante's intellectual inheritance, focussing on wonder seen in the light of medieval theological positions. Dante promises in the *Convivio* a treatment of wonder that he will never accomplish; instead, he stages in the *Commedia* the different phases of wonder. In this poem Dante's *meraviglia* comes alive in the oscillation between the rational and the irrational, aiming to overcome the antithesis. In the *Inferno* the full development of intellectual wonder is not possible, Hell being a symbol of darkness and extreme passions which interrupt the process of wondering, and cause stupor instead. This is the dominion of the *meraviglioso*, still imbued with classical and pagan elements that Dante Christianizes. Monstrous creatures like Minos, Pluto, and above all Geryon, all share a great deal with pagan literary tradition, and all help to anchor the otherworldly journey to a Christian reality where every element of the world created is to be understood as a manifestation of the divine, and, therefore, an aspect of truth. Their marvellous features, far from adding a fantastic dimension, operate as part of a strategy that aims to present the poem as attractive and entertaining, but at the same time as a means to intellectual awareness. The sensorial catalogue of marvels found in the *Inferno* appears as history, that is, as part of a real enterprise which Dante has been graced to undertake for his own and mankind's awakening. Dante presents his truthful creations as part of an allegorical veil that adorns his verses but is to be lifted in order to reach hidden truth, and to allow the progression from stupor to wonder.

The marvellous of the *Inferno* is a prologue to the dimension of wonder as I pursue it in this thesis, and which is developed only in the *Purgatorio* and in the *Paradiso*. In the second *cantica* we see the souls marvelling at Dante the pilgrim, and a first process of wonder is sketched pivoting around the pilgrim, who has now become part of the *meraviglioso* himself. Unlike in the *Inferno*, sensorial perceptions in the *Purgatorio* are followed by intellectual inquiry and prompt an experience that leads to learning, in accordance with the realm's function. Marvelling becomes a more pervasive attitude during the ascent to the Mount of Purgatory. A new component of wonder surfaces from the analysis of this *cantica*: *ammirazione*, which is closely linked to the time of contemplation. This becomes more evident in the Earthly Paradise where Dante rejoins Beatrice. Beatrice's apparition brings a reassessment of the terminology of wonder and love as found in the *Vita Nuova*. At first the pilgrim is overwhelmed by the echoing of the passions that used to make him a victim of stupor. But soon he manages to express his feelings by transforming what used to be a 'state' into an 'evolution'. The semantics of *meraviglia* are ready to be transformed and poured onto what is now recognized as the only object of wonder: the divine. The language of wonder is the link between the human and the divine. Through Beatrice Dante takes wonder to Paradise and rectifies it.

A main tension reaches its climax in the *Paradiso*: that between *meraviglia* and *ammirazione*. We witness Dante the pilgrim gradually learning to express and direct his wonder towards the right objects, aided by his guides. In order to do so, intellectual wonder eventually fades and yields to a language of infancy through which Dante can experience rebirth in Christ, final *medium* between the human and the divine dimensions. This saves wonder from a setback. The conclusion of the *Commedia* embraces the two components of wonder that I isolate at the

beginning of my research: intellect and passion. This chapter shows how *meraviglia* generates Dante's poem and how it is also found at the end of it. The *Commedia* is the greatest example of a wonder that does not fade away, but thrives in the spectrum of all its stages.

Ariosto's manifestation of wonder is of a different kind. The third chapter of my thesis begins by introducing the different approach that is necessary to adopt when analysing the *Furioso* in comparison to the method devised during the analysis of the *Commedia*. I isolate the metaphor of weaving as a space of authorial presence in the *Furioso*, embodying gnoseological discourse. For this reason I consider this metaphor closely linked to my investigation on wonder. If for Dante the veil made of his poetry was there to be lifted, Ariosto points at his own veil as the only attainable dimension. We are immediately presented with the core of the difference between Dante's and Ariosto's wonder: if in the *Commedia* wonder bridges the human and the divine, in the *Furioso* it expresses only the terrestrial dimension.

After a brief *excursus* on the historical role of the metaphor of weaving in literature, the first section of this chapter considers Ariosto's woof in relationship with other examples of weaving and spinning carried out by the characters of his poem, including Alcina's, and the Parcae's on the moon. Through this analysis, the components of the woof emerge as part of a discourse on falsehood and literature, issues which were present in Dante's *Commedia* too. But while the guarantor of the *Commedia*'s truths is the Christian God, which frustrates all possible attacks against falsehood in Dante's poetry, the guarantor of the *Furioso* can only be the poet himself. Hence the different role of the veil in the two works. The *Furioso*'s matter does not escape the issues connected to the fraudulent aspect of fiction, but it faces them embodying a reflection on poetry and truth which leads to a conception of human discourse as intrinsically mystifying, according to the standard and philosophical idea of truth. The marvellous elements of Ariosto's woof are then to be understood as symbols of a reality that does not adhere to a philosophical system, as was the case in Dante, but is a reality represented in its manifoldness and contrasts. Wondering at such a reality does not lead to systematic knowledge but to a 'fantastic' knowledge. This is not to be intended as a mere product of fantasy, rather as a poetic interpretation of a world that cannot be understood in its objectiveness.

The second part of the chapter aims to reassess the *Furioso*'s marvellous in relationship to the field of inquiring wonder. I do not dwell on what has traditionally been understood as *meraviglioso* by critics. Instead I focus on what I call the 'human' marvellous, considering the episode of Orlando's frenzy in its speculative drive. In order to do so I present it closely linked to the lunar sequence, where Ariosto's poetics is manifest. The moon, where Astolfo is sent to retrieve Orlando's wits, is a symbol of mutability and change. If Dante's moon was a first stop on the way to God, Ariosto's involves a rebound towards the earth. A brief comparison between the two moons prepares for the conclusion of my research, highlighting how the perception of the sublunary world has changed from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Both Dante's and Ariosto's moon have wondrous connotations and bear a revelation; the difference lies in the role that the two authors confer on such attributes. Ariosto's moon is an expression of

'doppia meraviglia': a wonder that does not lead to a univocal path of knowledge, but manifests the double side of terrestrial discourse.

The *Furioso's* 'fantastic' knowledge as expressed by the metaphor of the veil, and by the human marvellous, finds its synthesis on the moon where alterity is presented in its speculative power. St John's figure contains several references to Dante's guides in the *Commedia*, but his role is in accord with the message conveyed by the *Furioso*, a poem which celebrates thegnoseological bearing of the multiplication of points of view, and the triumph of poetic metaphor over self-deceiving claims of an unattainable univocal realism.

Finally, wonder emerges from the analysis of both poems in its characteristic of opening up a new dimension of reality. Whether this be a supernatural or a terrestrial dimension, wonder maintains its inquisitive essence, linking, balancing, synthesizing those elements that by nature seem to be more distant from each other than they really are.

INTRODUCTION

My research follows an image of 'unfading wonder' as it appears in Dante's *Commedia* and in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. In order to understand the relationship between the two terms 'unfading' and 'wonder' it is necessary to dwell first on the meaning of 'wonder' considered in the present investigation. The simple mentioning of 'wonder' may evoke several different ideas related to disparate fields of knowledge: philosophy, studies of material culture, literature, natural science, magic, and so on. When I first started my research I encountered all sorts of works dealing, superficially or thoroughly, with wonder. Every field has its wonder, wonder being a characteristic of man as he inquires about a portion of the reality surrounding him. While delineating a niche for my own research into *meraviglia* in Italian literature, I bore in mind Italo Calvino's lesson on 'beginnings'. He considers an opening (of a book, or of a conference paper) as the decisive moment when the writer distances himself from the potential multiplicity around himself: 'il distacco dalla potenzialità illimitata e multiforme per incontrare qualcosa che ancora non esiste ma che potrà esistere solo accettando dei limiti e delle regole'.¹ If this can be valid for every enterprise, it is especially true for the present research, which, due to the elusive nature of wonder, had to give itself quite strict rules in order to 'exist'.

¹ Italo Calvino, *Saggi (1945-1985)*, ed. Mario Barenghi, 2 vols (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), I, p. 734.

The semantic area around *meraviglia* is complex. Wonder has been presented as a concept, as an affection, as a phenomenon, as a rhetorical strategy, as a literary aim; sometimes it has been made to coincide with what traditionally has been understood as the marvellous, or with the fantastic. While I will later compare some of the above ideas, I would like to point out now that the kind of wonder I am going to consider is not to be confused with the modern concept of the fantastic, which in literature tends to represent a moment perceived to be on the border between the natural and the supernatural, or the real and the unreal, and is accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty and disturbance.² As Tzvetan Todorov suggests, the fantastic coincides with the duration of such uncertainty; the moment following the hesitation, when one decides whether a phenomenon belongs to the natural or to the supernatural, feeds either into the uncanny (the supernatural explained) or the marvellous (the supernatural accepted).³ Wonder and the fantastic reflect different reactions to the perception of reality; this will become evident along the course of my research when I consider wonder in relation to some of its neighbouring fields, like the marvellous. What is important to underline here, is that while the fantastic is the perception of *strange* events ('événements étranges'; Todorov, p. 97), wonder is a new perception and an interrogation of *natural* events. I will soon clarify what this interrogation involves and to where it leads.

² For an introduction to the fantastic as a literary genre see Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970). Among others, on the fantastic see also Neuro Bonifazi, *Teoria del fantastico e il racconto fantastico in Italia: Tarchetti, Pirandello, Buzzati* (Ravenna: Longo, 1982); *La narrazione fantastica*, ed. Remo Cesarani (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1983); Remo Cesarani, *Il fantastico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

³ For a definition of the fantastic see Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, pp. 28-29; for a definition of the uncanny (*l'étrange*) and the marvellous (*le merveilleux*) see pp. 46-47.

The history of *meraviglia* in Italian culture is partially reflected by the history of its textual occurrences. Mapping them out from early vernacular appearances in the Middle Ages down to its modern use may show how ideas shaping this term have greatly changed over the centuries. However, providing a short history of wonder does not fall within the scope of my research. I choose to focus on the aspect of wonder which seems to be the most fertile in gnoseological terms, and explore it as it appears in the *Commedia* and in the *Furioso*. Indeed, wonder had such a philosophical bearing in ancient cultures, out of which the present meaning is derived. Tracing wonder back to its early formulations will help to unveil its original nature.

The Greek verb *thaumazo* means ‘to wonder, to admire’, and it is frequently followed by an interrogative sentence. The root *thau-* is connected with *thea-* (‘vision’) from which comes *theaomai*, meaning ‘gaze at, behold, mostly with a sense of wonder’.⁴ From this root we also have *theoria*, which used to indicate the philosopher’s activity of contemplation, and *theatron*, the place where spectators were gathered to watch. So *theaomai* signified both a mental and a physical activity of contemplation.⁵ The equivalent verb in Latin is *miror*, from which is derived *admiror*, *mirabilis*, *miraculum*, all sharing the same root *mir-*.⁶ Both *theaomai* and *miror* are deponent verbs: they belong to a class of verbs carrying an active

⁴ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edn, rev. Sir Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

⁵ Plato attributes to sight the qualities of acuity and purity, thanks to which the mind attains an intimate relationship with reality. See for example *Pheadrus*, 250d (‘vision, of course, is the sharpest of our bodily senses’), and *Timaeus*, 47a (‘our sight has indeed proved to be a source of supreme benefit to us’). All English references to Plato’s works are taken from Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

⁶ See entry ‘miror’ in Charlton T. Lewis, and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879).

meaning (physical gazing) enclosed in a passive form (wonder intended as expression of *pathos*). In fact wonder has a passive and an active component: one is 'affective and receptive'; the other is 'effective and active'.⁷ The affective component is the first moment of being struck by something external to oneself; the active component is the inquisitive movement prompting a deeper knowledge of the object.

The English language kept the questioning aspect together with the admiring side up until contemporary usage. 'Wonder' derives from the Old English *wundrian* and Old Saxon *wundrôn*, and shares the same meaning as *thaumazo* and *miror*.⁸ The Old English noun *Wundor*, 'wonder', used to mean 'wonder, miracle, marvel, portent, horror, monster'.⁹ Modern Italian, unlike English but like the neo-Latin languages French, Spanish, Portuguese, has lost the original questioning charge. The German *sich wundern* still carries a nuance of it but its use seems to be limited to specific areas and to be old fashioned.¹⁰ The Italian *meravigliarsi* has now only a tone of surprise without any gnoseological consequence. The meaning is flattened in the first emotional shock. Not only was a terminological complexity lost, but also the active mental state linked to it. This is why I was first attracted to the study of wonder in Italian literature. The glaring

⁷ As Howard L. Parsons has defined them in his article 'Wonder', *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*, 30.1 (September 1969), 84-101 (p. 93).

⁸ See 'wundrian' and 'wundrôn' in Joseph Bosworth, and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898). As the *Oxford English Dictionary* (entry 'wonder', <<http://dictionary.oed.com>>; hereafter abbreviated as *OED*) points out, the etymology is unknown.

⁹ Some etymologists suggest that *wundor* might be cognate both with the German *Wunder* and with *Wunde* ('cut, wound'); cf. Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 9.

¹⁰ See 'wundern' in Gerhard Wahrig, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Lexikon-Verlag, 1968).

lack of research around a phenomenon that bears such fundamental implications in culture and in literature prompted me to return to the roots of *meraviglia*, and to consider it with regards to two of the major poems of medieval and Renaissance Italian literature. Looking back at wonder in the *Commedia* and in the *Furioso* will reveal the full potential of a term that encompasses the complexity of a speculative moment in literature.

Meraviglia is often confused with other neighbouring terms, *stupore* and *ammirazione*, which in contemporary usage (recorded by all major twentieth century dictionaries) are considered as synonyms but whose different nuances it is useful to remember. In order to do so it is worth looking at nineteenth century definitions of them as provided by Tommaseo-Bellini's *Dizionario della lingua italiana* (1861-79). Tommaseo-Bellini's dictionary defines *maraviglia* as 'affetto dell'animo che viene dalla vista o dal pensiero di novità più o meno importante o di cose nuove'.¹¹ The first qualification is 'affection', belonging to the sphere of passions; such passion can arise either from seeing a new thing or thinking about it. Sight and thought are in fact already joined in the etymology of the term. But the important element to underline is the co-presence of *pathos*, a physical stimulus and an intellectual one. *Pathos* was considered by the anonymous author of the treatise *On the Sublime* (I cent. AD) as one of the five sources of the sublime. It is due to a similar *pathos* that Descartes in *Les passions de l'âme* (1649) elected wonder (*l'admiration*) as the first of all passions, for he says its manifestation

¹¹ See 'maraviglia' in Nicolò Tommaseo, and Bernardo Bellini, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, 4 vols (Torino-Napoli: UTET, 1861-1879), III.

precedes all judgements of value about the object that provokes wonder.¹² But for Descartes, as for many other early-modern thinkers, wonder is just a means of achieving a fuller scientific knowledge of things, and therefore to be discarded soon after its appearance. However, he differentiates between wonder and astonishment (*l'étonnement*): if the former leads to science, the latter is an excess of wonder that blinds people and clouds their minds (A73). This is in fact the first meaning of the Latin *stupere*: 'to be struck senseless, to be stunned' (of inanimate things: 'to be brought to a stand-still').¹³ It has a component of psychological and physical stillness, unlike wonder, which is qualified by movement from the inner towards the outer in reaction to a natural but unpredicted stimulus. The Tommaseo-Bellini defines the Italian derivative *stupore* as 'stato dell'animo di colui che vedendo, o per alcun modo sentendo e vedendo cose meravigliose o grandi, resta quasi muto'. It is a 'state' that originates in the perception of something wondrous, qualified by an interruption of routine tasks, like speech, due to a silence of the intellect. Contemporary definitions pick on this shade of suspension; in medical terms *stupore* is even 'un arresto della motilità volontaria, associata a torpore dell'attività ideativa o a distacco della realtà esterna'.¹⁴ Dante in the *Paradiso* is 'oppresso di stupore' (*Par.*, XXII.1) at hearing the voices of the souls, which he understands only as a roaring, and he needs Beatrice to revive his intellect and his sight. The third term, *ammirazione*, is defined by Tommaseo-Bellini as 'sentimento e atto dell'ammirare', where *ammirare* stands for a

¹² See René Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, ed. Jean-Maurice Monnoyer (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), A70 (p. 196), A73 (p. 198), A75 and A76 (p. 199).

¹³ See 'stupeo' in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.

¹⁴ Giacomo Devoto, and Gian Carlo Oli, *Il dizionario della lingua italiana* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1990).

‘*riguardare attento con gli occhi o col pensiero cosa notevole per novità o altro pregio migliore*’ (my italics). The prefix *ri-* involves more time in contemplation of an object, not just because of its novelty but because of some higher value.

All three terms recall each other. The essential difference resides in their intensity as a reaction to something that is perceived as new (although it is not necessarily so from a different point of view). Luigi Pareyson’s *Estetica* likens *meraviglia* to the nature of aesthetic pleasure. In doing so he considers it as made of two components.¹⁵ On the one hand, wonder is the perception of a novelty that suddenly comes to the senses without possibility of escaping; the emotion deriving from this can be shocking and disruptive. On the other hand, it is a suspension of every activity: ‘un attimo di contemplazione immota, nella quale l’attenzione, improvvisamente sollecitata, ristà e si fissa, posando sull’oggetto che in tal modo ha trovato uno spettatore’ (p. 171). *Meraviglia* then comprises a ‘piacere mosso’, linked to the movement of surprise, and a ‘piacere immobile’ on which the attentive look rests. But not every surprise is followed by wondering. Pareyson underlines that when the emotional shock is at its utmost intensity, that should be called *stupore*, which is characterized by the extreme perception of the gap between the novelty and the wait; the object that causes astonishment transgresses into the rare, the extraordinary and the prodigious. The movement opened by surprise remains active: ‘nello stupore più facilmente che nella meraviglia si passa e si trascorre tosto ad altro, e la primitiva notazione resta senza sviluppo, presto disperdendosi nella distrazione di molteplici interessi incapaci di

¹⁵ See Luigi Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1960), pp. 171-173.

determinarsi e concentrarsi' (p. 172). *Ammirazione* is rather when the sense of surprise is weakened and the contemplative aspect prevails: it is 'una meraviglia che non cessa al cessare della novità, purché non si dimentichi che in tal caso l'atteggiamento contemplativo riesce a fissarsi solo se, a propria giustificazione, vada cercando nell'oggetto pregi singolari o apprezzabili caratteri d'eccellenza, tanto che facilmente l'ammirazione si colora di sensi di venerazione devota' (p. 172). Admiration and wonder differ in their aims. Wonder balances the inquiry and the find, interpretation and contemplation. In wonder there is an awareness of the necessity of interpreting what suddenly manifests itself and is in need of further examination; but there is also a contemplation that 'incalza e sollecita l'interpretazione prefigurandone la conclusione, annunciandone la quiete e la fruizione in cui essa possa placarsi contenta e soddisfatta'(p. 173). Therefore, Pareyson concludes: 'la meraviglia produce sì la tensione della ricerca, ma la guida con la promessa del successo e del godimento che ne consegue, e proprio perché spiega la tensione della ricerca, proprio per questo spiega anche la natura del godimento che la placa' (p. 173).

Pareyson's analysis casts light on a desire (sparked by wonder) that, when satisfied, still thrills in the fruition. This is the outcome of the aesthetic experience in his hermeneutic philosophy: 'la riuscita dell'interpretazione è l'apparire della forma allo sguardo che l'ha saputa figurare, e, appena la forma appaia come tale, non è possibile sottrarsi all'apprezzamento della sua contemplabilità, e cioè della sua bellezza'(p. 175). Such final contemplation is temporary and qualifies every act of interpretation, if only just for a brief moment, before embarking on the

subsequent enterprise. *Meraviglia*, *stupore*, and *ammirazione* are then three diverse aspects of the reaction to 'the other', differing in the degree of intensity of their components. We will see them functioning as such in Dante's *Commedia* and in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. *Meraviglia*, in Pareyson's view, contains the seeds of *stupore* and *ammirazione*, thriving in a perennial oscillation between the subject wondering and the object looked at. Such oscillation is also a sign of wonder's irreducibility. Any definition that does not consider its character of transformability is destined to fail.

The very fact that these three terms are today in need of being disentangled and clarified explains a great deal about the history of their use. Their semantic richness has gradually faded. As Mary Jane Rubinstein prompts us:

If we follow the traces of its forgotten and repressed meanings, then wonder loses much of the sugarcoating it has acquired in contemporary usage. [...] Wonder in the biblical and classical worlds responds to a destabilizing and unassimilable interruption in the ordinary course of things, an uncanny opening, rift, or wound in the everyday.¹⁶

There are contemporary critical efforts to reconstruct paths in the history of philosophy in the attempt to return to the archetypal value of wonder.¹⁷ In my opinion the problem is generally that of pursuing an idea of wonder identical to itself, while the heart of wonder is intrinsically open to fluctuations. The destabilizing power present in wonder escapes any rational definition. That is

¹⁶ Rubinstein, *Strange Wonder*, p. 10.

¹⁷As a start, see Joseph Pieper's short but inspiring chapter on wonder and philosophy in his *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), pp. 129-146. For a contained but informed account of classical and medieval wonder see James V. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Denver: Denver University Press, 1951), pp. 62-85.

why I believe that a manifestation of wonder can be found at its best in literature, which does not live by definitions but rather by representation.

Critics from different fields often lament that the history of wonder has yet to be written. My research was initially inspired by Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions*, a work which focuses on different aspects of wonder, from the medieval conception of it to the role played by wonder during the European conquest of the New World.¹⁸ Greenblatt's treatment of wonder and the marvellous as appearing in travel literature is intriguing because of his way of dealing with a topic, which is intrinsically pliable and shifting, without altering its nature nor attempting to reduce it to a mental taxonomy.¹⁹ Greenblatt considers it as a metaphor of the encounter with 'the other', introducing it as oscillating between the designation of a material object and the designation of the reaction to that very object (p. 50). Sometimes this encounter takes the shape of a respectful relationship and sometimes an invasion, as an attempt to possess 'the other'. Two central features of wonder emerge: firstly, its 'being-in-between' an object and a subject; secondly and consequently, its cognitive bearing. While expanding these points I believe the critic ought to endeavour to keep moving, as wonder does, between the object of the investigation and oneself, the subject, in order to diminish the omnipresent risks of flattening something that, due to its very nature,

¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

¹⁹ With regard to this see Sharon Larisch's review 'Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World, by Stephen Greenblatt; *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism*, by José Rabasa', *Comparative Literature*, 47.4 (1995), 366-370 (p. 367): 'Wonder involves a response or an object that eludes our common forms of assimilation. Greenblatt attempts to preserve this type of resistance in his work by shaping a flexible web of echoes, circulation, and connections'.

starts withering as soon as it is taken out of its environment. In reality, it is very easy to discern when a scholar has lost sight of wonder: it is when wonder has fled his research.

That said, it is no simple task to discuss wonder and probably this is the reason why no definitive history of wonder is yet available. Dennis Quinn's *Iris Exiled* is a quite recent attempt to fill such a gap.²⁰ As the subtitle announces, the book intends to be a 'synoptic history of wonder', and indeed it maps the developments of the idea of wonder from the ancient Greeks up to the modern period. Wonder is here identified with Iris who in Greek mythology was the personification of the rainbow and messenger between gods and men. According to Hesiod's *Theogony* (265), Iris was the daughter of Thaumas, god of wonder (from the Greek *thauma*, which means 'marvel', 'miracle', 'prodigy'), and Electra; from their union were also born the Harpies, employed as intercosmic messengers too but often charged with the task of carrying men off to the underworld.²¹ The image of wonder as a link between heaven and earth is fertile in illustrating the idea of mediation between two different levels, in this case one (the divine) being the perfective state of the other. It also has a component of communication, which shows the need of finding a meeting point between two separated extremes. One could in fact compile the history of wonder by looking at the history of the relationship between earth and heaven, or man and his gods, which at the end represents the relationship between man and the perfect idea of himself. When

²⁰ Dennis Quinn, *Iris Exiled: A Synoptic History of Wonder* (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 2002).

²¹ Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and transl. Gleen W. Most, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), I, p. 25.

heaven has started appearing to man devoid of mythologies or religious symbols, man has also stopped pursuing a perfect idea of himself and stopped wondering at superior things. The modern man is just man, in his strength and frailty. Wondrous now are his weaknesses. The communication sought is that amongst peers, and even this is proving challenging.

Quinn's pursuit of the unalloyed nature of wonder is commendable because it tries to trace a dimension which seems lost in the modern period. His encyclopaedic intent of observing wonder as a 'phenomenon' (Quinn, p. xii) appearing in different eras and different cultures allows him to survey the main problematic arising when approaching a rational discourse on wonder. Quinn identifies 'Iris regnant' in classical antiquity and the Christian era, 'Iris usurped' in the modern age, and finally 'Iris in exile' in the so-called postmodern age. The coordinates are undoubtedly correct. The trouble is that such a kind of review tends to imply superficial juxtapositions which do not necessarily help to deepen an understanding of wonder. The book is rich in examples and quotations that should be looked up and set in their original environment in order to be understood in their complexity. One could also argue about the selection criteria behind the choice of authors and works cited, which belong indistinctively to the most widely varied backgrounds (i.e. philosophy, literature, social sciences but only of select countries) and often lack their historical setting. Gathering this kind of information about wonder does not offer the right shading for a faithful picture. Perhaps then there is no need even to think about a history of wonder, although when working on such a topic one does feel the lack of proper historical support. I

believe instead it is worth isolating some pregnant moments in the history of individual cultures and devoting close attention to the tensions at play within them. This is the approach I embrace in the present work.

The first chapter of my thesis is divided into three sections which aim to prepare the ground for my analysis of wonder in Dante and Ariosto. In the first section, I start by following wonder's cognitive thread which originates in Plato and Aristotle. I will then move on to the more specific area of poetry, and highlight how poetry's gnoseological bearing is inevitably connected to the discourse on wonder. In the second and third sections, I will present some aspects of wonder, as they appear respectively in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, which are functional to my discussion of wonder in the *Commedia* and in the *Orlando furioso*.

The second and the third chapters are dedicated to Dante and Ariosto, two authors who are far enough apart in time to illustrate the different manifestations of wonder, but not so remote from one another to resist historical continuity altogether. Chapter II will show how Dante's treatment of wonder bridges the classical conception and the Christian. We will see the tensions performed by the *Commedia* between wonder as an essential stage for the pilgrim's journey, and wonder as an hindrance to it. I will also touch upon the relationship between the marvellous and wonder in order to discuss the issues implied in the poem's literary (and then inevitably fictitious) nature.

Chapter III will show how Ariosto's wonder surpasses the limitations set by medieval theology. I will consider the *Furioso* as a peak in the liberation of

wonder, and I will reassess the area of the marvellous in the *Furioso*. The aim of my analysis is to connect the sphere of wonder to that of the poem's speculative power, which critics have kept separated for too long. In presenting Ariosto's poem as a veil, I will argue for the different roles that the metaphor of the veil has in Ariosto's and in Dante's poems, while exploring the weave of the *Furioso* in light of the marvellous and wonder.

All three chapters are to be considered as part of one comparative discussion. When I gauge Ariosto's achievements against Dante's, I do not do it for the sake of juxtaposing themes and styles. My aim is to illuminate different sides of wonder as it appears in the texts, but also to bring to the fore cultural *motifs* related to wonder that resurface in various guises in time, beyond discrepancies of beliefs and style. The difference in nature between Dante's and Ariosto's narratives led me to organize my analyses differently in each chapter. Vincenzo Gioberti used a fitting simile to express the difference between the two authors: '[Ariosto] si mostra pittore ammirabile, e ritrae le bellezze naturali, come Dante è principalmente scultore, e si compiace delle idee, che sono l'anima dei suoi versi'.²² Hence the different nature of my reflection on the one and the other, at times focussing more on the weave or form of their works, other times following the plot and the ideas closely.

The scope of the thesis purposely refrains from engaging with late Cinquecento literary disputes on *admiratio* derived from the proliferation of studies on Aristotle's *Poetics*, because they would not contribute to the kind of

²² Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*, ed. Gustavo Balsamo-Crivelli, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Torino: UTET, 1925), III, p. 20.

research I intend to pursue.²³ I choose to focus on a period of time preceding such speculations in order to follow wonder as it appears before the burst of rhetorical constrictions: a 'natural' wonder as opposed to the idea of 'artificial' wonder that spread in the second half of the sixteenth century.²⁴ While being 'liberated' from religious constrictions, wonder was about to be attributed new ones, at this stage, more contingent. Freedom from transcendence allowed the study of the natural world, which in its turn initiated a mechanistic attitude towards the universe. In this way wonder became exposed to the real risk of fading into scientific knowledge and losing its archetypical value. The cultural trend of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries nurtured a normalization of the marvellous into the 'mechanic', in art as in the sciences.²⁵ This is not the wonder in which I am interested.

Archetypical wonder is not born out of human ingenuity and is not a product to pursue in order to persuade and impress: it is a natural reaction to the world that escapes our full comprehension; it is the openness to consider such a

²³ See Baxter Hathaway, *Marvels and Commonplaces: Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1989), pp. 9-19 for an overview on the influence of the Aristotelian works of Robortelli, Maggi, Varchi, Giraldi Cintio, etc. See also Marvin T. Herrick, 'Some neglected sources of *admiratio*', *Modern Languages Notes*, 62. 4 (April 1947), 222-226. More broadly on literary quarrels sparked by the *Poetics* see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), I-II, pp. 564-713.

²⁴ Erminia Ardissino, for example, in a rare attempt at summing up the main trends of *meraviglia* in Italian literature from Tasso to Vico, follows wonder indistinctively in its different manifestations. This approach has the disadvantage of missing the development of the history of an idea, considering classical and Renaissance wonder on the same cognitive level as the Baroque. See E. Ardissino, 'Maravilha e conhecimento de Tasso a Vico' (transl. Silvana Scarinci), *Per Musi – Revista Acadêmica de Música*, 24 (Julho/Dezembro 2011), 7-20.

²⁵ For the development of wonder in seventeenth-century Italian philosophy and science see Maurizio Torrini, 'Il *topos* della meraviglia come origine della filosofia tra Bacon e Vico', in *Francis Bacon. Terminologia e fortuna nel XVII secolo*, ed. Marta Fattori (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1984), pp. 261-280. Torrini isolates different and sometimes contrasting trends pivoting around the topic of *admiratio*, although all tend to stem from a trite and weakened conceit. He finds in Francis Bacon and Giambattista Vico the seeds of a rediscovery of its authenticity.

world as an interweaving of passions and intellectual search. I believe the *Commedia* and the *Orlando furioso* to be the greatest expressions of a wonder that does not fade away but persists, and informs life quests as an *arche* (a term that in ancient Greek not only circumscribes the moment of a beginning of an existing thing, but indicates an origin that resounds in the thing itself).²⁶ My thesis intends to cast a fresh look on a topic that critics have long ignored, in the hope to revive critical interest in a poetic moment that has been long in need of a more attentive analysis.

*

Finally, some notes on the conventions of translation and citation adopted in this thesis. The majority of Latin quotations in the main text are accompanied by English translations found in the same editions referenced in the first footnote to those texts. When some short passages have no translation it is either because no English translation is available or because the meaning is apparent. In those cases I ensure that the sense of the passage is clarified by the context. Quotations in footnotes appear only in the original Latin.

Latin quotations from the Bible are taken from *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robert Weber, 5th edn rev. Roger Gryson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007); the English translations are from '*The Bible*': *Authorized*

²⁶ See Aristotle's discussion on *arche* in *Metaphysics*, V.1, 1013a 1-15; Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, transl. Hugh Tredennick, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933-1935). All Greek quotations from the *Metaphysics* are taken from Tredennick's edition.

King James Version, ed. Robert Carroll, and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Quotations from Dante's *Commedia* are taken from Giorgio Petrocchi's *La 'Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, 4 vols (Milano: Mondadori, 1966-1967). The three *cantiche* are abbreviated in references as *Inf.*, *Purg.*, *Par.* All quotations of commentaries on Dante's *Commedia* are taken from the *Dante Dartmouth Project*: <<http://dante.dartmouth.edu>>, last accessed 30 July 2011. Each quotation appears clearly linked to the lines under which the commentary can be found. Quotations from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* are taken from Cesare Segre's edition (Milano: Mondadori, 1976), abbreviated in references as *Fur.*

The first time I quote from a text, the full reference to the text will be found in the footnotes. Further references to specific sections of that text will usually appear in the main text. Abbreviations are limited to those indicated in footnotes.

I

AN EURIPUS OF WONDER

I.1 The Philosophical Roots of Wonder

The connection between wonder and philosophy is first mentioned by Plato in the *Theaetetus* (155d). During a discussion led by Socrates, Theaetetus starts feeling dizzy:

Oh yes, indeed, Socrates, I often wonder [*thaumazo*] like mad what these things can mean; sometimes when I'm looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy.¹

Socrates replies that this wondering is the feeling (*pathos*), or the experience, of the philosopher:

This is an experience which is the characteristic of the philosopher, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else. And the man who made Iris the child of Thaumaspas was perhaps no bad genealogist.

Socrates, referring to *Theogony* 265, seems to identify Iris with philosophy; both in fact incorporate movements that link heaven and earth and both are born out of wonder. A similar instance is found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

¹ Transl. M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat; Plato, *Complete Works*, p. 173. Greek quotations are taken from Plato, *Theaetetus. Sophist*, transl. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921).

For it is owing to their wonder [*thaumazein*] that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about greater matters.²

In the opening of the *Mechanics* Aristotle dwells briefly on the causes of wonder:

Our wonder is excited, firstly, by phenomena which occur in accordance with nature but of which we do not know the cause, and secondly by those which are produced by art despite nature for the benefits of mankind.³

We are immediately presented with the two poles around which the discussion on wonder will become fiery in the Renaissance: nature and art, in an omnipresent competition. The semantic of wonder appears also in *On Marvellous Things Heard* (*Peri thaumasion akousmaton*), a collection of curious anecdotes traditionally attributed to Aristotle (although the issue of authorship is still debated by scholars). This work anticipates the passion that will develop in the Middle Ages around the *mirabilia*.⁴ It is in fact a catalogue of strange events taken from the natural world and arranged thematically (according to animals, plants, weather, etc.), based purely on hearsay. The fact that they are being collected in a text, despite their lacking any demonstrable reality, is a sign of interest in those elements of the natural world, belief in which investigation could prove either

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.2, 982b 12-13, transl. W.D. Ross; *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ; Chichester, UK: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, p. 1554.

³ Aristotle, *Mechanics*, 847a10, transl. E. S. Forster; *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, II, p. 1299.

⁴ See for example Gervase of Tilbury (XII cent.), '*Otia Imperialia*': *Recreation for an Emperor*, ed. and transl. S.E. Banks, and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2002); Jacques Le Goff, 'Le merveilleux dans l'Occident médiéval', in *L'Étrange et le merveilleux dans l'Islam médiéval. Actes du colloque tenu au Collège de France à Paris, en mars 1974*, ed. Mohammed Arkoun (Paris: Editions J.A., 1978), pp.61-79.

wrong or right. They represent a rough stage of knowledge: myth, in fact. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle says:

A man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders [*thaumasion*]); therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know.
I.2, 982b 17-21

The 'wonders' of *On Marvellous Things Heard* can be considered as part of myth; this very myth can originate rational investigation and produce knowledge; at this stage the lover of myth (*philomythos*) can become the lover of knowledge (*philosophos*). The path is from 'wonders' to 'sophia' through the act of wondering. It is apparent that wonder here functions as a primitive stage of a process which aims to dissipate the cloud of ignorance in order to attain truth. Myth is born out of ignorance but does not coincide with it. Myth is an archaic attempt to formulate answers and provide interpretations of a reality which is seen as marvellous and surprising due to a lack of 'scientific' knowledge. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics* the *philomythos* and the *philosophos* share a similar nature, which sends us back to Plato's method of using myth and metaphor in his philosophy.⁵

Nonetheless, while in Plato wonder inaugurates a mystery, in Aristotle it opens up a problem waiting to be solved.⁶ It is this polarity that I will explore here in depth. The Aristotelian wonder mirrors the inadequacy of man's previous

⁵ On the relationship between Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of philosophy, myth and wonder see Patrizia Pinotti, 'Aristotele, Platone e la meraviglia del filosofo', in *Il meraviglioso e il verosimile tra antichità e medioevo*, ed. Diego Lanza, and Oddone Longo (Firenze: Olschki, 1989), pp. 29-55; 'La nascita della teoria [*theorein*] non è altro che il segmento che unisce la meraviglia alla filosofia e che smarca quest'ultima dal *mythos*', p. 53.

⁶ On the different roles attributed to wonder by Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy see Silvano Petrosino, *Lo stupore* (Novara: Interlinea, 1997), p. 19.

knowledge and prompts a further rational enquiry. Wonder then gives way to the power of reason:

For all men begin, as we said, by wondering that the matter is so [...]. But we must end in the contrary and, according to the proverb, the better state, as is the case in these instances when men learn the cause.

Metaphysics, I.2, 983a 14-20

In this way wonder has in itself both a beginning (of philosophy) and an end (of its own essence). Different theories across the centuries are organized around either the Platonic or the Aristotelian approach, hinging upon the core issue of whether wonder is due to fade by the mastering of *scientia*. Contemporary mainstreams of thought tend to consider wonder from the scientific point of view, and therefore as an element destined to be left behind at the end of an investigation.⁷ Caroline Bynum traces back the causes of such an attitude to the fact that naturalist philosophers between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries developed the idea, hinging upon Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, that the aim of wonder was its own destruction.⁸ This interpretation, the critic underlines, originates in the medieval ontological distinction between *miracula* and *mirabilia*: miracles, since accomplished by divine power, were considered by Thomas Aquinas as *insolita* and *ardua*, while *mirabilia* were seen as natural facts, eluding human comprehension but in accordance with natural laws (Bynum, p. 5). Early Modern investigations would then transform those *mirabilia* into objects to possess, collect,

⁷ As an example, see Philip Fisher's method of analysis in his *Wonder, the Rainbow and the Aesthetics of Rare Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Wonder here tends to be considered as an experience of the extraordinary, while classical wonder sees the familiar (not yet understood) as the object of knowledge. But the proliferation of analysis concerned with wonder and science would be apparent to anyone browsing through a library catalogue.

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Wonder', *The American Historical Review*, 102. 1 (1997), 1-26 (p. 4).

and describe. This has nothing to do with the archetypical aspect of classical wonder, which does not aim at material possession but at pure knowledge for the sake (and the pleasure) of it. As Aristotle states: 'since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end' (*Metaphysics*, I.2, 982b 20).

Martin Heidegger, who understood the nature of the shift of modern philosophy towards science, picks up on the resonance of the *pathos* that in the *Theaetetus* is said to qualify the philosopher. I will quote him in the English translation but I would like the reader to be aware that the translators of the English edition of Heidegger's *What is Philosophy?* (*Was ist das-die Philosophie?*) chose to translate *Das Erstaunen*, Heidegger's term for *to thaumazein*, as 'astonishment', which I have been using with a different nuance of meaning in the present work. I therefore distance myself from the vocabulary selection in the following quotation and I will keep using 'wonder' for *thaumazein*.

The *pathos* of astonishment [*des Erstaunens*] thus does not simply stand at the beginning of philosophy, as, for example, the washing of his hands precedes the surgeon's operation. Astonishment carries and pervades philosophy. [...] It would be very superficial and, above all, very un-Greek, if we would believe that Plato and Aristotle are only determining here that astonishment is the cause of philosophizing. [...] Astonishment is *pathos*. We usually translate *pathos* with passion, ebullition of emotion. But *pathos* is connected with *paschein*, to suffer, endure, undergo, to be borne along by, to be determined by.⁹

This is what modern philosophers from Descartes onwards have modified and misinterpreted. The pursuit of knowledge cannot just be seen as a run for the

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, ed. and transl. William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (London: Vision Press, 1958), pp. 80-83. This is a dual language edition so the original German text is available next to the English translation.

possession of certainty, as Heidegger puts it, but as an experience of 'tuning' ('die Stimmung', p. 84) to the unfolding of what he calls the Being of being ('das Sein des Seienden'). What matters for our discussion on wonder, is this attitude involving a personal disposition, or emotion (*pathos*), essential for shattering a mere rationalistic conception of the relationship between man and the world.

The link between wonder and causal explanation has been widely discussed in philosophy, although never treated in an exhaustive way.¹⁰ While my research does not belong to philosophy, it does employ some of its tools. Dwelling initially on the philosophical side of wonder helps to outline its different components; transferring the issue of wonder and causality to a new terrain opens up fresh perspectives. Literature is most of the time a response to wonder, and also the very embodiment of it. The problem of whether wonder were to fade should not be contemplated by literature. A text is an interpretation of the world, a *medium* between reality and imagination, where wonder dwells under two different shapes: *meraviglia*, which belongs to the sphere of the subject enquiring and wondering, and *meraviglioso*, which is attributed to the object at which one wonders. The *meraviglioso*, *mirabile* in the medieval lexicon, is what is found in nature, or in a work of art, charged with the power of attracting our attention and creating a pause, feeding contemplation, and/or reflection.

This separation is already found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: *thaumazein* is the verb expressing an act of wondering, and *thaumaston* ('meraviglioso') is the object

¹⁰ For an introductory survey of these issues see Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Wonder', in *'Wonder' and Other Essays: Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), pp. 131-154.

undergoing the action (also appearing as *thaumasion*). Only the former is identified as a referent of the origin of the philosophical process, while *thaumaston* tends to qualify the phenomenon, focussing on the effect. Patrizia Pinotti underlines that this happens for the first time in the history of philosophy:

[è] con Aristotele che, per la prima volta, ed esplicitamente, il fenomeno segnalato al soggetto dallo stupore viene ad essere determinato non come *thaumaston* bensì come ciò di cui non si conosce la causa [...] e collocato, in quanto tale, nello spazio che ad esso l'episteme riserva, quello dell'ignoranza (*agnoia*) e dell'incertezza (*aporia*).¹¹

Aristotle's philosophy identifies *thaumaston* as separated from the field of knowledge, but at the same time it leaves space for an analogy like the one between *philomythos* and *philosophos*, which shows that literature and philosophy share a principle and that in some cases the marvellous can spark reflection too, if accompanied by wonder. This is the case of both the *Commedia* and the *Orlando furioso*, as I will show.

In his reflection upon tragedy and epic, Aristotle links *thaumaston* with pleasure: 'awe is pleasurable [*to de thaumaston hedon*]: witness the fact that all men exaggerate when relating stories, to give delight' (*Poetics*, 24.17-18). To give delight is in fact said to be the primary aim of story-telling and the marvellous is a component of it.¹² A similar point is made by Albertus Magnus commenting on Aristotle – a rather interesting reference to the *Poetics* in a medieval author: 'sicut enim in ea parte *logicae*, quae poetica est ostendit Aristoteles, poeta fingit fabulam

¹¹ Pinotti, 'Aristotele, Platone, e la meraviglia del filosofo', p. 36.

¹² In tragedy one needs to create a sense of awe [*thaumaston*], but epic has more scope for the irrational (the chief cause of awe), because we do not actually see the agent' (*Poet.*, 24.11-15). All references to the *Poetics* are taken from Stephen Halliwell's edition and translation in Aristotle, *Poetics*; Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Demetrius, *On Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

ut excitet ad admirandum, et quod admiratio ulterius excitet ad inquirendum'.¹³

As far as scholars are concerned today, the *Poetics* didn't circulate in Italy until the Renaissance. Once it had been rediscovered, and transformed from an unfinished draft to a system of rules to be applied dutifully in literature, it originated disputes amongst authors and critics. The *mirabile* (as it has been most frequently translated in the vernacular) in its relationship with reality and credibility started then to lose its spontaneity, and became a literary *topos*.

In the literary field, *meraviglioso* can be both an object (or a person) contemplated and the final product of writing, the latter activity consciously or unconsciously aspiring to prevail in some way on the former. Broadly it can be said that one of the main differences between philosophy and literature is in the degree of entertainment that the two aim to offer. A literary text is born out of a response to a reality that at first amazes us, and once the text is inserted in that same reality as a finished product, it becomes *meraviglioso* itself, able to delight and, if successful enough, to kindle further wonder in the person who reads it. From this point of view, 'active' wonder would not need to be interrupted, being able to generate further wonder. There is a sort of baton passing between two subjects: author and reader both participating in the making of the meaning. This reception activity is of course present also in philosophy, but to a lesser degree since, given the nature of philosophical discourse, the primary 'maker of the

¹³ Albert Magnus, *Metaphysica*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Augusti Borgnet, 38 vols (Parisiis: Apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam Editorem, 1890-1899), VI, I.2 c6, p. 30; quoted in English in J. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder*, p.78: 'Thus Aristotle shows in that branch of logic which is called poetic that the poet fashions his story for the purpose of exciting wonder, and that the further effect of wonder is to excite enquiry'.

meaning' is often expected to be the author himself.¹⁴ While philosophy is discourse, literature tends to be representation. That is why I find literature to be a more appropriate field within which to study multifaceted wonder and so escape the risk of a univocal definition.

Until the sixteenth century, theoretical observations on *meraviglia* and *meraviglioso* are quite scarce in Italy. In particular, within Italian studies we lack almost completely works related to the topic of wonder, especially with regard to literature; and when there are inputs, these are always very specialised and usually focus on the marvellous rather than on what is behind it, that is, wonder.¹⁵ I will now isolate specific aspects of wonder from the discussions in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, which will foreground some important issues linked to the textual analysis I will undertake in the following chapters. In doing so I intend to provide a sufficiently delineated background in which to embed the discussion on Dante's and Ariosto's poetics. I would like to point out that I do not intend to provide an exhaustive historical *excursus* on wonder, which is a task I leave to historians. I will rather present the areas of discussion which originate the issues I am going to touch upon in the next chapters, and bring to light tensions too often taken for granted by historical approaches that are not anchored to a cultural specificity.

¹⁴ I say this with regards to traditional philosophy. However, I am aware that modern tendencies of (especially continental) philosophy make use of a language that verges on literature and that the process of interpretation of previous philosophical works is always open. See above all Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*.

¹⁵ The only comprehensive text that refers to the Italian Renaissance is B. Hathaway's *Marvels and Commonplaces*, although it is concerned purely with literary criticism.

I.2 *Meraviglia* and *Meraviglioso*: Dante's Inheritance

The vernacular terms *maraviglia* and *meraviglia* originated from the Latin *mirabilia*. The vernacularization of *mirabilia* occurs in most medieval European vernacular languages (Anglo-Norman: *merveille*, *mervaille*, *marvaille*, etc; Old Occitan [XIII cent.]: *meravelha*; French [c1050]: *merveille*; Spanish [1140] *maravilla*; Portuguese [1258] *maravilha*; Italian [XIII cent.]: *meraviglia*, *maraviglia*).¹⁶ It is commonly found in vernacular love poems, most of the time referring to (different kinds of) love or to the lady dedicatee of the rhymes. To give some examples, it is present in Giacomo da Lentini ('meravigliosamente | un amor mi dstringe'); Lapo Gianni ('ogni su'atterello è meraviglia'); Guittone d'Arezzo ('Merabel meraviglia o cosa nuova').¹⁷ Dante's treatment of wonder sums up different nuances and the contrasts implicit in the term, and I reserve the treatment of his use of *maraviglia* and derivatives for chapter II, where I will discuss it also in relationship with its sources. This section is to be understood as a preface to a more specific treatment of the relationship between Dante and the medieval conception of wonder, which I will later present in a close dialogue.

It is possible to isolate broadly two poles of discussion on wonder in the Middle Ages: one pivoting around *mirabilia*, a term which loosely matches our modern idea of the marvellous, and another around *admiratio*, which leans more

¹⁶ Cf. the etymology of 'marvel' as it appears in the *OED*.

¹⁷ Giacomo da Lentini, 'Meravigliosamente', in *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. Gianfranco Contini, 2 vols (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1960), II.1; Lapo Gianni, 'Dolc'è il pensier che mi notrica 'l core', v. 9 in *Poeti del Duecento*, II.2; Guittone d'Arezzo, 'Beato Francesco', in *Le rime di Guittone d'Arezzo*, ed. Francesco Egidi (Bari: Laterza, 1940), 38,75.

towards our concept of wonder. The former describes an ambivalent category of objects (of love, of curiosity, of fear), often holding together pagan and Christian elements, which were frequent topics of travel accounts and history writings; its scope was mainly entertainment. The latter refers to the subject wondering and used to be found in religious discourse: it was a major component of sermons, an essential stage of the path towards mystical ecstasy, and it was often the focus of debates originated by the theological-philosophical theories of university intellectuals.¹⁸

Jacques Le Goff suggests that during the High Middle Ages (ca. V to XI cent.) there was a repressive attitude from within Christianity towards *mirabilia* as something that exerted too openly a seductive power over society; the critic also notices an irruption of the marvellous within high culture, during the Later Middle Ages (ca. XII to XIII cent.), due especially to the rise of chivalry and courtly literature.¹⁹ Low and middle nobility are in fact considered in their attempt at creating a counter-culture, something diversionary in respect to the prevalent ecclesiastic culture grounded in aristocracy. In order to assert themselves, the members of the new emerging class started reaching to the sources of a marvellous that imbued oral culture. It is no coincidence, Le Goff points out, that the marvellous is so prevalent in romance literature of the time: 'le merveilleux est profondément intégré à cette quête de l'identité individuelle et collective du chevalier idéalisé' (p. 65). During this stage, the Church, rather than continuing to

¹⁸ For an in depth interpretation on *mirabilia* and *admiratio* in the Middle Ages I refer the reader to Bynum's essay 'Wonder'.

¹⁹ See Le Goff, *Le merveilleux dans l'Occident médiéval*, pp. 64-66.

block the marvellous, gradually begins to tame it and use it to its advantage; the result is a tendency of mainstream culture to rationalize marvellous elements depriving them of their unpredictable components. Therefore the marvellous ends up channelled into the miraculous or the symbolical.²⁰

An example of the medieval Christian attitude towards the world is Ramon Lull's *Libre de meravelles*. Composed in Catalan around 1288-89, this book is a sort of 'encyclopedia for adults', as Frances A. Yates describes it.²¹ The protagonist is a young man called Felix who is instructed by his father to wander in the world, literally wondering at things.²² Wonder at the fact that some people stop loving and knowing God prompts the mission of Felix, who is so told: 'Ve per lo món, e meravelle't dels hòmens per què cessen de amar e conèixer Déu'.²³ And so he starts travelling through woods and plains, cities and castles, never ceasing to wonder: 'et meravellave's de les meravelles qui són en lo món; e demanava ço que no entenia, e recomptava ço que sabia'(p. 26). His wonder towards God and the Angels, Heaven and Hell, the Elements, plants, metals, and animals, leads him to interrogate hermits and philosophers who in their responses, articulating Lull's central philosophic systems, track all down to divine generation. The world is a symbol of God's operative power.

²⁰ See Le Goff, *Le merveilleux dans l'Occident médiéval*, pp. 68-69.

²¹ The quotation is from Frances Amelia Yates, *Lull and Bruno: Collected Essays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), I, p. 34.

²² And it is no coincidence that a verse of Virgil's *Georgics* recites: 'felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas'(II.490); Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid*, transl. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), I, p. 170.

²³ Ramon Lull, *Libre de meravelles*, ed. Salvador Galmés, 4 vols (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1931-34), I, p. 26.

Another way of recuperating the marvellous within mainstream culture, as Le Goff advocates, is that related to 'scientific' approaches. Some medieval intellectuals in fact tended to consider *mirabilia* as exceptional phenomena belonging to nature, and, therefore, part of a natural order. For instance, this was the case of Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia*, composed between 1211 and 1215. At the very beginning of the third part of the *Otia*, the section most concerned with different sorts of marvels, Gervase of Tilbury gives an eloquent definition of miracles [*miracula*] and marvels [*mirabilia*]. Both share the aim of arousing wonder [*admiratio*]: 'miracula dicimus usitatus que preter naturam divine virtuti ascribimus', while 'mirabilia vero dicimus que nostre cognitioni non subiacent, etiam sunt naturalia; sed et mirabilia constituit ignorantia reddende rationis quare sic sit'.²⁴ The essence of *mirabilia* is matched with our incapability of finding a rational explanation for them. As Elisabetta Bartoli highlights, this is Gervase of Tilbury's great conceptual innovation: rather than linking *mirabilia* to the fantastic or the supernatural, he takes it back to the physical realm and links it to the look of the viewer ('ignorantia reddende rationis quare sic sit').²⁵ The *Otia imperialia* is a collection of marvellous anecdotes destined to instruct and entertain the emperor during his spare time. The *mirabile* represented includes strange events from Europe or Asia, often supported by Gervase of Tilbury's own testimony; unusual stories about people, animals, plants, and rocks; sacred legends and miracles. All of these are narrated as if they really happened and therefore are intended to

²⁴ 'We generally call those things miracles which, being preternatural, we ascribe to divine power'; 'we call those things marvels which are beyond our comprehension, even though they are natural: in fact the inability to explain why a thing is so constitutes a marvel'; Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, p. 559.

²⁵ See Elisabetta Bartoli, *Gervasio di Tilbury. Il libro delle meraviglie* (Pisa: Pacini, 2009), pp. 20-21.

appear completely credible, accordingly to the medieval conception of a world in which man's quotidian existence is constantly crossed by a medley of nature, marvels and miracles.

The Latin term *admiratio*, used in the *Otia imperialia* to indicate wonder, was the one selected by Thomas Aquinas to translate Aristotle's *thaumazein* in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. *Admirari* means 'to regard with wonder' and, unlike wonder, extends in time. This is how Lewis and Short's dictionary defines the difference between *miror* and *admiror*: '*admiror*, [...] *to admire*, to be in a state of mind in which something pleases us by its extraordinary greatness, its sublimity, or perfection; while *mirari* signifies to be surprised at, to have the feeling of the new, singular, unusual' (see entry '*admiror*'). Due to Thomas Aquinas the term spread to describe the final stage within the path to God, part of a journey sparked by an inquiry after truth.²⁶ His *Summa theologiae* prescribes that the good exercise of *admiratio* must be tempered by the moral virtue of *studiositas*, able to rectify the desire of knowledge and the way of acquiring it.²⁷ This prevents *admiratio* from following simple curiosity, whose incessant movement does not allow pursuit of sound knowledge, but rather generates a sequence of temporary and superficial satisfactions. I will expand on this point in chapter II because it is strictly related to the discourse on Dante's wonder.

²⁶ See entry 'Wonder' in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd edn, 15 vols (Detroit: Thomson/Gale; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2003), XIV, pp. 832-833.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, '*Summa theologiae*': *Latin Text and English Translation, Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries*, ed. Thomas Gilby, 61 vols (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964-1981), Ia IIae, q166-7, q182 (henceforth abbreviated as S.T.) See also Guy Godin, 'L'admiration, principe de recherche philosophique', *Laval théologique et philosophique* 17.1 (1961), 213-242 (especially pp. 241-242).

In brief, if it is very difficult to say with precision what medieval people wondered at. The scholar could suggest an array of things: nature, in its beauty and its monstrosity, a cause of awe and fear at the same time; artificial rarities, the bizarre; sacred relics and miracles; the divine. All of these elements have in common a transitory component, a being-in-between two spheres: the known and the unknown, the familiar and the strange, the human and the divine. Hence Bernard of Clairvaux identified the main reason for marvelling (and therefore to be most controlled) in what he called *admirabiles mixturae*, events or phenomena in which ontological and moral boundaries are crossed, confused, or erased.²⁸ After all, the paradoxical nature of the marvellous was already understood by the anonymous writer of *On the Sublime*, although this text was virtually unknown until the middle of the sixteenth century: ‘it is always the unusual which wins our wonder’ (‘*thaumaston d’omos aei to paradoxon*’; 35.5).²⁹ *Thaumaston* is there put into a parallel with *paradoxon* which literally means something that goes beyond or is contrary to an expected opinion. In chapter III I will show the centrality of paradox and wonder in Ariosto.

A similar nature is well represented by Christ, although the paradox in his figure is overcome by faith, as it is in the Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas in fact identifies not God but God made flesh as the greatest mystery and therefore the main source of admiration:

[a]dmiratio non cadit in Deo: quia non fit nisi ex ignorantia
causae, quae non potest esse in Deo. Item est apprehensio

²⁸ Cf. Bynum on St Bernard, ‘Wonder’, p. 12.

²⁹ References are to W.H. Fyfe and Donald Russell’s edition in Aristotle, *Poetics*; Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Demetrius, *On Style*.

magnitudinis effectus magni, et sic potest cadere in Christo: unde admiratus est, id est magnum reputavit, et hoc turbis sequentibus ostendit.³⁰

Admiratio is not found in God, who is not ignorant about anything and in whom there is no duality (which is the source of wonder). It is rather a characteristic of Christ, human and divine, a sort of *admirabilis mixtura*. We will see how fertile this image is in Dante, who refers to God as 'colui che mai non vide cosa nuova' (*Purg.*, X.94); for the pilgrim's ascent in the *Paradiso* the figure of Christ as human and divine will be central. For the moment, I would like to underline, once more, the essential characteristic of medley, paradox, synthesis that is intrinsic in the type of wonder my thesis considers and that will recur in my discourse in different guises.

Although the discourse on *mirabilia* is often complementary to that on wonder, it is not the prime object of the present research. Authoritative scholars have successfully taken on the task of exploring medieval and Renaissance collections of natural and artificial marvels.³¹ These are often just considered as curiosities and studied according to their aesthetic value. My thesis does not focus on objects, or wonders, rather on wonder. I share this approach with Caroline Bynum, who has understood *admiratio* (and not wonders, as she makes clear) as 'cognitive, non-appropriative, perspectival, and particular. Not merely a physiological response'.³² On the strength of this view, she argues against early modern conceptions of wonder that tend to consider it removed from its roots. In

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Lectura super Matthaeum*, c.8, lect.2. For an in-depth analysis of Aquinas' treatment of *admiratio* see G. Godin, 'La notion d'admiration', *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 17.1 (1961), 35-75, where I found the above quotation discussed (p. 49).

³¹ A good starting point would be Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

³² Bynum, 'Wonder', p. 3.

fact, as I have already hinted at, wonder's rich aura tends to fade in the middle of the sixteenth century, until it becomes completely detached from its original significance. Europe gradually became filled with marvels, both immaterial, coming from travel accounts, and material, collected first in private collections and later on in public museums. Early modern wonder becomes appropriative, that is, the opposite of medieval cognitive wonder, and so it remains to this day.³³

At the same time, I distance myself from a definition of wonder that is merely based on cognition because I believe that to be diminishing. My interpretation of wonder in Dante's *Commedia* will challenge such a conception and will highlight other components of wonder which are equally important for a correct comprehension of Dante's poetics. Some of these components are ones which were more widely spread in the Renaissance. The advantages of the diachronic approach embraced by my thesis consist of broadening and questioning ideas that seem defined in one culture and are defied in another. Looking at wonder in two different periods allows an understanding of wonder's several nuances and benefits the analysis in both phases. I will now look at the rise of a new interpretation of wonder that will lead to the composition of such a poem as the *Orlando furioso*, in which I find the climax of the liberation of wonder from medieval theological constraints.

³³ See Bynum arguing against Greenblatt's approach in his essay 'Resonance and Wonder' [in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp, Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C; London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991; 42-56] which she defines as 'early modern, even Darwinian'; 'Wonder', p. 6 (n.20).

I.3 Towards a Liberation of Wonder

At the end of the thirteenth century, Marco Polo's travel accounts opened up a new dimension to the eyes of the medieval man. What is now known as *Il milione* was a joint project composed in 1298 in the prisons of Genoa by Marco Polo, merchant, and Rustichello da Pisa, a man of letters who was in charge of the actual writing. Accepting the hypothesis of the reality of Marco Polo's journey (which is still contested by some scholars), the work was written around ten years after the completion of the travelling.³⁴ In the travel account direct and indirect knowledge intertwine: some descriptions carry the flavour of truthful witnessing, some others follow previous literary stereotypes and hearsay, while the book explicitly claims its veracity: 'acciò che 'l nostro libro sia veritieri e senza nessuna menzogna' (1.3). As Lucia Battaglia Ricci puts it: 'il realismo fa il suo primo, timido ingresso nella letteratura occidentale: e l'infinitamente varia, "meravigliosa", realtà del mondo soppianta l'immaginaria foresta di simboli spuntata dai libri del Medioevo'.³⁵ This is a very important stage in the Italian history of wonder, so far mainly confined to the supernatural (with regards to both *admiratio* and *mirabilia*). The object of wonder started to include the wide(r) world. Occurrences of the term 'maraviglia' and its derivatives are numerous in the book, from the very opening where Marco Polo addresses emperors, kings, and, most importantly, all people interested in hearing about the diversity of the world:

³⁴ This is taken by some critics as a justification for the somewhat imprecise description of certain locations in the East.

³⁵ Marco Polo, *Il milione*, ed. Lucia Battaglia Ricci (Milano: Sansoni, 2001), p. XXXIV.

Leggete questo libro dove le troverete tutte le grandissime meraviglie e gran diversitati delle genti d'Erminia, di Persia e di Tarteria, d'India e di molte altre province. [...] Troppo sarebbe grande male s'egli [Marco Polo] non mettesse inn- iscritto tutte le meraviglie ch'egli à vedute, perché chi no' l'le sa l'appari per questo libro.

I.1-2, 4-5 (p. 4)

The tone of the narration reveals an impulse to disseminate those marvels that the author has seen and that all people should know about. Legends that have been circulating about an extraordinary East finally find a real anchoring. Marco Polo claims to have acquired an unprecedented knowledge of the world (which Dante would have condemned, as he did with Ulysses):

Non fu mai uomo né cristiano né saracino né tartero né pagano,
che·mmai cercasse tanto del mondo, quanto fece messer Marco,
figliuolo di messer Niccolò Polo, nobile e grande cittadino della
città di Vinegia.

CCIX.23 (p. 244)

The 'gran diversitati' no longer belong to imagination only, but to sensorial evidence. Novelty is the 'real' world, starting point of several sorts of investigations. The 'real' and lived experience will become central topics for Boccaccio. Some of these marvels in fact later materialize in the locations of Boccaccio's tales, and some others in exotic or magic objects charged with exchange value and social power as part of daily mercantile life.³⁶

The greatest shift happened from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries onwards, when all sorts of marvels start physically coming from the distant worlds, sometimes in the form of a book, sometimes in the form of a shell,

³⁶ On Boccaccio and the marvellous see Douglas Biow, 'The Value of Marvels', in *Mirabile Dictu: Representations of the Marvelous in Medieval and Renaissance Epic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 65-94.

sometimes as relics. The *literati* begin collecting Greek manuscripts coming from the East, some others collect natural objects, musical instruments, and so on. Renaissance men develop a way of looking at reality which is different from that of medieval man. Renaissance reality is there to be grasped, studied, often possessed, and not necessarily to be looked through as an allegory. Curiosity is no longer only to be retained as a sign of human pride, but it can also be an impulse that opens the doors to the world. As Nicola Gardini stated:

Il Rinascimento fu nelle intenzioni di molti individui e ancora possiamo dire che sia stato nella realtà, a giudicare dai documenti letterari e artistici pervenuti, la fondazione di una cultura consapevolmente innovativa e totalizzante, impegnata tanto nello studio del passato quanto nell'indagine del presente; un ideale *enciclopedico* sì spesso pago della ricerca microscopica, ma soprattutto impegnato a riconoscere nell'investigazione del *contingente* e del *mutevole* il valore ultimo dell'individuo.³⁷

With Humanism there is a shift in what men wonder at, the object moving from the divine to the human sphere. Man is no longer constrained to a one-way religious *admiratio*. The latter can in fact be channelled towards different objects since learning is now gradually gaining independence from the divine Architect. The world is not just a symbol but it is seen in its own right. Knowledge too ceases to be subordinated to the divine and starts entering a parallel path. This will be particularly evident in my reading of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.

The seeds of the process are already in Petrarch, who in fact tends to be considered among the first Humanists. Petrarch's letter to Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro on the occasion of his ascent to Mont Ventoux in 1336 pictures the conflict of a man caught up between two objects of admiration, the mundane and

³⁷ Nicola Gardini, *Rinascimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010), p. 16.

the divine; experience of the surrounding world, even if just for a brief moment, supersedes contemplation of the divine. Having reached the top of the mountain, Petrarch is astonished at the glorious view of the surrounding landscape ('stupenti similis steti'; *Familiars*, IV.1.17). His mind oscillates between earthly things and more elevated matter when he decides to open Augustine's *Confessions*. The passage randomly coming up to his eyes (*Conf.*, X.8.15) laments men contemplating nature and forgetting about their souls: just what is happening to himself. Petrarch, deeply touched by the reading, closes the book commenting:

*Obstupui, fateor; audiendique avidum fratrem rogans ne michi molestus esset, librum clausi, iratus michimet quod nunc etiam terrestria mirarer, qui iampridem ab ipsis gentium philosophis discere debuissem nichil preter animum esse mirabile, cui magno nichil est magnum.*³⁸ (my italics)

As the commentators point out, the last sentence of this passage is taken from Seneca (*Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, 8,5): 'nihil praeter animum esse mirabile cui magno nihil magnum est'. But in Petrarch the assumption that nothing is more wondrous than the soul is counterbalanced by the natural admiration springing out of the external world. Petrarch describes himself as upset for yielding to natural beauty and withdraws in silence with his mind in turmoil, but the passage

³⁸ Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari. Libri I-IV*, ed. and transl. Ugo Dotti (Urbino: Argalia, 1970), IV.1.28. 'I confess that I was astonished, and hearing my eager brother asking for more I asked him not to annoy me and I closed the book enraged with myself because I was even then admiring earthly things after having been long taught by pagan philosophers that I ought to consider nothing wonderful except the human mind compared to whose greatness nothing is great'; transl. Aldo S. Bernardo in F. Petrarca, *Rerum familiarum libri I-VIII* (Albany, New York: State University Press, 1975), p. 178.

has already revealed a sensibility that will be central to the development of humanist culture.³⁹

Two main poles of the marvellous can be isolated in the Renaissance: one is antiquity and the rediscovery of a historical past, embodied by the Humanists' activity; the other is a new enthusiasm for the present finally investigated in its physicality, either in an exotic shape, when coming from the new worlds (the area of study of Naturalists), or in its daily appearance (the present of the historians).⁴⁰ These poles are the two sides of one coin. Classical authors are admired for their moral and literary skills; contemporaries for their power of constructing meaning out of observation.

In the fifteenth century, Humanists casting a fresh look on classical antiquity began to see it as a separate culture from the present and from the medieval past, something worth studying in detail. Philological and archaeological studies spread:

It was a new attitude and appreciation and, above all, a new understanding of Antiquity, which led both to the liquidation of the *Mirabilia* and to the readiness to make use of all the sources available.⁴¹

Relegating the medieval conception of *mirabilia* to popular literature, the Humanists focussed their *admiratio* on the ruins of ancient Rome, which embodied

³⁹ For Petrarch's conception of knowledge subordinated to religion see Petrarch's much later *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (1367-70) where he defends himself from the attacks of four Aristotelians; see F. Petrarca, 'De Ignorantia'. *Della mia ignoranza e di quella di molti altri*, ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milano: Mursia, 1999), pp. 94-95, and p. 238.

⁴⁰ 'Possessing nature was a process that paralleled the humanists' possession of the wisdom of the ancients'; Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 56.

⁴¹ Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), p. 66.

the new marvellous compound of a mutilated perfection, as something to contemplate and over which to lament.⁴² The fascination with Rome's marvels was already present in the Middle Ages, as in the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, a twelfth century Latin text describing the wonders of the city of Rome (including palaces, temples, theatres, baths, walls, columns, hills, and so on). Despite its historical inaccuracies, this manuscript had a broad circulation, being much copied and revised until the fifteenth century, when works like Leon Battista Alberti's *Descriptio Urbis Romae* and Flavio Biondo's *Roma Instaurata* (both written in mid-fifteenth century) offered a new picture of Rome adhering to contemporary historical perspectives. What was understood by the Middle Ages in its materiality or usefulness, was now attributed an aesthetic value: in Gardini's words, 'l'antichità, nel Rinascimento, diventa sinonimo di bello e di meraviglioso'.⁴³

The medieval object of wonder, which held in itself a promise of completion, is now superseded by something which cries out for human intervention. In other words, human action is now part of it in its interpretative and re-constructive task. Hence the proliferation of collecting, an activity notably increasing during the fifteenth century; amongst the main purposes of the humanist practice of collecting was the studying of antique pieces in order to learn

⁴² See Weiss, 'The ruins of Rome and the Humanists', in *The Renaissance Discovery*, pp. 59-72; and Gardini, 'L'ammirazione e il lamento per le rovine: Colonna, Piccolomini, Ciriaco d'Ancona, Vergerio, Bracciolini' in *Rinascimento*, pp. 93-98.

⁴³ Gardini, *Rinascimento*, p. 94. The fascination with Rome and its ruins is already present in Petrarch: see his letter from Rome to Giovanni Colonna, *Familiars* II. 14 (but on Rome's ruins see also VI. 2), and the numerous apostrophes to Rome in the *Africa*, especially II.345 onwards and VIII.995 onwards; F. Petrarca, *L'Africa*, ed. Nicola Festa (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1998).

from them, and imitate them, in an attempt to tie together past and present.⁴⁴ We will find an example of a metaphorical collection on the *Furioso's* moon; Ariosto's poetics (and style) in fact is a grand example of such an endeavour to show the knot of memory and present.

A fascinating example of this new cultural sensibility is the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published by Aldo Manuzio in 1499 and attributed to the Dominican friar Francesco Colonna. Poliphilo, during his sleep, embarks on a journey towards Polia, his lost lover. The enterprise reveals itself to be a 'psycho-erotomachia', a mental battle between senses and reason which finally results in Poliphilo and Polia being reunited in a mystical embrace, synthesis of sensual and spiritual love. The work is complex in its symbolical bearing and Platonic echoes. I will here just touch upon the primary role of wonder in the text, which in itself would deserve a separate and in depth treatment. The first part of the *Hypnerotomachia* increasingly teems with architectonical marvels that kindle wonder and astonishment in Poliphilo. The following passage, which I quote from Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele's translation into modern Italian, illustrates this well:

Rapito, preso da un diletto, da un piacere inimmaginabili di fronte alla grazia e alla meraviglia [admiratione] delle sacre, venerabili antichità, i miei occhi restarono confusi, smarriti, insaziati. Curiosavo qua e là con grande soddisfazione [indi & quindi uolentiera mirando] e, pieno di meraviglia [di admiratione stipato], estasiato, osservavo e ragionavo sul significato delle storie scolpite, con libertà e diletto fissavo ed esaminavo attentamente ogni cosa. A bocca aperta, rimanevo a lungo come assorto, ma senza riuscire a soddisfare l'avidità dei miei occhi, l'inesauribile brama di guardare e riguardare [mirare & remirare] quelle sublimi, antichissime opere. Svuotato, privo di ogni altro

⁴⁴ See Weiss, p. 9, and his chapter 'The collections of Antiquities', in *The Renaissance Discovery*, pp. 180-202.

pensiero, solo la mia amata Polia più volte ritornava incolume e gratissima alla vischiosa memoria. Ma di fronte a tutto questo, pur contro voglia, con profondi sospiri, non potevo che metterla da parte. Imperterrito, continuavo a contemplare [mirabondo] le amatissime antichità.⁴⁵

Poliphilo is drawn to the progression of magnificent ruins in the shape of buildings, obelisks, fountains, doors, friezes, sculptures, which appear in his dream vision, and he describes them meticulously and voraciously for pages and pages. All of these *mirabilia* have a strong sensuous component and represent his appetites. The process of describing them is cathartic; the harmony they evoke symbolizes the concord between senses and mind that he has to attain. His observation is pervaded by nostalgia for a time and a *virtus* gone (as Polia has gone), which was widespread among the Humanists, as the following passages show:

Frammenti variamente istoriati a tutto tondo e a mezzo rilievo, ad altorilievo e a bassorilievo, la cui eccellenza denuncia e accusa che di tale arte, ai nostri tempi, si è persa, senza dubbio la perfezione.
H.P., 23 (II, p. 28)

O sublimi ingegni del passato, o età veramente aurea, quando la virtù si coniugava con la fortuna, solo a questo secolo hai lasciato, derelitta eredità, l'ignoranza e la sua accolita, la cupidigia!
H.P., 36 (II, p. 42)

At the early stages of Poliphilo's journey, which from many sides reminds us of the Dantesque one, the consequences of such ecstatic admiration are limited to description, but later on Poliphilo, aided by Logistica (embodying reason), manages to reflect on and interpret what he sees, taking even more pleasure out of

⁴⁵ Francesco Colonna, *Hyperotomachia Poliphili*, ed. Marco Ariani, and Mino Gabriele, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Milano: Adelphi, 2010), II, p. 74 (58). I put into square brackets the original (57d-58). Further references to the title will appear in the text as *H.P.*

it than out of the initial stun of great astonishment (*H.P.*, 127; II, p. 146, and 131; II, p. 151). In fact if at the beginning he cannot take his mind off such marvellous artefacts, at the end of his journey he is able to prioritize his purified love for Polia, and his admiration is channelled into her.⁴⁶ Wonder in the *Hypnerotomachia* encompasses the relationship between reality and imagination and changes from sensorial to mystical without losing its nature. As a resolution to the opposition of two extremes, Colonna offers an unprecedented image of Venus Mother, perfect *concordia* between earthly love and spiritual love, in whose presence he solves his *psychomachia*.⁴⁷

The other pole around which the marvellous is articulated, as I mentioned, is the new enthusiasm for the present which started developing especially towards the end of the fifteenth century, sparked off especially by the discovery of the New World. The new lands generated a fresh attention towards the present, which itself became a source of wonder and instability at the same time.⁴⁸ The geographical explorations are called by Francesco Guicciardini in his *Storia d'Italia* 'navigazione maravigliosa', and there is a special mention of Colombo's expedition in 1490, which is said to be 'più maravigliosa ancora'.⁴⁹ Guicciardini points out that 'per queste navigazioni si è manifestato essersi nella cognizione della terra ingannati in molte cose gli antichi' and even the interpreters of the Scriptures are contradicted

⁴⁶ Waiting for Cupid to ferry them to the realm of Venus, Polia, aware of Poliphilo's torment of love, encourages him to go and look at a ruined temple while saying 'so quanto ti entusiasmi nel vedere le antichità' (*H.P.*, 242; II, p. 253).

⁴⁷ Cf. *H.P.*, II, p. 1097 (n.1).

⁴⁸ Such enthusiasm in Italy is counterbalanced by a difficult political situation originating with the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico in 1492 and followed by the French invasion led by Charles VIII (1494).

⁴⁹ Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. Costantino Panigada, 5 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1929) , II, VI.9, p. 130.

in their claims about the geographical spread of Christian faith ('interpretazione aliena dalla verità'; VI.9, p. 132). The fervour towards the present not only embraces the exotic but also local and social events in which the intellectuals participate passionately, at times with excitement and at times with disappointment.

The Latin poem *Syphilis*, written by Girolamo Fracastoro in the first decades of the sixteenth century (when the first edition of the *Furioso* was published) and published in 1530, is one of the first literary treatments of the discovery of America. The subject of the poem is syphilis, a disease which had spread in all Europe, originating, some thought, in America. The third book opens with a celebration of the most recent enterprises nuanced with mythological and classical overtones. The navigators are in fact described in similar terms to the Argonauts (whose enterprise Dante uses as a symbol of his own literary journey, as we will see), with the classical image of the daughters of Nereus wondering at the racing of the ships on the sea: 'ignoti nova monstra maris Nereides udae | adnabant, celsas miratae currere puppes, | salsa super pictis volitantes aequora velis'.⁵⁰ The difference, and a clear sign of the new culture opening up, is that Fracastoro's wondering is not at a myth but reality. He underlines this when suggesting new poetic matter for future writers who, he fancies, will give up narrating about

⁵⁰ 'Around them swam the new wonders of the unknown sea, the daughters of Nereus, too many to be counted, sea-soaked, hastening from all over the watery abyss, wondering at the racing of the lofty ships flying over the salt water with their painted sails' (III. 98-101); Girolamo Fracastoro, *Syphilis*, ed. and transl. Geoffrey Eatough (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1984), p. 91. There are similarities to the vocabulary of Catullus' *carmen* 64 (vv. 14-15), when the Nereids emerge from the deep sea to wonder at the ship *Argos*, seen as a *monstrum*; see *Catullus. Tibullus. Pervigilium Veneris*, transl. F. W. Cornish, J. P. Postgate, and J. W. Mackail, 2nd edn rev. G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 98-99.

mythological deeds because captured by the fascination of the new events going on: 'Unde aliquis forsan *novitatis imagine mira* | captus, et heroas, et grandia dicere facta | asseuetus, canat auspiciis majoribus ausas | Oceani intacti tentare pericula puppes' (my italics).⁵¹ Fracastoro does not dwell long on the account of the discovery, rather he prefers focussing on syphilis, the *contagium*, and the cure. As he declares, his literary work in fact originated from an intense fascination with the disease, which seemed to him a wondrous novelty ('visa profecto ea mihi res est et nouitatis plena et admirationis').⁵² In an attempt at justifying his choice for such an apparently unpoetic topic, he claims to have been captured by the Muses and compelled to write ('raptus ad musam'; p.29).

Fracastoro's attitude is that of a humanist and of a scientist, one of the first that can be so called.⁵³ His scientific approach to natural events is tempered by his classical education and his fervent passion for poetry and philosophy. He appreciates nature as the highest marvel and therefore the worthiest object of investigation, following the trend of Aristotelian naturalism that spread in the period.⁵⁴ Reflecting on Aristotle's parallelism between *philomythos* and *philosophos*, Fracastoro argues about the strict connection between naturalist philosophers and poets. He finds evidence of this in the fact that the philosopher is used to observe

⁵¹ 'Someone gripped perhaps by a marvellous vision of these strange novelties, one accustomed to tell of heroes and great deeds, might sing of ships, guided by more encouraging omens, which dared to attempt the perils of the untried ocean', III.13-16, pp. 86-87.

⁵² This can be found in one of his letters, now published in Girolamo Fracastoro, *Scritti inediti*, ed. Francesco Pellegrini (Verona: Valdonega, 1955), p. 26.

⁵³ See Emilio Di Leo, *Scienza e umanesimo in Girolamo Fracastoro* (Salerno: Spadafora, 1937). Di Leo describes Fracastoro as 'ultimo umanista e primo scienziato moderno' (p.9), and quotes an epigram by Gian Battista Marino which labels Fracastoro 'e fisico, e poeta'.

⁵⁴ On nature as a source of wonder see Fracastoro, *De Intellectione* II. 134d, and *De Morbo Gallico*, L.I.261,2, as quoted and commented on by Geoffrey Eatough in his introduction to *Syphilis*, p. 18. The idea of nature and experience as starting points of knowledge is central to Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks.

and admire nature, and the poet loves greatness and beauty, both of which are in nature at the highest degree; hence their affinity.⁵⁵ As he states at the beginning of *Syphilis* (I.20-22), even the lowliest topic can be an object of wonder and therefore of poetic and philosophic inquiry, as long as beauty resides in language. His interest in the scientific aspects of *contagium* together with his decision to treat it poetically at first is a sign of the new spirit of early Cinquecento culture. The myth of Syphilus, in book three, symbolizes the awareness of a human society that defies tales and superstitions, rebelling against a transcendent tyranny; man is alone facing Nature and her laws, which is seen as a prodigy and as containing the seeds of good and evil.⁵⁶ Philosophy's aim must now be the contemplation of natural objects, which are the only ones man is able to reach, in a separation from metaphysics. 'Lo spirito naturalistico è incapace di risalire all'unità, perché si compiace della molteplicità e in essa esaurisce il suo compito', writes Giuseppe Saitta.⁵⁷ This is the poetics of *varietas* so frequently found in Quattrocento and early Cinquecento authors, but already present in classical literature.⁵⁸ It is a *varietas* that, as Gardini reminds us, must not be confused with chaos, but rather identified with a complexity tied together by reason and order.⁵⁹ I consider such *varietas* as central in my analysis of wonder in the *Furioso*.

⁵⁵ See Fracastoro, *Scritti inediti*, pp. 27-29.

⁵⁶ See Giuseppe Saitta, *Il pensiero italiano nell'Umanesimo e nel Rinascimento*, 3 vols (Bologna: Zuffi, 1949-51), II, p. 186.

⁵⁷ Saitta, *Il pensiero italiano*, II, p. 195.

⁵⁸ See chapters 'Varietas' and 'Varietas and natura' in Gardini, *Rinascimento*, pp. 254-262.

⁵⁹ *Rinascimento*, p. 263: 'Varietas e confusione non sono sinonimi, tutt'altro: *varietas* è abbondanza regolata, una complessità che suggerisce ordine. *Varietas* si potrebbe dire, è quell'"impressione di vita" che l'artista trasmette all'opera quando possiede il controllo perfetto dei propri mezzi'.

I.4 Wonder between Intellect and Affection

The realm of wonder has descended into earthly matters. It has always been earthly matter, in fact, wonder being a strictly human reaction to the unknown. But the Renaissance led man to wonder freely no longer only at eternal objects, but at natural ones, and, therefore, also at man in his merely earthly existence. This means also that early Renaissance culture superseded the conception of wonder as either entertainment or as an element tied to the divine, inaugurating a new dimension. I believe that both the medieval idea of wonder as found in Dante and the Renaissance spirit inspiring Ariosto's wonder are complementary in offering a complex and multifaceted picture of *meraviglia*. When I talk about liberation of wonder, I do not mean to express a biased judgement in favour of one or the other culture. Yes, Renaissance culture expanded the idea of wonder and allowed it to blossom to its fullest potential; but it also contained the seeds of its decline. Wonder starts to fade when it is considered as a product of human ingenuity, as a mere artifice, as happens in the sixteenth century. Wonder is not possession since it is not only a rhetorical strategy; wonder as an *arche* finds its expression in the quest, in the journey. It manifests itself in a relentless oscillation between the subject wondering and the object perceived as unknown, and worthy of wonder.

Francesco Patrizi's *Della poetica* (1587) offers a remarkably unusual delineation of such oscillation, especially considering the period out of which it was born. Platonic philosopher and professor, Patrizi was at odds with the dominant late Cinquecento Aristotelian literary disputes, all concerning the

relationship between the verisimilar and the marvellous. He disagrees with critics who advocate that wonder should be tempered by the 'credibile' because in his view wonder is not related to the 'credibile' but rather to the 'incredibile'. For this, he was also one of Ariosto's defenders against critical opinions that condemned the *Furioso's* marvels as too far from reality.⁶⁰ He is nonetheless aware of the risks of an ungrounded poetics relying exclusively on fantasy. Therefore in 'La deca ammirabile', a section of *Della Poetica* entirely dedicated to the concepts of 'mirabile' and 'maraviglia', he finds a solution in declaring wonder to be compounded of both 'credibile' and 'incredibile' (VI.60v). Patrizi here introduces the concept of 'potenza ammirativa', a mediatory power between intellect and affection:

la maraviglia sarà da dire movimento quasi portatore de' moti della ragione alla parte bassa [...]. Ed è parimente la maraviglia portatrice de' moti affettuosi alla ragione [...]. E si può perciò dire la potenza ammirativa essere tra queste due potenze quasi uno Euripo, per lo quale la marea, dalla ragione agli affetti correndo e ricorrendo da questi a quella, si va del continuo bilanciando sino che, unitesi le forze dell'una parte, la marea nell'altra si trasfonda tutta, e 'l bilanciamento fondato nella sua potenza ammirativa, toccante e contigua alle due, e discende, e asconde, e si diffonde / in loro, e secondo se le muove e si fa ministra e portatrice degli imperii dell'una nell'altra.⁶¹

The Euripus is a narrow tract of the Aegean sea that separates the island of Euboea from the Greek mainland, renowned for its strong and irregular tidal currents changing as often as seven times a day. According to popular belief it is the place where Aristotle drowned, despairing at understanding the cause of this

⁶⁰ On the quarrel over Ariosto see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, II, pp. 954-1073; with regards to Patrizi see especially pp. 997-1000.

⁶¹ Francesco Patrizi da Cherso, *Della poetica*, ed. Danilo Aguzzi Barbagli, 3 vols (Firenze: Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 1969-71), II, X.99r-v, p. 362.

phenomenon, which is still unknown today.⁶² Patrizi beautifully uses it as a metaphor of ‘potenza ammirativa’ that does not belong to reason nor to passions. And it is peculiar that a Platonic philosopher refers to a geographical place associated with the death of Aristotle, who was overwhelmed by the erratic movements of nature. The move is part of an attack on rationalistic trends dominating his culture. In doing so, Patrizi is the only Renaissance philosopher who explicitly did not condemn wonder to its fading. Wonder is considered by him to be a movement of ‘potenza ammirativa’ that lives in the doubt between yes and no, between believing and not believing (X.102r). Platonically, Patrizi conceives of wonder as the *permanent* condition of the philosopher and in doing so he seems to complete his master’s thought with these words:

La quale maraviglia *sempre* il filosofo accompagna, sin tanto che l’accompagna l’ignoranza o di tutte, o di qualche cagione. In notizia delle quale tutte pervenuto, non più filosofo /, ma sofo, e sapiente, e al colmo della felicità umana pervenuto. [...]; e chi finito ha di prendere maraviglia beato è divenuto.⁶³
Della Poetica, X.103r (my italics)

The end of wonder coincides with a situation surpassing the human, which shows how ‘human’ wonder is. I would add that such a state of beatitude feeds into what Pareyson has defined as *ammirazione*. *Philo-sophia* is in fact qualified by a desire for knowledge and the philosopher’s profession of inquiring implies his dwelling in the realm of wonder and desire.

⁶² See ‘Euripus’, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*:

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/195628/Euripus>>, last accessed 5 July 2011.

⁶³ Patrizi adds that this is the meaning of Horace’s famous lines ‘Nil admirari prope res est una, Numici, | solaque quae possit facere et servare beatum’ (*Epistulae*, I.6.1); p. 367.

As Giorgio Colli reminds us, philosophy was born out of a period of decadence of the pre-Socratic *sophia*.⁶⁴ Archaic wisdom involved manifesting the obscure divine message and was linked to primordial mania, folly, which had little to do with further developments of systematic knowledge and rhetoric, aiming not at wisdom but at persuasion. In the *Timaeus* Plato has designated folly as a state of divination in which the intellect is asleep:

While he is in his right mind no one engages in divination, however divinely inspired and true it may be, but only when his power of understanding is bound in sleep or by sickness [...]. On the other hand, it takes a man who has his wits about him to recall and ponder the pronouncements produced by this state [...], to analyze any and all visions that are seen, to determine how and for whom they signify some future, past or present good or evil. But as long as the fit remains on him, the man is incompetent [...]. This is the reason why it is customary practice to appoint interpreters to render judgement on an inspired divination.⁶⁵
71e-72a

Platonic philosophy values the space between intellect and passions in a way that was rejected by Renaissance Aristotelianism, although, as I have shown in the opening of this chapter, Aristotle's parallelism between *philomythos* and *philosophos* would leave the discussion open. Probably also due to the success of rationalist trends, 'La deca ammirabile' did not have great influence after Patrizi's death and has remained unknown for a long period, until Kristeller's discovery of a manuscript in Padua in 1949.⁶⁶

The idea of the sleep of the intellect as a preamble to vision was fertile in ancient and medieval literature. In this case especially, it links Dante's *Commedia*,

⁶⁴ See Giorgio Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*, 21st edn (Milano: Adelphi, 2007), pp. 13-21.

⁶⁵ Plato, *Complete Works*, p. 1272 (transl. Donald J. Zeyl).

⁶⁶ See Peter G. Platt, "'Not before either known or dreamt of': Francesco Patrizi and the Power of Wonder in Renaissance Poetics', *Review of English Studies* New Series, 43. 171 (1992), 387-394 (p. 389).

the *Hyperotomachia Poliphili*, and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* with regards respectively to the initial state of Dante the pilgrim, Poliphilo's *visio in somniis*, and Orlando who at the end of his fury is said to appear as if waking from a long sleep.⁶⁷ Platonically speaking, the difference between the three is that while Dante the pilgrim and Poliphilo are the interpreters of their own visions, Orlando is not. Ariosto in fact frustrates the Neoplatonic concept of *furor divino* sending Astolfo to retrieve the cure for it and presenting Orlando as intellectually passive both in the process (during his folly) and in the aftermath. Furthermore, Orlando goes mad following a process of interpretation (of Angelica and Medoro's love writing) *before* the annihilation of his intellect. The last chapter of this work will analyse the reasons why Ariosto does so.

In order to justify practically the selection of the authors in this work, it is now time to show how Dante and Ariosto, in different ways, dwell in the Euripus, the only space where wonder persists, oscillating between passions and reason. The treatments that Dante and Ariosto give to wonder mark important stages in the relationship between man and his world. Such a relationship is shaped under the name of knowledge. Knowing is in fact a reducing of the gap between one individual and the other, or one individual and his surroundings. We will see how Dante's idea of wonder bridges the classical and the Christian cultures, and how Ariosto's contributes to the formation of its modern conception. For both authors wonder plays a pivotal role in the representation of their conception of a reality

⁶⁷ 'Come chi da noioso e grave sonno, | [...] ancor si maraviglia, poi che donno | è fatto de' suoi sensi, e che non dorme'; *Fur.*, XXXIX.58.1,5-6.

that is far from being 'set' but is to be pursued through the tidal currents of an 'epic' journey.

II

DANTE AND GNOSEOLOGICAL WONDER

II.1 Philosophical and Poetic Knowledge

The medieval discussion concerning wonder aroused Dante's interest. In chapter I.1 we looked at an extract from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (I.982b 12-21) on wonder as the origin of philosophy. Dante would have read this passage in the translation of William of Moerbeke: 'Nam propter admirari homines nunc et primum incoeperunt philosophari'.¹ The same notion is also present in Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the *Metaphysics*: 'ipsi etiam philosophi ex admiratione moti sunt ad philosophandum'.² Influenced by these two passages, Dante hints at the same topic in his *Questio de aqua et terra*: 'propter admirari cepere phylosophari' (XX.17).³ Patrick Boyde, in *Dante Philomythes and Phylosopher* (p. 50), argues that Dante had the above two texts in mind whenever he makes gestures toward a discourse on wonder, and that he drew on them for the vernacular terms *ammirare*

¹ Quoted in Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 50.

² Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. Raimondo Spiazzi (Torino: Marietti, 1964), I.2, 982b 12, lect. 3, 55.

³ Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, ed. Domenico De Robertis [et.al.], 2 vols (Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1979-1988). All further quotations of Dante's minor works will refer to this edition.

and *ammirazione*, both extensively used in the *Paradiso*. Boyde also believes that Dante tends to adhere fully to the meaning of *admiratio* that emerges in those texts. I will come back to this in the last section of this chapter, but I would like to point out now that my reading of Dante, along the line of what I have sketched in the first chapter, suggests a kind of wonder that goes beyond systematic philosophy, as Dante's poetry does. The *ammirazione* that blossoms in the *Paradiso* is not only of a philosophical kind, but theological and mystical, as it often is in the Middle Ages; although born out of rational discourse, *ammirazione* is not confined to reason.

In the *Convivio* Dante briefly comments that 'li adornamenti de le maraviglie è vedere le cagioni di quelle; [...] sì come nel principio de la *Metafisica* pare sentire lo Filosofo' (II.15. 11). He then promises the reader a further treatment of wonder, which, in fact, he will never write: 'E di questo vocabolo, cioè 'maraviglia', nel seguente trattato più pienamente si tratterà' (II.15.11).⁴

Dante came out of a tradition that considered philosophy as superior to poetry, moral teachings as superior to the marvellous entertainment offered by literature. In the Middle Ages the classics were taught in school in order to educate, and their heroes had to be examples of virtue. Dante's *Commedia*, concerning human affairs as well as divine, had to overcome the opposition between philosophy's cognitive assertions and literature's poetic claims. The result was the merging of his art with philosophical-theological tenets that would

⁴ See entry 'maraviglia, in Umberto Bosco, ed. [et al.], *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 6 vols (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-78), III, p. 816 (hereafter abbreviated as *ED*). The authors' position is that Dante's attention to the term is not accidental, also considering the definition of *stupore* given in *Convivio*, IV. 25. 5 (hereafter in references abbreviated as *Conv.*).

have his work perceived as 'divine' (as Boccaccio so labelled it). As the *Epistle to Cangrande* (whose authorship scholars are still debating) states, the *Commedia* is formally twofold: it contains a 'forma tractatus' and a 'forma' tractandi' (*Ep.*, XIII.9). The 'forma sive modus tractandi' is described as 'poeticus, fictivus, descriptivus, et cum hoc diffinitivus, divisivus, probativus, improbativus, et exemplorum positivus'. Such terms are frequent in early thirteenth century prologues to philosophical and scientific treatises, as Bruno Nardi and James Simpson have noticed.⁵ Dante employed a technical vocabulary that, as it is clear from reading the *Commedia*, comes alive through a style sensitive to the needs of its public, for whom the poet did not want to create a treatise but an allegorical 'tale' capable of redeeming the world fallen into a state of misery (*Ep.*, XIII.15). In order to do so, he had to operate on a level of sympathy and persuasion, merging fantastic and conceptual elements in the structure of the poem, and transforming ideas into visual imagery.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Scholasticism faced the problem of justifying theology's gnoseological claims against the increasingly widespread pressure of the Aristotelian concept of science.⁶ Medieval theologians had to confront the Bible's metaphoric and poetic style with the degree of certainty required by philosophical science. The debate pivoted around the issue of whether theology belonged to philosophy. Albertus Magnus' *Summa Theologiae* confronted the problem by affirming that theology could not be attributed the same tools as

⁵ On this see Bruno Nardi, 'Osservazioni sul medievale "Accessus ad auctores" in rapporto all'Epistola a Cangrande', in *Saggi e note di critica dantesca* (Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1966), pp. 268-305; and James Simpson, 'Poetry and Knowledge: Dante's *Paradiso* XII', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 25.4 (1989), 329-343 (p. 334).

⁶ See Simpson, 'Poetry and Knowledge', pp. 334-335.

philosophy since its arguments do not proceed analytically as in Aristotelic philosophy.⁷ The Scriptures in fact speak by means of parables, expressing topics beyond rational comprehension through metaphorical veils ('sub tegumentis metaforicis'). In brief, Albertus Magnus defends the use of poetical figures in the sacred texts but only in those, differentiating them from the other human sciences, where metaphorical language is not to be accepted.

'What the poem, unlike philosophical works, is capable of doing is to set "scientific" discourse in a context where its cognitive limitations are felt. It is in this transgression of the bounds of "scientific" discourse that the specific kind of knowledge offered by the poem should, I think, be defined', writes Simpson.⁸ He refers to the *Paradiso*, where the authority of Aristotle is often invoked, and specifically to the episode of Beatrice rebuking Dante for being lost in wonder (*Par.*, I.136). His position is that Dante, aware of the open diatribe between philosophy and poetry, here is dramatizing their relationship, and taking the part of the latter while Beatrice embodies the former. There are moments though, the further one goes into the *Paradiso*, when wonder undermines any philosophical authority, as we will see. These moments are also where Dante's style recalls the Scriptures' in order to express something that goes beyond human reason and for which the use of figurative language is legitimate. Since the aim of my analysis is the relationship between wonder and poetic knowledge as found in the *Commedia*, I will now look at the different stages and roles of wonder in the three *cantiche*, my analysis bringing to light the discourse on wisdom in Dante's late work.

⁷ See Albertus Magnus, *Summa Theologiae*, in *Opera omnia*, XXXI, tract. I. q5, m1, p. 22.

⁸ Simpson, 'Poetry and Knowledge', p. 336.

II.1.2 Dante's Passions

The *Commedia* interweaves 'meraviglia' as an inquisitive passion and 'meraviglioso' as an effect. As already mentioned in my Introduction, the literary text, unlike philosophic and scientific ones, has such a twofold aspect: wonder can be found both at the beginning (and during) the writing enterprise as prompting the creative subject, and at the very end as part of the reception process, the finished text being a 'marvellous object' able to delight the reader.

The act of wondering at the tangle of reality prompts questions that can be shaped into a story. Towards the end of Dante's narration one kind of wonder fades into philosophical explanation, while the other coincides with the passion that initiates and persists throughout the *Commedia* itself. I am thinking of one of the final moments of the *Paradiso*:

La forma universal di questo nodo
credo ch'ì' vidi, perché più di largo,
dicendo questo, mi sento ch'ì' godo.
Par., XXXIII.91-93

The pleasure overwhelming Dante ('mi sento ch'ì' godo') is an earthly proof of the reality of lived experience. Passion is a sign of sight and a way of understanding what appears to the eyes. It is therefore source of poetic knowledge, which springs from wonder as we have presented it in chapter I, a mediating force between affections and intellect.

As most of the ancient commentators agree (see for example Lana, Ottimo, Serravalle, Daniello), this is pleasure of the senses and of the soul ('[...] e ancor mi

distilla|nel core il dolce che nacque da essa'; *Par.*, XXXIII.62-63). And even if Aristotle's *Poetics* was not very influential at the time, one could speculate that the statement linking the marvellous to pleasure (the already quoted 'to de thaumaston hedu'; *Poetics*, 1460a15) might have been circulated through different sources.⁹ Also, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle puts in a parallel: the marvellous, pleasure, and learning (*manthanein*; *Rhetoric*, 1371a30), a triad reproduced by Dante in his account of the journey in the *Commedia*.

Such pleasure resides in the heart. Augustine's *Confessions* define a life as blessed when rejoicing at divine truth: 'beata quippe vita est gaudium de veritate' (X.22).¹⁰ But the heart can also be domicile of fear, as it appears from the *Inferno*: 'allor fu la paura un poco queta | che nel lago del cor m'era durata | la notte ch'ì passai con tanta pietà' (I.19-21). According to Boccaccio, 'il lago del cor' was the inner cavity where blood collects and spreads, in which 'secondo l'opinione d'alcuni, abitano li spiriti vitali; [...] ed è quella parte ricettacolo d'ogni nostra passione'.¹¹

In chapter I, I suggested that passion is a component of wonder. How can that be valid in the case of Dante? The *Enciclopedia Dantesca* confirms that the term 'passione' is mainly used by Dante in an Aristotelian way, that is, to indicate a 'qualità o moto dell'animo'.¹² According to the Aristotelian/Thomist tradition passions are followed by something, for example joy or sadness, that causes a

⁹ On this see also Boyde, 'Wonder and Knowledge', p. 48.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. William Watts, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); hereafter abbreviated in references as *Conf*.

¹¹ Boccaccio's commentary on *Inf.*, I.19-21.

¹² See entry 'passione' written by Antonio Lanci, *ED*, p. 342.

physiological mutation. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* defines *pathos* primarily as 'a quality in respect of which a thing can be altered' (V.21 1022b1), and the *De anima* considers sensation (II.5 417a1) and also intellection (III.4 429a 14) as deriving from affections. Both Aristotle and Plato locate affections in the irrational soul; but unlike in the Stoics' conception, they are not condemned as elements disrupting the sage's life. Horace's *nil admirari* is an example of the Stoic position: he who can tame wonder at external things (for example the starry sky) will be able to remain unperturbed facing all human situations.¹³ Dante rejects such a position, for Stoics are in his view those who 'videro e credettero questo fine della vita umana essere solamente la rigida onestate; [...] di nulla mostrare dolore [...] di nulla passione avere sentore' (*Conv.*, IV.6.9). He assumes rather a Christian attitude according to which passions are accepted if governed by a reason guided by grace, and embraced as part of an experience of personal growth.¹⁴ A man knowing how to rein his affections acquires virtue, that is 'abito elettivo consistente nel mezzo' (*Conv.*, IV.20.1): 'una cosa mista di nobilitate e di passione, ma poichè la nobilitate vince in quella, è la virtù dinominata da essa, e appellata bontade' (*Conv.*, IV.20.2).

Although unknown to Dante, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* provides a helpful distinction: passions are grouped around *pathos* and *ethos*, following the ancient Greeks' classification (VI.2.8-9).¹⁵ *Pathos* and *ethos* are considered by

¹³ Horace, *Epistulae*, I.6.1-2: 'Nil admirari prope res est una, Numici, | solaque quae possit facere et servare beatum'; Horace, *Satires. Epistles. Ars poetica*, ed. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1955).

¹⁴ With regard to the passions of the souls in the *Commedia*, see Denise Heilbronn, ' "Io pur sorrisi": Dante's Lessons on the Passions (*Purg.*, XXI.94-136)', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 96 (1978), 67-74.

¹⁵ Quintilianus, '*Institutio oratoria*': *The Orator's Education*, ed. and transl. Donald A. Russel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); the model behind this conception is Cicero's *De*

Quintilian as complementary for the orator's success; the former representing more fiery ('concitatos') emotions and the latter quieter ones ('mites atque compositos'). *Pathos* is temporary; *ethos* permanent. Although varying in quality and intensity they share the same nature, and a parallel is drawn: 'ut amor *pathos*, caritas *ethos*' (VI.2.12). *Pathos*, closer to passions like wrath, hatred, fear, envy, corresponds to tragedy, while *ethos* corresponds to comedy whose irony has the power to tame feelings (VI.6.2.20). Dante's *Commedia* stages the interaction of these two aspects of passion, generating a movement that counterbalances bursts of *pathos* with a more moderated *ethos*.¹⁶ Let us now see how these two levels interweave in the poem and how this interweaving relates to wonder.

The *Inferno* without doubt leaves more space to *pathos*, especially when Dante's heart suffers as a consequence of the sleep of his mind and of his soul. A torpor, component of the stupor that coincides with the interruption of movement, qualifies the age that Dante is leaving behind, 'Adolescenzia'. Aldo Gargani defines astonishment as 'una condizione strutturalmente ambigua, perché tradisce la fedeltà alla *persona* alla quale ci consegniamo ordinariamente, suscitando, come prodotto derivato, un sentimento di colpa'.¹⁷ In fact Dante retraces his own past steps, facing sins that have a material shape in the *Inferno*. The *Convivio* talks about a youth 'che entra ne la selva erronea di questa vita' (IV.24.12) and is in need of a guide to find the right path. But the *Commedia*'s main character is no adolescent and ends up in the dark woods when thirty five years old, an age well belonging

Oratore (II.178-216). For a more articulate discussion on the relationship between *ethos* and *pathos* see Jakob Wisse, *Ethos and Pathos from Aristotle to Cicero* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1989).

¹⁶ While *ethos* was considered by Aristotle as exclusively belonging to the rational sphere in the *Rhetoric*, II.1.5-7; see Wisse, *Ethos and Pathos*, pp. 29-36.

¹⁷ Aldo G. Gargani, *Lo stupore e il caso* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1985), p. 12.

to 'Gioventute', defined as 'temperata e forte, | piena d'amore e di cortese lode' (*Conv.*, IV, third canzone, v.129), "'etade che puote giovare'", cioè perfezione dare' (*Conv.*, IV.24.1) and qualified by 'Soavitate' (*Conv.*, IV.24.11).¹⁸

There is neither fortitude nor mellowness in Dante's attitude during the infernal meanders, but rather physical and intellectual stupor. The *Convivio* attributes 'stupore' to the first phase of human life that is called 'Adolescenzia, cioè "accrescimento di vita"' (*Conv.* IV.24.1), lasting from the age of eight until the age of twenty five. During this stage it is good for the soul to be 'ubidente, soave e vergognosa' (*Conv.*, IV, third canzone, v. 125). 'Vergogna' is in fact 'apertissimo segno in adolescenza di nobilitate' (*Conv.*, IV.25.3) and comprises 'stupore', 'pudore' and 'verecondia', here called passions.¹⁹

Dante links 'stupore' to 'meraviglia' and considers it as an echo of the feeling arising from great and marvellous things:

E tutte e tre queste sono necessarie a questa etade per questa ragione: a questa etade è necessario d'essere reverente e disidiroso di sapere; a questa etade è necessario d'essere rifrenato, sì che non transvada; a questa etade è necessario essere penitente del fallo, sì che non s'ausi a fallare. E tutte queste cose fanno le passioni sopra dette, che vergogna volgarmente sono chiamate. Ché lo stupore è uno stordimento d'animo, per grandi e maravigliose cose vedere o udire o per alcuno modo sentire: che, in quanto paiono grandi, fanno reverente a sé quelli che le sente; in quanto paiono mirabili, fanno voglioso di sapere di quelle.²⁰

Convivio, IV.25.4-5

¹⁸ Cf. Christian pedagogy: 'Cum essem parvulus, loquebar ut parvulus, sapiebam ut parvulus, cogitabam ut parvulus. Quando autem factus sum vir, evacuavi quæ erant parvuli. Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte: tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum'; I Cor. 13,11-12.

¹⁹ As sources, Domenico De Robertis quotes Aristotle (*Ethics*, IV.15 1128b 10-11; *Rhetoric*, II.6 1383b 12-15), considering verecundity as a passion and not as a virtue, and Albertus Magnus (*Ethics*, IV. tr. 3,6).

²⁰ A similarity can be noticed here to the terms employed by Tommaseo-Bellini's *Dizionario* in defining 'stupore' (see my Introduction, p.6), probably deriving directly from Dante.

In order to reach awareness and maturity Dante has to become a child again, temporarily and allegorically, respectfully and humbly following the path to knowledge.²¹

There is a passage in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* which highlights the opposition between *stupor* and *admiratio*, from which Dante might have drawn:

Admirans refugit in praesenti dare iudicium de eo quod miratur, timens defectum, sed in futurum inquit. Stupens autem timet et in presenti iudicare, et in futuro inquirere. Unde admiratio est principium philosophandi, sed stupor est philosophicae considerationis impedimentum.²²
S.T., Ia IIae, q41 a4 (r5)

Here Aquinas defines *stupor* as 'impedimentum', hindrance to philosophy, as opposed to *admiratio* which is philosophy's 'principium'. Dante does not seem to share exactly the same perspective on *stupor* but does consider it as belonging to a phase of life to be surpassed.

In the Bible references to religious *stupor* are frequent. An example can be taken from the book of the prophet Daniel when he, exhausted and physically ill after a vision, declares that he is astonished because he cannot manage to interpret the vision: 'et stupebam ad visionem et non erat qui interpretaretur' (Daniel, 8.27).

²¹ In fact in the *Inferno* Dante is 'vergognoso' in front of Virgil: "'Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte | che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?" | rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte' (*Inf.*, I. 79-81). In the *Purgatorio* Beatrice rebukes Dante for his persistent feeling of 'vergogna' hindering purgation and progress ('Da tema e da vergogna | voglio che tu omai ti disviluppe, | sì che non parli più com'om che sogna'; *Purg.*, XXXIII.31-33).

²² 'One who is amazed refrains for the moment to pass judgment on the object of his amazement, fearing failure. But he does look towards the future. When stupor envelops a man he is afraid either to form a judgment here and now or to look towards the future. Hence amazement is a source of philosophizing, whereas stupor is an obstacle to philosophical thinking', S.T., XXI, p. 37. The Latin passage is also quoted by Busnelli as a source of *Conv.*, IV.25.5 in Dante Alighieri, *Il Convivio*, ed. Giovanni Busnelli, and Giuseppe Vandelli, 2 vols (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1934), II, p. 321.

But in the Old Testament there is an association between wonder and fear of God that is softened in the New Testament. To bring in another example from among many, in the gospel of Matthew the crowds marvel at Christ's words and the verb used in this case by the *Vulgata* is *admiror*: 'et factum est cum consummasset Iesus verba haec admirabantur turbae super doctrinam eius' (Matthew, 7.28). There is a shift from the fear of the incomprehensible to the admiration of God's miracles and love.

Similarly, Dante's journey to the otherworld starts from a state of sin which is a sleep of the soul ('tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto | che la verace via abbandonai'; *Inf.*, I.11-12). Often divinations happen during a sleep of the intellect, as we have seen in chapter I.3, and the same can be said for God's revelation in the Old Testament.²³ Dante falls into a divine sleep at the beginning of the *Vita nuova* too while he is thinking about Beatrice: 'e pensando di lei, mi sopraggiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale m'apparve una maravigliosa visione' (III.3).²⁴ In the *Inferno* the pilgrim has sudden fainting fits when he loses his senses; reminding us of what happens to the prophet Daniel during the visit of the angel Gabriel: 'cumque loqueretur ad me, collapsus sum pronus in terram : et tetigit me, et statuit me in gradu meo' (Daniel, 8.18). Dante's path starts with a fall (physical and mental) and ends with his body and soul being elevated before the divine.

²³ Drowsiness is a symbol of the mind yielding to a higher potency. A few examples: in the book of *Genesis* Eve is created during Adam's sleep: 'Immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam : cumque obdormisset, tulit unam de costis ejus, et replevit carnem pro ea' (2.21); and see also Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in Daniel. Moreover in Christ's words falling asleep is often a euphemism for death (John, 11,11; Matthew, 27,52; I Corinthians, 7,39); this is frequently found in Christian epitaphs (*obdormuit*).

²⁴ Dante, *Opere minori*, I.1, p. 37.

This trajectory is flanked by *stupore*, *meraviglia*, and *ammirazione*. Each stage involves a different development of knowledge that I will gradually illustrate in the following chapters.

The polysemy of wonder involves two levels of analysis. The first one is the level of the object, in the case of Dante the marvellous story presented to the reader, and as such immediately perceived; 'we' are the wonderers here. The second one is the level of the subject, that is the act of wondering (*meravigliarsi*) which can be split into two further perspectives: Dante's wondering as an author and Dante's wondering as a character in his own story. These two stages are masterfully intertwined all along the narration but they end up melting together at the end of the poem, when the pilgrim becomes the author of that which will form the *Commedia*. This happens following a gradual regression of the pilgrim to infancy which climaxes in the *Paradiso* (we will come back to this) and allows an identification of Dante the character with Christ and His birth. At stake is not just the reaching of Jerusalem, as for the traditional traveller, but grasping the mystery of the Incarnation, symbolized by Mary to whom Dante will appeal (through Saint Bernard) in the last canto of the *Paradiso*.

Dante's poetry comes alive in the oscillation between the rational and the irrational, the two components of wonder.²⁵ As Giulio Marzot reminds us, 'la

²⁵ As already mentioned in chapter I, see Francesco Patrizi, 'La deca ammirabile' (X.98r), *Della poetica*, II, p. 361. Patrizi defines here *meraviglia* as 'potenza mezzana' between the act of knowing and the affections.

poesia è quando il mistero perdura nella mente umana'.²⁶ Aiming to overcome the antithesis, Dante does not want to stage the drama of two dumb extremes but struggles to offer the most symmetrical and measured representation of the otherworld. What is then the mystery persisting in Dante's mind, that gives life to his poetry? The mystery is man and the power of his language created to fill the gap between oneself and the other. I agree with Marzot when he writes that the sublime in Dante is to be found when 'lo spirito del poeta si piega dalla parte dei sensi' (p. 221) and not through soaring stylistic features leading to the perception of a sense of fearful vertigo, as sometimes it appears in the Scriptures. This is why it is worth singling out the meaning of wonder in the *Commedia*, because, beyond its rhetorical function of persuading and compelling the reader, as we will see, it plays a pivotal role in the pursuit of knowledge, between the rational and the irrational.

We will first look at the way in which Dante engages with the tradition of the marvellous through the analysis of some selected 'monsters' of the *Inferno*. I will then focus briefly on the *Purgatorio* and finally on the *Paradiso*, where we will see what other facet of wonder helps Dante to build the final phase of his poem and how the language of wonder is anchored in Dante's divine experience as a man; in other words, how wonder contributes to the credibility of his poetic discourse. During my investigation I opt for a closer consideration of the beginning and the end of the *Commedia* because I believe that these are the areas of higher relevance for my dissertation. Nonetheless I am aware of the many other

²⁶ Giulio Marzot, *Il linguaggio biblico nella 'Divina Commedia'* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1965), p. 202.

directions towards which such an investigation could be directed. Wonder is multifaceted and can be found in various shapes and contexts. My aim here is to link wonder to poetic discourse as a means of exaltation of some aspects of reality, like a song that soars and empowers words.

We mentioned in the first chapter the close relationship between sight and knowledge among ancient philosophers, condensed in the etymology of *thaumazo* and *mirror*. Unlike mystic writers, who write because they see, I argue that Dante writes in order to see. This is how his fiction is born: he makes the reader believe he saw in order to be authorized to narrate. If no vision had taken place his contemporary readers would not have followed him with the same faith. And in order to see and to show others, Dante stages wonder.

II.2 Infernal *Thaumaston*

At a first glance, Dante does not seem to differentiate much in his use of *meraviglia*, *ammirazione* and *stupore* in the *Commedia*, nor is this something upon which ancient and modern commentators dwell.²⁷ Once again, these terms end up being treated as synonymous. Let us take an example. In the *Paradiso*, Beatrice tells Dante: ‘Non dei più ammirar, se bene estimo | lo tuo salir [...] | [...] | Maraviglia sarebbe in te se, privo | d’impedimento, giù ti fossi assiso, | com’a terra quïete in foco vivo’ (I.136-141). Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi’s paraphrasis adds further semantic

²⁷ See also Boyde, ‘Wonder and Knowledge’, p.311 (n.22): ‘Dante does not maintain distinctions between these three words, which could and perhaps should have been observed’.

confusion introducing the word *stupore*: 'non devi più guardare con stupore ormai il tuo salire verso l'alto [...]. Cosa stupefacente sarebbe ora in te se, così privo di impedimento, tu ti fossi seduto [...]' (commentary on vv. 139-41). What for Dante was part of *ammirazione* and *maraviglia* is for the critic uniformly part of *stupore*, perhaps to tune it to the modern reader's vocabulary. This was to present the problematic issues around a mere linguistic inquiry. It is not satisfactory to locate all the occurrences of the words.

It is my intention both to focus on the topography of wonder, voluntarily displayed by Dante, and on its development, which is independent from vocabulary choices. Every context can bestow a different nuance of the same term, but at the end of the study one realizes how different terms fit within a complete and coherent semantic frame. I would like to go back to the beginning of Dante's pilgrimage to linger on the relationship between *maraviglia* and *maraviglioso* as it appears in the *Inferno*; there we find set the premises that allow us to understand the role of wonder in the *Paradiso*.

The *Inferno* contains six occurrences of *maraviglia*, one of *maravigliar*, two of *maravigliosa/e*, and no instances of *stupore* and *ammirazione*. In the *Purgatorio* we have six occurrences of *maraviglia*, twelve of *maravigliar* (differently conjugated); fifteen of *stupor(e)*, two of *stupido* (staying for *stupito*); three of *ammirazion(e)* and ten of the conjugation of *ammirar*. In the *Paradiso* there are eight occurrences of *maraviglia*, three of *maravigliar(e)* and its forms and tenses; two for *stupor(e)*, four

of the conjugation of *stupir(e)*; eight of *ammirar* and three of *ammirazion(e)*.²⁸ The use of *stupore* and *ammirazione* increases in God's proximity (*Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*), while *meraviglia* seems to be steadily present in all three *cantiche*.

Having found wonder rooted in sight, it is worth underlining that in the *Inferno* there is very little light to provide a clear look. The time of vision is often reduced to passing by a window, as Virgil tells Dante meeting the slothful sinners: 'non ragioniam di loro, ma guarda e passa' (*Inf.*, III.51). Hell is a blind world ('cieco mondo'; *Inf.*, IV.13) because devoid of God's light, so the walking rhythm adapts to it and does not leave time for reflection, which will occur instead later on in the poem. This portrays a moment of complete ignorance and darkness, a pre-wonder situation. But this also coincides with the practical nature of the poem, as announced in the *Epistle to Cangrande* (*Ep.*, XIII. 15-16). And since words are made to show what is unknown, as Dante tells us in the *Convivio* (I. 2.7: 'le parole sono fatte per mostrare quello che non si sa'), the starting point will be to illustrate ignorance before overcoming it.

Compared to this state of ignorance the matter of the *Paradiso* will appear even more spectacular. The different stages of wonder are in fact also part of Dante's rhetorical strategy to persuade and draw readers to his side, organizing for them a classical and therefore authoritative path towards knowledge. Part of this is the hint at the extraordinary quality of the *Paradiso* in the *Epistle to Cangrande*: 'cum ergo materia circa quam versatur presens tractatus sit admirabilis, et propterea ad admirabile reducenda' (*Ep.*, XIII.19). The *Epistle* is employing the

²⁸ Such data can easily be found in *Concordanza della 'Commedia' di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Luciano Lovera, 3 vols (Torino: Einaudi, 1975).

term *admirabilis* to construct an idea of poetry as new, marvellous, and therefore delightful; that is one of the three rhetorical procedures that the author says he follows in order to make the reader 'benivolum et attentum et docilem' (19). The other two aims are usefulness and possibility: 'In utilitate dicendorum benivolentia paratur; in admirabilitate attentio; in possibilitate docilitas' (*Ep.*, XIII.19). Benevolence is to be attained through the usefulness of the narration (*utilitas* is here intended as the account of Paradise's joy, the highest object of human desire); attention, through being wondrous (*admirabilitas* is the sublime quality of the matter narrated); docility, through possibility (that consists of having managed to retain in the mind the sublime experience). This *possibilitas* confers reality on Dante's journey: the fact that this has been completed by himself means that others, if graced by God, can follow his steps too.

Such rhetorical procedures are written in the wake of Cicero's *De inventione*, (I.21.15-16 and I.23) where similar notions can be found.²⁹ In particular, Cicero gives instructions to the orator who has to present a case that is considered *admirabile*: 'In admirabili genere causae, si non omnino infesti auditores erunt, principio benevolentiam comparare licebit' (I.21.15).³⁰ H. B. Hubbell translates *admirabile* as 'difficult', explaining that here the term has the same meaning as the Greek *paradoxos*, "'marvellous'", apparently from the point of view of the juror, who thinks it strange that anyone should speak on behalf of such a defendant. It is

²⁹ As De Robertis notices, that paragraph recalls the *De Inventione* and not the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as it could be gathered from the mention in the *Epistle to Cangrande* to 'Nova Rethorica', title which was generally used by Dante to refer to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*; see *Opere Minori*, II, pp. 626-628.

³⁰ Cicero, *De inventione. De optimo genere oratorum. Topica*, transl. H. M. Hubbell, 7th edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 43.

therefore a 'difficult' case to present' (p.40).³¹ *Admirabile* is in fact defined by Cicero 'a quo est alienatus animus eorum qui audituri sunt' (I. 20. 15), that is a case which causes alienation (and not sympathy) in the audience. It is something strange and unusual that goes beyond belief (I have shown already the connection between *thaumaston* and *paradoxon* in the treatise *On the Sublime*), but not necessarily positive, which challenges the orator's skills. In this case, Cicero says, it is good to win the benevolence of the audience with an introduction.

In fact the author of the *Epistle to Cangrande* is discussing how to gain readers' attention and benevolence right from the prologue to the *Paradiso*, which is the most innovative and *admirabilis* (both in the sense of difficult and marvellous) part of the poem and therefore needs preparation. And how does one gain benevolence? Through *utilitas*, says the *Epistle*. In fact Dante takes great care to make sure that the *Commedia* is to be admired not for speculation but for practical aims. The focus is constantly on the reality of his journey, the reality of his divine 'call', the reality of his marvellous, that the reality of his poetry ties all in. 'Si ascendero in celum, tu illic es; si descendero in infernum, ades' (*Ep.*, XIII.22). Psalm 138 is quoted to underline God's omnipresence in the created world. The marvellous found in the *Inferno* has the same nature as the wonders in the *Paradiso*; both are expression of God's will.

The *Inferno* is developed around a sensorial marvellous: the hell of overwhelming passions that only when reined can lead to salvation. The first occurrence of *maraviglia* is in canto fourteen: 'per che, se cosa n'apparisce nova, |

³¹ The connection between *paradoxos* and *admirabile* in Cicero is also confirmed by Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 'admirabilis, -e', p. 39.

non de' addur maraviglia al tuo volto" (vv.128-129). Virgil is speaking. The relationship between novelty and wonder is here established. New and strange things appear to the traveller who at times is astonished at them, at times wonders at them asking for an explanation. It is to be noticed that 'maraviglia' appears here within a negative expression. We will see later on how this often characterizes the speeches of Dante's guides designed to stifle the wayfarer's wonder in the attempt to free him from his human ties as sinner. Additionally, Virgil's speech is enframed between two of Dante's questions about the infernal geography. This reproduces wonder's traditional movement: Dante wonders at something of which he is ignorant, and asks his guide in order to dissipate the cloud of ignorance surrounding him. Virgil is happy to answer his questions ('In tutte tue question certo mi piaci | [...] ma 'l bollor de l'acqua rossa | dovea ben solver l'una che tu faci"; *Inf.*, XIV.133-35) although he makes a point of underlining that the answer Dante is looking for was available to him, if he only had known how to observe properly. The expression at line 129 appears in the negative form because during this otherworldly journey nothing is left to chaos or chance; everything responds to divine order. Negating wonder here means to believe in reason's power to reach the causes of the events, which represents the first stage in Dante's path to God. In fact similar expressions in the *Commedia* are always uttered by Virgil and Beatrice, embodying rational and theological discourse. I will come back to this in the following sections of this chapter, when I will discuss intellectual wonder in the *Paradiso*.

In the *Inferno* the episodes are interrupted according to the principle of 'guarda e passa', and no rational discourse is possible yet. It is a collection of fragmented sensations that the pilgrim undergoes and to which he responds emotionally. The narration slows down only when a description is necessary for moral purposes. It is the case of the appearance of the characters from classical mythology that in the *Commedia* take on demoniac aspects. The first one is Charon, infernal divinity traditionally represented as son of Erebus (or Chaos) and Nox (the Night).

Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo,
gridando: "Guai a voi, anime prave!
Non isperate mai veder lo cielo:
i' vegno per menarvi a l'altra riva
ne le tenebre etterne, in caldo e 'n gelo.
Inf., III.82-87

'Ed ecco' is a stylistic element often found in the Bible and frequent in the *Commedia*. It introduces a solemn figure of Charon, old and white-haired, that reminds us of some images of God in the Scriptures.³² Darkness (Erebus) enfolding the abyss before creation is the negative opposite to the light that God originates at the beginning of the book of Genesis: 'terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux [...] et divisit lucem ac tenebras' (1.2-4). I believe that Dante's Charon shares a figurative familiarity with God as He appears in the Old Testament. In this way Dante presents the divine and therefore his poem as

³² For example the prophet Daniel describes in similar terms the vision of an old man: 'vestimentum eius quasi nix candidum et capilli capitis eius quasi lana munda; thronus eius flammae ignis rotae eius ignis accensus fluvius igneus rapidusque egrediebatur' (7.9-10).

coincidentia oppositorum, which is reflected in the co-presence of infernal *meraviglioso* and paradisiacal *meraviglia*.

The arrival of Charon, as he emerges out of the distance, has the characteristic of a vision, especially since Dante the pilgrim is silent. Charon violently denies hope (one of the three theological virtues) in a verse that terminates with 'cielo' ('non isperate mai veder lo cielo'; v. 85), a rhyme embedded between the previous 'bianco per antico pelo' (v. 83) and 'gelo' (v. 87), two infernal elements; this visual juxtaposition of underworld-heaven-underworld casts light on the unbridgeable distance between the old man and the sky, but at the same time it brings him syntactically and conceptually closer to the divine sphere, which at this stage of the narration seems suffocated by Hell. Another opposition that is highlighted but immediately mellowed by the proximity of the terms is 'riva' ('i'vegno per menarvi a l'altra riva', v. 86) and 'viva' ('e tu che se' costì, anima viva', v. 88). Dante focuses on his privileged position: his body and his poem embody the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Charon, God, the underworld and real life are merged into a moment of physical and spiritual transition. The description of Charon's corporeal aspect and actions is prolonged, distributed along several lines (81-83; 97-99; 109-111), interspersing their effect on the souls. When Virgil explains the meaning of Charon's words, the plain trembles, the earth releases wind and a red flashing, and Dante faints ('e caddi come l'uom cui sonno piglia'; III. 136) in the manner of the Old Testament prophets.³³

³³ See also Ezekiel, 2: 'et vidi et cecidi in faciem meam'.

Although Virgil is the primary source for many of the mythological characters encountered by Dante, there is an apparent difference in the description and the function that they assume in Dante's Christian perspective. Another good example is Minos, the second figure that Dante extrapolates from the tradition. While Charon still had human features, Minos is introduced with the adverb 'orribilmente' (*Inf.*, V.4), as a growling monster. We are in the second circle, that of carnal sinners, where Dante is almost lost ('pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito'; *Inf.*, V.72) at the thought of the ladies and the knights who have loved too passionately. Dante's dismay is interpreted by Buti as an alienation ('alienato da' sensi e dalla ragione'), a condition that the magnanimous soul must overcome.³⁴ Here Dante inserts himself as a character as part of the marvellous, and part of the ignorance of the causes. While he suffers a sequence of events, the reader is entertained and astonished by *monstra* displaying different levels of divine power.

Dante does so on the back of centuries of rationalist tradition, according to which monsters were nothing but allegories, myths, or the result of erroneous perceptions. The Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions considered them as marvellous only because they were rare; the real *mirabilia* were those events whose causes are *still* unknown but show the potency of nature and its creator (for example, magnets).³⁵ In the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux was concerned with grotesque carvings in Cluny's churches, fearing that they would lead astray

³⁴ Buti commenting on 'smarrito'.

³⁵ On this see Peter Armour, 'I Monstra e i Mirabilia ai tempi di Dante', in *I Monstra nell' 'Inferno' dantesco: tradizione e simbologie. Atti del XXXIII Convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 13-16 ottobre 1996* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1997), pp. 141-159 (p. 156).

the monks' attention.³⁶ Augustine, disturbed at natural monstrosities, attempts to redeem them, writing in the *De civitate Dei* that anyone who feels that monsters are disconcerting does not comprehend that they are part of God's plan.³⁷ Originally the term *monstrum* belonged to religious language, and meant 'a divine omen indicating misfortune' (from *moneo*), but it tended to be connected to the verb *monstro* and was understood as a sign through which the divine would show and communicate to man in extraordinary circumstances.³⁸

As Peter Armour notices, Dante decided to employ monsters as real existences, exactly like the human souls residing in the *Inferno*.³⁹ Minos, in fact, is charged with the role of judging the souls and sending them into the different sections of Hell. In rolling his tail he even embodies the infernal circles, sculpting them in the air. Minos' body represents figuratively the marvellous materialization of the whole of the *Inferno*. One must consider that all of Dante's monsters are God's servants, that is, they act according to God's rules. Despite their coarse remarks, they do not have freedom of choice and their presence is registered only as a product of the created world. 'Dante legò la sua "comedia" e

³⁶ See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 222 vols (Paris: Ex. Migne, 1844-1863), CLXXXII, c12, cols 914-16: 'Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum ubique varietas apparet, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando', col. 915.

³⁷ See Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and transl. William M. Green, 7 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), VII, XXI.8. See John Kleiner's interpretation of Dante between Bernard and Augustine in 'O brave monster', in *Mismapping the Underworld: Daring and Error in Dante's 'Comedy'* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 117-137 (especially pp. 125-126).

³⁸ Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 'monstrum', p. 1163. See also Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XXI.8.5: 'monstra sane dicta perhibent a monstrando, quod aliquid significando demonstrent' (p. 57). On the *monstra* in classical antiquity see Ubaldo, 'I *monstra* nella cultura classica', in *I Monstra nell' 'Inferno' dantesco*, pp. 1-26.

³⁹ Armour, 'I *Monstra* e i *Mirabilia*', p. 153.

le sue meraviglie alle meravigliosamente vere creazioni della divinità', writes Barański.⁴⁰ Dante puts them in the first phase of his journey so as to demonstrate that human intellect needs sensorial images to begin a gradual comprehension of the superhuman and to gain means of developing a relationship with an invisible but omnipresent God. These monsters, and the marvellous in general, have the function of making God visible in all his manifestations and roles.

With Pluto, another example of a figure taken from pagan infernal divinities, the process of marvelling is doubled. Pluto himself is astonished at seeing Dante at the opening of the seventh canto, and we find him yelling: 'Papé Satan, papé Satan aleppe!' (*Inf.*, VII.1). Medieval commentators agreed on interpreting 'papé' as 'interjectio admirationis' (Jacopo della Lana) or 'interiectio admirantis' (Guido da Pisa, Pietro Alighieri) or 'adverbium admirandi' (Guglielmo Maramauro, Boccaccio); that is, according to Ottimo's explanation, 'una parte di gramatica, che ha a dimostrare quella afezione de l'animo, che è con stupore, e maravigliarsi; e due volte il disse, per più spriemere quello maravigliarsi'. It derives from the Latin exclamation *papae* (coming from the Greek *papaĩ*, exclamation of suffering, surprise, scorn) and it is present in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* with the meaning of 'wonderful'.⁴¹ With regards to 'aleppe', the commentators link it to the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*,

⁴⁰ Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Il "meraviglioso" e il "comico" (*Inferno*, XVI)', in *'Sole nuovo, luce nuova'. Saggi sul rinnovamento culturale in Dante* (Torino: Scriptorium, 1996), pp. 153-182 (p. 179).

⁴¹ 'Papae', in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*: 'wonderful! how strange! indeed!'. See entry 'papaĩ' in H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. See Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, IV.2.1: 'Papae,' inquam, 'ut magna promittis!'. 'Papae' has been translated by S. J. Tester as 'wonderful!' in Boethius, *The Theological Tractates: The Consolation of Philosophy*, transl. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, 2nd edn rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 319.

also present in the opening of Jeremiah's Lamentations in the Bible.⁴² Whatever meaning one decides to attribute to that expression, it should be related to Dante's reaction to it. He is in need of comfort and finds it in Virgil, who calms him down and shuts Pluto up thwarting his anger. What is seen as marvellous by Dante sees Dante as marvellous. Once more the discourse on wonder is inserted within the broader issue of ignorance. Both perceptions (the monsters' and the pilgrim's) originate from a state of ignorance, for which everything appears as new. At the same time, it is also part of a rhetorical strategy designed to put the *Commedia* into a new genre, as a new literary enterprise, and therefore worthy of admiration. In fact the reader is implicitly invited to mirror the reactions of the characters and wonder at the poem.

As usual though, the episode, rather than insisting on Dante's fear or on Pluto's description, is interrupted by reason prompting progression. The movement leads to a scene that Dante the author paints with realistic and comic shades while Dante the character is distraught ('lo cor quasi compunto', VII.36). The avaricious and the prodigal are forced into a round dance accompanied by cries and blows. Like blind waves eternally breaking on each other, the sinners collide and immediately reverse direction shouting at each other. The vanity of these actions is reinforced by the comicality intrinsic in such an absurd 'joust' ('giostra'; VII.35). While the external observer can perceive the sarcasm, the characters involved can only suffer from it.

In the *Monarchia* Dante treats wonder and comicality together:

⁴² See Jeremiah, 'Lamentationes', 1.

Sicut ad faciem cause non pertingentes novum effectum comunitur *admiramur*, sic, cum causam cognoscimus, eos qui sunt in *admiratione* restantes quadam derisione despiciamus. *Admirabar* equidem aliquando romanum populum in orbe terrarum sine ulla resistentia fuisse prefectum [...] Sed postquam medullitus oculos mentis infixi et per efficacissima signa divinam providentiam hoc effecisse cognovi, *admiratione* cedente, derisiva quedam supervenit despectio, cum gentes noverim contra romani populi preheminentiam fremuisse [...] Verum quia naturalis amor diuturnam esse derisionem non patitur, sed, ut sol estivus qui disiectis nebulis matutinis oriens luculenter irradiat, derisione omissa, lucem correctionis effundere mavult, ad dirumpendum vincula ignorantie [...] me hortabor.

We commonly marvel at a new effect when we do not perceive its cause, but when we do recognize the cause, then we look down with a kind of scornful amusement on those who are still lost in wonder. In fact, at one time I myself marvelled that the Roman people had attained the first place on earth without any resistance [...] But after my mind's eye penetrated to the heart of the matter, I recognized by most convincing signs that divine providence had brought this about. Then my wonder ceased and was replaced by disdain and somewhat amused contempt, since I knew how the nations raged against the pre-eminence of the Roman people [...] Natural love, however does not let derision last long, but (like the summer sun, which in rising scatters the morning mists and shines forth splendidly) it puts derision aside and prefers to pour forth the light of correction. Accordingly, in order to break the bonds of ignorance [...] I shall [...] go on to exhort myself.⁴³
Monarchia, II.1.2-5 (my italics)

This passage illustrates how we first wonder at things we do not know; once the cause of those things is grasped, ignorance fades away, and we laugh at those who persist in wondering; gradually laughter fades too because we are naturally prompted to spread the knowledge that we have acquired. The author places himself at the third stage of the process, willing to articulate his own experience, in stark opposition to the first stage that qualifies the traveller of the *Commedia*, still

⁴³ Dante's '*Monarchia*', transl. Richard Kay (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), pp. 93-95.

enduring *stupor* and distress, and also to the second that could qualify instead the reader of the *Commedia*.⁴⁴

‘Perché nostra colpa sì ne scipa?’, Dante wonders entering the circle of the avaricious and the prodigals (VII.21). Why do our offences destroy us in such a way? Why such monstrosity in our life? Human reason alone is inept in the presence of ultimate questions, and Dante will have to wait until the *Paradiso* to have an answer to this. Rationality is humiliated openly for the first time in the *Inferno* when the devils lock Virgil out of the city of Dis refusing him access.

Li occhi alla terra e le ciglia avea rase
d’ogni baldanza, e dicea ne’ sospiri:
“Chi m’ha negate le dolenti case!”.
E a me disse: “Tu, perch’io m’adiri,
non sbigottir, ch’io vincerò la prova,
qual ch’alla difension dentro s’aggiri”.
Inf., VIII.118-123

Virgil is temporarily distraught too. But Virgil, representing Reason, has in himself the resources to overcome the anger and does not yield to the paralysis that could weaken his role as guide. His emotions do not last long, unlike Dante the character’s. Once more Virgil does not linger over the infernal divinities and he wins them over. However, the final victory that will allow the two to go past the gate cannot happen without the intervention of the heavenly messenger in canto nine.

A similar situation occurs in canto twenty three, where for the first time wonder is attributed to Virgil: ‘Allor vid’io maravigliar Virgilio | sovra colui ch’era disteso in croce | tanto vilmente ne l’eterno essilio’ (*Inf.*, XXIII.124-126). The cause

⁴⁴ See De Robertis’ commentary, *Opere Minori*, II, p. 365.

of such wonder has been interpreted in different ways. According to some critics, Virgil wonders because he is new to Caiaphas' punishment, since at the time he had come down Christ was not dead yet and he could not have known about Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who condemned Jesus to crucifixion during the Sanhedrin. Other critics believe it is simply horror at the sight. It is certainly a wonder connected to the ignorance of the causes that in this case are strictly linked to the figure of a Christ unknown to him.⁴⁵ Francesco da Buti comments: 'maravigliasi la ragione della grandezza della giustizia di Dio, la quale avanza la possibilità del nostro intelletto; e però finge Dante che si maravigli Virgilio, il quale significa la ragione' (on v. 124). Reason, in fact, wonders, because reason is that faculty which cannot fully understand the divine, since the divine lies beyond rational capabilities. In spite of being 'turbato un poco d'ira nel sembiante', Virgil appears collected and does not show any further emotional reaction; he soon walks off with great strides out of the sixth *bolgia*, followed by his pupil. Even if Dante did not verbalize his reflection on wonder as he thought he could do at first (*Conv.*, II.15.11), he is nonetheless representing wonder in its practical developments. We will see in the *Paradiso* how the wondering of reason will be retained in order to leave space for the blossoming of faith and love that will find abode between the lines of Dante's *terza rima*. Another side of wonder will then take charge.

Let us now go back to the marvellous as found in the *Inferno*, in order to conclude our discourse. As well as Charon, Minos and Pluto, other monsters are

⁴⁵ The traditional reaction described in the Bible would be astonishment: 'Omnes, qui viderint te, obstupescant super te'; Ezekiel, 28. 19.

included in the catalogue of Dante's *mirabilia*. Canto nine opens with Virgil's and Dante's dismay. It is the time of the Furies. Medusa's threat is the climax of the marvellous: if Dante is not able to overcome dread and looks at the Gorgon, he will be petrified forever in stupor. That is why Virgil, with a fatherly gesture, makes sure with his own hands that Dante's eyes remain closed (vv. 58-60). This is a very intense moment in the *Commedia*. The temptation of the marvellous, linked to utmost intellectual ignorance, is at its highest, and here would lead to annihilation. It is the ultimate teaching on passions of the *Inferno*, especially considering the feminine nature of the Furies and of Medusa standing out amongst the previous male figures of Charon, Minos and Pluto. As Sapegno notices, the sensual threat of Medusa occurs during the most difficult part of the journey, when all the doubts, the problems and the fears that had been overcome at the beginning of the journey seem to be resurfacing.⁴⁶ Virgil's gesture is prompted by the fear that words (rational discourse) are not enough against senses; he offers physical help to combat a physical threat. His hands are now on Dante's hands keeping his eyes shut. At this point there is a moment of suspense. While Dante the character waits, devoid of the faculty of sight, Dante the author appeals to the reader:

O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani,
mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
sotto 'l velame de li versi strani.
Inf., IX.61-3

⁴⁶ See Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, 8th edn, 3 vols (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1959), I, p. 100.

Dante the author suggests that we look attentively just when Dante the character's sight is impaired. As the *Convivio* explains, 'lo nostro intelletto [...] sano dire si può, quando per malizia d'animo o di corpo impedito non è ne la sua operazione; che è conoscere quello che le cose sono, sì come vuole Aristotile nel terzo de l'Anima' (IV.15.11).⁴⁷ Therefore, only the look of those among us who are not mentally or physically hindered (as Dante happens to be) is able to cast light on the matter *hiding* beneath the *veil* of strange *verses*. There is a game of veiling and unveiling going on ruled by language ('li versi strani') because language can reveal things that are not otherwise visible to the naked eye. And when the naked eye is covered, that is to say, when senses are in the process of being reined, the eye of the mind can grasp the ultimate truths. And, in fact, this episode prepares for the apparition of the celestial messenger sweeping away fears and threats. Virgilio's hands are the materialization of hindrances to Dante the character's pursuit of knowledge.

The role of the reader is essential within the process of interpretation of the story narrated. The veil is laid by the author and can only be lifted by the attentive reader who knows about the manifold method of interpretation. The verses are defined as strange. 'E chiama l'autore questi suoi versi strani, in quanto mai per alcuno davanti a lui non era stata composta alcuna fizione sotto versi volgari, ma sempre sotto litterali, e però paiono strani, in quanto disusati a così fatto stile', comments Boccaccio (on vv. 61-3). They could be seen as strange form-wise, because in the vernacular, but also content-wise, because of the unusual subject

⁴⁷ And see also *Inferno*, XI.91: 'o sol che sani ogne vista turbata'.

matter, and also because they are new, as part of such a marvellous poetic enterprise. Dante is always careful in establishing a solid relationship with his literary predecessors, while simultaneously emerging as a superior Christian poet. Although Dante presents himself with his revealed God, it is not for God that he writes his poem, but for us. His verses unveil different layers of significance according to the reader's proficiency, in the same way as the Scriptures do. Dante mentions in the *Convivio* the fourfold method of interpretation of the Scriptures (literal, allegorical, tropological, anagogical), applying it to his own poetry.⁴⁸ The first level, the literal one, 'è quello che non si stende più oltre che la lettera de le parole fittizie, sì come sono le favole de li poeti'; the second, the allegorical, 'è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna' (*Conv.*, II.1.2-3). The 'manto', or 'velame', is shaped as if it were a beautiful lie to cover a truth. In this way all sorts of people, even those who are not interested in art and *scientia*, can be attracted to it. Only the wise though will be able to lift the veil. It is a discourse that comes from the Bible: 'Quod si etiam opertum est Evangelium nostrum, in iis, qui pereunt, est opertum. In quibus Deus hujus saeculi excaecavit mentes infidelium, ut non fulgeat illis illuminatio Evangelii gloriae Christi, qui est imago Dei' (II, Corinthians, 4.3).⁴⁹ Guiniforto delli Bargigi's interpretation of 'strani' (1440) confirms: 'strani dic'essere i sopradetti versi, perocchè parendo, quanto a testual significato,

⁴⁸ On the fourfold method see also *Epistle to Cangrande*, 7. On biblical hermeneutics, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia IIae, q10.

⁴⁹ 'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them'.

recitare favole, pure importanto sentenza morale, e fruttuosa' (on vv. 61-63). What is perceived as *favole* is then a veil bearing moral teachings.

The climax of the discourse on *favole* is in canto thirteen of the *Inferno*. 'Strani' are here the Harpies' laments or, depending upon the interpretation, the trees on which they are perching. The Harpies, mythological creatures with women's faces and wild birds' bodies, are the daughters of Thaumas, god of wonder, and Electra, as is Iris, the goddess of the rainbow. Iris and the Harpies represent two sides of wonder, the first being linked to the brighter side and the second to the darker side of it, and together contributing to a picture of wonder juggling intellect and passions. Here they preside over the discourse on the marvellous linked to the clouding of reason. The episode of the forest draws upon the third book of the *Aeneid*. While in Virgil mysterious and magic details are included to enrich the narrative, in Dante what is called the pagan marvellous is strictly functional with regards to the moral message, as is the case for biblical beasts. The core of the problem is uttered by the Dantean Virgil: 'Però riguarda ben; sì vederai | cose che torrien fede al mio sermone' (*Inf.*, XIII.20-21). Dante is warned that he will see things which would sound incredible if they were only related by Virgil's words. Dante the author is here narrating events whose truth bearing is stated to be superior to Virgil, who in the *Aeneid* had already told the story Dante the pilgrim is going to witness in this canto. Dante the author is paying homage to his master, but at the same time he is making a point of differentiating Virgil's *favole* from his *favole*, as becomes clearer in the following lines.

In these woods Dante the character is 'tutto smarrito'; the adjective recalls his original disorientation in the harsh woods of the first canto of *Inferno* ('la diritta via era smarrita', I.3). This forest is dark, crossed by no path, dominated by fear and uncertainty. The line 'cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse' (XIII.25) ushers in the fantastic and subjective dimension of the episode and suspends the reader between possibility and reality. Dante the character is deliberately left in ignorance by Virgil, and so prompted to experience facts directly. Following his master's suggestion, he plucks a branch from a tree. From the broken branch flow out words and blood, lamenting Dante's cruel gesture ('de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme | parole e sangue'; XIII.43-44). Virgil intervenes in Dante's defense:

'S'elli avesse potuto creder prima',
 rispuose 'l savio mio, 'anima lesa,
 ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima,
 non averebbe in te la man distesa;
 ma la cosa incredibile mi fece
 indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa'.
Inf., XIII.46-51

The identification of words and blood, or in other words the materialization of language into blood, gives Dante's poetry a further anchoring in reality and a physicality that elevates it to a higher position to that of Virgil.⁵⁰ In Dante's rhetoric, the *Commedia* is not just *favole* hiding moral teachings, but it is talking flesh and blood; not just a fantastic vision, but a real journey.

As Francesco D'Ovidio has underlined, Virgil seems to think that Dante read the episode of Polydorus in the *Aeneid* as a 'fandonia poetica', therefore, he invites him to live it in the woods of the suicides in first person to prove its

⁵⁰ For an analysis of speech in canto thirteen with some references to its bodily aspects, see Leo Spitzer, 'Speech and Language in *Inferno* XIII', *Italica*, 19. 3 (1942), 81-104.

reality.⁵¹ But if the character Virgil is asserting the historicity of his poem, Dante is doing the same with his own. While doing so, Dante is stating his relationship with the literary past: his poem is that which proves previous matter true or false because it has new (revealed) means of investigation. Douglas Biow puts forward the thesis that Virgil's doubts about the pilgrim's belief mirror his own (or better Dante's) uncertainty about his poem's ability to persuade and represent the incredible:

Dante's poetic strategy throughout the *Commedia* is to historicize the marvelous, to assert repeatedly that everything on this voyage must be understood as credible and real, in part because everything exists in a universe ordered by God, but above all because the poet, as the wayfarer, witnessed these events and has returned to tell us.⁵²

Dante transforms the Virgilian marvellous into a Christian marvellous, anchored to history; he is concerned with a real event whose truth will be kept and consolidated by the *Commedia* itself.

I will now look at the way the relationship between fantasy and history is staged, beginning with the way it is embodied by the figure of Geryon.

⁵¹ On this see Francesco D'Ovidio, 'Il canto di Pier della Vigna', in *Nuovi studii danteschi*, 2 vols (Napoli: A. Guida, 1932), I, pp. 117-278. See also Gian Roberto Sarolli, *Prolegomena alla 'Divina Commedia'* (Firenze: Biblioteca dell'archivium romanicum 1.112, 1971), pp. 118-278. Sarolli suggests that Virgil is here stating his poem as *historia* and not just *favola*.

⁵² D. Biow, 'From Ignorance to Knowledge: The Marvelous in *Inferno* 13', in *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. Rachel Jacoff, and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 45-61 (p.51). Aristotle also mentions the belief about the poets' lies in *Metaphysics*, I, 2, 983 a.

II.3 Geryon and the Poetics of *mirum verum*

During the episode of Geryon we find the first occurrence of ‘meraviglioso’, in its feminine form ‘meravigliosa’. It is no coincidence that in this canto the discourse on *favole*, and, therefore, on truth and falsity, resurfaces. It is worth remembering that Geryon is introduced by Virgil in these terms:

[...] ‘Tosto verrà di sopra
ciò ch’io attendo e che il tuo pensier sogna;
tosto convien ch’al tuo viso si scovra’.
Inf., XVI.121-123

An atmosphere of expectation and prodigy anticipates his arrival, which is perceived as an unveiling (‘si scovra’). The following lines masterfully intertwine the topics of ‘ver’ and ‘menzogna’ through an insinuating syntax full of enjambments (I am referring especially to lines 127-136, part of which I am quoting here) that materializes the nature of the monster.

Sempre a quel ver c’ha faccia di menzogna
de’ l’uom chiudere le labbra fin ch’el puote,
però che senza colpa fa vergogna;
ma qui tacer nol posso; e per le note
di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro,
s’elle non sien di lunga grazia vòte,
ch’i’ vidi per quell’aere grosso e scuro
venir notando una figura in suso,
maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro[.]
Inf., XVI.124-132 (my italics)

Bosco-Reggio’s commentary quotes a passage from Alberto di Brescia, which Dante seems to recall in lines 124-126: ‘tal veritade déi dire che ti sia creduta, altramenti sarebbe reputata per buscià’, and also another from Bono Giamboni according to which ‘la veritade ha molte volte faccia di menzogna’. The issue of

poetry's credibility has a long history and will be especially debated in the Renaissance, following the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*; the discourse on the verisimilar will acquire relevance particularly in relationship to literary criticism. The *Poetics* addresses the issues that the poet must consider when selecting the topic to treat: if it is taken from reality, it must be credible; otherwise, in case its *mimesis* does not lend the effect of reality, the poet will have to select a different topic, not true but credible (*Poetics*, 1460a-1460b). In Dante's instance, knowledge of truth is the only possible reason of philosophic inquiry and the only poetic matter worth considering. What is the 'official' truth for Dante? The one residing in God, to which the believer moves toward, following Christ's example, as announced by the Gospels (on this see amongst all John, 14.1,12). And Dante is the *homo viator*, he who is on his way to God. So in order to be credible and to be accepted, Dante's poetry has to comply with the divine doctrine. And even if his truth has 'faccia di menzogna', that is to be understood within the discourse of allegory, within which the marvellous plays an important role.

In the above quoted passage the marvellous is associated with the heart ('maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro'). Line 132 has been understood by medieval commentators mainly in terms of fear and dismay. Following Tommaseo's definition, a 'cor sicuro' does not fear unexpected occurrences ('sicurtà è non dubitar delle cose che sopravvengono').⁵³ Geryon generates marvel even in firm hearted souls, because it is part of the supernatural over which even virtuous

⁵³ Quoted by Sapegno in his commentary on *Inf.*, XVI.132. The quotation is already present in Bono Giamboni's commentary.

souls have no power. The issue is represented in the *Purgatorio*, when the lustful souls marvel at Dante the character:

Non altrimenti stupido si turba
lo montanaro, e rimirando ammuta,
quando rozzo e selvatico s'inurba,
che ciascun'ombra fece in sua paruta;
ma poi che furon di stupore scarche,
lo qual ne li alti cuori tosto s'attuta[.]
Purg., XXVI.67-72

There is an allusion in line 72 to the 'magnanimi', for whom all passions are slaked in order to attain tranquillity of the spirit; 'stupore' hinders language and delays comprehension and therefore must not last.⁵⁴ The figure of the 'stupido montanaro', rough and uncivilized, who has not refined his reactions and is overwhelmed by stupor at things he ignores, contrasts with the magnanimous souls ('alti cuori') constantly controlling instincts and emotions according to the stoic teachings so often practised by Virgil the character in the *Commedia*.⁵⁵ The mountain dweller's response to the city is parallel with the souls' marvelling at the sight of Dante; their wonder is defined by Tommaseo as 'quella meraviglia ch'è stupore, non di quella ammirazione che attende e intende' (commentary on line 72), a reaction proper to the unprepared spirit (and who in fact still resides in Purgatory).⁵⁶

Stupor holds back language, the means of expression of the philosopher and the poet. As Dante writes in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, language is the rational

⁵⁴ See Vellutello's commentary (1544) on line 72: 'quelli che sono grandi d'animo, non possono lungamente esser oppressi da stupore, come sono i pusillanimi, ma desiderano continuamente discorrer cose nuove'.

⁵⁵ See also the admonition of the Sybil to Aeneas in *Aeneid*, VI.95: 'Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito'.

⁵⁶ Tommaseo, in support of his comment, quotes Augustine's 'ignorantia mater admirationis' (*Conf.*, XIII.21).

and sensible element allowing men to communicate with one another ('rationale signum et sensuale'; I.3.2). During Geryon's arrival, Dante makes the point of not being held back by his emotions and of using language as means between his senses and his mind: 'ma qui tacer nol posso' (*Inf.*, XVI.127).⁵⁷ Soon after (line 128) he mentions for the first time his 'comedià' vouching for the reality of the episode. Linking Geryon to his poem opens a fertile ground for reflection on the relationship between the marvellous and the *Commedia*. Once more it is stressed how the infernal 'monsters' represent the poem physically and embody a discourse on language as materialization of the space depicted. Unlike the others, Geryon spreads over a whole canto. As John Kleiner notices:

Dante is not merely showing us the beast, he is slowing his narrative to give us time to wonder [...] The poet, like the theologian, finds in the fascinating but fear-provoking shape of a monster a vehicle for outlining art's hazards.⁵⁸

The Virgilian approach to a similar matter is different in the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas while talking to Dido wonders whether he should narrate at all the episode of Polydorus: 'Eloquar, an sileam?' (*Aeneid*, III. 38). Aeneas saw a horrible prodigy, marvellous to say: 'horrendum et dictu video mirabile monstrum' (*Aeneid*, III.26). Douglas Biow notes that *mirabile dictu* recalls the Homeric formula 'thauma idesthai', 'a marvel to behold', with the difference residing in the verb change: not 'to see' but rather 'to say'.⁵⁹ While the Greek text focuses on sight, that

⁵⁷ As Kleiner remarks, 'for all the fears and trembling attributed to the traveler, the poet hardly seems tongue-tied or terrified [...] The image of the silent poet descending on the back of the monster reflect imaginative exuberance rather than modesty'; *Mismapping the Underworld*, p. 136.

⁵⁸ Kleiner, *Mismapping the Underworld*, p. 120. As in *Inferno* V, Dante portrays the perils connected to the pleasure derived from literature.

⁵⁹ See Biow, *Mirabile dictu*, pp. 2-3. In Homer the formula appears in the *Odyssey* 6.306, 7.45, 8.366, 13.108 and in the *Iliad*, 6.725, 10.439, 18.83, 18.377.

is, on a more objective account, Virgil inserts a subjective nuance, stressing the language dimension. The emphasis moves from the object narrated to the subject narrating, and it is fruit of a reflection on the activity of narrating.⁶⁰ Similar emphasis is adopted by Dante but, as Biow underlines ('O Brave Monster', p. 8), the Virgilian treatment of the marvellous, even if always linked to history, never becomes history itself, while Dante's marvellous comes as historical from all points of view. This led Teodolinda Barolini to define Dante's poetics as the poetics of the *mirum verum*, using an expression taken from Dante's second Eclogue.⁶¹ In there, Melibeus starts playing the flute that, rather than producing music, sings a verse of Mopsus. During the narration, Dante writes that he is about to say marvellous things, but true: 'mira loquar, sed vera tamen' (*Eclogues*, II.40), which seems to reflect Dante's late concerns (the *Eclogues* were written in his old age, around 1320-1321). The same statement is in fact in the *Paradiso*, when Cacciaguida declares: "Io dirò cosa incredibile e vera" (XVI.124; my italics), which coordinates the two elements 'incredibile' and 'vera' that in the *Eclogues* will be linked by the adversative 'but'.

In the Geryon episode the oxymoron *mira vera* is emphasized by the juxtaposition of 'meravigliosa' and 'vidi'; the verb 'to see' functions as a proof that what Dante is telling is true. As Barolini rightly remarks, rather than escaping and fearing the marvellous, Dante is using it as a moment to reinforce the credibility of

⁶⁰ 'From Homer to Virgil, then, we move from the oral poet's characteristic emphasis on the vision shown (*idesthai*) to the writerly poet's concern for the reflexive act of telling (*et dictu*); Biow, *Mirabile dictu*, p. 3.

⁶¹ See Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 58-67.

his poem.⁶² In fact, as I have already underlined, his marvellous monsters reinforce the credibility of his poetry, giving it 'a body' against whose existence it would be hard to argue. The body of the *Inferno*, and I would add the body of the whole of the *Commedia*, could be seen as part of the medieval *mirabilia*: something strange and marvellous to behold, but rooted in Christianity and therefore not a curiosity but rather part of the supernatural whose causes are veiled. The infernal marvellous points at reality, covering it with its veil. The veil attracts the attention due to its novelty, strangeness and beauty. But the aim is not the veil. Once the seduced reader finds the way to lift it, following Dante's instructions, the hidden truth will come into sight. From this point of view, Geryon condenses and symbolizes the whole of the *Commedia*.

While linking Geryon to his own poetic discourse, Dante also points to the fraudulent nature of language as human construction.⁶³ Barolini observes that the author, making the reader aware of the problematic surrounding the treatment of the marvellous and sharing the reader's reluctance to treat the marvellous, lays the basis for a relationship of trust between reader and author that will support the whole poem.⁶⁴ In this way we are induced to believe in the narration as if we were experiencing the same composition problems as Dante. And the aim of Dante's language is to adhere to reality, as is evident from the following passage in which the author appeals to the Muses in the lowest part of Hell:

⁶² *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 60.

⁶³ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p.61: 'Even a *comedia*, in order to come into existence as a text, must to some extent accommodate that human and thus ultimately fraudulent construct, language'.

⁶⁴ By mixing experience with narration, Barolini observes, 'the narrator secures our confidence for the rest of his story'; *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 61.

non senza tema a dicer mi conduco;
ché non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo
discriver fondo a tutto l'universo,
né da lingua che chiami mamma o babbo.
Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso
ch'aiutarono Anfione a chiuder Tebe,
sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso.
Inf., XXXII.6-12 (my italics)

A rough and primitive language ('che chiami mamma o babbo') cannot represent the depth and the complexity of his experience, and Dante needs help to accomplish his poetic artifice. On the one hand, remembering childhood he seems to allude to the topic of *favole* and to the infancy of a (pagan) culture whose myths attempt to explain reality. On the other hand, introducing elements from popular and childlike language ('pigliare a gabbo', and 'mamma e babbo', which also rhyme), the author emphasizes, through his kaleidoscopic vernacular, the human dimension of his experience: real first, then poetic.

The preoccupation conveyed by the previous passage becomes terror in the last canto of the *Inferno* ('e con paura il metto in metro'; *Inf.*, XXXIV.10) while the travellers meet Lucifer.

Com'io divenni allor gelato e fioco,
nol dimandar, lettor, ch'i' non lo scrivo,
però ch'ogne parlar sarebbe poco.
Io non morì, e non rimasi vivo[.]
Inf., XXXIV.22-25

There is a moment of physical and intellectual suspension. Dante is neither in good nor in evil, frozen in stupor as Lucifer is stuck in the ice. Lucifer ignites 'gran meraviglia' in Dante, but compared to the complex description of the pilgrim's reaction to Geryon this wonder is expressed rather weakly and immediately dropped after its occurrence in line 37:

Oh quanto parve a me gran maraviglia
quand'io vidi tre facce a la sua testa!
Inf., XXXIV.37-8

The body of Lucifer, the last monster of the *Inferno*, embodies fear, destruction, and repulsion, more than wonder. Being condemned to eternal silence in a frozen world, he is the denial of language, over which a sort of an unfruitful cannibalism prevails, therefore he is also the denial of humanity and rationality.⁶⁵ Tears, and froth mixed with blood coming from the mangled bodies of the sinners leak from his three chins ('con sei occhi piangëa, e per tre menti|gocciava 'l pianto e sanguinosa bava'; *Inf.*, XXXIV.53-54). There is a curious sequence: Francesca in canto five 'piange e dice' (V.126), the suicides in canto thirteen shed 'parole e sangue', Ugolino in canto thirty three shows Dante a 'parlare e lagrimare' (XXXIII.9), Lucifer drips 'pianto e sanguinosa bava' (my italics).⁶⁶ With regard to Francesca, the suicides, and Ugolino, the coordination holds together on the same level speech mixed with tears or blood; in Lucifer, speech is substituted with bloody dribble, erasing from him any form of humanity and highlighting his bestiality.

Lucifer's refusal of divine power made him the utmost negation of communication, rationality, inquiry. Barolini observes that Lucifer excites a realistic fright without instigating a real passion (which in fact would signal wonder): 'the text privileges the process of becoming, of transition, not the

⁶⁵ On Lucifer and language see Dino S. Cervigni, 'Dante's Lucifer: The Denial of the Word', *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation*, 3 (1988), 51-62; 'precisely because Lucifer, when he was created, rebelled against God and against the Word, Dante's Lucifer parodies the Word and is condemned to eternal silence', p. 62.

⁶⁶ The link between Francesca, Ugolino and Pier delle Vigne has been noted by Spitzer as 'a kind of hendyadys' in 'Speech and Language', p. 8 (n.7).

creature who emblemizes the ground of transition, the core of what must be left behind'.⁶⁷ Lucifer has in common with Geryon and the other monsters the role of his physicality, allowing Dante and Virgil to pass over his body and to reach Purgatory. He is the pivot of the terrestrial section of the otherworld, that which around him had materialized, according to Dante's mythical account of his fall (*Inf.*, XXXIV.121-125).

The fact that Dante and Virgil climb the beastly body of Lucifer, whose three heads recall the summit of a cross stuck in the ground (as Lucifer is in the ice), refers to the Passion of Christ, the only way to Redemption. Dante's path through the infernal human tragedies is also an itinerary through the causes of Christ's passion. It is men that, prompted by their predisposition to sin, crucified Christ, and it is their passions to be eternally crucified in the infernal circles. While visiting the lands of sin, Dante gains awareness of his own responsibility as a man who, facing the climax of horror, feels neither dead nor alive, and, therefore, not even human. The repossession of the self will gradually happen, moving closer to God.

In the last chapter of the present section we will see how Dante's partaking of the divine is not just sharing an aim but a rebirth. On such a level the last and most truthful wonder will be expressed. The authentic moment when new marvels will appear not just to the pilgrim but to the author himself, is during the last stretch of the voyage. There the act of marvelling will be shifted from marvellous object (within the text) to the subject marvelling (from an external

⁶⁷ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p.98.

prospective). These are in fact 'li adornamenti de le maraviglie', the ultimate causes, that Dante mentions in the *Convivio* (II.15.11). As Peter Armour writes:

Nella *Commedia* i veri mirabilia non sono tanto quelli ereditati dal passato pagano, per quanto siano stati meravigliosamente riplasmati dal poeta, ma i misteri cristiani della salvezza e della redenzione rivelati al pellegrino nel corso del suo viaggio attraverso quei due regni [*Purgatorio* e *Paradiso*].⁶⁸

In the first canto of the *Paradiso* Dante appeals to Apollo, rather than to the Muses, because he perceives his language fading in front of the matter he is setting about to treat ('trasumanar significar per verba | non si poria'; *Par.*, I.70). There will be an elevation of all themes from the human level to the divine, to which language has to adapt. This is the real novelty or the real *monstrum*, never approached before. 'Ma la parola in realtà è necessaria fin che l'uomo che la pronuncia è distinto dal suo oggetto, vale a dire nella dimensione del tempo e del sensibile, come dice il *De vulgari eloquentia* (I.2-3)', underlines Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi in her introduction to the *Paradiso*.⁶⁹ In the passage of the *De vulgari eloquentia* mentioned above, Dante defines the aim of speech as 'nichil aliud quam nostre mentis enucleare aliis conceptum' (I.2.3; my italics). Wonder expresses precisely a permanent oscillation between the self and the other, of which it becomes metaphor, in the expectation of knowledge of what is external to us, or perceived as such. Once the distance between subject and object is diminished, as in the final harmony of the *Paradiso*, the *meraviglia* that at first was tension and desire, relents

⁶⁸ 'I *Monstra* e i *Mirabilia* del mondo ai tempi di Dante', p. 158.

⁶⁹ Chiavacci Leonardi, *La Divina Commedia*, III, p. xxix.

in *admiratio*.⁷⁰ Through his poetry (and especially through its training in the sweetness of feelings of the *Purgatorio*) Dante will gradually gain control of that 'rough' passion that sparks off novelty, in order to attain the fervour of the soul brimful of wonder of the last *cantica*.

II.4 The Expression of Redemptive Wonder

As a parallel to Charon in the third canto of the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio* has the figure of Cato: old, white haired, lonely and angry at the wayfarers whom he believes to be escaping from the eternal prison (*Purg.*, I.40-48). Unlike Charon, Cato's face is illuminated by four holy lights. He commands reverential respect, not paralyzing fear, in accord with a realm in harmony with divine laws. While the *Inferno* still represented an ancient world ordained by Aristotelian ethics (*Nicomachean Ethics*) and articulated on the axis justice/injustice, the *Purgatorio* presents a realm classified according to a Christian conception of love as measure of judgment.⁷¹ The spirit of the Gospels undermines classical ethics, affirming principles of humbleness, sweetness, hope, and conversion of the heart. The infernal sinners still think about earthly achievements, which were of primary value in antiquity; the souls of the *Purgatorio* care for the value of prayer and future salvation. 'Ma qui la morta poesì resurga' (*Purg.*, I.7) announces Dante, appealing to the Muses in the proem to the second *cantica*. Poetry will here elevate,

⁷⁰ As in Pareyson's interpretation of *meraviglia* as compound by a 'piacere mosso' and 'piacere immobile'. This is also a pleasure made by the same matter as the one in *Paradiso*, XXXIII.93.

⁷¹ See Chiavacci Leonardi's introduction to *Purgatorio*, in *La Divina Commedia*, II, p. xvii.

resurrected from its infernal ashes, as human bodies will be reborn in God's love. Once more the reference is to the bodily and human aspect of the poetry in the *Commedia*, now with its new task of depicting purgation and freedom of choice.

The *Purgatorio* welcomes the two wayfarers in an atmosphere of religious mystery (no longer religious horror) immediately disclosed by the episode of Virgil girding his pupil about with a rush that, once uprooted, miraculously sprouts again. Dante marvels at the sight:

oh maraviglia! ché qual elli scelse
l'umile pianta, cotal si rinacque
subitamente là onde l'avelse.
Purg., I.133-136

This is the first exclamation of wonder in *Purgatorio*. Interestingly, it mirrors (in a positive image) the last exclamation of the *Inferno* that we have seen with regards to Lucifer ('oh quanto parve a me gran maraviglia'; *Inf.*, XXXIV.37). The two cantos pick a concept and show it in its evolution: if the last occurrence of wonder in *Inferno* was within a context of stasis, wonder is represented here in a new frame expressing movement and rebirth.

In the *Inferno* I isolated the guardians of the circles as wondering at Dante in the flesh; in the *Purgatorio* this can be said for the souls. In Hell seeing was difficult due to the poor visibility and because of the kinds of punishment meted out, which often hindered both sight and dialogue. However there are some exceptions. Brunetto Latini welcomes Dante with an affectionate 'Qual maraviglia!' (*Inf.*, XV.24). The sinners in canto twenty eight stop to look at the pilgrim: 'Più fuor di cento che, quando l'udiro, | s'arrestaron nel fosso a riguardarmi | per maraviglia, obliando il martiro' (*Inf.*, XXVIII.52-54); and amongst

them Pier da Medicina: ‘ristato a riguardar per meraviglia | con li altri, innanzi a li altri aprì la canna’ (*Inf.*, XXVIII.66-68). In the two passages from canto twenty eight the alliteration in ‘r’ (‘arrestaron’, ‘riguardarmi’, ‘maraviglia’, ‘martiro’; ‘ristato’, ‘riguardar’, ‘maraviglia’) celebrates an extension in time that is rarely allowed in Hell. The rhyme ‘maraviglia’/‘ciglia’ lays a further emphasis on the nature of the response, strictly linked to sight.

A similar situation is found in canto two of the *Purgatorio*, where the souls become aware of Dante breathing (‘maravigliando diventaro smorte’; II.69) and stare at him:

così al viso mio s’affisar quelle
anime fortunate tutte quante,
quasi obliando d’ire a farsi belle.
Purg., II.73-75

The topic of oblivion is again present, but here ‘obliando’ is preceded by ‘quasi’ and followed by ‘d’ire a farsi belle’ rather than ‘martiro’ as it was in the *Inferno*.

As Chiavacci Leonardi underlines:

Comincia qui un motivo che accompagnerà tutti gli incontri, quello della meraviglia, dello stupore di vedere Dante vivo, o per il respiro, o per l’ombra che gli proietta sul terreno, o altro; anche lo stupore è sentimento proprio del fanciullo, dell’animo semplice, quali Dante raffigura le anime del suo secondo regno.⁷²

Dante is perceived as part of the *mirabilia*; the discourse was anticipated by the *Inferno*, but it is developed now that the souls are able to recognize him for who he really is and articulate it rationally (unlike the infernal guardians and sinners, blinded by their error and pains). The reaction of the souls that Dante depicts mirrors the reaction that he would expect from his reader, that is, he is to be

⁷² Chiavacci Leonardi on *Purgatorio*, II. 68.

recognized as a marvellous (because real) presence in the otherworld. Through such a juxtaposition man-*mirabilia*, the *mirum verum*, is even more enriched with history and truth.

The motif becomes dominant during the first of the three days that the two travellers spend at the feet of the Mount of Purgatory, as Patrick Boyde also underlines, when the degree of novelty is at its highest.⁷³ Dante's reaction to the souls is of wonder too. For example, having recognized his friend Casella amongst the souls staring at him, he comments with affection: 'di maraviglia, credo, mi dipinsi' (*Purg.*, II.82). The specular reaction is meaningful because it appears at a stage of the narration in which both Dante and the souls of *Purgatorio* are partaking of a process of purification, on the threshold of a new life.⁷⁴ This is the wonder that generates the poetry of the last two *cantiche*, involving the subject and not only marvellous objects. As Boyde writes:

Marvel is always the effect of ignorance, since it is aroused only when we have noticed something we had not noticed before. If it were only an effect, however, it would be a dead end, and there would be nothing more to say. But it is also a cause. Marvels awaken the desire to find out.⁷⁵

⁷³ See Boyde, 'Wonder and Knowledge', p. 44.

⁷⁴ Cf. Boyde, 'Wonder and Knowledge', p. 49: 'Metaphorically speaking, they remain on the threshold of their "new life"; or better, they are in the "first age" of that "new life". In the same way, Dante the character is here portrayed during the first phase of his ascent to Paradise. And so he and the souls are endowed with the same good qualities that are given to noble souls in the first age of their earthly life in order to help them "through the gateway and along the path by which we enter the city of virtue".'

⁷⁵ Boyde, 'Wonder and Knowledge', p. 50.

In order to appreciate wonder as a movement it is important to bear in mind its passionate side, as outlined in chapter I. In the *Convivio* passion is understood as a correlative of action, following Aristotle:⁷⁶

quanto l'agente più al paziente sé unisce, tanto e più forte è però
la passione [...]. [...] tanto lo desiderio è maggiore, e l'anima, più
passionata, più si unisce a la parte concupiscibile e più abbandona
la ragione.
Conv., III.10. 2

As the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* sums up: 'la passione, in tal caso, è il moto dell'animo concupiscibile [*Epist.*, III.5] che aumenta con l'unione, o anche solo con l'avvicinarsi, al suo oggetto, che così viene a essere agente' (p. 343). This is the course of wonder that prompts knowledge, and, therefore, prompts both the pilgrim and Dante's poetry. Going back to Pareyson's interpretation, we could say that we are on the first level of 'piacere mosso': to use Marco Lombardo's words, the level of the fervour of the new born 'anima semplicetta che sa nulla' and enters the world 'a guisa di fanciulla' (*Purg.*, XVI.85, 93).

In the whole of the *Purgatorio* there are several references to wonder that mainly follow the same pattern: sight (of which Dante is usually the subject but sometimes becomes also the object); expression of wonder (not necessarily tied to the term *meraviglia* itself); question arising; answer to the question. A particularly symptomatic moment is the opening of canto five, when the negligent souls become aware of Dante's shadow on the ground. Dante writes: 'E vidile guardar per meraviglia | pur me, pur me, e 'l lume ch'era rotto' (V.8-9). The position of 'meraviglia' at the end of the line suggests a suspension soon broken by the

⁷⁶ As the *ED* points out: Aristotle, *De Generatione et corruptione*, I.9, 326b, 31-34. See entry 'passione', *ED*, IV, pp. 341-344.

repetition of 'pur me, pur me' emphasizing Dante's surprise at the intensity of their look. His reaction is defined by Virgil as a distraction to be removed: 'perché l'animo tuo tanto s'impiglia| [...] che l'andare allenti?' (V.10-11). The usual negative connotation that the effects of 'maraviglia' assume in Virgil's words is accentuated here by the rhyme with 'impiglia'. As Bosco-Reggio underscores, Dante is now not a simple spectator as he was in the *Inferno*, but is atoning for his sins too, so that every delay becomes a guilt.⁷⁷ In fact Dante the author soon tells about the pilgrim blushing and walking, according to Virgil's directives.

Immediately after this, they meet another multitude of souls that utter their wonder at the passage of the pilgrim:

Quando s'accorser ch'i' non dava loco
per lo mio corpo al trapassar d'i raggi,
mutar lor canto in un "oh!" lungo e roco;
e due di loro, in forma di messaggi,
corsero incontr'a noi e dimandarne:
"Di vostra condizione fatene saggi".
Purg., V.25-30

In this passage there is a musical alternation of assonances in 'a' and 'o' climaxing in the long and hoarse 'oh!' placed right in the middle of the two periods as the heart of the event. Amongst the presence of open vowels the closed sound of wonder, 'oh', stands out as a fading of the *Miserere* that was sung until Dante's appearance. Again wonder interrupts ordinary routine. Vellutello compares such exclamation to Pluto's in the *Inferno* ('Pape Satàn, pape Satàn aleppe!'; *Inf.*, VII.1), in his words both expressing 'grande ammirazione' (commentary on v. 27). Both are direct discourse and both are followed by an exclamation mark; but while

⁷⁷ See Bosco-Reggio's commentary on vv.16-28.

Pluto's is born *ex abrupto* at the very beginning of the canto, the one in the *Purgatorio* is well embedded in the narration, and it is presented fluidly as a natural transformation of the chant, which shifts from rhythmic sequence to a sole broken note. Also, if in the *Inferno* most of the expressions of wonder were soon stifled, in the *Purgatorio* they have time to be articulated into questions. The episode in canto five of the *Purgatorio* recalls other previous encounters, for example, that of the wondering souls growing pale in canto two (II.67) or that of the souls drawing back in fright in canto three (III.88). Dante always ties wonder to situations dominated by passionate and instinctive reactions.

A particularly intense moment is when Virgil meets Sordello in canto seven. For the second time, Virgil is hit by surprise. Dante had already used the verb 'maravigliar' with regard to Virgil's surprise at Caiaphas (*Inf.*, XXIII.124). Here the verb is used to qualify Sordello rejoicing at Virgil's presence.

Qual è colui che cosa innanzi a sé
 sùbita vede ond' e' si maraviglia,
 che crede e non, dicendo "Ella è... non è..."
 tale parve quelli; e poi chinò le ciglia,
 e umilmente ritornò ver' lui,
 e abbracciòl là 've 'l minor s'appiglia.
Purg., VII.10-15

The oscillation between whether to believe and not to believe is among the main aspects of wonder and it contributes to create the dimension of uncertainty sought by Dante. In this episode all of the elements of wonder are present: the unexpected ('sùbita'), sight ('vede'), the position of the object distinct and distant from the subject ('cosa innanzi a sé'), the resulting 'maraviglia' linked to vision and rhyming with 'ciglia' (as is frequent in the *Commedia*), the doubt arising from it

(‘crede e non’) and the speech that manifests the contradiction (‘Ella è... non è...’), the physical transformation (‘tal parve quelli’), the lowering of the eyes in sign of reverence (‘chinò le ciglia’), and finally the union between subject and object in an embrace (‘abbracciòl’) followed by a dialogue between the two. It is important to bear in mind this sequence, modelled on the classical conception of wonder. In the *Purgatorio* it is drafted on the human level through temporary satisfaction of the senses and the mind. Only the *Paradiso* though will thrive in the extended time of wonder, erasing temporality and historical sequence, in a fast paced progression that does not leave time for the lowering of the eyes.

As usual, Dante the author does not dwell long on moments suspended between belief and disbelief so as not to lose sight of the aim of the journey. Virgil reacts to Sordello ‘quasi ammirando’ (VII.61), but he does not wonder at him, rather at the information provided on the route to follow. Sordello in fact offers to guide them through the realm whose laws are unknown to Virgil, and the Latin poet wonders at the impossibility of climbing the mount at night as if he were wondering at divine power itself. Both Buti and Landino insist that Dante ‘fakes’ Virgil’s wonder in order to show that human reason has little power compared to divine grace (commentaries on v. 61). Poletto’s remarks on the same line are interesting: ‘ma tale ragione non basta a capire le leggi, che devono regolare certi viaggi; o se la ragione le capisce, le capisce quando sono spiegate da altri, ma non le sa scoprire di per sè; di qui la maraviglia’ (DDP on v. 61). The importance of the ‘mediator’, the ‘other’, is underlined in order to disentangle the knots that reason alone cannot face. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Dante chose the verb

'ammirare' over 'maravigliare' to give a reverential and learned nuance through a term directly deriving from the theological *admiratio*, which he would have frequently encountered in Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Most importantly, this is the first occurrence of the verb *ammirare* in the *Commedia*.

In canto twenty one of the *Purgatorio* Dante hinted at a differentiation between the two terms:

[...] "Forse che tu ti maravigli,
antico spirto, del rider ch'io fei;
ma più d'ammirazion vo' che ti pigli".
Purg., XXI.121-123

With a smile of complicity, Dante reveals to Statius that the one he has in front of him really is the poet to whom he is so indebted, and he carefully joins 'maravigli' to 'ammirazion'. Statius' wonder originated a question ('perché la tua faccia testeso | un lampeggiar di riso dimostrommi?'; XXI.113-114); from the answer to this question reverence and admiration are born. This sequence implies a higher intensity carried by *ammirazione* and also a different aim; in fact *ammirazione* does not spark a question but some contemplative pleasure on which to dwell. In this case Statius is the referent, but soon Dante the character will be the protagonist of the shift from the excited and untidy movement of the *Purgatorio* to the harmonic and circular movement of the *Paradiso*.

Purgatorio's reasons for wonder are intrinsic to the function of the *cantica*, that is, transition, conversion of the heart, and the consequent vision of new things in preparation for the following realm. At the door of *Purgatorio* Dante the author appeals to the reader, inviting him not to wonder if his style rises as the matter

treated becomes more elevated (*Purg.*, IX.70-72).⁷⁸ In canto thirteen Sapia, having understood that Dante is alive, remarks: ““Oh, questa è a udir sì cosa nuova” | rispuose, “che gran segno è che Dio t’ami” (*Purg.*, XIII.145-146); ‘nuova’ is in a parallel position to ‘t’ami’ anticipating the *Paradiso* where things are new as depending from divine love (and in fact also in these lines Sapia’s comment is broken into two verses by the verb ‘rispuose’ hanging verse 145 on verse 146). In canto fifteen when Dante is astonished at the sudden luminosity of the sun hurting his eyes (‘quand’io senti’ a me gravar la fronte | a lo splendore assai più che di prima, | e stupor m’eran *le cose non conte*’; *Purg.*, XV.10-12, my italics) and asks Virgil the reason for that, he is once more told by Virgil to retain his wonder: ““Non ti maravigliar s’ancor t’abbaglia | la famiglia del cielo”” (XV.28-29). Dante’s ‘maraviglia’, now still blinded by passions, will transform into an *ammirazione* leading to redemption once the eyes become accustomed to the luminosity.

There is another occurrence of *ammirazione* that is here worth remembering before concluding this section. Following the usual pattern, the souls of canto twenty four marvel at Dante passing by:

Né ‘l dir l’andar, né l’andar lui più lento
facea, ma ragionando andavam forte,
sì come nave pinta da buon vento;
e l’ombre, che parean cose rimorte,
per le fosse de li occhi ammirazione
traean di me, di mio vivere accorte.
Purg., XXIV.1-6

Dante is so absorbed in the conversation with Forese that he barely acknowledges the gluttonous souls’ wide open eyes around him (‘e io, continüando al mio

⁷⁸ ‘Lettor, tu vedi ben com’io innalzo | la mia matera, e però con più arte | non ti maravigliar s’io la rincalzo’.

sermone, | dissi [...]; XXIV.7-8). He had already sustained their look in the previous canto, where *ammirazione* was used to qualify the group of souls overtaking Dante and his companions: ‘venendo e trapassando ci ammirava | d’anime turba tacita e devota’ (XXIII.20-21). The crowd is no longer crying and singing as it was in the immediately preceding lines (‘ed ecco piangere e cantar s’udìe’; XXIII.10-11) but it is described as ‘tacita e devota’ to create the atmosphere of suspense in tune with the admiration expressed by them. The souls are repeatedly described as intensively staring at Dante’s shadow also at the conclusion of the same canto (‘vedi che non pur io, ma questa gente | tutta rimira là dove ‘l sol velì’; XXIII.113-114). But only the first time Dante reacts with wonder to them, because the following times he knows about them thanks to Forese’s explanation:

Già era in ammirar che sì li affama,
per la cagione ancor non manifesta
di lor magrezza e di lor triste squama[.]
Purg., XXIII.37-39

In all three passages, but especially in XXIII.20-21 and XXIV.5-6, there is an insistence on the souls’ eyes. We have seen how wonder is always linked to the faculty of sight, and so it is in the *Commedia*. In this instance though that is particularly evident. The gluttons’ process of expiation involves mainly their mouths, that in life have been active agents of sin, and that are now singing prayers to God.⁷⁹ The sight of the inaccessible fruit tree described in canto twenty two (vv.131-141) and the smell coming from it excite their yearning, doomed to

⁷⁹ And in fact they are singing ‘*Labia mēa, Domine*’ (from Psalms, 50.17: ‘Domine labia mea aperies’) in *Purg.*, XIII.11. Denise Heilbronn-Gaines underlines the association between gluttony and speech (food entering and words coming out), and its precedents in the Bible (Matthew, 15.11) and in Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae*, 11.1.49); see entry ‘Gluttony’ in Richard Lansing, ed., *The Dante Encyclopedia*, 2nd edn rev. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 449-450 (p.450).

remain frustrated. Amongst all these sensorial stimuli grows an admiration for a living soul passing by the terrace of their torment, initiating a pause in their expiation. Such admiration draws Dante's attention to their eyes: 'ne li occhi era ciascuna oscura e cava' (XXIII.22), 'per le fosse de li occhi ammirazione | traean di me, di mio vivere accorte' (XXIV.5-6).

Lines 4-6 of canto twenty-four express a stark contrast between life, embodied by the pilgrim, and death as lived by the souls: on the one hand there is a lively dialogic progression, of which Dante and Forese are the pivot, and on the other, 'cose rimorte'.⁸⁰ The link between the two is the souls' almost avid admiration towards Dante, as towards life itself. The choral admiration helps to build an atmosphere of excitement kindled from the affectionate reunion of Dante and Forese under the sign of remembrance of earthly life of which the souls take part. Chiavacci Leonardi observes: 'In queste ombre più che morte, tanto più straordinaria appare la luce di meraviglia che si accende in fondo agli occhi infossati, improvvisamente vivi. Parevano morti ma lo stupore li manifesta vivi'.⁸¹

That the whole episode of Forese is imbued with wonder, is also clear from Dante's words soon after their meeting: 'non mi far dir mentr'io mi maraviglio, | ché mal può dir chi è pien d'altra voglia' (XXIII.59-60). This type of wonder, hindering discourse, qualifying human experiences, and so present in this canto full of human affections, will be articulated fully in the presence of Beatrice. The discourse is in fact developed in the Dantean Earthly Paradise, necessary

⁸⁰ See Carlo Grabher's remark on the wonder of the souls: 'Si noti ancora una volta che, di fronte a un vivo, nel Purgatorio le anime si meravigliano soltanto; non si sgomentano come nell'Antipurgatorio'; commentary on lines 1-6.

⁸¹ Chiavacci Leonardi, *La Divina Commedia*, II, p 171.

transition to the divine realm, where are concentrated 'tutte le meraviglie dell'universo sensibile' and where Beatrice, 'novo miracolo e gentile' (*Vita nuova*, XXI, sonnet line 14) appears to Dante as his new guide.⁸² I will now illustrate how the role of Beatrice, symbolical synthesis of the human and the divine, helps in clarifying the discourse of wonder within Dante's poetics.

II.5 From Wonder to Admiration

The origin of change is to be found in Eden. It is, in fact, in the Earthly Paradise, at the very top of the Mount of Purgatory, where Dante rejoins Beatrice. Man and woman are together just as it was at the beginning of history, at the origin of sin. The temptation of the love of Dante's youth is here announced by an intense physical reaction. In canto thirty Dante sees Beatrice, veiled, for the first time in his journey:

E lo spirito mio, che già cotanto
tempo era stato ch'a la sua presenza
non era di stupor, tremando, affranto,
sanza de li occhi aver più conoscenza,
per occulta virtù che da lei mosse,
d'antico amor sentì la gran potenza.
Purg., XXX.34-39

Dante's emotions seem to mirror his old passions when Beatrice was still alive. He feels the power of his love for her and remembers how he used to be caught in

⁸² 'Tutte le meraviglie dell'universo sensibile' is a quotation from Chiavacci Leonardi, *La Divina Commedia*, II, p 838.

stupor, without being able to control himself.⁸³ Once more there is a reference to the eyes, but this time it is a negative one: ‘*sanza de li occhi aver più conoscenza*’ (my italics). The pilgrim is temporarily overwhelmed by the echoing of his passion without even seeing clearly the object of his love, so that even his blood is said to be trembling (‘*men che drama | di sangue m’è rimaso che non tremi*’; *Purg.*, XXX.46-47). As Francesco da Buti explains: ‘perchè l’amore sta nel cuore, e lo cuore n’à passione, lo sangue corre da le vene al cuore per soccorrere lo cuore, e per lo discorso del sagne lo corpo trema’ (commentary on vv. 22-36).

Let us compare his reaction in the *Commedia* with his reaction in the *Vita nuova*, immediately after Dante saw Beatrice for the first time:

In quello punto dico veracemente che lo spirito de la vita, lo quale dimora ne la secretissima camera de lo cuore, cominciò a tremare sì fortemente, che apparia ne li menimi polsi orribilmente; e tremando disse queste parole: ‘Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi’. In quello punto lo spirito animale, lo quale dimora ne l’alta camera ne la quale tutti li spiriti sensitivi portano le loro percezioni, si cominciò a maravigliare molto, e parlando specialmente a li spiriti del viso disse queste parole: ‘Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra’. In quello punto lo spirito naturale, lo quale dimora in quella parte ove si ministra lo nutrimento nostro, cominciò a piangere[.]
Vita nuova, II.4-6

There is a spirit trembling in the *Vita nuova* that is still trembling in the *Commedia* in a moment that at first sight seems not to have changed; it is so powerful that it

⁸³ Critics have given different interpretations of line 36, most of them associating ‘stupor’ with Dante’s reaction in the *Vita nuova* (Trifon Gabriele, Pompeo Venturi, Daniele Mattalia, amongst others) and some with his present reaction in the *Commedia* (Francesco da Buti, Vellutello). See G.A. Scartazzini’s notes (1872-1882) on vv. 35-36 for a concise history of the different interpretations according to the different editions of the *Commedia* that the commentators would consult. The interpretation that I follow is the most generally agreed one, and it also appears in C. H. Grandgent’s, John D. Sinclair’s and Robert M. Durling’s translations into English.

repeats itself across time and space.⁸⁴ However, as strong as the passion is in the *Purgatorio*, the pilgrim is not as completely struck by it as he used to be. Instead, he recognizes his emotional state, and manages to articulate it to Virgil, who nonetheless has already disappeared. He compares himself to a 'fantolin' (*Purg.*, XXX.44) running to his mother, seeking soothing, which shows an immediately active reaction, in contrast to the feeling of absolute powerlessness undergone in the *Vita nuova*. The experience has been internalized, as is evident from the fact that the heart is now at the centre of it beyond clarity of sight. Clarity of sight is necessary to know new things, but this is no complete novelty. Dante is gradually acquiring more maturity and the reference to the 'fantolin', as he frequently depicts himself in the *Commedia*, is in itself a promise of growth, as we will see in chapter II.6.

The discourse on love will be central until the very last *cantica*, although its connotations change; as Franco Ferrucci has noticed, the adjective 'nova' is in fact still central in the last canto of the *Paradiso* ('vista nova'; *Par.*, XXXIII.136).⁸⁵ The spirit of love as climax to a wonderful experience is alive until the end of the *Commedia*, but the object of love will evolve. What happens then to the vocabulary of wonder used to describe Beatrice in the *Vita nuova*? Does it return unchanged in the *Commedia* when the poet trembles again? The terminology of Dante's early *libello* is rich in words like 'meraviglia', 'miracolo', 'apparizione', which help build up an image of the *donna* within the semantics of wonder. The 'language of

⁸⁴ The verb *tremare* frequently illustrates the passion of the lover in the *Vita nuova*, as for example in XI.1-3, XIV.4-6, XXIV.1, and it also characterizes Paolo in canto five of the *Inferno* ('la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante'; V.136).

⁸⁵ See Franco Ferrucci, *Dante. Lo stupore e l'ordine* (Napoli: Liguori, 2007), p. 272.

wonder' is found there as part of the theme of love and it is lifted to the level of miracle, in the wake of the vast use made of it by the Scriptures (see Matthew, 21.15; Luke, 5.26; Psalms, 9.2; etc.) to indicate the works of God. In the *Vita nuova* Beatrice is in fact depicted as 'maraviglia ne l'atto' (XIX.7), 'novo miracolo e gentile' (XXI.4.14), 'cosa venuta dal cielo in terra a miracol mostrare' (XXVI. 6.8). She is portrayed as a *medium* between the human and the divine (a Christ-like figure, but also an Iris-like figure), admired by the angels and longed-for by Heaven (XXXIII.8). Above all, she is caught 'ne l'atto', a marvel 'in the act', which shows the centrality of her belonging to the sphere of the becoming and not of the eternal, where wonder in fact dwells. As Domenico Consoli suggests, Dante calls in 'un' urgenza quasi liturgica e una trepidazione adorante in concordanza con la sua visione d'amore che delinea per la prima volta nella *Vita nuova*'.⁸⁶ While going beyond the boundaries of *stilnovismo*, he develops a new use of 'practical' *meraviglia* that has no precedent; in Consoli's words, 'altri stilnovisti adornano di meraviglia gli atti, le bellezze, l'essenza stessa della donna amata ma la natura del vocabolo appare già depotenziata, vicina alla misura di una consueta metafora' (*ED*, p. 816).

However, these terms do not follow the new role taken up by Beatrice in the *Commedia*.⁸⁷ The semantics of wonder will be, in fact, transferred from Beatrice to Beatrice's almighty creator. My aim in this final section is to show the consequences of this shift and to highlight the rhetorical function of wonder in

⁸⁶ Domenico Consoli in *ED*, see entry 'meraviglia', III, pp. 816-817.

⁸⁷ Consoli draws the same conclusions: 'Il vocabolo ['meraviglia'] non partecipa alla recuperata signoria di Beatrice sull'anima dantesca, quale si celebra nella *Commedia*' (*ED*, p.816).

Dante's 'marvellous' poem. I will now analyse certain moments of Dante's journey, which will help us to understand the linguistic passage from one stage to the other.

The first appearance of Beatrice in the *Commedia* is followed by Dante's tears. The 'marvel' of the apparition is not enough to console Dante for the loss of Virgil, symbol of poetry and his own history. Dante cries for the fleeing past, and for future responsibilities caused by the need to transform both himself and the object of his poetry.⁸⁸ The transition from the *Purgatorio* to the *Paradiso* does not happen peacefully. The type of wonder at stake becomes now different. It no longer connotes Beatrice as an object, since her theoretical function has now changed, but it connotes Dante as a subject. We witness here the shift from 'meraviglioso' to 'meravigliarsi', as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. If the object of Dante's love was unreachable during a life in which rules are mostly incomprehensible, things must change in the *Paradiso* where Dante will be granted a direct vision, a '*facie ad faciem*' knowledge in which the distance between the object and the subject is dissolved. Nonetheless Dante maintains the admiration for his lady in the third *cantica*, as the following passage shows:

Ma quella reverenza che s'indonna
di tutto me, pur per *Be* e per *ice*,
mi richinava come l'uom ch'assonna.
Par., VII.13-15

Dante the character seems to be lost in a mystical rapture. Beatrice, who does not put up with this impasse for very long, takes care to solve his theological doubts ('la mia donna | che mi diseta con le dolci stille'; *Par.*, VII.11-12). The sense of

⁸⁸ Different were his tears in *Vita nuova*, II.6, expressing mainly weakness rather than awareness.

reverence he feels towards her is akin to the moment in the *Vita nuova* when Dante is dazed by her presence (V.N., XIV and XV), seeming to remain so for the rest of his life ('dal primo giorno ch'i' vidi il suo viso | in questa vita, infino a questa vista, | non m'è il seguire al mio cantar preciso'; *Par.*, XXX.28-30). This is the reason behind the two present tenses 's'indonna' and 'assonna', as highlighted by Chiavacci Leonardi's commentary.⁸⁹ The power of Beatrice's name, in all its syllables, reminds one of the power of God's name as often described in the Bible. But Beatrice's strength is now amplified by her being in Paradise amongst the blessed souls. Dante looks into her eyes in canto fifteen and uses the term 'stupefatto':

poscia rivolsi a la mia donna il viso,
e quinci e quindi stupefatto fui;
ché dentro a li occhi suoi ardeva un riso
tal, ch'io pensai co' miei toccar lo fondo
de la mia gloria e del mio paradiso.
Par., XV. 32-36

From 'mia donna' to 'mio paradiso' the insistent use of possessive adjectives and pronouns ('mia', v. 32; 'suoi', v. 34; 'miei', v. 35; 'mia' and 'mio', v. 36) emphasizes the presence of the individual, the pilgrim who brings to the *Paradiso* his joys and sorrows. The experience is similar to the *Vita nuova* when Dante sees 'tutti li termini de la beatitudine' after Beatrice's salutation in the street (V.N., III.1), although the breath of canto fifteen reveals the different nature of the paradisiacal event. And again we have the *Vita nuova* merging into the *Commedia* at its greatest level in canto thirty of the *Paradiso*, when Dante understands the necessity of

⁸⁹ Chiavacci Leonardi, *La Divina Commedia*, III, p. 191.

moving beyond Beatrice's poetic depiction in order to be imbued with the divine beauty that cannot be shaped by human art:

ma or convien che mio seguir desista
più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,
come a l'ultimo suo ciascuno artista.
Par., XXX.31-33

Admiration in the *Paradiso*, if not directly related to the object as was the case with the 'meraviglioso', develops around two main parallel lines that can be traced back to the original Latin verb *admiror*. Having already dealt with the classical roots of wonder and admiration in chapter I, we are only going to recall here the two principal meanings of *admiror*: 'to admire' and 'to wonder (at)'. It seems that they are both present in Dante's discourse. However, the interesting point is that 'to wonder (at)' seems gradually to be gaining a negative meaning in the third *cantica* while 'to admire' tends to convey a positive one. This has to be considered despite Dante's choice of the terms 'maraviglia' or 'ammirazione', since the aim of my research is to follow ideas that are often conveyed by more than one word in the vocabulary (as frequently happens in any case). I will return to this point later on, and show how the relationship between the two terms is often conflictual.

In order to do so, let us turn now to Beatrice's reaction to Dante's doubts in the first canto of the *Paradiso*. The pilgrim first utters:

Già contento *requièvi*
di grande ammirazion; ma ora ammiro
com'io trascenda questi corpi levi.
Par., I.97-99

And Beatrice responds, sighing like a mother over a foolish child:

'Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo,
lo tuo salir, se non come d'un rivo

se d'alto monte scende giuso ad imo.

Maraviglia sarebbe in te se, privo
d'impedimento, giù ti fossi assiso,
com'a terra quïete in foco vivo'.

Quinci rivolse inver' lo cielo il viso.

Par., I.136-142

This is the usual pattern of 'doubt – question – answer' so often found in the *Commedia*. The repetition of 'ammirazion' and 'ammiro' within verse 98 is however to be noted because it emphasizes the quick turn from one object of admiration to the other, *in crescendo*. Dante for a moment thinks himself content ('*requïevi'*') in his admiration. But suddenly the perception of a new element moves him away from his state and makes him wonder again, revealing once more his ignorance. We can find a similar repetition of terms in Beatrice's reply, although split into the beginnings of two different tercets: 'non dei più ammirar' (v.136) and 'maraviglia sarebbe in te' (v.139), where Beatrice first picks up the verb that Dante used, 'ammirar', to refer to the agent of the activity, and then shifts to the resulting object of such admiration, 'maraviglia', intended here as 'marvellous thing'.

In the episode of Sordello, I highlighted the lowering of his eyes following sight and wonder; the first canto of the *Paradiso* concludes instead with Beatrice's eyes freely lifted upwards, and a denial of wonder. Sight has acquired a new (higher) vanishing point, on which the pilgrim has to model his own direction of look; as a consequence wonder must give way to comprehension. The first occurrence of 'ammirar' in the *Paradiso* is, therefore, in the negative form, '*non [...]* ammirar' (my italics), and it occurs just after Purgatory, during Dante's and

Beatrice's ascent to Paradise. The same negation is present again just after their landing on the moon, when Beatrice warns Dante in these terms:

certo non ti dovrien punger li strali
d'ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi
vedi che la ragione ha corte l'ali.
Par., II.55-57

'Omai' is in the middle of verse 56, functioning like a pivot in the tercet. It stresses the temporal dimension of the journey and the awareness that is now expected from Dante the character. 'Certo', it is no longer time to follow what the senses suggest. Beatrice's attitude is also in accord with Aquinas' prompt to temper *admiratio* with the virtue of *studiositas* (as I mentioned in I.2). *Studiositas* in this case is turned to directing the look towards the right objects and to allowing the completion of the journey without any going astray.

A clear picture of the attitude against this type of wonder is offered by Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a text dear to Dante. In book four, the main character of the dialogue expresses wonder ('vehementer admiror'; IV.5.15) at the apparent unfairness of fortune and even astonishment at the idea that God is the governor of it ('Minus etenim mirarer, si misceri omnia fortuitis casibus crederem. Nunc stuporem meum deus rector exaggerat'; IV.5.17-19).⁹⁰ Lady Philosophy, assuming a role upon which Beatrice is often modelled in the *Commedia*, explains why one should not feel wonder:

'Nec mirum,' inquit, 'si quid ordinis ignorata ratione temerarium
confusumque credatur. Sed tu quamvis causam tantae

⁹⁰ 'For I should indeed wonder less, if I believed that all were jumbled up by random chances. But as it is, my belief in God as governor increases my astonishment'.

dispositionis ignores, tamen quoniam bonus mundum rector
temperat, recte fieri cuncta ne dubites.⁹¹
Cons., IV.5.22-25

Her warning is reiterated in the immediately following poem:

Cuncta quae rara provehit aetas
Stupetque subitis mobile vulgus,
Cedat inscitiae nubilus error,
Cessent profecto mira videri.⁹²
Cons., IV.5.19-22

She is saying that his mind is confused because he cannot grasp the order of the things *yet*. Should he understand it, he would not wonder at it nor consider it unjust. Having heard this, the fictional Boethius pleads with Lady Philosophy to unfurl for him the causes of hidden things, because, he declares, he is disturbed by the wonder that he feels: 'hoc me miraculum maxime perturbat' (IV.6.4). The feeling of wonder is perceived as a disturbance. This request prompts a lengthy disquisition on free will, fortune and providence that is aimed to dispel his intellectual confusion (and therefore his wonder). The pattern is similar to that of the dialogues between Dante and Beatrice, although wonder is not felt by Dante the character in first person as a disturbance; the pilgrim in the *Commedia* is taught about it being a disturbance by his guides, first by Virgil and now by Beatrice, reflecting rational and theological tenets.

At this stage the question arises as to whether *ammirazione* is legitimate at all in the *Paradiso*. The negation of *ammirazione* encountered in the first canto

⁹¹ 'It is no wonder,' she said, 'if a thing be thought random and confused, when the true ground of its order is unknown. But you, although you do not know the cause of this great ordering, yet, since a good governor does regulate the universe, do not doubt that all things are rightly done'.

⁹² 'All things that time brings forth but rarely, |and unexpected things, astound the excitable mob. |Let the clouded error of ignorance give place, |and straightway let them cease to seem astonishing'.

contrasts with what *is* allowed: 'Quinci rivolse inver' lo cielo il viso' (*Par.*, I.142). It is vain to carry on wondering at things which have their own order in God's will; this attitude would only result in keeping terrestrial ties. Wonder, as Beatrice's look, more than her words, teaches, has now to move to a higher object and become that aspect of wonder that has been defined by Pareyson as *ammirazione*.⁹³ What Beatrice's look promises is in fact a (truly) 'mirabil cosa' (*Par.*, II.25): the moon, first star of the Paradise. We could say, then, following Pareyson, that wonder is not allowed as *meraviglia* but it is as *ammirazione*. Dante's language inherited three terms to express very similar ideas: 'maraviglia', 'stupore' and 'ammirazione'. As I have already underlined, the last two were derived directly from Latin and kept essentially their original meaning and a very similar spelling in Italian; the first one, 'maraviglia' or 'meraviglia', was at the time quite a recent development of the Latin *mirabilia* and carried the meaning of 'wonderful thing' often embodying a reaction to a sensible reality. In the *Commedia*, while 'ammirazione' in a negative construct always refers to human ignorance, the same term in a positive construct refers to the supreme object of admiration, the only one who should retain that title, that is, God. Once human ignorance is swept away, and there will no more be such a thing as human knowledge, no questions will be raised, and enquiring wonder (that belongs to the human world) will move from the terrestrial to the divine.

⁹³ See my Introduction, p. 8: 'una meraviglia che non cessa al cessare della novità, purché non si dimentichi che in tal caso l'atteggiamento contemplativo riesce a fissarsi solo se, a propria giustificazione, vada cercando nell'oggetto pregi singolari o apprezzabili caratteri d'eccellenza, tanto che facilmente l'ammirazione si colora di sensi di venerazione devota'.

I argue that in Dante's *Commedia* is present a tension in the interweaving of *meraviglia* and *ammirazione* that mirrors the tension within the relationship between human love and divine love (body and spirit) in the *Paradiso*. Dante's use of the two terms can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the Latin tradition and the vernacular one. In fact while *ammirazione* carries a more detached meaning, referring generally to spiritual issues, *meraviglia* is at the core of the vernacular tradition of love poetry, which often envisages the woman as connecting earth and heaven, the object of a love that stirs illogical reactions (as in the *Vita nuova*). *Meraviglia*, in sum, bears the more subjective emotional drive that is characteristic of love on earth. Because of this mysterious and illogical aspect of love, human love is considered to be the closest experience to divine love, something that cannot be understood completely by men's rationality (hence the sensual love vocabulary of the Song of Songs and of numerous mystics' writings). The attempt to reconcile the Latin tradition and the vernacular one is also a means of transcending physical love without forgetting it.⁹⁴

Kenelm Foster recalls the two ways through which Dante articulates his intellectual aspiration towards God.⁹⁵ As Dante explains to St John in canto twenty six of the *Paradiso*, his love for God originates both in philosophical arguments (mainly Aristotle, the authority of reason) and in his reading of the Scriptures (the

⁹⁴ With regards to the issue of the role of Beatrice in *Paradiso* there are two contrasting arguments: Lino Pertile argues that Dante leaves behind earthly love, in his article 'Does Stilnovismo go to Heaven?', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini, and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 104-114, but see also his chapter 'Dimenticare Beatrice', in Pertile, *La punta del disio: Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Firenze: Cadmo, 2005), pp. 235-246; on the other hand, Regina Psaki stands for the fusion between bodily and spiritual love in 'Love for Beatrice: Transcending Contradiction in the *Paradiso*', in Barolini, and Storey, *Dante for the New Millennium*, pp. 115-130.

⁹⁵ See Kenelm Foster, 'Dante's vision of God', in *The Two Dantes and Other Studies*, pp. 66-85.

authority of revelation). The relationship between reason and revelation ends in agreement, according to Dante's way of proceeding.⁹⁶ It is interesting to recall Foster's analysis because it brings to light the scholastic distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. *Ratio* is defined as 'mind's discursive procedure from point to point' while *intellectus* is 'mind's capacity to rest, in a point acquired (i.e. understood) in a truth actually apprehended'.⁹⁷ Consequently, Foster continues, the Scholastics would call *ratio* Dante's intellect *in via*, running after one doubt and another in a dialectical movement ('Nasce per quello, a guisa di rampollo, | a piè del vero il dubbio; ed è natura | ch'al sommo pinga noi di collo in collo'; *Par.*, IV.130-132); and they would call *intellectus* the mind's more profound inclination to rest in truth's 'dolce aspetto' (*Par.*, III.3), or that noble faculty that allows the transition from symbols to substance. *Ratio*, in fact, chases doubt after doubt relentlessly; each question enlightens an aspect of truth that in its turn raises other issues waiting for an explanation, in a movement which could carry on indefinitely if it were not for God, the first cause, 'motore immobile'. The alternation of *intellectus* and *ratio* allows Dante to set up the rhythm of the *Paradiso*.

Niccolò Tommaseo writes about 'ammirazione che attende e intende'.⁹⁸ Wonder kindles the intellect, it does not bring the peace sought in the *Paradiso*; it pursues, it does not wait. Wonder belongs to the human world with its tensions, it responds to eyes and heart. It is still present until the end of Dante's poem, as Dante as an individual is still present. But it brings along Beatrice's rebukes like

⁹⁶ See Chiavacci Leonardi's commentary on vv. 25-27.

⁹⁷ Foster, 'Dante's vision of God', p. 74.

⁹⁸ See Tommaseo's commentary on *Purgatorio* XXVI.70. Quoting Augustine's 'ignorantia mater admirationis' (*Conf.*, XIII.21), he differentiates 'maraviglia ch'è stupore' from 'ammirazione che attende e intende'.

something that is not really contemplated as part of the third reign. No wonder can occur where the intellectual process fulfils itself to exhaustion. The blessed souls of the *Paradiso* have the faculty of reading Dante's mind so that the dialectic does not exist as such. Dialectic can only take place amongst peers or it turns into lectures. And Dante is journeying to God, a stage where no discussion is needed. The movement, that until the final vision of the Trinity has been of ascesis, and therefore upwards, at the end becomes circular. According to Aristotle's *Physics*, circular motion is the closest one to stillness.⁹⁹ Thus the interpretation of *intellectus* (Foster) and *ammirazione* (Pareyson) as 'quiet' components rightly describes Dante's last attempt. Dante's final intention follows a quietness that is not to be seen, however, as complete immobility, rather as order and harmony. This echoes Richard of Saint Victor's *Benjamin Major*, an author mentioned as an *auctoritas* both in the *Epistle to Cangrande* (*Ep.*, XIII.28.80) and in the *Paradiso* ('Riccardo, | che a considerar fu più che viro'; *Par.*, X.131-132). Richard of Saint Victor tells about the power of admiration, which is able to elevate the soul above itself (or outside itself, in *ek-stasis*):

Magnitudine admirationis anima humana supra semetipsam ducitur, quando divino lumine irradiata, et in summae pulchritudinis admiratione suspensa, tam vehementi concutitur, ut a suo stato funditus excutitur, et in modum fulgori corruscantis, quanto profundis per despectum sui invisae pulchritudinis respectu, in ima dejicitur, tanto sublimius, tanto celerius per summorum desiderium riverberata, et semetipsam rapta, in sublimia elevatur.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, V. C4 228b 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Benjamin Major*, V.5, in *Patrologiae*, CXCVI, p. 174. 'By greatness of wonder the human soul is led above itself when, as it is irradiated by divine light and suspended in wonder at supreme beauty, it is shaken with such overpowering awe that it is utterly driven out of its state. In the manner of flashing lightning, the more deeply the souls is cast down into the depths by despising itself with regard to that invisible beauty, the more sublimely, the more quickly it is elevated to

Shining with divine light, the human soul is lifted by the greatness of admiration that keeps the soul suspended in rapture until struck as by a lightning. This is what Dante experiences at the end of his journey, even recalling the metaphor of the lightning ('la mia mente fu percossa | da un fulgore'; *Par.*, XXXIII.140-141); that which he sees through Beatrice's eyes at first, and through his own at the very end.

II.5.1 The 'solco' of the *Commedia*

Now that we have considered the development of Dante the character's admiration we must also look at the other kind of admiration at stake, that is, the reader's. The reader's admiration is kindled by the account of some marvels that can be placed within history, since they have literary precedents (as the ones in the *Inferno*), and by some others that are outside of it, that is, without precedent (a man in flesh visiting Paradise *and* writing a poem about it). What the pilgrim sees exists for him only and it is created specifically by Dante; it is something that has never been sung in poetry before and therefore outside of history, although populated by historical and consequently real figures.¹⁰¹ But the admiration that imbues Dante has to fill the reader too, if the poem is to be successful. At the

sublime things when it rebounds by means of the desire of highest things and is carried away above itself.'; English translation in Richard of St Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs. The Mystical Ark. Book Three of the Trinity*, transl. Grover A. Zinn (London: SPCK, 1979), p. 316. The relationship between *admiratio* and suspension is frequent topic in mystical writings; see also Quinn, *Iris Exiled*, pp. 45-47.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of Dante's *Paradiso* and the idea of history see Chiavacci Leonardi, 'Introduzione al canto XXX', in *La Divina Commedia*, III, pp. 817-823.

beginning of the *Paradiso*, Dante the author predicts to his public that the reward for following him in his poetic journey will be greater than the wonder the Argonauts felt at witnessing Jason's enterprise when taming the bulls breathing fire and ploughing the field (episode narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, VII.104):

Que' gloriosi che passarono al Colco
non s'ammiraron come voi farete,
quando Iasón vider fatto bifolco
Par., II.16-18

This is an Ovidian reminiscence too (see *Metamorphoses*, VII.115-120). However, while in Ovid the natives of Colchis wonder at Jason ('mirantur Colchi', v.120), in the *Commedia* Dante makes the Argonauts wonder. As Robert Hollander also suggested, this follows Dante's will to make a connection between the Argonauts and his readers, his 'shipmates'.¹⁰² But in Ovid, Jason's shipmates, the Minyans, are described first as 'stark with fear' ('deriguere metu Minyae', v. 115) and then as shouting aloud, increasing the hero's courage during his marvellous deeds ('Minyae clamoribus augent | adiciuntque animos', v. 120-121). In Dante there is no comradeship; he wants his readers to admire him as a lone hero. Moreover, while Jason's deeds were aided by Medea's magic, Dante's are aided by God's grace only.

Dante will mention the Argonauts again at the end of the *Paradiso* so as to frame his journey in a kind of competition with their feats:

Un punto solo m'è maggior letargo
che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa

¹⁰² See Robert Hollander, 'Dante's Voyage: History as "Shadowy Prefaces"', in *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 192-232. Hollander, comparing Jason's navigation to Ulysses', underlines also that Jason is the man who found the Golden Fleece unlike Ulysses, whose goal can be considered as less certain (and in fact included in the *Inferno* by Dante).

che fé Nettuno ammirar l'ombra d'Argo.
Par., XXXIII.94-96

Dante is approaching the climax of his divine experience. After Saint Bernard's prayer to the Virgin Mary, he can finally clearly see 'la forma universal di questo nodo' (*Par.*, XXXIII.91). This moment brings him greater oblivion than the Argonauts' deed twenty five centuries before. Trying to express the great wonder he is filled with, Dante imagines the amazement of Neptune, god of the Seas, looking upwards from below the water.¹⁰³ Neptune admires the shadow of Argo, first ship that has ever dared to cross the seas. Having recalled the potent mythological figure of Neptune, Dante gives life to it, turning to describe his own suspended mind, a poetic strategy that ends up informing the image of Neptune too.

Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,
mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,
e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa.
Par., XXXIII.97-99

Dante's mind is represented with four adjectives ('sospesa', 'fissa', 'immobile', 'attenta', accesa') sharing a similar meaning and recalling mystical experience as, for example, that seen in Richard of Saint Victor; this contributes to the depiction of *Paradiso's* 'quiet' circular motion. Hollander points out that Dante, in this last figural moment in the poem, takes on two figural identities: 'he is Jason and Neptune. The pilgrim is Jason, on the way to getting the Fleece, the Poet

¹⁰³ As already mentioned in chapter I, a similar image of sea divinities wondering at Argos is in Catullus' poem 64. It is interesting to notice Catullus' use of *monstrum* to name the ship Argos, something worth looking at; a portent even in the eyes of a divinity.

is Neptune, watching him do so'.¹⁰⁴ And if Neptune admires the shadow of Argo, Dante the poet together with the reader admire the very shape of the portent, not only the shadow of the poem, but the neat product of Dante's imagination, not through the rippled waters, but in full light. It is the poet's admiration as we have depicted it that will lead the poem to its conclusion.

The image of the marvel of the Argonauts has always been fecund soil in poetry.¹⁰⁵ As Dronke suggests, Dante develops the conceit of *lethargus* from Boethius and Alan; however, Dante transforms its meaning into something different, almost the opposite.¹⁰⁶ In fact *lethargus* for Boethius' and Alan's characters had meant 'a feverish, dumb stupefaction, an "alienation of the mind", that required the healing therapy of their mentors, Philosophia and Natura, before they could themselves progress' (Dronke, p. 32). Dante's 'maggior letargo' is greater than that: 'it is a divine ailment, a self-forgetfulness in ecstatic wonder, which is not an obstacle to the highest seeing but its very condition' (Dronke, p. 32). Dronke notices that all the symptoms related to what we can call *stupor* have their positive counterparts in Dante's own account.

There are two objects at stake here: the most wondrous object, God, and a wondrous text that tells about it (almost competing with God), which becomes the marvellous in the reader's eyes, the *mirum verum* able to bridge, temporarily, the gap between earth and heaven; a *coincidentia oppositorum* where the opposites are

¹⁰⁴ Hollander, 'Dante's Voyage: History as "Shadowy Prefaces"', p. 230.

¹⁰⁵ Amongst others, see Catullus, *Carmina*, 64.15; Ovid, *Amores*, 2.11.1, in *Amores*, ed. Guy Lee (London: Murray, 1968).

¹⁰⁶ See Dronke, 'The conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*', *Italian Studies*, 49 (1994), 21-39 (pp. 32-33). See also Dronke, 'Boethius, Alan and Dante', in *The Medieval Poet and his World* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984), pp. 431-438.

considered to be so only from the human perspective. While trying to escape the pagan marvellous, Dante cannot avoid producing a new kind of marvellous, the new born Christian one. To persuade the reader to follow him and to trust him, he uses wonder as a rhetorical strategy. He makes a point of presenting *ammirazione* as a sort of aesthetic pleasure (as Aristotle does in the *Poetics*) that draws the reader.¹⁰⁷ The anonymous author of the treatise *On the Sublime* had already discovered this: 'invariably what inspires wonder [*to thaumasion*], with its power of amazing us [the term used is *ekplexei*], always prevails over what is merely convincing and pleasing. For our persuasions are usually under our own control, while these things exercise an irresistible power and mastery, and get the better of every listener' (I. 4). This is exactly the force of Dante's 'oltraggio'.

In building up such a *monstrum*, with extreme refinement both in content and in shape, Dante gives the coordinates of his journey. Dante's utmost concern is in fact his public, as he shows many times through his appeals to the reader. Countless times critics have engaged with the mystical aspect of the *Commedia*.¹⁰⁸ What differentiates Dante from a mystic writer, I believe, is his preoccupation with his story being thought of as true, which reveals his burning desire for a reader. If a medieval man would not have questioned Dante's vision of God, the modern reader may do so. This is without doubt due to the secularization of our culture,

¹⁰⁷ See also Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 195: 'the amazement [...] designates a rhetorical construction – a strategy whereby the pilgrim's own amazement can be renewed for the reader'. See pp. 195-194 for Mazzotta's brief considerations on *admiratio* in the *Paradiso*.

¹⁰⁸ For example, see Edmund G. Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics: A Study of the Mystical Aspect of the 'Divina Commedia' and its Relations with Some of its Mediaeval Sources* (London: J. M. Dent & sons Ltd E. P. Dutton, 1913); Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Manuela Colombo, *Dai mistici a Dante. Il linguaggio dell'ineffabilità* (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1987).

but not only that. Saint Catherine of Siena's *Libro della divina dottrina* (XIV century) does not initiate the same feeling of disbelief. Here is what ser Cristofano di Gano Guidini, public notary and pupil of the saint, reports about her divine experience:

Anco la detta serva di Cristo fece una notabile cosa, cioè uno libro, el quale è di volume d'uno messale; e questo fece tutto essendo ella in astrazione, perduti tutti e' sentimenti, salvo che la lingua. Dio padre parlava in lei, ed ella rispondeva e dimandava, ed ella medesima recitava le parole di Dio Padre dette a lei, e anco le sue medesime, che ella diceva e dimandava a lui; e tutte queste parole erano per volgare...[.]¹⁰⁹

It is clear from this passage that Catherine's experience is very far from Dante's. However, they share the vernacular as means of communication. It is interesting to underline that Catherine's secretary describes her as having lost all the feeling but the language (because God speaks through her). Language rather seems to be Dante's main preoccupation, especially when approaching the final vision. Moreover, Catherine does not write herself but dictates so there is little care for the form, and everything she writes about is the very vision she had, nothing before nor after that. Telling us about his journey to God, but not much about his personal relationship with him once graced by the divine vision, Dante achieves something different: he allows us to retrieve the trail in order to reach God ourselves. He shows us the reality in a different way, displacing real characters and discovering a redeeming path.

¹⁰⁹ Ser Cristofano di Gano Guidini, 'Memorie' [*Archivio Storico Italiano*, 4 (1843) (Firenze: Olschki, 1842), 29-48], quoted in Santa Caterina da Siena, *Libro della divina dottrina*, ed. Matilde Fiorilli, 2nd edn, rev. Santino Caramella (Bari: Laterza, 1928), p. 410.

Since the focus is on the 'cammin di nostra vita', as we have been told in the opening of the *Inferno*, what Dante offers us is a sort of a map to be consulted whenever we happen to be lost during the course of our life:

metter potete ben per l'alto sale
vostro navigio, servando mio solco
dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna eguale.
Par., II.13-15

The 'solco' (the poem) that we have to observe carefully and to follow closely before the water returns level, has the power of making the journey occur over and over again. The poet demands from the reader the same activity implicit in the verb *admiror*, to look attentively with wonder, with which the pilgrim is involved in the last stretch of his journey. The request, as Vellutello notices (commentary on lines 10-15), reiterates Dante's prompting in canto nine of the *Inferno* ('mirate la dottrina', v. 62), with the additional reference to a physical movement. This 'solco' is the material proof that his journey is real; like the 'solco' that modifies the natural aspect of the sea, the craftsmanship of the poem modifies reality. This is the only occurrence of 'solco' in the whole poem and it is introduced as the first rhyme in '-olco', followed by 'Colco' (v.16) and then 'bifolco' (v.18), so it is strictly linked to Jason's enterprise. Dante puts his poetical endeavour in parallel with Jason's labours while ploughing the field.¹¹⁰ This aspect tends not to be present in strictly religious texts and it is what makes the *Commedia* a product of artistry before it is a piece of theology. Poetic knowledge wins over philosophical arguments through the device of the *mirum verum*: the truthful side

¹¹⁰ As John A. Scott recalls, ploughing is a traditional metaphor of writing. See John A. Scott, *Understanding Dante* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. 294.

of the marvellous coincides also with this physical 'solco' at which Dante is pointing. The signposting is made out of his infernal monsters, out of the human emotions of the *Purgatorio*, and out of the elative metaphors of the *Paradiso*.

In the last stretch of his trip Dante is about to fulfil that inborn desire for knowledge, which is proper to every man, as he states in the *Convivio*.¹¹¹ But it is not only a matter of knowing. In fact, as we find in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (I. 981b 6), the characteristic that distinguishes the man who knows from the man who does not know, is being able to teach (*didaskhein*). This is also the same principle behind Plato's myth of the cave, where the freed prisoner goes back to the darkness and releases his chained companions (*Republic*, VII). And that is exactly what Dante does by becoming an author. At stake is the relationship between rational and irrational knowledge, which we will consider as two extremes in the trajectory of a pendulum. I will now illustrate how this is embodied by the depiction of infancy in the *Paradiso*, in order to proceed to the last stage of wonder present in the *Commedia*.

II.6 Reassessing Infancy in the *Paradiso*

The language of the wondrous text has to live up to its object. This is the aim pursued by Dante from the beginning of his poem ('sì che dal fatto il dir non sia

¹¹¹ 'Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio de la Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere', *Conv.*, I.1. The passage, as is well known, refers to the opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

diverso'; *Inf.*, XXXII.12). Chiavacci Leonardi writes about the simplicity and the sublime in the third *cantica* of her *Lettura del Paradiso Dantesco*.¹¹² Frequent anaphora, hendiadys and the generous use of coordination typical of the *Paradiso* are considered by her as 'modi del linguaggio dell'infanzia che splendono nell'ultimo Dante' (p. 25). Chiavacci Leonardi also reminds us that similar characteristics can be found in the Bible, whose stylistic features and repetition of language patterns can set the rhythm of discourse comprehension, its authority and memorability.¹¹³

Infancy has generally been considered to be the cradle of wonder. Since they are ignorant of the world as an adult knows it, children see most things as a novelty and a motive of wonder. I will analyse the role of the frequent references to infancy in the *Paradiso* in order to understand the reasons behind this insistence in the last section of Dante's journey. Why does the poet, at the very end of his work, return to the primal scene of suckling at the mother's breast (*Par.*, XXXIII.106-108)? How does this accord with the Christian conception of adult maturity? Answering these questions will allow me to reveal the ultimate stage of wonder in the *Commedia*.

As we have already seen in this chapter, connections to childhood can be found throughout the poem, mainly in the depiction of the relationship between

¹¹² Chiavacci Leonardi, 'La semplicità e il sublime nella terza cantica', in *Lettura del Paradiso Dantesco* (Milano: Sansoni, 1963), pp. 21-60.

¹¹³ Chiavacci Leonardi, 'La semplicità e il sublime', p. 93. In relation to Dante and the biblical language see also Marzot, *Il linguaggio biblico nella 'Divina Commedia'*, p. 18: 'Lo stile e la lingua delle Sacre Scritture apersero al suo spirito la visione di un felice tempo umano, della integra giovinezza dell'anima: le cose, i fatti spirituali, i quadri della vita storica, il sentimento religioso si traducevano con ingenuità e profondità, nel giro di parole nude, di scarsa aggettivazione, di svelta sintassi'.

Dante and his guides: first of all Virgil, then Beatrice, and finally Saint Bernard. Dante reveres Virgil as a father in the *Inferno* and in the *Purgatorio*. In the Earthly Paradise he calls him both 'patre' and 'matre' (*Purg.*, XXX.50, and XXX.52) . Beatrice too appears to him as a mother in the same canto ('così la madre al figlio par superba'; *Purg.*, XXX.79), although much sterner than Virgil. Saint Bernard is called 'santo padre' in *Paradiso* (XXXII.100). It seems that Dante insists on making his guides coincide with paternal and maternal figures that protect him, spurring him and putting him on the right path, and also helping to rid him of terrestrial wonder.

But we can also find terms belonging to the lexicon of childhood in different moments of the *Commedia*, usually referring to a primitive state of being. I am thinking, for example, of canto thirty two of the *Inferno* ('ché non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo | discriver fondo a tutto l'universo, | né da lingua che chiami mamma o babbo'; vv.7-9) and canto eleven of *Purgatorio* ('Che voce avrai tu più, se vecchia scindi | da te la carne, che se fossi morto | anzi che tu lasciassi il 'pappo' e 'l 'dindi'; vv.103-105). 'Mamma', 'babbo', 'pappo' and 'dindi' belong to baby talk, to that 'idioma | che prima i padri e le madri trastulla' (*Par.*, XV.122-123). They surface when the situation contrasts childhood and old age in terms of language skills, the mastering of which in Dante always symbolizes maturity (as a poet). Letting off infantile prattle is a recurrent theme in the *Commedia* and represents an ambivalent condition until the very end of the *Paradiso*. On the one hand the poet presents it as something to leave behind, on the other hand it is a state to which Dante seems to regress the closer he gets to his aim (the divine vision). The same

can be said about the contrast between the rational and the irrational. The same also could have been said about wonder, before demonstrating the different values of its manifestations. I will shortly demonstrate that the treatment of infancy bears only an apparent paradox. As it was in the case of wonder, it is a matter of isolating different aspects of the issue and attributing to each the appropriate meaning. Both infancy and wonder are part of the same poetic endeavour of mediating between the rational and the irrational.

At this stage we must recall Erich Auerbach's essay on *sermo humilis* in which he identifies the characteristics of Christian rhetoric.

The lowly, or humble, style, is the only medium in which such sublime mysteries can be brought within the reach of men. It constitutes a parallel to the Incarnation, which was also a *humilitas* in the same sense, for men could not have endured the splendour of Christ's divinity.¹¹⁴

The *humilitas* connected to the Incarnation aligns itself with Dante's self depiction as an infant. The fact that Dante depicts himself as a child in need of protection and support naturally agrees with the Christian conception. Senior members of Church are called Fathers because they represent God (the supreme father) on earth and all men are considered children of God. In this regard, see also the *Convivio* :

Dico adunque che per tre cagioni la presenza fa la persona di meno valore ch'ella non è: l'una de le quali è puerizia, non dico d'etate ma d'animo. [...] La prima si può brevemente così ragionare. La maggiore parte de li uomini vivono secondo senso e non secondo ragione, a guisa di pargoli; e questi cotali non conoscono le cose se non semplicemente di fuori, e la loro bontade, la quale a debito fine è ordinata, non veggiono, per ciò

¹¹⁴ Erich Auerbach, 'Sermo Humilis', in *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 27-81 (p. 51).

che hanno chiusi li occhi de la ragione, li quali passano a veder
quello.

Conv., I.4.2-3

The lack of rationality seems to be the main reason why 'puerizia' should be disregarded during a man's life. The *Convivio* undermines the *Vita nuova* on account of its being a 'youthful' work ('fervida e passionata'; *Conv.*, I. 1.16). But this vision seems to be corrected in the *Commedia*, as Dante re-embraces affections in a more mature way.

Augustine fills the two opening books of the *Confessions* with his negative comments on childhood, as: 'et ecce infantia mea olim mortua est et ergo vivo' (*Conf.*, I.4). While confessing his entire life to God he declares his childhood dead a long time before his present life. There is nothing innocent about infancy, the cradle of sins ('istane est innocentia puerilis? Non est, domine, non est, oro te, deus meus'; *Conf.*, I.19). He also comments about the moment in the Gospels when Christ says that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children. Augustine specifies that Christ, praising the little ones, meant to praise their humility not their purity ('humilitatis ergo signum in statura pueritiae, rex noster, probasti, cum aisti: talium est regnum caelorum'; *Conf.*, I.19). According to the Gospel of Matthew, when children are brought to Jesus, he puts his hands on them and prays. The disciples rebuke the children for going near him but Jesus says: 'sinite parvulos, et nolite eos prohibere ad me venire: talium est enim regnum caelorum'(19.14).¹¹⁵ A similar event is reported by Luke (18.15-17) and Mark (10.13-16). On the one hand, children are considered low because of their instinctive approach and their lack of

¹¹⁵ 'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven'.

maturity, to which Christians should aspire. On the other hand, their freshness and trustful attitude is praised.

British psychologist Margaret Knight questions the meaning of Christ's encouraging childlike behaviour. She writes:

Socrates encouraged his young followers to develop towards maturity; Jesus to the level of children. [...] What attracted Jesus towards little children, obviously, was their unquestioning trust in adults, and his ideal was to be surrounded by adults who had a similar trust in him.¹¹⁶

But I would argue that this interpretation of Christ's teaching is too simplistic. Since faith requires a complete conversion of the soul, where baptism is the symbol of new life in Christ, it is no wonder that children are part of the metaphor of spiritual renewal. Nonetheless what is expected is a voluntary and conscious step dictated by mature love, which would not be possible during childhood. William J. Bouwsma recalls that the idea of Christian maturity consists of growing in Christ: 'Christian conversion is thus not, as in the mystery religions, an immediate entrance into a safe harbour but rather, though its direction has been established, the beginning of a voyage into the unknown'.¹¹⁷ Hence the image of the Christian as a pilgrim who that does not escape the difficulties and perils of life but rather accepts them and transforms them into opportunities of spiritual growth. Bouswma in fact speaks of 'indefinite growth' (p.405) whose progress will not find a conclusion in earthly life. As in Dante's journey, faith allows exploration; it is 'freedom not from the constraints of experience – the Stoic ideal –

¹¹⁶ Margaret Knight, *Honest to Man: Christian Ethics Re-Examined* (London: Elek: Pemberton, 1974) pp. 41-42.

¹¹⁷ William James Bouwsma, 'Christian Adulthood', in *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 397-417 (p. 405).

but freedom to grow in and through them' (Bouswma, p. 409). He also highlights that infancy and maturity are not to be considered as separate as in a temporal progression. In fact the Christian metaphor contemplates them as intertwined. Infancy does not cease and does not belong to a historical but rather a figurative time: 'Fundamental to the Christian view of man is [...] an insistence on a process of growth in which the past is not left behind but survives, shapes, and is absorbed into the present' (Bouswma, p. 405).

This could not be better exemplified by the *terza rima*. As John Freccero puts it, the *terza rima* implies the following 'reconciliation of motion':

a forward motion, closed off with a recapitulation that gives to the motion its beginning and end. Any complete appearance of a rhyme ... BA BCB ... incorporates at the same time a recall to the past and a promise of the future that seem to meet in the now of the central rhyme.¹¹⁸

This agrees with the Christian theory of history called recapitulation, a term that translates the original *anakephalaiosis* used by the early Greek fathers of the Church to describe Christ as synthesis of past, present and future.¹¹⁹ Christ was considered to be the recapitulation. We can understand better now what Dante is seeking within infancy.

The more Dante learns the more he feels like a child. The more he feels like a child the more he is given the chance to wonder. From Eden onwards Dante often turns to Beatrice as to a mother 'come parvol che ricorre | sempre colà dove più si confida' (*Par.*, XXII.2-3). And Beatrice speaks to him 'come madre che

¹¹⁸ John Freccero, 'The significance of *Terza Rima*', in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 258-274 (p. 262).

¹¹⁹ For further details on recapitulation see Freccero, pp. 266-271. The same pattern is reinforced by Augustine's *Confessions*.

soccorre|sùbito al figlio palido e anelo' (*Par.*, XXII.4-5). Not only is Dante associated with a child but so are the blessed souls. The metaphor displayed in the following canto uses the image of the infant to disclose the desire felt by the souls towards Mary:

E come fantolin che 'nver' la mamma
tende le braccia, poi che 'l latte prese,
per l'animo che 'nfin di fuor s'infiamma;
ciascun di quei candori in sù si stese
con la sua cima, sì che l'alto affetto
ch'elli avieno a Maria mi fu palese.
Par., XXIII.121-126

Dante stretches his simile until he reaches himself the status of a baby, and in this way he stages his desire to be united with God. God, source of life is the equivalent of the mother's breast for a baby. In canto thirty we find another image of breastfeeding when Dante drinks from the heavenly rose with his eyes:

Non è fantin che si sùbito rua
col volto verso il latte, se si svegli
molto tardato da l'usanza sua,
come fec'io, per far migliori specchi
ancor de li occhi, chinandomi a l'onda
che si deriva perché vi s'immegli[.]
Par., XXX.82-87

If the first image conveys the dependency of the child, the second one communicates the impulsive instinct of suckling in order to portray the pilgrim's fervent desire to feed on the sacred.¹²⁰ There is a third image of breastfeeding in the final canto. The references in fact continue even if Beatrice is no longer there to function as a 'mother'. The feminine image is taken over by the Virgin Mary who

¹²⁰ See Dronke's analysis in 'The conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*', p. 33.

supremely embodies the mystery of the Incarnation. This is how Dante represents himself just before the divine vision:

Omai sarà più corta mia favella,
pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante
che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella.
Par., XXXIII.106-108

There is no stress on the instinctive side of infancy here, rather a sense of 'helplessness', as Dronke defines it.¹²¹ Also, the idea of the poet's mouth full of milk, divine nourishment, excludes naturally the presence of words. It gives an image of receiving rather than giving away, although this comes from the very source of the text; and it is Dante the poet speaking here, not the character.

Despite Augustine's stern account of his childhood (recalled as a period lacking faith), we can find a similar theme in his final praise of the created world, at the end of the *Confessions*: 'Tibi est testimonium tuum sapientiam praestans parvulis: perfice, deus meus, laudem tuam ex ore infantium et lactantium' (*Conf.*, XIII.15).¹²² This image sends us directly to the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus, entering Jerusalem, rebukes the high priests and the scribes for showing disdain to children who are acclaiming him in the temple: 'utique numquam legistis quia ex ore infantium et lactantium perfecisti laudem?' (21.16).¹²³ Christ's expression is a direct quotation from Psalm eight: 'ex ore infantium et lactantium perficisti laudem' (8.2). The verb *perficio* (to bring to an end, to accomplish) appears in all three of the quotations. Dante must have had this in mind when accomplishing his

¹²¹ Dronke, 'The conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*', p. 33.

¹²² 'There is that testimony of thine, which giveth wisdom to the little ones: perfect, O my God, thine own praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings'.

¹²³ 'Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?'

deed. Right at the end of his journey he rejoins the infants' voice. 'Volti' and 'voci puerili' appear in canto thirty two of the *Paradiso* (vv. 46-47) a few verses after Augustine himself was mentioned (v. 35). These children have been graced because of the baptism they have received. It is interesting to juxtapose the presence of these children with the following lines:

Dentro a l'ampiezza di questo reame
casual punto non puote aver sito,
se non come tristizia o sete o fame[.]
Par., XXXII.52-54

The children of the *Paradiso* appear devoid of those instincts that characterize infancy, like hunger ('fame') and thirst ('sete'). All three of the terms in line 54, characterizing wordly desire, denote lack. At the same time, Dante's metaphor gains strength because of its very physicality, that is, breastfeeding, symbol of a baby's most immediate need. How do these two poles harmonize in Dante's last canto? Let us consider the succession of actions in canto thirty two. Immediately after Bernard's explanation of the reasons for the presence of children in *Paradiso*, Dante is invited to gaze at Mary's face, which has the greatest resemblance to Christ's. That is the moment when Dante experiences the most intense admiration so far ('che quantunque io avea visto davante, | di tanta ammirazion non mi sospese'; XXXII.91-92). While he sees Mary he hears an angel singing '*Ave, Maria, gratia plena*' (XXXII.95), the same words that were uttered at the Annunciation. Bernard then reveals that he is Gabriel, 'quelli che portò la palma | giuso a Maria, quando 'l Figliuol di Dio | carcar si volse de la nostra salma' (XXXII.112-114). The palm here mentioned symbolizes Dante's arrival at God (the palm was in fact what pilgrims used to take back home as a symbol of their journey to Jerusalem)

and also his personal achievement as a man and as a poet. This reminds the reader of Beatrice's words to Dante in *Purgatorio*:

voglio anco, e se non scritto, almen dipinto,
che 'l te ne porti dentro a te per quello
che si reca il bordon di palma cinto.
Purg., XXXIII.76-78

As the pilgrim returning from the Holy Land carries a palm, Dante has to carry at least a shadow, a sign of his holy journey (which is 'la passion impressa' of *Par.*, XXXIII.59).¹²⁴ It is the same palm with which people hailed Christ at Jerusalem's gates, five days before Easter.¹²⁵ The palm is taken by Dante as a symbol of the Incarnation and the Resurrection at the same time, as an emblem of Christ's bodily aspect.¹²⁶

The image of the suckling baby is quite common in the Bible. In Isaiah we can find: 'ut sugatis et repleamini ab ubere consolationis ejus, ut mulgeatis et deliciis affluatis ab omnimoda gloria ejus' (Is., 66.11).¹²⁷ So God says: 'quomodo si cui mater blandiatur, ita ego consolabor vos' (Is., 66.13).¹²⁸ Another reference can be found in the Psalms:

Domine, non est exaltatum cor meum, neque elati sunt oculi mei,
neque ambulavi in magnis, neque in mirabilibus super me.

¹²⁴ See Dante's *Vita nuova*, XL, specifically the sonnet 'Deh peregrini che pensosi andate'. Dante's reflection on the condition of the pilgrim as somebody far from his home land helps to delineate his figure in the *Commedia*.

¹²⁵ See John 12.12-13: 'In crastinum autem turba multa quae venerat ad diem festum cum audissent quia venit Iesus Hierosolyma acceperunt ramos palmarum et processerunt obviam ei et clamabant Osanna benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini rex Israel'.

¹²⁶ An eloquent analysis of the role of the resurrected body in Dante can be found in Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005).

¹²⁷ 'That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her [Jerusalem] consolation, that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory'.

¹²⁸ 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you'.

Si non humiliter sentiebam, sed exaltavi animam meam:
sicut ablactatus est super matre sua, ita retributio in anima mea.¹²⁹

Psalms, 131.1-2

This is David singing: 'as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child'. He uses the same image, the suckling baby, but with a different stress. The child nursed by God is weaned, is no longer leaning on the breast. Reading this Psalm helps us to understand the nature of Dante's metaphor. Dante's soul in the *Paradiso* is not 'even' because still breastfed. This hints at the live desire bubbling up in the last section of his poem, leading to God.

The fact that Dante refers to himself as a child is not just because Heaven is said to belong to the humble and the small, as found in the Gospel of Matthew. There is a deeper reason than that: it is Dante's way of participating in the mystery of Creation and Incarnation. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells Nicodemus: 'Non mireris quia dixi tibi oportet vos nasci denuo' (3.7).¹³⁰ 'Non mireris' is the equivalent of the expression often put by Dante in the mouth of Beatrice: 'non ammirar'. The source of the fictional authority of Beatrice's words is in fact divine. The point made is similar: there should be no wonder when one is aware that everything is flowing according to a preordained plan. Intellectual wonder undermines faith.

This rebirth carries forth one of the main characteristics of the child, that is, his being in need. As one can read in Isaiah:

¹²⁹ 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child'.

¹³⁰ 'Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again'.

Dominus dedit mihi linguam eruditam, ut sciam sustentare eum
qui lassus est verbo. Erigit mane, mane erigit mihi aurem, ut
audiam quasi magistrum. Dominus Deus aperuit mihi aurem, *ego
autem non contradico; retrorsum non abii.*

The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue. So that I may know
how to reply to the wearied he provides me with speech. Each
morning he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple. The Lord
has opened my ear. For my part, *I made no resistance*, neither did I
turn away.

Isaiah, 50.4-5 (my italics)

As a child, or a disciple, the Christian must make no resistance to God's will.
Dante, during his journey, has acquired the status of a disciple whose wish
operates in harmony with God's. What can be seen as weakness is in fact the
power of yielding to the universal motion. The lack of rationality to which the
Convivio (I.4) alludes allows exactly this pliable and docile condition, necessary
for men to welcome Christ and to follow him. The same happens with Dante, who,
in fact, concludes his poem with the much celebrated lines:

ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.
Par., XXXIII.143-145

These verses suggest a reintegration with the cosmos, which is symbolized by
Mary's womb, mediator between the human and the divine.

As the pilgrim sees the final circle of light, its background of a human
figure, Dante seems to set the image of the infant as a background to his approach
to God through Mary. Not by chance, the opening of canto thirty three focuses on
the relationship between Mary and Christ as 'figlia' and 'figlio'. These are the first
lines of the last canto of *Paradiso*, uttered by Bernard:

Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,
umile e alta più che creatura,
termine fisso d'eterno consiglio[.]
Par., XXXIII.1-3

The rhyme 'figlio' | 'consiglio' can be also found in Iacopone da Todi's 'Donna de Paradiso', a poem which beautifully portrays the motherly reaction of Mary facing the news of her son's arrest:

O figlio, figlio, figlio,
figlio amoroso giglio!
figlio, chi dà consiglio
al cor mio angustiato?¹³¹
vv. 40-43

Moreover, Iacopone's poem mentions Christ's infant condition: 'Figlio, perché t'ascundi | al petto o' si' lattato?' (vv. 46-47). Making a parallel between Dante's Mary, 'termine fisso d'eterno consiglio', and Iacopone's Mary pleading for a 'consiglio' from her son, underlines the role Dante gives to 'his' Mary. As Dronke has noticed, Dante presents an omnipotent figure of the Virgin.¹³² This functions by focussing on her body as a bridge between two worlds, a fusion of flesh and spirit. Through the figure of Mary, symbol of the recognition of a mystery, Dante underlines the value of knowledge freed from rational ties. Mary represents the compensation of the irrational. As Steven Botterill highlights, the question that Mary addresses to the angel at the annunciation as reported by Luke's Gospel is: 'Qomodo fiet istud' (L.34). 'How shall this be?'.¹³³ This moment of wonder, where

¹³¹ Contini, ed., *Poeti del duecento*, II, pp. 119-124.

¹³² Dronke, 'The Conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*'; see especially pp. 22-25 with regards to the figure of Mary.

¹³³ See Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, pp. 161-162.

the credible and the incredible coexist, denotes Dante's attitude throughout his journey.

The rebirth Dante is going through is powerfully represented by Mary's womb: 'nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore, | per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace | così è germinato questo fiore' (*Par.*, XXXIII.7-9). Regressing to the infant condition allows Dante to take part in the mystery of the Incarnation, the starting point of the Christian life. Constant references to bodily aspects through the allusions to infancy, the 'blossom' of life, are therefore functional: they build the final merging between a fleshly man, Dante, and his God, as the following passage shows.¹³⁴

Io credo, per l'acume ch'io sofferesi
del vivo raggio, ch'i' sarei smarrito,
se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi.
E' mi ricorda ch'io fui più ardito
per questo a sostener, tanto ch'i' giunsi
l'aspetto mio col valore infinito.
Par., XXXIII.76-81

Dante's stare is now tied to its object as a baby to his creator, free of any distraction or resistance. He is reborn in Christ. His vision ceases but the passion remains as evidence of his achievement as a man.

It is also worth noticing that a few lines ahead in this canto 'fante' rhymes with 'sembiante':

Omai sarà più corta mia favella,
pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante
che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella.

¹³⁴ See Manuele Gragnolati, 'Nostalgia in Heaven: Embraces, Affection and Identity in the "Commedia"', in *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, ed. John C. Barnes, and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), pp. 117-138. The essay highlights the role of the fleshly body in *Paradiso*, while arguing that the *Commedia* 'conveys a sense that the aerial body is not enough, that a shade without its real body – made of flesh, not of air – is imperfect' (p. 137). This reinforces the importance of the connection between Dante and Christ through infancy (both physically and symbolically).

Non perché più ch'un semplice sembiante
fosse nel vivo lume ch'io mirava[.]
Par., XXXIII.106-110

The rhyme stresses the link between Dante's state ('fante') and the divine appearance ('sembiante') and, therefore, once again, the value given to the close relationship between infancy and the divine during the most poignant moment of the account. Also, 'fante' comes from the Latin *fans*, past participle of *fari* which means 'to speak'. And the position of 'favella' and 'fante', both at the end of the verse, stresses the role of the language of infancy in *Paradiso*. As Gary Cestaro shows in his study *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body*, the language of infancy is the first one the baby learns, and was generally considered as belonging to the maternal sphere.¹³⁵ The opposite phase of language apprehension is that of the learning of grammar (*Grammatica*): 'Lady Grammar took young boys from the breasts of their mothers and nurses and set them on the road to adult society' (Cestaro, p. 48). And so reads the *Convivio*: 'onde, sì come, nato, tosto lo figlio a la tetta de la madre s'apprende, così, tosto come in esso alcuno lume d'animo appare, si dee volgere a la correzione del padre, e lo padre lui ammaestrare' (IV. 24,14). Dante the character has been regressing to the stage of infancy in order to be picked and taught again from the principle by 'The' father. The aim of his preceding guides was to accustom him to obedience and humble training so that he could become the child of God.

¹³⁵ Cf. Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). See especially chapter I for a discussion on *Grammatica* in the Middle Ages and pp. 145-166 for Cestaro's interpretation of the pilgrim as *infans/puer* in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.

Another child-like character is Saint Francis in canto eleven, who is referred to as 'pusillo' (*fanciullo*):

Quando a colui ch'a tanto ben sortillo
piacque di trarlo suso a la mercede
ch'el meritò nel suo farsi pusillo[.]
Par., XI.109-111

Francis is the one who 'da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo' (*Par.*, XI.107), where 'l'ultimo sigillo' means the stigmata. He represents somebody whose life has followed closely Christ's example (until the mystical marriage with Poverty, already Christ's spouse, to which Dante alludes at v. 64) and who often in his writings has referred to himself as 'parvulus'.¹³⁶ Francis is also compared by Dante to the sun ('nacque al mondo un sole'; *Par.*, XI.50), the usual divine attribute. For this reason his life is considered as 'mirabil' (*Par.*, XI.95). The adjective 'mirabil' starts appearing only in the *Purgatorio* (XXX.117) and it is present seven times in the *Paradiso*, of which occurrences, two refer to Francis' 'mirabil vita' (XI.95 and XIII.32) at the end of a verse. One of the two occurrences of 'mirabile' is found in Saint Benedict's definition of God's miracles in assisting man: 'mirabile a veder' (*Par.*, XXII.96).¹³⁷ The Homeric formula 'thauma idesthai' here supersedes the Virgilian 'mirabile dictu', in a *cantica* entirely focussed on the role of sight, from its

¹³⁶ Often: 'Ego frater Franciscus parvulus' (Testamentum sancti Francisci, 11; Ultima voluntas S. Clarae scripta, 1) in *Regula et testamentum seraphici patris nostri s. Francisci* (Franciscans; Antuerpiae: Ex Officina Plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, 1664). Ugo Cosmo suggests that 'il perfetto cattolico si presentava a lui [Dante] come l'uomo ch' avesse potuto alla scienza di frate Tommaso accoppiare l'anima, la serafica anima di san Francesco d'Assisi'; 'Le mistiche nozze di frate Francesco con madonna Povertà', *Il giornale dantesco*, 6 (1898), 97-118 (p.117).

¹³⁷ The first occurrence of 'mirabile' describes the works of saint Dominic: 'mirabile frutto' (*Par.*, XII.65).

very opening, where sight is presented as source of movement, to its conclusion, where such movement coincides with God's will.¹³⁸

The close ties between wonder and sight are made apparent in Francis' canto, with the addition of one new element:

La lor concordia e i lor lieti sembianti,
amore e maraviglia e dolce sguardo
facieno esser cagion di pensieri santi[.]
Par., XI.76-78

Introducing Francesco and Povertà as two lovers (like Christ and Poverty), Dante establishes a coordination between 'amore', 'maraviglia', and 'dolce sguardo', which are here grouped together for the first time. The polysyndeton in line 77 accords wonder with love and the sweet look that Dante's *Paradiso* feeds on. 'Amore e meraviglia e dolce sguardo' merge in a hendecasyllable, whose vowels (a-o-e-e-a-a-i-i-a-e-o-e-a-o) alternate, giving life to an extremely melodious verse. All these three elements are characterized by expressing ties. Love, wonder, and look, are means of reducing the distance between subject and object: love through feelings or passions; wonder through sight, thought, and emotions; look through a physical activity. It is evident that wonder is the intermediary between the mental and the physical sphere, and it is no coincidence that it occupies a median position, not only in relation to 'amore' and 'dolce sguardo' but also with regards to the hendecasyllable itself; 'maraviglia' in fact holds the fourth, the fifth, the

¹³⁸ I have mentioned the two expressions in chapter II.2 when discussing Geryon, who in the *Inferno* is described as 'figura [...] maravigliosa'. The adjective 'maraviglioso' is never present in the *Purgatorio* nor in the *Paradiso*. In this case the term used to indicate the marvels of Paradise is 'mirabile'. This underlines the different nature of the wonder experienced in the *cantiche*.

sixth and the seventh syllables, carrying the stress on the sixth, which is central to the metric progression (the first stress being on 'a-móre' – second syllable).

On one side, we have Francis the little one. On the other side, this little one shares with his spouse Poverty love, wonder and sweet looks. The introduction of the character of Francis is important because it links infancy and wonder, illustrating wonder under love's light. Guittone d'Arezzo had already associated Saint Francis with *meraviglia* in his *canzone* 38, where the hendecasyllable 'Merabel meraviglia o cosa nuova | qual è tua pare?' (v.75) resembles closely Dante's (v. 77).¹³⁹ The difference between the Franciscan conception of love and Dante's lies in the thomistic idea, embraced by Dante, according to which love follows knowledge, not *vice versa*.¹⁴⁰ This can be seen in canto thirty three when Dante explains the beatitude of the angels: 'quinci si può veder come si fonda | l'esser beato ne l'atto che vede, | non in quell ch'ama, che poscia seconda; [...]' (*Par.*, XXVIII.109-11). However vv. 77-78 suggest a further (circular) movement that from 'amore' leads again to 'pensieri santi'.

Wonder is aligned with love also because they are both a form of desire, which is a stretching towards something not yet possessed. Saying that love ties the universe together means that the universe needs a tie and would be lost otherwise; saying that love is necessary to reach God means God and men are separated. Elena Lombardi points out that 'the main objective of Dante's theory

¹³⁹ *Le rime di Guittone d'Arezzo*, p.103.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *S.T.*, Ia IIae, q3 a4; and also St. Bonaventure, *Soliloquium* IV.5.27 (*Opera omnia* VIII): 'tanto gaudebunt quantum amabunt; tantum amabunt, quantum cognoscent' quoted by Chiavacci Leonardi's commentary on vv. 40-42. See also *Paradiso*, XIV.40-2.

and practice of language is to reconcile the two extremes' and 'poetry emerges as an antidote to the irremediable deterioration of human language after the Fall'.¹⁴¹

As in *philosophia*, which has been named after a desire to know (not only *sophia* but *philo-sophia*), having men lose the knowledge itself, love is a tension that joins two separated items, as wonder does. Thinking about desire, love and wonder, therefore, involves presence but also absence. Also, love, in classical poetry, used to be depicted as a child (Cupid). Although one of Dante's aims is to distance himself from pagan elements and to ground them in the Christian doctrine, it is interesting to notice that some of the main elements that compound the last picture of Dante's *Paradiso* can be veiledly put in a parallel with the classical personification of love. The theme is brought up by Dante in the *Vita nuova* when the poet clarifies his representation of love as a real character (a man) in the sonnet *Io mi senti' svegliar dentro a lo core* (V.N., XXIV.7). He quotes Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* in which the poet appeals to Love: 'puer es' (v. 23).¹⁴² Dante was certainly aware of this parallel, which reinforces my argument. Reassessing infancy in the *Paradiso* involves linking infancy with Christian love. The parallel between infancy and love (the mystery of the Incarnation) contributes to the drawing of that circle whose perfection Dante is enchanted by at the end of his

¹⁴¹ Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, The Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 122.

¹⁴² Ovid, *The Art of Love, and Other Poems*, transl. John Henry Mozley, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). Cf. also Tasso's 'Epilogo' of *Aminta* ('Amor Fuggitivo') in Torquato Tasso, *Opere*, 5 vols, ed. Bruno Maier (Milano: Rizzoli, 1963), I.2. The vocabulary that Tasso deploys for Venus' description of her son, Love, is Dantesque, especially when the poet compares Amore to a child: 'con lingua che da 'l latte | par che si discompagni | dolcemente favella, ed i cari detti | forma tronchi e imperfetti' (vv. 103-5).

flight. Dante the pilgrim swims upstream until he reaches Christ, a baby, as we all were once, and so a man amid men.

The importance of the fact that wonder is found depicted side by side with love becomes clearer if we go back to the function attributed to wonder by Plato and Aristotle, that is, at the origin of philosophy. Philosophy, the love of knowledge (in this case at its supreme stage, as love of God's knowledge), has been represented by Dante as antecedent to Christian love, which ties the universe together and keeps burning although perpetually satisfied.¹⁴³ The movement portrayed is circular: wonder (as 'desire to know') has spurred the pursuit of knowledge; knowledge has led us up to love; love is aligned with wonder, although, as it happens for the individual, we could say that the wonder at stake in the *Paradiso* has gone through an evolution (or re-birth).¹⁴⁴ The 'admirative' component of wonder is in fact now more dominant than the inquisitive one, even though the persistence of the latter in this last *cantica* attributes an ambivalence to wonder. But admiration, although it differs in intensity, has the same components of wonder, or *meraviglia*, as we also found in Richard of Saint Victor. It is still that mixture of light and darkness that inquisitive wonder has been depicted as, because it is still a very human experience, as Dante underlines in his *Commedia*, even if caused by grace. Human senses are still involved, being the only gate to knowledge.

¹⁴³ Regarding the discussion about the final shape of desire in the *Paradiso* see Lino Pertile, *La punta del disio*; 'Il moto è sempre insomma segno di desiderio', as Pertile acknowledges (p. 178). This is rooted in St Bernard of Clairvaux, according to whom if the soul ceases to desire its movement towards God, God will withdraw his gift of 'pulling' the souls towards himself. Pertile also quotes St Bernard's 'Sermo' XXI (*Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*).

¹⁴⁴ 'Ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle, | sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa' (*Par.*, XXXIII.143-145) well expresses the interlocking of these three elements: 'amor', 'disio' and 'velle'.

As I have already mentioned in I.2, *admiratio* was considered by Aquinas as belonging to Christ, not to God. In the *Purgatorio* Dante refers to God as ‘colui che mai non vide cosa nova’ (X.94), therefore, also that which cannot experience wonder, which is rather born out of the perception of a novelty. The gospel of Matthew finds Christ marvelling while listening to the centurion’s expression of faith in Him: ‘audiens iesu verba centurionis miratus est’ (8.10). ‘Miratus est’ is the translation of the Greek ‘ethaumasen’.¹⁴⁵ This passage has been used by Aquinas to demonstrate Christ’s human nature; if Christ marvelled one must suppose the presence of human mind, which, unlike God, is capable of wondering.

Oportet igitur, praeter divinitatem verbi et animam sensitivam, in christo aliquid ponere secundum quod admiration ei competere posit, scilicet mentem humanam.¹⁴⁶

Dante’s path to God is a path of wonder seen in its different phases: from the marvellous to *admiratio*. The *admiratio* that Dante experiences during this last stage, which even characterizes Christ, cannot help but root his experience in humanity. This happens despite Virgil’s and Beatrice’s rebukes that Dante, showing weaknesses, hindered his learning all along the way, paralleling their attempt to inhibit wonder. Guidance is sought to moderate and control the excesses of human passions, nonetheless at the end of the journey the pilgrim is still a man who wonders. Until the very end of his journey, Dante’s mind is still inquiring about the vision (‘vista nova’; *Par.*, XXXIII.136) that appears to him:

¹⁴⁵ *The Greek New Testament with Greek-English Dictionary*, ed. Kurt Aland [et al.], 4th rev. edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001).

¹⁴⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV.33,5, in *S. Thomae Opera omnia*, ed. Roberto Busa, 7 vols (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), II.

veder voleva come si convenne
l'imago al cerchio e come vi s'indova[.]
Par., XXXIII.137-138

He soon realizes that his mind is impotent before the divine: 'ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne' (XXXIII.139). Like the tide of the Euripus, reason, which compounds one side of wonder, yields to the other side of it: love (*caritas*, or *agape*). Divine grace strikes the pilgrim like a lightning, completing his intellectual endeavour. It is the great miracle. It is the extended time in which *ammirazione* dwells. With the fading of the rational side of wonder, the poem also ends, leaving behind that 'passione impressa' (XXXIII.59) that acts like the wake of a ship and will allow Dante the poet to recreate literally his experience.

What is reassuring in Dante's vision is precisely the presence of 'la nostra effigie' within the divine circle. All the 'travaglio' Dante goes through is rewarded by man having a place within glory, that is, in the future.¹⁴⁷ I would like to quote Dronke's commentary on the conclusion of the *Paradiso* (XXXIII. 124-32):

That it retains unremitting power is due to the strength of the two impulses which are held in tension: the *via negativa*, that sees no image as worthy, or even possible, in the face of the mystery of how the divine and the human can be joined, and the anthropocentric impulse, the keen optimism that reaches towards the fullest cognition of the divine only to find there an effigy of the human. If that had not been there, as the ultimate perception of the quest, could a human quest for the 'trans-human' ever avoid delusion?¹⁴⁸

This makes me think of Hegel's definition of the sublime, as given in his *Aesthetics*: 'the sublime in general is the attempt to express the infinite, without finding in the

¹⁴⁷ I use a Dantesque term following the verb 'travagliare' found in *Inf.*, XXXIV.91, *Purg.*, XXI.4, *Par.*, XXXIII.114.

¹⁴⁸ Dronke, 'The conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*', p. 35.

sphere of phenomena an object which proves adequate for this representation'.¹⁴⁹ Of course Dante's sublime, *if* we can talk about it in these terms, is at the opposite pole of the discussion about the sublime in the eighteenth century, which focuses rather on the feeling of fear and horror, originating from the relationship between the finite and the infinite.¹⁵⁰ And it also contrasts with the postmodern sublime, as theorized by Lyotard, in the spirit of the refusal of artistic 'pacification'.¹⁵¹ Still, Dante's proposal is not devoid of trouble nor does it try to escape the complexity of reality. His faith in humanity has saved him from a setback while allowing him to respect the enigma behind creation. Once the Sybil's leaves are scattered to the wind, there is no need of a bridge between the two worlds: Dante can partake of the divinity himself, and as a man finds the divine element of his own nature.¹⁵² From wonder to wonder Dante has taken us up to the most sublime reality he could ever contemplate. Wonder initiated his enterprise and wonder is found at the very end of it, embodied in the image of a new born baby.

¹⁴⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, transl. Thomas Malcolm Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, II.2, p. 363.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion on Dante's sublime see Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime*, pp. 250-278.

¹⁵¹ Jean François Lyotard, *Leçons sur l'analytique du sublime: Kant, 'Critique de la faculté de juger'* 23-29 (Paris: Galilée, 1991).

¹⁵² 'Così la neve al sol si disigilla; | così al vento ne le foglie levi | si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla' (*Par.*, XXXIII.64-66).

III

ARIOSTO'S VEIL

III.1. Weaving: The Fabric of the *Furioso*

As the table of contents prefacing this thesis makes clear, the chapter on Ariosto has a different structure compared to the chapter on Dante. Studying wonder in the *Commedia* led me to an approach that inevitably followed the pace of Dante's journey. Wonder developed according to the three stages of Dante's acquisition of awareness and I believe it was important to hold on to this gradual movement. The type of wonder found in the *Commedia* is closely derived from the classical pattern of knowledge. The only variation is in its Christian interpretation, which directs wonder towards different aims compared to pre-Christian authors. I showed three phases of wonder: the *meraviglioso* associated with the ignorance of the *Inferno*; the articulation of wonder's redemptive power in the *Purgatorio*; the ambiguity of the relationship between the rational side of wonder and the contemplative progression of *ammirazione* in the *Paradiso*, articulated beyond reason. Through the analysis of the appearance of these different facets of wonder in the *Commedia* we obtained a composite picture which helped us to understand the nature of wonder. The *Commedia* was revealed to be an essential text for any

discourse on *meraviglia*, a topic surprisingly neglected by centuries of critical analyses of Dante.

With this in mind we can proceed to the study of wonder in Ariosto. Having found the widest possible span of occurrences of wonder in the *Commedia*, I wanted to challenge the resulting picture. My aim is in fact to suggest a wider area of analysis and to avoid running after the same image over and over again in different historical periods with the risk of making uniform and flattening the richness of the texts observed. In order to do so I chose to look at wonder in a sixteenth century text, the *Orlando furioso*, which nonetheless proved to have, and to intend to have, several elements in common with the *Commedia* (and undoubtedly also several divergences). Both engage in some sort of personal journey across human behaviours and inconstancies; both have a communal aspect that allows each poem to thrive in a realistic depiction of human society; both have an omniscient narrator – however different they may be in function – guiding the reader through the meanders of the travelling. Above all, both texts have a wide-ranging scope: they aim to offer an ambitious and nuanced interpretation of life in its successes and in its limitations, each offering different modes of redemption. As we will see, this results in their engagement with universal themes, traversing different times and cultures, which I will gradually isolate in this chapter.

The divergence that comes across is mainly due to the difference in subject matter from Dante to Ariosto. Ariosto's subject matter is not presented as marvellous, unlike Dante's (which is, however, historically marvellous, as we have

seen), but as representing reality in its oscillation between the rational and the irrational, a movement that sometimes produces marvellous swings. In this context, Federico Chabod's comment on the Middle Ages is revealing : ' [nel Medioevo] se "realistico" è il particolare, non realistica è la concezione d'insieme, dal momento che il primo motore della vita e della storia umana è posto fuori dal mondo'.¹ What Ariosto purportedly produces is a real picture of the world 'below the moon' (apart from a brief but meaningful excursion *on* it), which was that portion of the universe that in Aristotle's thought was said to be changeable, corruptible, as opposed to the unchangeable world above the moon where Dante sets the climax to his poem.² As Chabod reminds us, the relationship between God and man was very variable at the end of the Quattrocento.³ After exalting man's excellence, the closing of the fifteenth century witnesses a social and historical crisis that intensifies the need for a morality. At the same time, studies on nature and its specific laws (no longer just God's laws) had started proliferating. The problem at stake was then how to conciliate the different sides of the world: God, nature and man. Chabod underlines that the answer is never clear and definitive, but it oscillates differently from one pole to the other for each individual. He identifies these two poles with 'essere' and 'dover essere'. 'Essere' is man's individuality and freedom, with the choice of distancing himself from God as perceived in society (Chabod quotes the example of the arts reclaiming independence from religion); 'dover essere' is still strictly connected to divine

¹ Federico Chabod, *Scritti sul Rinascimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1967), p. 92.

² See especially Aristotle, *On the Universe*, I.2.392a 1.

³ See Chabod, *Scritti*, pp. 100-102, where the author (whose position I am now illustrating) sketches the problematic relationship between Providence, Fortuna, and man.

precepts and their consequences (sin and punishment).⁴ Sometimes Fortuna interposes between the two, sometimes as God's helper and sometimes as the blind pagan force that is above anybody's control. Ariosto's poem stages these cultural tensions and develops the figure of an author ironically passing from 'essere' to 'dover essere', and back again. A closer look reveals that this also happens to be the realm of Iris, with the difference that the perception of the distance between the human and the divine worlds is intensified in comparison to the Middle Ages.

The *Orlando furioso* does not offer the same landscape of wonder that we identified in chapter II, because it does not conform to any philosophical discourse in the way the *Commedia* does. As a consequence, my discussion of the *Furioso* is organized thematically according to 'clusters' of wonder that represent the various ways wonder makes its appearance in the text. Ariosto's reader is invested with quite a central role in the interpretation of the poem and has to follow closely the intricacy of the author's threads to trace back the unity of the narration. Much of the work is to be done on the surface of the poem, that which Dante would call 'veil' and Ariosto 'woof'. But while for Dante the veil was there to be finally lifted, for Ariosto it symbolizes the core of his poetic discourse. This is why I am first going to discuss the role of such a veil and the composition of its fabric (III.1). I will then move on to the level of the story and discuss the role of certain marvellous elements which I will isolate as central to Ariosto's speculative

⁴ 'L'essere l'Alberti e il Machiavelli lo hanno piantato, ciascuno nel campo suo, solidamente sulla terra; ma il *dover essere*, quando anche l'Alberti e lo stesso Machiavelli ci pensano, è ancor sempre collegato con la norma religiosa. Mondo di moralità e mondo religioso fanno tutt'uno; l'etica conclude nella teologia'; Chabod, *Scritti*, p. 101.

discourse (III.2). To conclude, I will look at the lunar sequence as embracing a synthesis of the author's *ars poetica* and also as the pivot of the story itself (III.3).

III.1.1 A Weave Marvellous to Behold

Ariosto's veil can be understood as an affluence of words that represent, adorn, and hide reality. Its role is in fact manifold: a veil separates one object from the other, it is a symbol of such separation, but it can also represent a decoration adding a subjective dimension to the object, which, under the veil, appears and disappears at the same time. For such qualities, the veil has always been a fertile metaphor. In the Bible, the beautifully decorated veil of the temple functions as a separation of the holy area (the *sancta sanctorum*; see Exodus, 26.31-37), where only the high priest is allowed once a year, from the access area open to common priests and worshippers. After Christ's death on the cross, according to the Gospel of Mark and to the Gospel of Matthew, the temple veil was torn; this fact has been interpreted as a revelation of Christ's embodiment of both human and divine nature.⁵ The veil is considered by Christian religion as a symbol of the original sin, and often of the human body itself. It is the materialization of the invisible separation between man and God, which happened after the Fall. The revelation

⁵ Matthew, 27.51; Mark, 15.38. See amongst others Harry L. Chronis, 'The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37-39', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 101. 1 (March 1982), 97-114 : 'For Mark, the rending of the temple veil (15:38) is not simply an event signifying divine disqualification of the temple and its cultus. It also functions at an important level in the drama as interpretative metaphor, phrased in cultic idiom, for both the self sacrificial character and the self-revelatory force of Jesus' death', p. 114; 'In the "rending" of his flesh, Jesus "unveils" his divine identity', p. 113.

contained in the last book of the Bible aims literally to un-veil divine mysteries allowing a direct communication between God and man. Still, its message is shaped allegorically and is perceived by men as a further veil: veiled communication is again the only possible communication between man and God *in this life*.

On this is built the whole of Dante's *Commedia*, whose allegorical verses are in fact referred to as 'velame' ('mirate la dottrina che s'asconde | sotto 'l velame de li versi strani'; *Inf.*, IX.62-63), and 'velo' ('Aguzza qui, lettor, ben li occhi al vero, | ché 'l velo è ora ben tanto sottile, | certo che 'l trapassar dentro è leggero'; *Purg.*, VIII.19-21). Poetry, presenting itself as a veil, points at its terrestrial dimension and therefore at its limits. Nonetheless these very limits are the only way of representing and therefore revealing man's face, which is also God's. In the case of Dante in fact, revealing man's face coincides with finding God through Christ, human and divine, who appears in the centre of the *Paradiso*'s final vision: 'Quella circolazion [...] | [...] | dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso, | mi parve pinta de la nostra effige' (*Par.*, XXXIII.127; 130-131).⁶ This path involves an awareness of the self followed first by contrition, and finally by a divine bestowal. Dante's poetry reveals and celebrates man's ability (and need) to merge with the divine, thanks to an awareness of one's limitations. And what does Ariosto's poetry veil and reveal? What does its weave represent?

First of all, the role of the narrator in the *Furioso* is to unveil the value of the terrestrial sphere not only as a transitory moment but in its complex ethical

⁶ A similar image is in Ezekiel, 1.1-9 where the visionary iris-like image contains human features.

bearing. The narrator is he who *reads* reality and covers it with its interpretative veil to grant it, paradoxically, lucidity and meaningfulness. Such a veil is not destined to be lifted, as it is in Dante's case, because there is no doctrine *below*; the teaching is intrinsic to it. The veil is what we make of reality and it is all we can access. The relevance of human experience in its interpretative activity is absolute. The fact that reality itself is considered as a text puts truth and interpretation on the same level, and, therefore, also literature, which is the discourse built around it, the story (*historia*) of life without which there can be no comprehension. Ariosto seems to be claiming back poetry's original gnoseological scope, before the ultimate separation of poetry and philosophy that occurred during the passage from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance when philosophy was attributed the privilege of dealing with the truth, and poetry was begun to be perceived mainly as entertainment. At the same time, he is not advocating for a coincidence between poetry and philosophy. As is clear from the sixth *Satira*, he sees philosophers' truth as separated from experience and therefore not able to fulfil the leading role which it claims.

What is offered by the *Furioso*, framed by the *topoi* belonging to the chivalric romance, is a lucid picture of a reality which has in itself the key to understanding itself but cannot always make use of it due to personal, social and historical circumstances. Here comes literature, side by side with life, not as a mirror, but rather as an interpretative tool; a trusted companion to be listened to, weaving its interpretation on a parallel level and offering it to him who is willing to 'read'. In this way life is tied together and not let loose. Dante's vision illustrates a universal

reality bound by love, coinciding with God and divine scripture ('legato con amore in un volume, |ciò che per l'universo si squaderna: |sustanze e accidenti e lor costume'; *Par.*, XXXIII.86-88). The idea of the universe as a volume comes from the Bible (Revelation, 6.14) and returns in Augustine (*Confessions*, XIII.15). Dante's words 'compete' or follow the example set by the divine scripture in binding reality. The metaphor is picked up also by Petrarch who refers to poetic language as a 'velo' covering reality, a pleasurable layer that attracts readers who are then encouraged to lift it and reach the core issues at stake.⁷ Ariosto starts binding his own portion of life with a humanistic faith in his own potentiality as a 'maker' of terrestrial things.

This chapter opens by looking at hints that can reveal gnoseological overtones in the *Furioso*, to which I will later connect the discourse on wonder. Such tones can be found in the texture of the poem and in the tambour-lace which makes it so attractive to the reader. Given the frequency of the metaphor of weaving in the *Furioso*, mostly referring to the narrator's activity, I have felt the urgency of reflecting on what Ariosto seems to be pointing at several times. The space of weaving is a space of authorial presence. It is important for my investigation because it is an expression of Ariosto's poetics. The time of wonder coincides with the moment when an author decides upon his creation and directs

⁷ See Petrarch, *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (henceforth *RVF*) XI.1,12; CCCLII.10, in Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964). See also *L'Africa*, IX.92-103, when Ennius tells Scipio about poets' duties towards truth: 'Scripturum iecisse prius firmissima veri | fundamenta decet, quibus inde innixus amena | et varia sub nube potest abscondere se se, | lectori longum cumulans placidumque laborem, | quesitu asperior quo sit sententia, verum | dulcior inventu. Quicquid labor historiarum est, | quicquid virtutum cultus documentaque vite, | nature studium quicquid, licuisse poetis | crede: sub ignoto tamen ut celentur amictu, | nuda alibi, et tenui frustrentur lumina velo, | interdumque palam veniant fugiantque vicissim' (my italics), p. 264.

it; it is an instance of harmony between rational and irrational tidal forces where the lot of the poem is laid. I will start considering the poem as moulded by its author, presenting it as an artefact, in its intrinsic function as a veil, as a woven fabric, and its relationship with the worlds to which it belongs (that is, the author's, the characters', and the reader's).

Once more I will temporarily separate what is traditionally defined as marvellous from the movements of cognitive wonder, addressing the following questions: which aspects of the poem awaken wonder in the reader and where does this lead to? What is the poetics behind this, that is, what does the author wonder at that fills us with wonder? These answers are linked also to the intellectual and emotional reactions of the characters in the *Furioso*. The level of the analysis is in fact always twofold, as it was for Dante: the text as an expression of the author's world, and the world of the reception of that text. On the one hand, I will deal with the appearance of the text (linked to the marvellous); on the other hand, with poetic wisdom (linked to wonder). I am not interested in the marvellous as a mere rhetorical strategy, as a *topos* of the romance. Other studies have already dealt with these aspects, which I acknowledge as my work proceeds. My aim is to concentrate on the episodes which make of the marvellous a real 'event' influencing the story and deviating from the characters' reciprocal semantic area.⁸

⁸ I am thinking here of Jurij M. Lotman's definition of 'event' as a unit of the plot: 'an event in a text is the shifting of a persona across the borders of a semantic field'; 'the movement of the plot, the event, is the crossing of that forbidden border which the plotless structure establishes. It is not an event when the hero moves within the space assigned to him'; *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, transl. Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), p. 233 and p. 238.

Within the discussion of wonder, desire to know can be considered as one of the forces leading the inquiry. If desire was in the *Commedia* to be fulfilled, the *Furioso* seems to act as an oppositional counterpart. Dante the character was spurred on by a 'gran disio' (*Purg.*, IV.29) which found peace in the final vision; the blessed souls were content with their, albeit different, levels of fulfilment (as Piccarda states in *Par.*, III.74). Ariosto's personification of love as origin of desire rather appears to be unjust from the beginning of the *Furioso*: 'Ingiustissimo Amor, perché sì raro | corrispondenti fai nostri desiri?' (II.1.1-2). The desire at stake is very different here, because the *Furioso's* unrequited love is of a sensual nature (*eros*, and not *caritas*). Hence the lack of reciprocity. Hence, I would add, also the lack of harmony and sometimes coherence intrinsic to the human society depicted by Ariosto, which the author rather tries to complement through his narration.

Due to its lack of teleology, the *Furioso* is a maze where the delight lies in running through it more than in looking for an exit. It could be seen as staging one of Dante's comments in canto five of *Paradiso*, when the narrator appeals to the reader and expresses his own desire to listen to the blessed souls:

Pensa, lettor, se quel che qui s'inizia
non procedesse, come tu avresti
di più sapere angosciosa carizia;
e per te vederai come da questi
m'era in disio d'udir lor condizioni[.]
Par., V.109-113

Here Dante, author and character, asks his reader to identify with the pilgrim. Reader and character partake of the same desire to know and also of its fulfilment, which is the drive of the whole poem. Ariosto, through his discontinuous narrative, leaves countless times the reader in a sort of 'angosciosa carizia'. Reader

and author are not on the same level because the author is outside the plot. Ariosto's reader embodies the projection of him who, following Dante's suggestion, has imagined the feeling of confronting an interrupted story.

The sentence 'Disir mi mena, e non error di via', uttered by Norandino in *Furioso* XVII.39.7, well represents this idea behind the poem. The concept is also found in canto five of the *Inferno*, where the lustful sinners are blown about by the infernal wind, symbolically acting as desire in life ('di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena'; *Inf.*, V.43); and also in Petrarch's *RVF* 125 where the poet is led to writing by desire ('così 'l desir mi mena | a dire', vv. 43-44). Desire, by nature, is movement. In principle Ariosto's characters are not stumbling into unwelcome adventures (however this can happen); they tend rather to look out for them. Desire is not a mistake, but the engine of life and literature, as Boccaccio has also shown in his *Decameron*, from which Ariosto has extensively drawn.

Ariosto does take his stories to an end, but he interweaves his plots in such a way to leave the reader suspended and frustrated as the characters are in the story, as in Daniel Javitch's interpretation of the function of the *entrelacement*.⁹ In theory this should work to kindle the reader's desire to know further, but in practice such desire is almost softened. This is one of several moments when the author underlines his narrative technique:

Come raccende il gusto il mutar esca,
così mi par che la mia istoria, quanto
or qua or là più variata sia,
meno a chi l'udirà noiosa fia.
Fur., XIII.80.5-8

⁹ Daniel Javitch, 'Cantus Interruptus in the *Orlando furioso*', *Modern Language Notes*, 95 (1980), 66-80.

'Mutare esca' whets one's appetite and directs it towards something new. But a new story temporarily lets the reader put aside the previous one to give way to the next.¹⁰ Ariosto says here 'la mia istoria', using the singular, and not 'le mie istorie', conveying a sense of unity. Ariosto knows how his story will end.¹¹ The curiosity awakened in the reader would be even greater if the deal with the author were for us not to know that he knew. In this way Ariosto takes the attention off the single stories to direct the public to the 'whole'. Since the *Furioso*, due to its length, is unlikely to be read in one breath, the reader will tend to forget about previous threads. To compensate for this, the narrator is constantly present in the story, communicating a feeling of safety which is counterbalanced by the unexpected events in the poem. That is the space where the reader's wonder comes into play. The path to knowledge is immediately presented by the author as interrupted as the narration is. Ariosto's mastered technique of entrelacement points to the problematic behind his conception of knowledge, which I am investigating in the present chapter.

Ariosto deals with different threads composing a unitary tapestry: 'Di molte fila esser bisogno parme | a condur la gran tela ch'io lavoro' (*Fur.*, XIII.81.1-2). Dante, as 'buon sartore' (*Par.*, XXXII.140), pushes forward ('per la cruna | del mio disio', Dante says in *Purg.*, XXI.37-38) one thread only until the final 'punto'

¹⁰ Javitch distinguishes amongst different types of interruptions, some being more abrupt and disconcerting than others; the more premature ones are also those which paradoxically leave the reader less frustrated because the reader, engrossed in the narrative, tends to cease to be interested in the outcome of earlier situations. See D. Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of 'Orlando furioso'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 91 (but see also pp. 88-91 for a discussion on the various types of interruptions).

¹¹ Cf. Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*, p. 88: 'When Ariosto interrupts a plot line yet briefly anticipates its sequel, he reminds us that, unlike his characters or his first-time readers, he knows the final outcome of his poem'.

that can be read both as 'stitch' and as temporal dimension where past, present, and future coincide (*Par.*, XVII.17-18; XXXII.140; XXXIII.94). Ariosto does not condense his enterprise into *one* point, or dot, or stitch. At the same time he is keen on presenting his creation as one, but kaleidoscopic. His will of variation and multiplicity is well expressed by a passage in canto fourteen: 'Or l'alta fantasia, ch'un sentier solo | non vuol ch'i' segua ognor, quindi mi guida' (XIV.65.1-2). 'L'alta fantasia' is a direct quotation from Dante's *Paradiso* XXXIII.142, the very conclusion of the *Commedia*; if Dante's 'fantasia', the perception of a vision, is won by divine enlightenment, and his desire is one with God's, Ariosto's 'fantasia' is that which leads him astray, and not towards 'un sentier solo'. In canto two Ariosto in fact presents his manifold narration, focussing on the different warps needed: 'Ma perché varie fila a varie tele | uopo mi son, che tutte ordire intendo' (II.30.5-6).

As we have previously seen underlined by Freccero (chapter II.5), Dante's *terza rima* has a forward motion which implies 'the integration of the beginning into the end' (*Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, p. 266), mirroring the tailor's stitch. Dante's poetry, 'the syntax that binds and stabilizes fallen language through rhyme and rhythm', in Elena Lombardi's words, 'becomes the mirror of the order ruling personal and universal history' (*Syntax of Desire*, p. 123) so that it fills the gap between human language and God's language. In Ariosto each octave is projected into the future, 'desiring' the following adjacent one; this is represented by the metrical scheme ABABABCC in which the final rhyming couplet, rather than simply introducing a new rhyme to herald the conclusion, tends to usher the

following stanza in. He rather prefers the image of weaving a 'gran tela'. Every comment on the skill of weaving brings the author into the story to make explicit to the reader his own narrative strategy. Hence the reader has the impression of being guided while the author gains authority and trust.

Weaving was a common classical metaphor for composing texts, widespread in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, since the Latin *textus* (text), comes from the verb *texo* which means to weave, both physically and metaphorically. *Texo* shares the root of the Greek *tikto*, 'to beget'. In fact in ancient Greek texts goddesses and women are frequently represented as weavers. Their works are depicted as possessing marvellous qualities.¹² Both in Greek and Latin texts the image of a cloth or a tapestry would be frequently associated with an expression of wonder, a connection that I will explore later. Just to pick two examples, in the *Odyssey*, inside the cave of the Naiads in Ithaca the nymphs weave sea-purple cloths described as 'thauma idesthai', a marvel to behold (XIII.107-109); in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Philomela's web acts miraculously on Procne ('mirum potuisse'; VI.583), who reading ('legit'; VI.582) on her 'callida tela' (a skilful, but also sly, web; VI.574) about her sister's fate is astonished and falls in silence. A similar meaning is carried by the Latin *necto*, 'to bind', 'to entwine', 'to

¹² Amongst the most famous women weavers, from the *Odyssey* I could list Penelope (II.93-110; XIX.137-156; XXIV.128-146), Circe (X.220-223), Calypso (V.61-61); Homer, *The Odyssey*, transl. Augustus Taber Murray, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919). From the *Iliad* Helen (III.125-128) and Andromache (XXII.440-447); Homer, *The Iliad*, transl. Augustus Taber Murray, 2nd edn rev. William F. Wyatt, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). But see also in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the myths of Arachne (VI.1-145) and Philomela (VI. 575-583). For further classical references see entry 'Weaving and Spinning', in Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also John Scheid, and Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric*, transl. Carol Volk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

weave', which is the equivalent of the Greek *neo*, 'to spin', the activity carried on by the Parcae (Moiras in Greek culture), ambiguous figures whose spinning sometimes obeyed a higher Fate and sometimes coincided with the Fate.

As pointed out by Scheid-Svenbro in *The Craft of Zeus*, the metaphor of poetic weaving actually descends from the idiom developed by Greek choral poets. The verb *hyphaino* was often used metaphorically as to govern 'words', 'stratagem', and 'wile'.¹³ Also, the Parcae's weaving was frequently connected to singing, and the very word *rhapsodos* is compound of *rhapt-*, 'stitch', and *ode*, 'song'.¹⁴ From the two critics' analyses we learn that the metaphor of language weaving in ancient Greek culture was mainly reserved to qualify skilfully manipulable stories: 'for a bard to assert himself as the "weaver" of his own songs would mean breaking his ties to the Muse, who is the only one able to fill him with song, as well as throwing into doubt the veracity of those songs' (*The Craft of Zeus*, pp. 135-136). I will shortly show how this can be seen also in Ariosto's weave. Once man's dimension gained independence from the gods and the poet stopped being vessel of the Muse, the writer began to identify with the weaver, weaving his own creation. It became associated with writing only with Cicero who used *texere* to refer to his own familiar letters as they were woven in everyday words ('quotidianis verbis texere'; *Epistulae ad familiares*, IX.21.1).¹⁵

¹³ As for example in *Iliad*, III.212; V.356. See Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, p. 228.

¹⁴ Cf. Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, pp. 228-231.

¹⁵ Cicero, *Letters to Friends*, ed. and transl. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, rev. edn, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

The metaphor reached Christian literature and Neoplatonic thought.¹⁶ The back and forth movement of hands during weaving was in medieval religious texts often associated with prayer; hence weaving as a material means of filling a gap between man and God.¹⁷ In fact weaving was the main occupation of nuns in convents, although this can be said of women in general since this activity was common at the same time in most households. In Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, lady Philosophy utters the following words: 'I weave arguments for you bound to each other in due order' ('Nexas sibi ordine contexo rationes'; IV.6.20). A similar act of weaving and binding is found again in a subsequent passage referring to providence and fate, which are respectively defined like this: 'Providence is [...] the reason which disposes all things that exist; but fate is a disposition inherent in movable things, through which providence binds [*nectit*] all things together, each in its own proper ordering [*suis ordinibus*]' (IV.6.32-35).¹⁸ First of all to be noticed is the recurrence of both 'to weave' and 'order'/'ordering'. The difference in vocabulary is that the Latin verb used for providence's activity is *necto*, which stresses the binding, while the one used for lady Philosophy is *contexo*, which focuses more on the act of joining together, weaving on; still different from *texo* which tends to refer to the act of composition, creation, and is preferred when it is a case of divine craftsmanship (as in *De Consolatione*,

¹⁶ On this see also Peter V. Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo: The Origins of 'Orlando furioso'* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1987), pp. 193-195.

¹⁷ For weaving as a religious metaphor in the late Middle Ages see *Weaving, Veiling and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Kathryn M. Rudy, and Barbara Baert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

¹⁸ 'Providentia est ipsa illa divina ratio in summo omnium principe constituta quae cuncta disponit; fatum vero inhaerens rebus mobilibus dispositio per quam providentia suis quaeque nectit ordinibus'.

IV.6.56).¹⁹ The order, the weaving in time, belongs to fate. 'Fate arranges as to their motion separate things, distributed in place, form and time; so that this unfolding of temporal order being united in the foresight of the divine mind is providence, and the same unity when distributed and unfolded in time is called fate' (*De Consolatione*, IV.6.37-42).²⁰ Providence weaves through Fate, lady Philosophy weaves for man to understand her arguments (based on God's plan: 'nexas sibi ordine').

From the examples seen, weaving implies a governing of the matter which can be either in accord with or in competition with God's presiding over it. In Isaiah (30.1), God thunders against people weaving their own web independently from his instructions, that is when people's projects differ from His: 'et ordiremini telam et non per spiritum meum'.²¹ Not just pagan gods are assimilated to the weaving metaphor, but also *the* Christian one. Using the analogy of poet-God, Robert Durling clarifies his view of the relationship between the figure of God and Ariosto:

Ariosto's narrator is an analogue of the Creator, but he is still a finite being. If he is a god he is, to use Cusanus' term, a *deus occasionatus*, a contingent god. This is the point that connects Ariosto's joyful pride in his own poetic powers [...] and his deep sense of the limits of human endeavor.²²

¹⁹ On the difference between the use of *texo* and *contexo* see Scheid, and Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus*, p. 143.

²⁰ 'Fatum vero singula digerit in motum locis formis ac temporibus distributa, ut haec temporalis ordinis explicatio in divinae mentis adunata prospectum providentia sit, eadem vero adunatio digesta atque explicata temporibus fatum vocetur'.

²¹ On this see Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 126-129.

²² R. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet*, p. 132. See pp. 131-132 for Durling's use of Cusano.

As Boethius' lady Philosophy reveals, Providence, being outside of history, weaves through Fate, which belongs rather to history. The implicit 'competition' or 'collaboration' is between weavers, both in Boethius and in Ariosto: on one hand lady Philosophy *versus* (or with) God, on the other Ariosto *versus* (or with) God. Unlike Durling, Albert Ascoli prefers to place Ariosto *between* God and Fortuna, since he is 'neither able to escape the world of his poem nor fully to enter into it'.²³ Ascoli therefore states: 'he [Ariosto] is certainly no poet-God' (p. 361). Ascoli quotes a passage from the *Furioso* that refers to the wheel of fortune: 'Si vede per gli esempj di che piene | sono l'antiche e le moderne istorie, | che 'l ben va dietro al male, e 'l male al bene' (XLV.4.3), that recalls the motto 'pro bono malum' placed by the author at the conclusion of his poem. He then comments: 'it is no accident that the poet frequently shifts responsibility for events in the poem from God's providence to Fortuna's caprice and back again' (p.359). But the reading of Boethius helps an understanding that Fates, therefore also Fortuna, and Providence can coexist in the same world and it is not necessary to choose between them at all when thinking about Ariosto's narration. It is all a matter of time: providence is outside of time, still and simple ('immobilem simplicemque'); Fates are time, a changing and movable interlacing ('mobilem nexum').²⁴ And so is Fortuna, intertwined with human stories. The narrator of the *Furioso* is above time while his characters are entangled in it. So he is a sort of a poet-God when locating his characters in time and space. But he also appears in the story as the poet-man,

²³ Albert Russell Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 360.

²⁴ *De Consolatione*, IV.6.56-57 and 59.

sharing the same problems and facing similar issues as his characters in his own life, which is part of a separate, but parallel, plot. Ariosto uses his authorial perspective to experience (in the narration) freedom from time and from fortune, whose activities are, being unpredictable, to be embraced as they come. Accepting with irony both good and bad is certainly easier when one feels oneself to be the author of one's own vicissitudes. Fearing Fortuna means instead not having the confidence to feel oneself as the author of one's own life. Ariosto is experimenting with this idea, gathering in his own hands both providence and fortune to assert his authority both as an author and as a man. Essential for the relationship between time and poetry is the lunar sequence, which I will later consider (III.1.2, III.3). Under the moon's changing influence, while the Parcae spin human lives, Ariosto, articulating his own poetics, links time to his poem, revealing himself in his role of *artifex*. We will then find Fates spinning *in* time in a lunar landscape symbolizing human instability, time and Fortuna.

These veils or tapestries, metaphor of language, were commonly considered by Christian thought as means to achieve truth. Ariosto's treatment of this metaphor attains slightly different results. The author of the *Furioso* points at his 'tela' to reveal its problematic nature. A piece of woven fabric, like an engraving or a *bas relief* or any other work of art, is a finite artefact overlapping reality: the difference between reality and the artefact lies in the intrinsic immutability of the artefact opposing the changeability of reality. The work of art fixes reality in time. Reality is free to change, the artefact is chained to itself. Spurred on by a desire of overcoming mortality and decay, men interpret reality, and weave and paint and

write and carve to make these interpretations durable. Ariosto, like others, is aware that the process of creation is also intrinsically haunting. Lifting the veil does not lead necessarily to truth; what is behind is changeable, as changeable are the times. Machiavelli emphasized in *Il principe* that a ruler needs always to keep pace with his own time in order to succeed; Ariosto, as a ruler of his fictional world, is aware of this.²⁵ The artefact stays; its truth is pliable. It is better to produce an artefact that is able to sustain and to adapt to the multifaceted reality. Therefore, if Dante's marvels must have been understood as truthful to adhere to God's laws, Ariosto's can be openly deceitful (like Alcina's weave, and like Geryon): reflecting man's world, they are nonetheless worthy of admiration because the deceit is also part of Ariosto's game, not to be understood as a fake, but rather as another face of creation, as a symbol of potentiality.

Ariosto's 'tela' embodies the space of a quest. Behind the veil of language there is something that man cannot manage. The veil is the aim because it is the only attainable, although relative, aspect of truth. The quest does not want to be defined as philosophical, if philosophy is separated from life and its immediate concerns. This is the well known topic of Ariosto's sixth *Satira*, and it is also picked up by the prologue of *Il Negromante* (vv.27-30):

Parmi che vorreste intendere
la causa che l'ha qui condotta: dicovi
chiar ch'io nol so, come chi poco studia
spiar le cose che non mi appartengono.

Ariosto at line twenty eight is referring to Cremona where the comedy takes place. Who wants to know about the reasons why the comedy has reached town, should

²⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe*, ed. Mario Martelli (Roma: Salerno, 2006), XXV.11 (p. 304).

go and ask shop holders who, polemically, are said to know all things happening around them but nothing about their own private affairs (vv. 31-44). The same could be applied to the whole attitude towards 'causes' in the *Furioso*, which are rarely a concern of the characters. Ariosto registers human instances, organizes and shows them to us with the freshest sense of wonder, without pushing them to their very roots but rather playing with and challenging the way they appear to be. Ariosto does not question the cause, he questions the appearance of something (or somebody) together with its socially accepted role.

The result of the experiment, or play, is at least a temporary sense of power and control to defeat what cannot be understood in life, which is however destined to end with the conclusion of the poem. So Zatti comments on the poem's surprising *finale*: 'la scelta di Ruggiero in favore della conversione e del matrimonio, e contro l'errore e il differimento (XLVI.139), è in effetti una scelta di morte'.²⁶ It surely alludes to the future events of Ruggiero's life, but it must also refer to the author's choice. During the last fight between Ruggiero and Rodomonte, Ariosto is torn between the pleasure of narration and the call for a definitive end, which is reflected by the following lines: 'ma il giovene s'accorse de l'errore|in che potea cader, per differire|di far quel empio Saracin morire' (XLVI.139.6-8). After a long and detailed description of their battle, lasting for twenty five octaves, Rodomonte is making a last desperate attempt to wound Ruggiero. At this stage, Ruggiero realizes that it is time to end the fight and to kill his enemy, which after all is Fortuna. The terms used to define the risks involved

²⁶ Sergio Zatti, *Il 'Furioso' fra epos e romanzo* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1990), p. 31.

in further deferral are 'errore' and 'differire'. Any further deferral would be a mistake, for Ruggiero but also for Ariosto. A mistake ('differire' rhymes with 'morire') that would coincide with his own death, if not Rodomonte's. The death of the opponent announces the death of the poem too. Rodomonte is killed together with the narrator. It seems that life and erring are on the same side, as opposed to death, the ultimate absence of deferral. Death coincides with the cut of the thread that Ariosto is weaving by one of the Parcae. As long as the narrator exists, his 'tela' does too. In canto eight Ariosto connects death, narration, and beauty when telling about Angelica made prisoner by Ebuda's raiders:

Ma poté sì, per esser tanto bella,
la fiera gente muovere a pietade,
che molti dì le differiron quella
morte, e serbârla a gran necessitade[.]
VIII.65.1-4

As Angelica's death is postponed in the story thanks to her beauty, which is a source of pleasure, so narration lasts as long as the narrator's skills to produce amusement endure.

Classical rhetoric understood eloquence as a means of instilling wonder in an audience.²⁷ Such wonder can be instilled also through technical craft in poetry and takes on diverse shapes and meanings in different periods and in different authors.²⁸ At times it can be understood as a form of contemplation, at times as a purely stylistic procedure, to mention only the two extremities. Ariosto's poem deals with a kind of wonder for which style takes an active part in the content

²⁷ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.2, 1404b5. Also, Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria*, VIII.3.6) reports Cicero's statement in a letter to Brutus (now lost): 'nam eloquentiam, quae admirationem non habet, nullam iudico' ('eloquence which evokes no admiration is, in my opinion, unworthy of the name').

²⁸ The *Epistle to Cangrande*, as discussed in II.2, presents *admirabilitas* as generating *attentio* in the reader.

making; using his metaphor, both the weaving process and its pattern, or weave, are expressions of that. Apuleius begins his *Metamorphoses* by drawing attention to the narrative style, its interweaving a way of generating wonder:

But I would like to tie together [*conseram*] different sorts of tales for you in that Milesian style of yours, and to caress your ears into approval with a pretty whisper, [...] so that you may be amazed [*ut mireris*] at men's forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and then restored again in an interwoven knot [*mutuo nexu*].²⁹

The pattern of the weaving is important in order to make the text marvellous and therefore pleasurable: *ut mireris*. Through such foregrounding of stylistic devices Ariosto also expresses his own vision of the world. I am now going to look at the threads of Ariosto's woof as an articulation of his poetics. I aim to present the problematic linked to the discourse of poetic truth, at the centre of my discussion on wonder and knowledge, by discussing wonder in terms of both style and content in the *Furioso*. Due to the erratic structure and evasive nature of the *Furioso*, I believe it is essential first to delineate its discourse on knowledge, both stylistically and thematically, which will frame my analysis of the marvellous and wonder.

²⁹ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, transl. J. Arthur Hanson, rev. edn, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), I.1, p. 3.

III.1.2 The Threads of Poetic Knowledge

I will now consider the relationship between Ariosto's weaving and the weaving of other characters in the poem, namely Alcina and Cassandra, in order to approach the core of such symbolic operation with the Parcae spinning on the moon. This will isolate the metapoetic parts in the *Furioso* and cast light on Ariosto's position with regards to the role of poetry in its relationship with time.

When Melissa arrives on Alcina's island, she finds Ruggiero sitting by a stream wearing precious clothes that Alcina had woven for him:

Il suo vestir delizioso e molle
tutto era d'ozio e di lascivia pieno,
che de sua man gli avea di seta e d'oro
tessuto Alcina con sottil lavoro.
Fur., VII. 53.5-8

The result of Alcina's work is connected to lechery and idleness, and it is no coincidence that her weaving is connected to clothes destined to cover and adorn Ruggiero's body while his mind is under her spell. Clothes and veils play an important role in this episode. The couple is caught changing several different garments within the same day ('E due e tre volte il dì mutano veste'; VII.31.3); Alcina is depicted as being wrapped in a very flimsy veil ('il vel sottile e rado'; VII.28.6). When it is not about clothing, it is about bed sheets: 'Ruggiero entrò ne' profumati lini | che pareano di man d'Aracne usciti' (*Fur.*, VII. 23.5-6). Alcina is weaving a physical and a mental web to trap the object of her desire. Her web has many marvellous features, which are here connected to deception. Her work is compared to Arachne's, which is described by Ovid as 'wondrous skill' ('opus

admirabile'; *Metamorphoses*, VI.14) but also as 'pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes' (VI.131) since Arachne selected the gods deceiving of humanity as a subject to weave (i.e. Europa being cheated by the disguise of the bull, the story of Leda and the swan; see VI.103-128). As we mentioned, the 'wondrous skill' is frequently associated with wiles and fraud in classical literature, and it has a similar function in the *Orlando furioso* too.³⁰

The name of Alcina is more than once associated with fraud. Melissa, taking on Atlante's aspect, addresses Ruggiero in this way: 'Ma perché tu conosca chi sia Alcina, | levatone le fraudi e gli artifici | tien questo anello in dito, e torna ad ella' (*Fur.*, VII.64.5-7). When Ruggiero finally 'lifts the veil' and sees Alcina's real appearance, he is disgusted at the sight of her decaying body (VII.70-74). The narrator comments that 'sua fraude non le giova' (VII.74.8), referring to Alcina's real appearance, after the magic spell has been broken by Bradamante's ring; and again, in canto eight the narrator extends his observations to all lovers, depicted as enchanters: 'con simulazion, menzogne e frodi | legano i cor d'indissolubil nodi' (VIII.I.6-8). The narrator had already warned his readers about this in canto seven, when he was about to tell the story of Alcina: 'A voi so ben che non parrà menzogna, | che 'l lume del discorso avete chiaro' (VII.2.3-4). Ascoli rightly connects Alcina with Dante's Geryon (*Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, pp. 252-257). Geryon, beyond being defined as 'sozza imagine di froda' (*Inf.*, XVII.7), is also

³⁰ The same is true of Dante; see Barolini's discussion of Arachne in *The Undivine Comedy*, pp. 130-132; 'with the paradox of nonfalse error Dante expresses the dilemma of art and provides the formula that synthesizes the various facets of the terrace of pride: all art is error, but some art – like his and God's – is nonfalse', p. 142.

associated by Dante with Arachne. It is no coincidence that Geryon's body is depicted with several colours, probably representing fraud's manifold deceptions:

lo dosso e 'l petto e ambedue le coste
dipinti avea di nodi e di rotelle.
Con più color, sommesse e sovrapposte
non fer mai drappi Tartari né Turchi,
né fuor tai tele per Aragne imposte.
Inf., XVII.14-18

'Nodi' and 'rotelle' have been generally interpreted as symbols of fraud's manifold wiles, and Arachne's weaving is recalled here as representative of multi-coloured tangle.³¹ As we have seen in chapter II.3, at Geryon's appearance Dante immediately brings up the theme of 'menzogna' ('Sempre a quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna | de' l'uom chiuder le labbra fin ch'el puote, | però che senza colpa fa vergogna'; *Inf.*, XVI.124-126), which is picked up by Ariosto too:

22
[...]
e se non che pur dubito che manche
credenza al ver c'ha faccia di menzogna,
di più direi; ma di men dir bisogna.
23
Il buon Turpin, che sa che dice il vero,
e lascia creder poi quel ch'a l'uom piace,
narra mirabil cose di Ruggiero,
ch'udendolo, il direste voi mendace.
[...]
Fur., XXVI.22.6-8 and 23.1-4

It is interesting to note that the two brief reflections on 'menzogna' are in both cases tied to the marvellous. In Dante's case the marvellous is Geryon, who leads

³¹ Arachne appears in Dante's *Purgatorio* among the examples of punished pride engraved in canto twelve, and she is called by Dante 'folle' ('O folle Aragne, sì vedea io te | già mezza ragna, trista in su li stracci | dell'opera che mal per te si fe'; *Purg.*, XII.42-5), just as 'folle' is Ulysses' flight (*Inf.*, XXVI.125).

the two poets to the Malebolge, the eighth circle where simple fraud is punished (including the figures of seducers, flatterers, simonists, soothsayers, hypocrites, thieves, fraudulent counsellors, among others).

Ariosto introduces this very motif already in the second canto, when Pinabello narrates to Bradamante the battle he witnessed between Gradasso and Ruggiero, before they are captured by Atlante at the feet of his palace:

Fu quel ch'io dico, e non v'aggiungo un pelo:
io 'l vidi, i' 'l so; né m'assicuro ancora
di dirlo altrui; che questa maraviglia
al falso più ch'al ver si rassomiglia.
Fur., II.54.5-8

Pinabello does not dare to tell the story to anyone else but to his present interlocutor because he knows that what happened sounds marvellously untrue, although it is worth telling and was a real experience ('io 'l vidi, i' 'l so'). Both Pinabello's and Turpino's claims of truths are linked to the verb 'sapere' : 'Il buon Turpin, che sa che dice il vero' (XXVI.23.1), and 'i' 'l so' (II.54.6). Marvels are presented as truths when anchored to a personal view, no longer to shared history as it was in Dante; and the fact that the personal view in this case belongs to an imaginary character like Pinabello is indicative of Ariosto's irony. The individual in the Renaissance benefits from a cultural belief in diversity rather than in uniformity (uniformity which was derived from an idea of unquestioned tradition prevalent in the Middle Ages). The value of personal opinion is central to the articulation of Ariosto's poetics, and sometimes it bears ambiguities, as I am going to show.

Ariosto introduces the level of deception intrinsic in narration at the beginning of his poem, with reminders throughout his work. This is the opening of the seventh canto:

Chi va lontan da la sua patria, vede
cose, da quel che già credea, lontane;
che narrandole poi, non se gli crede,
e stimato bugiardo ne rimane:
che 'l sciocco vulgo non gli vuol dar fede,
se non le vede e tocca chiare e piane.
Per questo io so che l'inesperienza
farà al mio canto dar poca credenza.
Fur., VII.1.1-6

The issue is 'credere', and the making of authorship. This is developed by the relationship between the marvellous and truth, which are related respectively to 'credere' and 'vedere'. There is a temporal contrast displayed here pivoting around 'credea' (v.2) and 'crede' (v.3): 'credea' represents the situation preceding 'va' and 'vede' that represent the reality of personal experience clashing against a past belief not based on experience; 'crede' refers to a subsequent moment when he who travelled away narrates the things he saw, but his account is not considered truthful. Those who do not believe are called "'l sciocco vulgo', and are on the same level of knowledge that characterized the traveller before travelling ('quel che già credea').

The topic of authorial credibility has been touched upon during the discussion on Dante's *Inferno* (chapter II.2 and II.3), where we have seen how Dante is trying to historicize the marvellous he depicts in order to be believed. Those who grasp the meaning behind Ariosto's poetic fiction can be compared to those who have 'intelletti sani' in Dante's *Commedia*:

O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani,
mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
sotto 'l velame de li versi strani.
Inf., IX.61-63

A voi so ben che non parrà menzogna,
che 'l lume del discorso avete chiaro[.]
Fur., VII.2.3-4

While Dante invites his reader to lift the veil in order to understand, Ariosto decides to deem as 'sciocco vulgo' the ignorant people who cannot understand his discourse, and asks for unquestioned trust in the very surface of his veil. The 'sciocco vulgo', who do not believe if they do not see for themselves, echoes Petrarch's 'vulgo avaro et scioccho' (*RVF*, LI.11) praising precious and shiny materials over poetry, and represents those who do not value poetry.³² But on what basis does Ariosto claim to gain unconditioned trust? To what is he anchoring his discourse of poetic knowledge?

Ariosto's sixth *Satira* provides a helpful point of view of the topic of belief. Within a wider discourse on poetry's civilizing force, it is said that poetry's power of persuasion can make ignorant people believe in incredible things:

Indi i scrittori féro all'indotta plebe
credere ch'al suon de le soavi cetre
l'un Troia e l'altro edificasse Tebe[.]³³
Sat., VI. 82-84

The verb 'credere' is presented once more linked to ignorance. This time poetry is depicted as creating belief that initiates civilization, persuading 'the indotta plebe',

³² Cesare Segre pointed out the Petrarchan subtext in his *Orlando furioso*, note 2 canto VII. A similar attack on ignorant people not appreciating poetry can be found in *Fur.*, XXXV.24.1-4: 'Credi che Dio questi ignoranti ha privi | de lo 'ntelletto, e lor offusca i lumi; | che de la poesia gli ha fatto schivi, | acciò che morte il tutto ne consumi'.

³³ All references to the *Satire* (hereafter abbreviated in references as *Sat.*) are taken from L. Ariosto, *Opere minori*, ed. Cesare Segre (Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1954).

who otherwise would not leave wilderness, to gather. Ariosto is here following Horace's poetics of *utile dulci*, embracing an ideal of poetry that teaches and delights at the same time, and depicting an ideal condition of a poetry not only actively involved in life but even originating society and having practical responses from people.³⁴ This contrasts with the opening of canto seven, quoted above, where the author expresses his real concerns for the reception and the role of poetry, reiterated and expanded through the allegory of the swans in the lunar sequence (XXXV.22-24).

The issue at stake is the old one connected to the relationship between literary fiction and reality. Stefano Jossa, commenting on VII.2.3-4, raises a crucial point:

Ariosto denuncia lo statuto doppio della sua poesia, che racconta cose che non hanno a che vedere con la storia e la realtà, perché la verità della poesia si colloca su un altro piano rispetto ai fatti e all'esperienza.³⁵

This is what Jossa elsewhere calls 'conoscenza fantastica'.³⁶ Dante's attempt to historicize the marvellous pivoted around proving his own experience to be true, as marvellous as it might seem to the general reader, in order for it to compete with theological truth. Dante's marvellous served his poetry to persuade the reader that the *Commedia* is a divine marvel, as the created world is. Two hundred

³⁴ Horace, *Ars poetica* 343-4: 'omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, | lectorem delectando pariterque monendo'. On this see Alberto Casadei, 'Il finale e la poetica del *Furioso*', *Chroniques Italiennes web*, 19 (January 2011), 1-21 (pp.16-17), <<http://chroniquesitaliennes.univ-paris3.fr/numeros/Web19.html>>, last accessed 5 July 2011.

³⁵ Stefano Jossa, *Ariosto* (Napoli: Il Mulino, 2009), p. 64.

³⁶ 'Ariosto spiega ai lettori avvertiti che la verità della poesia sta non nella conoscenza empirica, l'esperienza, ma nella disponibilità al viaggio, proponendosi come conoscenza fantastica'; S. Jossa, 'Oltre la tradizione romanzesca: Rinaldo e l'"aspra legge di Scozia" (*Orlando furioso* IV-VI)', *Chroniques Italiennes web*, 19 (January 2011), 1-20 (p. 12), <<http://chroniquesitaliennes.univ-paris3.fr/numeros/Web19.html>>, last accessed 5 July 2011.

years later, Ariosto 'deconstructs' any established truth declaring that what he is saying might not be true according to the traditional idea of truth. The difference is in the author's attitude towards his creative energy. As Jossa persuasively shows, Ariosto is communicating that truth does not necessarily coincide with history, but with interpretation (*Ariosto*, pp. 64-5). There is a jump from the objective to the subjective level. In this light Jossa reads St John's speech on the moon ('e se tu vuoi che 'l ver non ti sia ascoso, | tutta al contrario l'istoria converti'; *Fur.*, XXXV.27.5-6) which deals with the thorny issue of poetic truth built through and into poetic fiction. And then, if Turpino's account, Ariosto's fictional source, is no longer considered as reliable, neither is Ariosto's own literary creation felt as such.³⁷ This is why I believe that the veil can be considered as an appropriate tool of investigation and a fertile metaphor for Ariosto's art.

I do not understand Ariosto's knowledge as 'fantastica' in the modern sense of the term (which I mentioned in my Introduction, p. 2), but in a sense closer to the role of the faculty of the mind that in the Middle Ages was called *fantasia* or *virtù imaginativa*, which is the power of the mind to receive images collected by the senses from the outside world, retaining them and re-organizing them.³⁸ At the end of the fifteenth century, Cristoforo Landino separates the *imaginativa* from

³⁷ Cf. Jossa, *Ariosto*, pp. 65-66.

³⁸ See Dante's invocation to the *imaginativa* in *Purg.*, XVII.13-18, and Bosco-Reggio's commentary on line 13 which reports a passage from Thomas Aquinas that identifies *phantasia* and *imaginatio* ('phantasia sive imaginatio'), defining the latter as 'actus facultatis animae qua ipsa vocatur imaginativa seu imaginatrix potentia' (*S.T.*, Ia, q78 a4r).

phantasia, considering them among the five interior senses of man.³⁹ He regards the *imaginativa* as a stage preceding *phantasia*:

[la imaginativa] non solamente riceve la imagine della chosa presente, ma la ritiene et serba dopo la partita della chosa. Vedesti hieri nel tempio Marsilio Ficino, hoggi non lo vedi; nientedimeno la imagine sua perchè è riservata in questo secondo senso nella medesima forma nella quale lo vedesti non solamente ritieni in te la faccia sua et e liniamenti et el colore, ma e gesti et el volto[.]

And he considers *phantasia* as the sense that puts together the images stored by the *imaginativa*:

la phantasia la cui facultà è dividere et comporre tutte le imagini che truova nella imaginativa et le intentioni che truova nella chogitativa. Il perchè può la mia phantasia torre la imagine di monte Morello, et quella de l'oro, fare monte Morello d'oro; può torre le corna del cervio et un cavallo, et formare una imagine di cavallo colle corna del cervio. Può fare una città che corra, un fiume che stia.

Whether the *imaginativa* and *phantasia* (or *fantasia*) be considered together or separately, their activity still mediates from reality to the imagination. Landino's description of *phantasia* creating a horse with deer horns makes one think about Ariosto's marvellous creations in the *Orlando furioso*; they do not have the pretension of being considered real like Dante's, but they are certainly part of a real discourse with real (and realistic) claims. As Marcello Turchi also acknowledges, the *Furioso* develops within a dynamic confrontation between imagination and reality.⁴⁰ Ariosto's fantasy, or better 'imagination', never

³⁹ For a complete account of man's five interior senses ('senso comune, imaginativa, estimativa, phantasia, et memoria') and for a source of the following two quotations see Landino's commentary on Dante's *Inferno*, 23.18-29.

⁴⁰ See Marcello Turchi, *Ariosto o della liberazione fantastica* (Ravenna: Longo, 1969), pp. 17-31. 'È da porre in rilievo come l'inclinazione ariosteica verso la comprensione del regno della fantasia concluda a un implicito paragone di essa nei confronti della realtà, insomma a un senso della

overcomes reality, it rather completes it, offering an array of possibilities that may not have happened for real but come from real images (the task of *phantasia* is 'dividere et comporre tutte le imagini che truova nella imaginativa', according to Landino) and symbolize human variety and potentiality.

What Ariosto calls 'alta fantasia' (*Fur.*, XIV.65.1) in a direct quotation from Dante (*Purg.*, XVII.25; *Par.*, XXXIII.142) does not adhere to the meaning it had in the *Commedia* as a repository of divine light, but it sounds rather as a sign of a voluntary contrast. Poets' divine inspiration was a familiar topic within Neoplatonic texts, but it is an aspect that Ariosto skirts playfully. Another weaver character in the *Furioso*, Cassandra, is attributed 'furor profetico', as she was traditionally:

Una donzella de la terra d'Ilia
ch'avea il furor profetico congiunto,
con studio di gran tempo e con vigilia
lo fece di sua man di tutto punto.
Fur., XLVI.80.4-6

There is a connection between Cassandra's woof and Ariosto's poetry. Ariosto is referring to the 'prezioso velo', as he calls it (XLVI.84.4), woven by Cassandra and used by Melissa to adorn Ruggiero and Bradamante's nuptial pavilion. The *ekphrasis*, as it is known, is inspired by Boiardo's 'pavaglione', which in the *Innamorato* was said to be woven by the Sybil of Cuma (*Innamorato*, II. XXVII.50-61; hereafter abbreviated in references as *Inn.*). Boiardo's pavilion shows beautiful images of graceful Nymphs, brave knights, and battles; in the author's words 'pur vi era ordita alcuna eletta impresa | de arme, o di senno, o di guerra, o de amore'

misura. La fantasia vive per sé sola sino a un certo punto, poiché l'autentica fantasia si spiega nel suo rapporto con il reale, con una determinata situazione', pp. 18-19.

(*Inn.*, II. XXVII. 57.1-2), which closely resembles the opening of the *Furioso* where the topic of the poem is disclosed as 'le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori, | le cortesie, l'audaci imprese' (I.1.1).⁴¹ The matter of Ariosto's text, announced in the first canto of his poem, is the topic of the prophetic pavilion found in the very last canto, as if drawing a circle, to finish off the weaving job. There is one element missing from Boiardo's list in Ariosto's selection of topics to treat: 'senno'. This in fact is substituted in the second octave of the *Furioso*'s first canto by 'furore' (referring to Orlando, 'che per amor venne in furore e matto'; *Fur.*, I.2.3). Ariosto alludes to it while describing Cassandra's woof, contributing to the closure of the circle. In fact 'furore' appears in canto forty six for the penultimate time, the very last one being used to portray Rodomonte's rage against Ruggiero ('a maggior rabbia, a più furor si mosse'; *Fur.*, XLVI.121.5).⁴² Cassandra's 'furor' is of a special kind: it has been bestowed on her by Apollo, according to Greek mythology, who then doomed her not to be believed by anybody. A fascinating pagan prophetic truth, which loses all the advantages of being true, and which is here linked to Orlando's intellectual stupor derived from his madness. In this specific aspect it can be associated with Ariosto's 'deconstructive' treatment of poetic truth as unattainable, multifaceted, fleeing, changeable, just as he depicts love in his poem.

The *Furioso*'s subject matter at times can seem unreal, as with the pavilion, which is an art work too. The discourse is underlined by Ariosto, who comments on the effects of the pavilion in this way:

⁴¹ Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando innamorato*, ed. Riccardo Bruscagli, 2 vols (Torino: Einaudi, 1995). See Segre's comment on the *Orlando furioso* for the different sources upon which this first octave has been modelled (Virgil, Dante, Boiardo), p. 1267 (n.1).

⁴² Ruggiero's spear is also defined 'furiosa' ('(sì furiosa venne)', XLVI.117.5); it is an adjective usually found in the *Furioso* in the masculine and mostly refers to Orlando.

[...] così avea ben finti
i gesti lor chi già gli avea dipinti.
XLVI.89.7-8

Le donne e i cavallier mirano fisi,
senza trarne construtto, le figure;
perché non hanno appresso che gli avvisi
che tutte quelle sien cose future.
XLVI.98.1-4

Similarly Boiardo comments on his own pavilion:

Non vi potrei contare in veritate
il bel lavoro fatto a gentilezza;
[...]
quivi erano ritratti a non mentire;
ma a qual fine, alcun non sapria dire.
Inn., II. XXVI.61.1-2, 7-8

While Boiardo simply states an ignorance, Ariosto points out that such ignorance is due to the lack of recognition of future events, and the lack of something or somebody unveiling the meaning for them.⁴³ Among the spectators in the *Furioso* only Bradamante knows what that is about since Melissa had instructed her about the whole history. No wonder is felt by her then, because she knows already. The others can only enjoy the aesthetic pleasure that comes from looking at art, a pleasure which, as we have already seen, has been considered linked to the marvellous since Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1460 a.15).

In Cassandra's woof one can find the reflection of Ariosto's woof. Ariosto takes his subject matter from Boiardo's pavilion, disclosing it at the opening of the *Furioso*; but he adds 'furore' to it and he makes Cassandra the manufacturer of the

⁴³ As Segre points out (p. 1419), in the 1516 edition Ariosto on line 3 used 'chi' rather than 'che' as in the 1532 edition. The result of the marble engravings was different in *Purgatorio* XII: their *artifex* was God in person; the consequence of realistic representation was clear and immediate understanding for the pilgrim, the reader, and the souls, since the artist was God in person, the only point ('punto') where art and nature merge (*Purg.*, XII.67-69).

pavilion rather than the Sybil (who represents rather an accredited medium between man and the divine); Ariosto and Cassandra share the same activity with regards not only to the material action but also to its content. This episode is to be understood in connection to the episode of the Parcae on the moon, not only for the centrality of the metaphor of weaving but also for the temporal dimension with which both occurrences are involved, as I am going to show.

Although the metaphor of textiles is present throughout Astolfo's lunar expedition, the most metapoetic moment of the *Furioso*, this time it is not exactly a matter of weaving but of spinning, the activity preceding it. Astolfo reaches the palace where the Parcae are spinning human lives. Spinning involves working raw material, like wool or flax, and converting it into continuous threads, those very threads that Ariosto metaphorically interweaves in his 'tela'. The poet here takes his readers right to the source of his poetry, to the making of the threads that represent life spans. The insistence on the repetition of the term 'vello' and 'velli' at the end of canto thirty four and at the beginning of canto thirty five is revealing of Ariosto's concern for the symbolism related to it.⁴⁴ In canto thirty four, four subsequent octaves hold the term in the first line:

ch'ogni sua stanza avea piena di velli
88.1

V'è chi, finito un vello, rimettendo
89.1

Quanto dura un de' velli, tanto dura
90.1

⁴⁴ David Quint suggests that the episode of the Parcae and their fleeces has its model in Seneca's mock encomium *Apocolocyntosis*; see Quint, 'Astolfo's Voyage to the Moon', *Yale Italian Studies*, 1 (1977), 398-409 (pp. 404-405).

Di tutti i velli ch'erano già messi[.]
91.1

'Vello' was the term generally used to indicate the coat of an animal and figuratively also human hair.⁴⁵ In this latter sense it appears in Ariosto's *Cinque Canti* to indicate aging: 'qui crespo e curvo, qui debole e lasso | m'ha fatto il tempo, e tutti bianchi i velli' (IV.43.5-6).⁴⁶ The term has a strong temporal component in the *Furioso* too.

'Quanto dura un de' velli, tanto dura | l'umana vita, e non di più un momento', St John explains to Astolfo (XXXIV.90.1-2). All the fleeces found on the moon are human lives and symbolize the time allotted to each of them. They are of three kinds, and Ariosto presents them in this order: some are piled up in the rooms of the palace, awaiting to be spun (XXXIV.88); some are in the process of being spun, already on the swift (XXXIV.89-90); some others have already been spun, and their threads are sorted either to adorn Paradise or to function as binds for the damned in Hell. Their name plates ('imprese note'; XXXV.12.4) are about to be carried away by a slender old man, allegory of time (XXXIV.91; XXXV.12). The fleeces represent past, present, and future. They are also the raw matter of Ariosto's weave. I believe that Ariosto's poetry can be seen as a synthesis of these temporal dimensions, and he is taking us to the moon to make a poetical statement: his poetic activity in the present salvages the past, preserving it and

⁴⁵ See entry 'vello' in *Grande Dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. Salvatore Battaglia, and Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 21 vols + 2 supplements (Torino: UTET, 1961-2009). The term is present also in the *Commedia* with both meanings ('di vello in vello giù discese poscia', referred to Lucifer, in *Inf.*, XXXIV.74; 'con altro vello | ritornerò poeta', referred to Dante the poet, in *Par.*, XXV.7-8).

⁴⁶ Ariosto, *I Cinque Canti*, in *Opere Minori*, ed. C. Segre. The expression is in Petrarch's *RVF*, CCXIX.8: 'pettinando al suo vecchio i bianchi velli'.

interpreting it, and at the same time it opens up lastingness in the future. In this way the present is given a transformative power, in accord with the humanistic view, and embodies the dialectic between preservation and renovation.⁴⁷ In particular, Ariosto's activity is in competition with the Parcae's. If they traditionally represent a world ordained by superior laws, Ariosto puts forward his own world where the time of narration does not coincide with the natural and verisimilar progression of the events narrated (and of the spinning of lives). The narrator of the *Furioso* is above time, and he decides to pause it or to jump forward as he likes, interweaving past, present and future in the narrative web.

Amongst all these fleeces, Astolfo is first depicted as attracted by one of the future lives, which gives Ariosto the chance to celebrate Ippolito d'Este, whose 'vello' is described as a fleece brighter than gold:

e scorse un vello che più che d'or fino
splender pareva[.]
Fur., XXXV.3.5-6

Ippolito's fleece is then called 'veste' (XXXV.8-10), garment of the soul. 'Vello' represents here the unfolding of man's very existence *in* the world, in all its ambivalences; mortal veil, *involucrum*, human appearance.⁴⁸ This is what we find on the moon: rather than a sign of the otherworld, as it was in Dante, it is 'concentrated humanity'. This 'vello' recalls Jason's mythical enterprise to possess

⁴⁷ With regards to this, see Jossa's reflection on the relationship between tradition and innovation in Ariosto's poetics in *La fantasia e la memoria. Intertestualità ariostesche* (Napoli: Liguori, 1996): 'Qui sta tutto il senso della scelta scrittoria ariostesca, una scelta tipicamente 'umanistica': da una parte c'è l'esigenza di inserirsi in qualcosa di noto, dall'altra c'è la volontà di esprimere qualcosa di nuovo', pp. 4-5.

⁴⁸ The *topos* of the body as clothing the soul was widespread both in the pagan and the Christian tradition. In these lines Ariosto follows the tradition: 'né sì leggiadra né sì bella veste | unque ebbe altr'alma in quell terrestre regno' (XXXV.8.1-2).

the golden fleece, which in book six of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is referred to as 'vellera [...] nitido radiantia villo' ('the bright gleaming fleece of gold', in F. J. Miller's translation). It is interesting to notice that book six begins with Arachne's tale and ends with Jason and the Argonauts' setting out to capture the golden fleece: the two episodes share a similar textile reference that frames the book.

I read in Ariosto's repetition one of his ambivalent statements. The term 'vello' is to be found again in *Il Negromante* (1509-1528), placed in a humorous context. The astrologer is plotting to shave golden and silver fleeces off some sheep, which represent his gullible clients; in his speech he mentions 'vello aureo' (v. 1286) in an ironic allusion to the Argonauts, as Cesare Segre confirms in his note to the text.⁴⁹ The enterprise of the Argonauts has always symbolized an unparalleled journey. The myth was picked by Dante to refer to his own symbolical sailing of unexplored seas (*Par.*, XXXIII.94-96) and it is present in the *Furioso* on two occasions. In canto XIII.61.6 Melissa is prophesying to Bradamante her glorious progeny and telling her about Isabella d'Este's virtue; comparing the potential eulogy of all her several accomplishments to the length of Tifi's (the steersman of the ship Argo) navigation, she pauses and passes onto other members of the lineage. In canto fifteen, Andronica, leaving Logistilla on a boat with Astolfo, tells him a prophecy about the new explorers who will sail the oceans towards new lands, and names them 'nuovi Argonauti e nuovi Tifi' (XV.21.3). In both instances the citation is inserted within a prophecy, in the wake

⁴⁹ All references to Ariosto's *Commedie* are taken from *Opere Minori*, ed. C. Segre; see note at v. 1286, p. 465.

of Virgil and Seneca.⁵⁰ On both occasions it is connected to a discourse on the future, of which poetry is guarantor.

The future is in fact the only dimension that is not regulated by the Parcae. In fact what reaches the future are not the fleeces but their name plates, 'l'impresse note', salvaged by the swan-poets and carried to the temple of Immortality: what used to be yarn becomes 'note', that is words, and is bestowed lastingness.⁵¹ That is parallel to Ariosto's activity: he too transforms yarns, whose fate is rigidly set by the Parcae, into futurity, which is open and flexible.

Son, come i cigni, anco i poeti rari,
poeti che non sian del nome indegni;
sì perché il ciel degli uomini preclari
non pate mai che troppa copia regni,
sì per gran colpa dei signori avari
che lascian mendicare i sacri ingegni[.]
Fur., XXXV.23.1-6

The unheeded 'sacri ingegni' recall Cassandra's unrecognized 'furore profetico'. Beyond Cassandra being the connection between the dynasty of the Este family and the foundation of Troy, she is also linked to the *Furioso* by her 'furore', or better by the 'furore' attributed to her by people not believing her words. The myth narrates that she was granted her divinatory gift by Apollo, the god of poetry, who also condemned her not to be believed after she denied herself sexually to him.⁵² Ariosto redeems the reception of her divinatory powers by making her the weaver of the future of the Este dynasty, and this time we cannot

⁵⁰ Virgil, *Eclogue* IV.34-35; Seneca, *Medea*, 375-379, as Bigi points out in his commentary on XV.21.3; *Orlando furioso*, ed. Emilio Bigi, 2 vols (Milano: Rusconi, 1982), p. 611.

⁵¹ 'Note' was also the term employed by Dante to refer to his poetry in the *Commedia* ('e per le note | di questa comedia, lettor, ti giuro'; *Inf.*, XVI.127-8).

⁵² On Cassandra and Ariosto see Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, pp. 390-391; 'She embodies the poet's mute and resigned protest of his reader's inability to hear and believe him', p. 391.

deny that her weaving bears the truth. Their woofs are put on a parallel level. The connection between Ariosto's verses and Cassandra is also to be understood in light of the fleeces representing human lives in time. Both figures have to do with the future: Cassandra knows it, but she is misunderstood; Ariosto the man does not know it (although Ariosto the narrator does) but his poetry can reach it and act upon it, and even grant a future to those who otherwise might not have one after their death. Unlike Cassandra, he does not know the future, but he can *create* it, if his work survives him. Among the reasons why Ariosto selected St John as lunar guide, I believe there is this very aspect of him representing both past (the Gospel) and the future (the Revelation), therefore standing for Ariosto dealing with the subtle balance between preserving and innovating. I will return to the discourse of time in the last section of this chapter (III.3.2) while setting it in its lunar background. Such dialogue between past and future will then be seen developing during Astolfo's wanderings among the mounds of lost things, representing the past and Fortuna's activity.

So far I have looked at the fabric and the design of the *Furioso* as a whole; its poetic craft (*poetiche techne*), which allows it to outlive its author and reach into the future. I have isolated self-referential moments in the poem which have helped me to ground Ariosto's discourse. In the next section I will delve into the topic of the marvellous as found in the *Furioso*. We will see how the two analyses converge. Wonder is traditionally an essential tool of poetic craft. As Ovid's *Metamorphoses* show, not only the finished woof is worthy of praise, but also the weaver's skills,

leading us to consider the work as 'opus admirabile' (VI.14). This is the way Ovid writes about the pleasure deriving from observing Arachne's talent:

nec factas solum vestes, spectare iuvabat
tum quoque, cum fierent: tantus decor adfuit arti,
sive rudem primos lanam glomerabat in orbes,
seu digitis subigebat opus repetitaque longo
vellera molliabat nebulas aequantia tractu,
sive levi teretem versabat pollice fusum,
seu pingebat acu; scires a Pallade doctam.⁵³
Metamorphoses, VI. 17-22 (my italics)

Both this passage and Ariosto's episode on the moon are linked by the presence of *vello* / *velli* / *vellera* to indicate the rough matter awaiting to be transformed into art. In Ariosto's case, these coincide with human lives, first appearing like yarns in the grip of Fate, and then manipulated by the poet to make them overcome their destiny, to open wide their future.

Ariosto's disseminated references to his craft do not surprise. They are partially to underline his auctorial authority and partially to emphasize the marvellous resulting from it. The *Furioso* inspires wonder (it is not just a matter of beauty and harmony) because of its ambiguities, its apparent contradictions, its dead ends, its ambition. Wonder here does not openly aspire to pacification. It is a puzzling wonder. If Dante's poem ended with a merging of the subject and the object, Ariosto's poem endlessly oscillates from one to the other all along. This is the realm of a wonder which does not aim to become *admiratio* in the classical and mystical sense, but thrives in the tides of *meraviglia*. The result is a kind of

⁵³ 'And 'twas a pleasure not alone to see her finished work, but to watch her as she worked; so graceful and deft was she. Whether she was winding the rough yarn into a new ball, or shaping the stuff with her fingers, reaching back to the distaff for more wool, fleecy as a cloud, to draw into long soft threads, or giving a twist with practised thumb to the graceful spindle, or embroidering with her needle; you could know that Pallas had taught her'.

knowledge that never rests on intellectual satisfaction but keeps undulating from passion to reason, and from reason to passion in an unfading dialectic. Ariosto's weave embodies this movement, which is sometimes perceived as fraudulent because the author seems to present it in association with the discourse on falsity. But we will learn that it is never fraud, but rather acknowledging the ambiguity of the nature of literary production. Fictionally, it is deemed as fraud for those who understand Cassandra's prophecies as false. But, as Ascoli suggests, Cassandra's discourse 'violently erases the lines between poetry's falsehoods and prophecy's truths' (*Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, p. 390). Her presence in the *Furioso* proves that the result of a perception does not coincide with the thing itself. Not even a sum of different perceptions can coincide with the thing itself; the thing stays and thrives in its manifoldness. It can nonetheless be liberated by language which, being in charge of its expression, provides it with a material and visible aspect. I like thinking about this materialization in terms of a veil that un-covers while covering. This is Ariosto's re-velation, *a-letheia* (a truth which is an un-concealing): the creation of a veil of language around something ephemeral that otherwise could not be seen, and that is now visible only thanks to poetic craft. Poetry is then the absolute way of investigating the ambiguity of reality. A veil that reveals the concealing.

III.2 Between the Marvellous and Admiration

It is now time to focus on the relationship between wonder and the marvellous in the *Furioso* to illustrate how specific elements of the poem embody Ariosto's speculative concerns. Unlike Dante, Ariosto's wonder can be seen as freed by classical philosophical models. Wonder is acting here within a sphere of a poetic knowledge that gained its independence from religious constrictions and Scholastic precepts. Looking at wonder and the marvellous in the *Furioso* is important especially since the poem belongs to a historical period that preceded the diatribes around Aristotle's *Poetics*, which broke out in the middle of the sixteenth century. Dante's preoccupations with his poetry's authenticity will surface especially in Tasso, who will have to defend his own poetry from accusations of ungrounded fantasy and prove his marvellous to be Christian (and therefore true).⁵⁴ Although the time when Ariosto composed his epic poem is still substantially alien to all of this, the *Furioso* will be judged by later critics according to those very criteria.⁵⁵ But it is worth investigating the role of wonder and the marvellous before any theoretical speculation, when they would appear naturally as part of artistry. Reflecting on the marvellous involves wondering about poetry's

⁵⁴ With regards to Tasso's position towards the marvellous see Torquato Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (especially I, pp. 6-8) and *Discorsi del poema eroico* (especially book I, pp. 72-77; and VI, pp. 228-230) in *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*, ed. Luigi Poma (Bari: Laterza, 1964); *Giudicio sovra la 'Gerusalemme' riformata*, ed. Claudio Gigante (Roma: Salerno, 2000) - especially I.33-36, pp. 16-18.

⁵⁵ For an exhaustive and well documented investigation into the reception of the *Furioso* see Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*. For more in general, on the polemics surrounding romance and the idea of poetry in the second half of the sixteenth century, see S. Jossa, *Rappresentazione e scrittura. La crisi delle forme poetiche rinascimentali (1540-1560)* (Napoli: Vivarium, 1996) and particularly chapter II.1;2 on Giralaldi's defense of the *Orlando furioso*.

'face'. What is Ariosto really showing us as marvellous? Picking one of the main principles of rhetoric, Horace teaches that a poet must first feel himself the emotion he wants to convey in order to obtain readers' sympathy ('as men's faces smile on those who smile, so they respond to those who weep. If you would have me to weep, you must first feel grief yourself', *The Art of Poetry* vv. 101-102).⁵⁶ What does Ariosto, a Renaissance man, wonder at?

III.2.1 Fantastic Marvellous and Human Marvellous

The discussion about wonder brings up all the attributes carried by the term 'marvellous' as traditionally understood by the critics, that is, a narrative element able to create surprise, to revive readers' attention, in short, to entertain. This aspect of the 'marvellous' is a *topos*, part of literary tradition, derived from the classics; it often follows patterns and is part of the imitative/allusive process. Although this aspect is not the main focus of my research, it is necessary to touch upon it, since it emerges especially when discussing romance and its magic components. I will first consider 'the marvellous' in its traditional aspect in order to move on to the marvellous conceived as a step towards poetic knowledge, and not simply as a literary aim or part of a narrative technique. While surveying the position of some critics on the first type, it will be worth thinking about it as the 'fantastic marvellous'; I will later refer to the second kind as the 'human marvellous'.

⁵⁶ Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars poetica*, p. 459: 'ut ridentibus arrident, ita flentibus adsunt | humani voltus: si vis me flere, dolendum est | primum ipsi tibi'.

Giovanna Scianatico observes that the proliferation of fantastic adventures, as in some parts of the *Furioso*, leads to a thwarting of the marvellous, a marvellous which was normally understood by classicist critics as the engine of the 'epic machine'.⁵⁷ Considering the marvellous as a mechanism empties it of its originally sublime components. Giovambattista Giraldi Cinthio, scholar and critic at the university and the court of Ferrara, in the middle of the Cinquecento composed his treatise on romance in which he defended Ariosto from attacks against narrative discontinuity in the *Furioso*. In his *Discorsi intorno al comporre dei romanzi* (1554) Giraldi praises Ariosto for using the technique of entrelacement as a 'maraviglioso artificio' necessary for a romance composed of different actions and different 'actors' intertwining, such variety regarded as pleasurable.⁵⁸ From Giraldi onwards the discussion about romance, marvels and verisimilitude becomes fiery, especially regarding the competition between Ariosto's and Tasso's poems. Renaissance critics considered Ariosto as an inventor of marvels, sometimes pushing the discussion to a condemnation of what was understood as excessive levity and frivolity, especially during the constrictive years of the Council of Trent.⁵⁹ As Zatti reports, one can find the *Furioso* defined as 'animal d'incerta natura' (a definition given by Tasso) or 'monstre admirable' (Voltaire), because of its structural anomalies; but more than being a *monstrum*, in Zatti's

⁵⁷ Giovanna Scianatico, *Il dubbio della ragione. Forme dell'irrazionalità nella letteratura del Cinquecento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1989), p. 39; see also Walter Moretti, *Cortesia e furore nel Rinascimento italiano* (Bologna: Patron, 1970), pp. 121-122.

⁵⁸ See Giovambattista Giraldi Cinthio, *Scritti critici*, ed. Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti (Milano: Marzorati, 1973), p. 68.

⁵⁹ For an exhaustive map of Renaissance literary criticism see Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (on Ariosto: II, pp. 954-1073); and Baxter Hathaway, *Marvels and Commonplaces*.

view, the poem can be seen as a living proof of its very nature of *fictio*, 'del fatto cioè che qualunque tipo di poesia è per definizione "deviante"', and, I would add, of what Jossa has defined as 'conoscenza fantastica'.⁶⁰

Contemporary critics tend rather to devalue the *Furioso's* fantastic side in order to highlight the depth of his discourse on reality and society.⁶¹ Therefore, the marvellous is often presented as part of a mechanism and not thoroughly investigated in its connection to the poem's speculative power. In one of the very few analytical essays on Ariosto's marvellous, Guido Almansi talks about 'tattica del meraviglioso ariostesco'.⁶² Almansi identifies an eccentric position of the *Furioso* when representing the marvellous, consisting of lack of orchestration: the *Furioso's* marvellous tends to be introduced in a low key, as part of natural events.⁶³

Il meraviglioso ariostesco si manifesta in una lingua per lo più pacata, tranquilla, non eccezionale. Quasi del tutto assente è la sorpresa della voce poetante, il tono di entusiasmo o di religioso stupore del raccontare che ha partecipato agli 'stupendi' avvenimenti e ora li narra. [...] Assente è la minuzia descrittiva ed analogica, l'indagine insistita e curiosa sul meccanismo dell'avvenimento fantastico. (Almansi, p. 191)

⁶⁰ In Zatti, *Il 'Furioso fra epos e romanzo'*, p. 200, and p. 211 (n. 57). When writing "deviante" Zatti quotes here Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.48.

⁶¹ But see Biow, 'Ariosto, Power, and the Desire for Totality', in *Mirabile Dictu*, pp. 95-121. The essay explores mainly the marvels connected to Astolfo and his voyaging, and to the power of the new firearms, arguing that the *Furioso's* marvels, expressing a desire for totality, function as instruments of power to achieve a coherent vision of the world.

⁶² Guido Almansi, 'Tattica del meraviglioso ariostesco,' in *Ludovico Ariosto: lingua, stile e tradizione. Atti del Congresso organizzato dai comuni di Reggio Emilia e Ferrara 12-16 ottobre 1964*, ed. Cesare Segre (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976), pp. 175-193.

⁶³ Ezio Raimondi also shares Almansi's reading: 'gli elementi meravigliosi entrano nel racconto in sordina come circostanze del tutto naturali'; E. Raimondi, 'Ariosto', in *La letteratura italiana. Dalle origini al Cinquecento*, ed. Loredana Chines (Milano: Mondadori, 2007), p. 319.

Almansi is here thinking about Dante, whose marvellous, unlike Ariosto's, is soaring, persuasive and quite openly practical. The atmosphere of the *Commedia* was created through the intertwining of the marvelling subject and the object worthy of admiration (the latter coinciding with the poem itself). The *Furioso* relies rather on the intertwining of actions and stories, bringing to the text as a whole a feeling of earthly life of which both the natural and marvellous are part.⁶⁴

Leaving aside the marvellous found on the moon, which deserves separate treatment, I will now concentrate on the 'terrestrial' aspects of the marvellous, which can be gathered in different thematic clusters. Almansi singles out three different types of marvellous acting in the poem.⁶⁵ The first one is 'il meraviglioso pratico', which is related to the story's pragmatic needs (i.e. Angelica's magic ring); this marvellous is lowered to the level of routine. The second one is 'il meraviglioso incredulo', which involves a doubt about the reality of the fantastic event that appears as possible and impossible at the same time; fantasy is controlled by an element of scepticism and irony that blocks the complete development of the marvellous (i.e. the description of Alcina's palace in VI.59.1-8). As Almansi observes, this is a different kind of doubt from Dante the pilgrim's, which is often given an emphatic function, reinforcing the context. Although present in some instances of the *Furioso*, this assertive doubt leading to a deeper knowledge is rare in Ariosto's poem as much as it is frequent in Dante's. The third

⁶⁴ See Walter Binni, *Ludovico Ariosto* (Torino: ERI, 1968), pp. 244-255. Binni speaks of a "'sopra mondo" [...] nato appunto dalla fusione del reale e del sopra-reale, del naturale e del meraviglioso, di modo che il meraviglioso, portato a volte fino all'estremo limite del magico, non svapora mai nello svolazzo fumoso e non perde mai il sussidio del senso della realtà, mentre la realtà, a sua volta, non resta mai ad un livello puramente fotografico, non è mai ripresa, imitata nelle sue forme più immediate e veristiche', pp. 244-245.

⁶⁵ See pp. 177-190.

type is 'il meraviglioso onirico', the more classical sort, as found for example in the dreamy atmosphere of Orrilo's episode (XV.65). All these 'sub-kinds' share, in Almansi's view, a lack of meticulous elaboration of the fantastic aspect. A possible hypothesis of interpretation, advanced by the critic, lies in the narrative structure of the poem. As I have underlined in II.2, the marvellous requires a pause to watch, during which the narrative has to slow down to allow contemplation. That is not generally allowed to Dante the pilgrim, as we recall from the Virgilian 'guarda e passa' (*Inf.*, III.51). Too much wonder, and too long a pause, becomes a stupor that freezes the intellect and therefore also discourse. Almansi, aware of such pausing, or 'shock' as he calls it (p. 192), caused by the act of marvelling, speaks about Ariosto's narrative technique, which constantly reaches out towards the next octave, and the next, so that the reader is captivated by the story. Some critics in fact talk about the *Furioso* in terms of a narrative machine.⁶⁶ In order to achieve such a fluidity the author manipulates his language, renouncing a 'voce meravigliosa' (Almansi, p. 193), and controlling that marvellous which came from the tradition of the romance and which Boiardo had already adapted for the Renaissance courtly public.⁶⁷

The object of Almansi's reflection is always what can be called the 'fantastic marvellous'. The fact that this kind of marvellous is not rhetorically emphasized in the *Furioso* is, in my view, a sign that the author is pointing to a different direction

⁶⁶ 'Il Furioso, mi sembra, non ha struttura: è una macchina per farsi leggere', writes Almansi (p. 192). I am also thinking of Corrado Bologna, *La macchina del 'Furioso'. Lettura dell'Orlando e delle 'Satire'* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998).

⁶⁷ For the marvellous in Boiardo see Denise Alexandre Gras, 'L'Orlando innamorato tra meraviglioso e magico', in *Il Boiardo e il mondo estense nel Quattrocento. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Scandiano, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Ferrara, 13-17 settembre 1994*, ed. Giuseppe Anceschi, and Tina Matarrese, 2 vols (Padova: Antenore, 1998), pp. 271-295.

for us to follow, beyond the formal appearance of marvels. In order to learn about Ariosto's intentions it is worth paying attention to how the *Furioso* deals with the marvellous from the opening of his poem, organizing the first occurrences of terms belonging to the general semantic sphere of wonder into a brief sequence. Gathering what at first sight seem scattered terms and episodes, may seem, to begin with, a mechanical procedure, but it is in reality a fruitful technique when analysing the poem, an attempt at re-constructing the original image of a jigsaw.

The first occurrence of the term 'maraviglia' appears in the second canto and it refers to Atlante's castle, 'a maraviglia bello' (*Fur.*, II.41.8). Following Almansi's classification, this can be considered as part of the 'meraviglioso onirico', and it is indeed introduced in a low key. The castle is a fortress dominating a valley 'inculta e fiera, | di ripe cinta e spaventose tane' (*Fur.*, II.41.5-6) accessible 'per balze e per pendici orride e strane' (*Fur.*, II.41.2). The marvellously beautiful and shiny castle contrasts with the eeriness of the landscape, but what really emerges from the description is the power connected to its charm, not just the charm itself. The 'maraviglia' here is caused by magic controlling wild nature, a point which is reinforced by the second occurrence of the term in II.54.7 during the battle between the two knights Gradasso and Ruggiero, and the wizard Atlante on the hippogryph. It is here that the first comment on truth and falsity is embedded amongst Dantesque echos: 'questa maraviglia | al falso più ch'al ver si rassimiglia' (*Fur.*, II.54.7-8). Two elements are to be underlined. The first being that these first occurrences are placed within Pinabello's telling of the story, that is during a fiction within the (main) fiction; this immediately sets 'maraviglia' in its

narrative context. The second is the presence of Ruggiero, destined to be the founder of the Este dynasty and for this reason emphatically connected to the marvellous in the *Furioso*; in fact, his interaction with characters like Atlante, Alcina, Marfisa, is always source of a marvellous that tends to have a formulaic and hyperbolic role. Canto two also holds the third occurrence of 'maraviglia', which is now associated with the Emperor's opinion of Bradamante's worth in battle: "1 suo valor con maraviglia | riguardar suol, quando armeggiar la vede' (*Fur.*, II.64.5-6); the connection is highlighted by the assonance carried by 'maraviglia' and 'armeggiar', both holding a strong metrical position in each verse. This occurrence also belongs to the hyperbolic vocabulary, designed to eulogize the founder of the Este dynasty, and drawing closer to *ammirazione*.

The second canto displays the two semantic spheres of the marvellous, as found in the *Furioso*: magic and human. The first occurrence refers to Atlante's magic powers; the second one to *the account* of a battle between two men and a wizard; the third one to man's valour only, or, more importantly, woman's valour in the eye of a man, Charlemagne. The sequence is then enriched by a fourth occurrence at the beginning of canto three, still part of the narrative segment of the preceding canto. Bradamante, having arrived in Merlino's grotto, is astonished ('sbigottita'; *Fur.*, III.13.1) at the encounter with Melissa, a narrative moment which also discloses the first appearance of the enchantress; the woman 'ha sì pieno il cor di maraviglia, | che non sa s'ella dorme o s'ella è desta' (*Fur.*, III.13.3-4).

This dreamy state of mind is the consequence of magic, which clouds the senses.⁶⁸ We are back in the 'meraviglioso onirico', where an excess of wonder becomes astonishment and where prophecies can be revealed. The sequence concludes with two more occurrences of 'maraviglia', this time defined as 'alta' in IV.4 and IV.17, which again refers to Atlante's flight on the hippogryph. After that, the story takes a new turn and there is no more wonder until canto five, where a 'valoroso a maraviglia' (V.18) appears, in Dalinda's words, referring to Ariodante, Italian knight at the Scottish court who fell in love with Ginevra. Here valour and admiration appear again on the same side, as for Bradamante.

Such oscillation between magic and human marvellous is indicative of Ariosto's intentions in adapting the matter that comes from the tradition to his own artistic purposes. The marvellous related to man tends to be embedded between episodes of 'magic marvellous', in order to ground fantasy. The fact that the two types are always alternating and feed on each other is indicative of the poet's interest in intertwining man's world with the collective imaginary. This is also another reflection of a poem belonging to a society straddling past and present, imitation and originality, and aiming to assert its own dimension within a historical context constantly in flux.

It is worth distinguishing different kinds of marvellous according to the difference in the act of marvelling (cause) that lies behind them, and not merely by their effect, which is secondary. I will therefore look at selected passages, bearing

⁶⁸ These are also the effects of Atlante's shield: 'lo scudo mortal, che come pria | si scopre, il suo splendor sì gli occhi assalta, | la vista tosse, e tanto occupa i sensi, | che come morto rimaner conviensi'; *Fur.*, III.67.5-8.

in mind the other two 'neighbouring' sides of wonder: astonishment (*stupor*) and admiration (*admiratio*). Each of these two poles embodies the extremities of the contrast at play in the *Furioso* between the irrational and the rational, the former represented by magic and the latter by admiration of heroic feats.

Magic, the first type of marvellous encountered in the *Furioso*, generally falls under *stupor*. The main property of a charm is in fact to draw the person/object away from his/its usual functioning; it leads to a parallel world and it is a suspension of reality. This happens to Astolfo and Ruggiero on Alcina's island and it is the same mechanism behind Atlante's palace of illusions, which is a steel prison that blocks the access to reality. Magic objects coming from the romance tradition appear in the *Furioso* too, like the enchanted shield, the magic ring, the golden spear, the book of enchantments, the horn, and so on. Some of these magical elements work towards providence's plan and some others work as a hindrance to it. Sometimes magic is contrasted with human virtue, sometimes they act together. As Julia M. Kisacky argues, Ariosto's magic lacks the vitality of Boiardo's, the latter using it as an essential part of his narrative to awaken wonder and entertain readers, and the former attributing to it a more intellectual nuance: 'in the *Furioso* the association of magic with chance and chaos is contrasted much more strongly with a positive concept of order, reason, harmony, Providence'.⁶⁹ Magic for Ariosto is essential in the sense that it plays an important narrative role, without which the plot would not be the same. However, within the discourse on

⁶⁹ Julia M. Kisacky, *Magic in Boiardo and Ariosto* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 138. See specifically chapters three, four, and five respectively for her analyses of Ariosto's marvellous artefacts, supernatural creatures and practitioners of magic.

the marvellous, the portions of the text crossed by magic are not the richest in marvel-related vocabulary as is the case in Boiardo. This is part of that 'unprepared' marvellous, which I mentioned above. The reason behind this lack of enthusiasm lies in Ariosto's interest in man as crossroads of different forces. Therefore the irrational is welcomed as a component, not as a self-sustaining tract.

'The use of magic is acceptable in the *Furioso* solely outside of the chivalric context', argues Kisacky, while in a broader context it may be 'the only means of defeating evil or amoral opponents who have their own unfair advantages' (p. 68). In fact Ruggiero is often reluctant to use the magic shield he found attached to the hippogryph, as in canto six, against the monsters obstructing his way towards Logistilla, 'perché virtude usare vòlse, e non frodo' (VI.67.8); he uses it as a last resort as we see in octaves 81-83 of canto twenty two ('per l'ultimo soccorso | nei più gravi perigli avea ricorso'; XXII.81.7-8). In the *Furioso* there are different kinds of magic and different kinds of agents. The fiction of Alcina and Atlante for example, aimed at trapping the characters in their own illusions and blind desires, is balanced by Melissa's endeavours to help and protect Ruggiero and Bradamante. But this is a special instance because it works towards the protection of the forbears of the Este dynasty; fiction and wiles underlie the majority of the magic episodes, and the balance yields to deceit.⁷⁰

Ariosto himself seems generally to formulate negative comments about practitioners of magic. In the *Furioso* the forecasts of 'il dotto Alfeo [...] | [...] |

⁷⁰ See Giulio Ferroni, 'L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia', in *Convegno Internazionale Ludovico Ariosto. Roma, Lucca, Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, Reggio Emilia, Ferrara, 27 settembre-5 ottobre 1974* (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1975), 73-92 (p. 85).

medico e mago e pien d'astrologia' (XVIII.174.2 and 4) are ridiculed as fake, as underlined by the rhyme 'astrologia | bugia' (XVIII.174.4 and 6). The astrologer in his comedy *Il Negromante* shows himself as a mere charlatan. But magic is part of a much more complex dimension in Renaissance society and it often shares its borders with scientific knowledge. It can be perceived at the same time as an attempt to investigate the mysteries of nature, and an occasion for spiritual inquiry, bearing an esoteric imprint.⁷¹ In Ariosto's Ferrara magic is a dominant element. Several intellectuals at the Este's court considered themselves erudite in astrology and alchemy; some of them would believe in magic craft; the Este themselves would have astrologers prognosticating about different aspects of their life.⁷² Most *litterati* were in the habit of deriding such practices and condemning them, as is apparent from Celio Calcagnini's *Apologus Magiae*. But some were open to them and would rather consider the problematic behind it, like Niccolò Leonicensio, humanist and translator of Lucian, and expert on astrology. He is also mentioned in the *Erbolato*, a prose composition attributed to Ariosto and published in 1545, as he who bequeathed the Elettuario, a curative wonder vessel, to the astrologer.⁷³ Ariosto applies in the *Erbolato* a vast range of vocabulary extracted from the semantic sphere of wonder. Most of the occurrences are related to the works of the doctor-charlatan, who presents his art as miraculous: people all

⁷¹ See Pisana Grossi, 'La magia rinascimentale e il Furioso', in *Il mago, il cosmo, il teatro degli astri*, ed. Gianfranco Formichetti (Roma: Bulzoni, 1985), pp. 115-134. For magic and astrology in the Renaissance see Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1976).

⁷² See Cesare Vasoli, 'L'astrologia a Ferrara tra la metà del Quattrocento e la metà del Cinquecento', in *Il Rinascimento nelle corti padane. Società e cultura*, ed. Paolo Rossi [et al.] (Bari: De Donato, 1977), pp. 469-494.

⁷³ All references to the *Erbolato* are taken from Gabriella Ronchi's edition, in *Tutte le opere di Ludovico Ariosto*, ed. Cesare Segre, 3 vols (Milano: Mondadori, 1964-84), III.

around the world witnessed his ‘mirabili cure’ and were ‘stupefatti’ (III.61); he calls the Elettuario ‘miracoloso rimedio’ (IV.15) and ‘non è cosa più mirabile’ (V.44). The *Erbolato* is an interesting piece. Although some critics have dismissed it as just a parodic *réclame* pamphlet, I believe that Ferroni has done it justice by considering it in its ambivalence.⁷⁴ It was published in Venice by Jacopo Coppa, a supposed charlatan from Modena; the very fact that he embraced it, belonging himself to the same category as the *Erbolato*’s narrator, the medic and philosopher Antonio Faentino (in reality Antonio Cittadino from Faenza), is in Ferroni’s opinion enough to show that the work touched upon some serious issues. The monologue advertises the prodigious Elettuario in an attempt to sell it to the audience. It is considered as being part of the so called literature ‘della piazza pubblica’ or ‘carnevalesca’.⁷⁵ It starts with a theme drawn from the preface to book seven of Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* used (contrary to Pliny’s original argument) to assert the worth of reason over nature. This sparks a eulogy on the art of medicine, which at the time was not a science as such but often associated with charlatanry and magic. Ferroni observes:

Proprio la medicina e la ciarlataneria mostrano che la ragione più autentica è quella che sa trascorrere su di una estrema varietà di metodi, esperienze, usi, costumi, luoghi e paesi; emblema della conoscenza autentica viene ad essere proprio il ciarlatano, la sua mobilità che gli fa toccare le più varie nature e le più varie opinioni degli uomini.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ferroni, ‘Nota sull’*Erbolato*’, *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 79 (1975), 202-214.

⁷⁵ Ferroni, *Ariosto* (Roma: Salerno, 2008), p. 113. Ferroni here refers to Bakhtin’s study *Rabelais and his world*.

⁷⁶ Ferroni, *Ariosto*, p. 114.

A similar conclusion can be gathered by the astrologer's speech in act II scene II (vv. 638-680) of *Il Negromante* when the astrologer recognises human variety, to incorporate it and to interpret it, in order to make as much money as he can. In order for the deceit to work, the charlatan will act according to his target's attributes, playing with his/her illusions and desires, as Alcina and Atlante do in the *Furioso*.

This irrational side of the *Furioso* is counterbalanced by human virtue and honour displayed by the knights especially during battles and duels. What Ferroni calls 'il cavaliere virtuoso e degno di ammirazione, antesignano del signore rinascimentale' embodies the other extreme aspect of the marvellous, connected to *ammirazione*. Battles and duels are a stage for knights to show their own human skills, physical and moral, and also a place of encounter, as highlighted by Marco Dorigatti: 'Il duello è sì uno scontro, ma più spesso anche un incontro, un appuntamento con 'l'altro' (ossia l'ignoto) o col destino'.⁷⁷ Dorigatti also points out (p. 4) that it is in fact during a duel that Bradamante and Rugiero meet for the first time in the *Innamorato* and Bradamante falls in love with him while admiring his battle skills (*Inn.*, III.4.49-59 and III.5.9.5-7). It is also a field where several terms belonging to the semantic sphere of wonder are clustered, following the traditional *topos* of the chivalric poem. In fact it bears a high level of theatricality and hyperbole, where a marvellous blow from one contender corresponds to a

⁷⁷ Marco Dorigatti, "'Di novo se comencia la tentione': il duello nell'universo cavalleresco di Matteo Maria Boiardo", in *Convegno Internazionale 'Orlando innamorato'. Oralità e scrittura*, XXXV Festival di Morgana, Palermo, Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino, 11-12 novembre 2010 (forthcoming), p. 4.

likewise wondrous swing from the opponent, in a mostly dominating symmetry, which sometimes only fades in the duel's outcome.⁷⁸

As one would expect, Ruggiero's specific deeds are frequently decorated by formulaic marvel-related expressions. For instance, in canto twenty six Marfisa is in awe looking at Ruggiero and his companions fighting:

con maraviglia tutti li lodava:
ma di Ruggier pur il valore stupendo
e senza pari al mondo le sembrava;
e talor si credea che fosse Marte
sceso dal quinto cielo in quella parte.
XXVI.20.4-8

Mirava quelle orribili percosse,
miravale non mai calare in fallo[.]
XXVI.21.1-2

Sol mira ella Ruggier, sol con lui parla[.]
XXVI.29.3

A similar reaction is described, but with less emphasis, when Ruggiero looks at Marfisa, full of admiration:

e non men di Ruggier gli occhi a sé trasse,
ch'ella di lui l'alto valor mirasse.
XXVI.23.7-8

Although Ruggiero for narrative reasons is frequently associated with marvels, he is not the only one to generate admiration. As we have seen, Ariodante is praised in canto five as being 'valoroso a maraviglia' (V.18), and the same happens in canto sixteen where Ariodante 'dà di sé timore e meraviglia' (XVI.59.7); at the beginning of the same octave Zerbino's deeds are described as 'mirabil pruove' (59.1). People in canto seventeen marvel at the surprises offered by the joust

⁷⁸ This depends on the valour and the importance of the characters contending. See M. Dorigatti, "'Di novo se comencia la tentione'", p. 6.

between Grifone and Martano: 'ognun maravigliando in piè si leva; | ch 'l contrario di ciò tutto attendeva' (XVII.93.7-8). Marfisa is introduced for the first time as 'ne le battaglie a maraviglia fiera' (XVIII.98.8) and in canto nineteen she wonders at Guidon Selvaggio's valour:

Si maraviglia la donzella, come
in arme tanto un giovinetto vaglia;
si meraviglia l'altro, ch'alle chiome
s'avede con chi avea fatto battaglia[.]⁷⁹
XIX.108.1-4

Mandricardo in canto thirty says of himself: 'non cessa ancor la maraviglia loro | de la gran prova ch'io feci quel giorno' (XXX.41.1-2). I could provide several more examples, scattered in the poem, that belong to the same semantic sphere, but at this stage I would like to underline one element that they share: the reciprocity of such admiration. In most of the examples I reported, there is a similar pattern of two (or more) people admiring each other's dexterity. This creates an atmosphere of excellence, of which reciprocal respect and acknowledgment of one's valour is a vital part. It also establishes a parallel mechanism for gratitude, one of the constant values of humanist culture; it corroborates the image of an ideal world where individual skills should be recognized, commended, and recompensed.⁸⁰ This counterbalances the lack of

⁷⁹ Jossa in fact notices a double wonder when he looks at the episode of Marfisa and Guidon Selvaggio admiring each other at the end of a duel: 'il XIX canto si era chiuso con una doppia meraviglia'; see S. Jossa, *Lectura Ariosti* (canto XX), ed. Franco Tomasi (Firenze: Edizioni del Galluzzo) (forthcoming 2012).

⁸⁰ On the concept of gratitude cf. Mario Santoro, *Lecture ariostesche* (Napoli: Liguori, 1973), pp. 39-41.

correspondence of the desires in the *selva*, where Fortune denies the object of the *quête*.⁸¹

In real society, if gratitude is not always valued as it should be, it could at least ideally materialize within love's domain. As Ficino elaborates in his first vernacularization of his own Latin work, the widely circulated *El libro dell'amore*, unreciprocated love was considered to be like death. Love, in the wake of courtly conceptions, is portrayed as a voluntary death of the 'amante' followed by a resurrection in the 'amato' once the latter has accepted love and reciprocated it. If the 'amato' does not reciprocate love, the 'amante' is said to die and the 'amato' is responsible for it, and then called by Ficino 'ladro, omicidale e sacrilego' (p. 42).⁸² When Orlando goes mad he is in fact defined as dead: 'la sua donna ingratisima l'ha ucciso: | sì, mancando di fé, gli ha fatto guerra' (*Fur.*, XXIII.128.3-4). War and madness are sparked off by lack of faith. But there is a counter-movement, if valour is displayed during war and admiration arises as a social means. The only two characters bound by mutual love from the beginning of the *Furioso* are unsurprisingly Ruggiero and Bradamante. They are too much a part of the reciprocal admiration, which is for them also due to love: 'Ruggier riguarda Bradamante, et ella | riguarda lui con alta maraviglia' (XXII.32.1-2), and 'l'alto parlare e la fiera sembianza | di quella coppia a maraviglia ardita' (XXII.45.1-2).

Admiration for human virtue is definitely something that is omnipresent in Ariosto, as it was in Boiardo too, being human virtue the noblest thing to

⁸¹ See Sergio Zatti, 'Il cosmo, la corte, il poema: il sistema di corrispondenze', in his *Il 'Furioso' fra epos e romanzo*, pp. 127-171.

⁸² See Marsilio Ficino, *El libro dell'amore*, ed. Sandra Niccoli (Firenze: Olschki, 1987). See specifically II.viii, pp. 40-42 (p. 42).

contemplate. That is what two hundred years have brought: a shift onto the object of contemplation. From the realm of the unchangeable (above the moon), where the supreme object was God, to the realm of the changeable (below the moon), where man freely wonders at his own capabilities, humanism has produced what Eugenio Garin has called 'l'abbassamento dei cieli alla terra, su cui si leva, unico reale dominatore, l'uomo che opera, che vede e prevede per fare'.⁸³ Boccaccio had initiated this process in the fourteenth century; the object of his *Decameron* was not heavenly but terrestrial. As he states in the introduction to day four, where he lays a defence of his work against attacks of critics lamenting the lack of high topics in his *novelle*, he does not refer to Muses, but to women in the flesh.⁸⁴ Reality is rich enough to offer teachings and entertainment to men without the need of turning to higher spheres, about which not much is given men to know. This does not involve a denial of such spheres, but simply a fair division of tasks and a different attention to human nature, at least when depicted in literature.

The *Diario ferrarese* (1409-1502) offers a great picture of society from the point of view of an anonymous citizen; the author, as underlined by G. Pardi's preface, must not have been particularly well educated since there are no comments at all on Ferrara's *Studio*, at the time one of the main centres of humanism, nor about artists at the court, and he was probably not part of the

⁸³ E. Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi e ricerche* (Bari: Laterza, 1954), p. 188.

⁸⁴ 'Né noi possiamo dimorar con le Muse né esse con essonoi. [...] le Muse son donne [...]; le donne mi fûr cagione di comporre mille versi, dove le Muse mai non mi furono di farne alcun cagione'; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Mario Marti, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Firenze: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1979), I, p. 272.

military body either, but perhaps a notary.⁸⁵ The chronicler's eye dwells mainly on the magnificence of public parades to mark visits of the pope and the emperor, weddings, arrivals or departures of members and guests of the Este family; the marquis Borso is said to enter Ferrara 'cum splendida et magnifica comitiva' (p. 33). Particular attention is dedicated to the number of horses accompanying the party, people's clothing, the value of jewellery worn, the beauty of the ladies, the splendour of objects in the trousseau; these are often defined as 'maravelgia', 'cosa incredibile' (p. 282). On these occasions the palace of the Este is said to be 'mirabilmente adornato' (p. 34). It all mirrors the image of the prince that the Este consciously constructed to win the support of their people, who in fact were encouraged to take part in the big events at the house of the Este, such as weddings, funerals, and general celebrations, during which shops in town were allowed to shut in order for people to join street merriments. The prince's generosity and display of magnificence were a constitutional element of the society; admiration for the prince would guarantee taxes to be levied and loyalty to the ruling family.⁸⁶

While in the Middle Ages the semantic sphere of wonder was to be directed towards *the Lord* and His creation, the Renaissance transfers the object of contemplation to worldly ones; *the Lords* of the Renaissance attract attention and embody power on earth in a god-like manner. Therefore admiration shifts too and is directed toward men rather than God. However, the marvellous that Ariosto

⁸⁵ *Diario ferrarese dall'anno 1409 sino al 1502*, ed. Giuseppe Pardi (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1928-1937) [Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, XXIV, pt.7].

⁸⁶ With regard to the Este's power and dominions see Ernesto Sestan, 'Gli Estensi e il loro stato al tempo dell'Ariosto', *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 79 (1975), 19-33.

inherited from tradition experiences some variations in the *Furioso*. Marcello Turchi identifies the important relationship between the marvellous and chivalry in the *Furioso*:

le nozze di Bradamante e Ruggiero incarnano quindi in tal guisa un incontro della fantasia e del reale mitico [...] o, per meglio dire, una fantasia che nel poema acquista la funzione di alludere a una realtà storica, indicandone i germi di nobiltà e gentilezza: così per mano di Ruggiero si distrugge il mostro epico e leggendario, furente di eroismo e di volontà distruttrice, il più autentico mostro del poema, il disperato e tracotante Rodomonte, e si apre la via della storia, si apre la strada a una connessione dinastica[.]⁸⁷

History is enlivened. Assigning Rodomonte the nature of 'the most authentic monster of the poem' enriches the perspective on the marvellous. There is a 'destructive' marvellous too behind all the admiration of knight's valour. The same battle skills possessed by Ruggiero and Orlando can be used for deconstructive purposes. The description of Rodomonte in canto seventeen confirms this:

Sta sulla porta il re d'Algier, lucente,
di chiaro acciar che 'l capo gli arma e 'l busto,
come uscito di tenebre serpente,
poi c'ha lasciato ogni squalor vetusto,
[...]
tre lingue vibra, et ha negli occhi foco:
dovunque passa, ogn' animal dà loco.
Fur., XVII.11.1-4; 7-8.

He looks like a character from Hell. Rodomonte is part of the marvellous too with Ruggiero, Bradamante, Orlando, Marfisa, and so on. The ideals of a chivalric world descend into the real world and are put into discussion by Ariosto's look.

⁸⁷ Turchi, *Ariosto o della liberazione fantastica*, p. 31.

At the same time they keep their fantastic halo in its symbolic value, as Turchi notices:

I cavalieri divengono sostanzialmente uomini, ponendosi fuori dell'accensione ideale in cui sono nati; resta il 'meraviglioso', che però si complica e si sviluppa in una sorta di simbolismo allusivo della condizione umana.⁸⁸

That is in fact what happens with the figure of Rodomonte, concentrating fury and comedy. The suit of armour has a symbolic role too. Characters appear in all their splendour with their defences protecting their own bodies. Armour is an extension of the body. On the fourth day of Orlando's madness, we read that the crazed paladin rips his suit of armour and scatters around his helmet, his shield and all his fighting tools (*Fur.*, XXIII.132-33) until he remains naked. We understand here that the suit of armour symbolizes social behaviour, being the means through which knights interact with each other and face hindrances. Nakedness is a symbol of Orlando's bestial degradation.

The marvellous connected to chivalry occupies a central role in the run for social acceptance. In order to gain society's praise and support, in other words, to gain rights of existence, the poem had to comply with the courtly dimension; as Ferroni puts it:

doveva rassicurarla [la corte] sul finale trionfo di una saggezza trasparente a se stessa, sulla possibilità di identificare norma morale e norma sociale, nella misura eroica di Orlando rinsavito e di Ruggiero progenitore degli Estensi.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Turchi, *Ariosto o della liberazione fantastica*, p. 73.

⁸⁹ Ferroni, 'L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia', p. 89.

But conformity to society's laws is just one superficial aspect of the *Furioso* and does not coincide with its heart.⁹⁰ Hence Ariosto's placement of the episode of Orlando, the exemplar knight, going mad at the core of his poem. Traditionally, magic and chivalry function as symbols of the human condition: magic of irrationality and disorder, and chivalry of rationality and order. The former being represented by the *meraviglioso* and the latter by *ammirazione*. But the very fact that an exemplar of knights goes mad and that his healing is described as due to inhaling some kind of magic potion muddles up once again the two poles, and transforms what was traditionally the object of safe *ammirazione* into a disruptively dangerous *meraviglioso*.

III.2.2 Orlando's Frenzy

A brief look at Boiardo's treatment of the marvellous in the *Innamorato* will isolate by contrast an important element in the *Furioso*. In the opening of the *Innamorato*, Boiardo displays in a traditional manner the topic of his poem. In the first octave the author introduces Orlando's 'alta fatica' and 'mirabil prove' (*Inn.*, I.1.6) as the subject of the poem, followed by an immediate comment on his own literary enterprise: 'Non vi par già, signor, meraviglioso | odir cantar de Orlando innamorato' (*Inn.*, I.2.1-2). The subject matter of the poem is made by love and consequent admirable feats, and it is meant to be perceived as marvellous by the

⁹⁰ Ferroni, 'L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia', p. 81.

reader.⁹¹ The marvellous, in order to be accepted, needs credibility, and for this reason the third and fourth octaves promptly present the source of the 'bella istoria', as Boiardo refers to his own poem in I.1.4, which coincides with the 'vera istoria' (*Inn.*, I.4.1) of the archbishop Turpino. In this way, delight and truth are fictionally joined. Ariosto, in the opening of the *Furioso*, does not explicitly resort to the term 'meraviglioso'. However, he makes use of a rhetorical formula to prepare his own story matter:

Dirò d'Orlando in un medesimo tratto
cosa non detta in prosa mai né in rima:
che per amor venne in furore e matto[.]
Fur., I.2.1-3

I argue that this is the 'real marvellous' with which Ariosto is most concerned. If the fantastic marvellous is understated and appears almost naturally, this one is orchestrated from the very beginning. This is done to create expectation and it is part of the rhetorical procedure to create the marvellous. We have seen the same strategy in Dante's opening of the *Paradiso* ('l'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse'; *Par.*, II.7). Drawing attention to the novelty of the poetic matter, the author secures the readers' attention and kindles their wonder.

In order to give credibility to this, Ariosto does not mention Turpino (whose name appears for the first time, and in brackets, in canto XIII. 40.2), but he draws a parallel with himself. The first four lines of the second octave are dedicated to Orlando; the last four lines refer instead to Ariosto who addresses his lady, 'colei che tal *quasi* m'ha fatto' (*Fur.*, I.2.5; my italics), in the hope that she will

⁹¹ On Boiardo's marvellous see Denise Alexandre Gras, 'L'Orlando innamorato tra meraviglioso e magico', pp. 271-295.

not consume his intellect completely but allow him to finish his story. Although he is not at the same stage of madness as Orlando, the poet anchors his character in the reality of which he is himself part. The poet also wishes the thoughts of his (courtly) public to be lowered a little in order to listen to his verses ('e vostri alti pensier cedino un poco,| sì che tra lor miei versi abbiano loco'; *Fur.*, I.4.7-8). Ariosto's main concern is not the traditional supernatural or magic marvellous; it is the 'human marvellous'. On paper, the operation is the opposite to Dante's who would rather ask the unprepared reader ('o voi che siete in piccioletta barca'; *Par.*, II.1) not to follow him in open sea; Ariosto asks the learned reader to lower his expectations and to look at the ground level in order to go along with the narration.

Because my interest lies in the gnoseological aspect of wonder, I will focus on those passages that are most representative of such. A study of the 'fantastic marvellous' in the *Furioso* would deserve a different treatment. Two-faced wonder, standing between the rational and the irrational, offers a fresh perspective on Ariosto's poetics. Dante's path to knowledge appeared in a quite straight line, unlike Ariosto's which boasts a tortuous and endless 'errare' just contained by the geometry of the poem. Isolating Orlando's madness as one of the most densely marvellous moments implies a discourse on knowledge that paradoxically lacks rationality. The stress is not on the aim but on the route, or in fact the *quête*. This means being trapped in an eternal stage of oscillation between the rational and the irrational, which is precisely where *meraviglia* lives.

'Man', as an expression of such oscillation, is what Ariosto wonders at above all. At the end of chapter II.1, I similarly suggested that the real mystery for Dante is man, hence his desire to partake of the Incarnation and the attention to the human effigy in the final vision at the end of *Paradiso*. The same interest for man can be found in the majority of literary works. The difference lies in the interpretation of man that each author embraces, that is, in the role attributed to it. While Dante's man was still theoretically considered as a 'veil' to lift so that access might be gained to the divine realm, as was the case in Dante's poetry, Ariosto points rather to what lies behind the veil, or tapestry, as the only knowable level. Signs of this can be found in his later *Satire*. In *Satira* IV the poet moans about his situation in Garfagnana, where he had been recently sent as *commissario ducale*, and comments on his own lament:

E direbbe il Vangel di san Giovanni;
 che, se ben erro, pur non son sì losco
 che 'l mio error non conosca e ch'io nol danni.
 Ma che giova s'io 'l danno e s'io 'l conosco,
 se non ci posso riparar, né truovi
 rimedio alcun che spenga questo tòsco?
Sat., IV.34-39

Ariosto, unlike Dante, does not judge his own mistakes and does not endeavour to transform them into something that can elevate him. A similar point is made in the *Furioso* XXXV.2.1-3:

Per riaver l'ingegno mio m'è avviso
 che non bisogna che per l'aria io poggi
 nel cerchio della luna o in paradiso[.]

Earthly problems have earthly causes, so the poet's wits are nowhere else but on his lady's body, and the poet will only be able to retrieve them by picking them

with his own lips. When the intellect soars too high, the risk is plummeting down like 'Nicoletto o fra Martin' in *Satira* VI:

[...] salendo lo intelletto in suso
per veder Dio, non de' parerci strano
se talor cade giù cieco e confuso.
Sat., VI.46-48

If Ariosto renounces a 'voce meravigliosa' when narrating fantastic elements, as Almansi has suggested, I believe he does so in order not to confuse these two dimensions of the supernatural and the human. The rhetoric of the marvellous gives emphasis; if the emphasis was on magic or the supernatural the poem would take a different turn. The episode that is more orchestrated, and therefore bears more emphasis, is instead that of Orlando's frenzy, as indicated by the very title of the poem. That is the great expectation, the novelty that is to generate wonder. The readers are ready to witness his madness from the very first lines of the poem, but they have to wait until canto twenty three to watch his madly marvellous feats, announced as such in XXIII.134.4 ('mirabil cose').

Ariosto doesn't indulge too long in the fantastic aspect of Orlando's madness, whose features are in the end only spread for the length of three months (XXXIV.66.3) and narrated in XXIII.132-136, XXIV.4-14, XXIX.39-72, XXX.4-15, XXXIX.36-56, just around 80 verses in total. Orlando is said to be 'offuscato in ogni senso' by his rage, which seems to have a similar effect to magic's stupor. His incredible deeds ('incredibil prove'; *Fur.*, XXIV.5.1) are accompanied by the reaction of wonder and astonishment both in characters like Fiordiligi, 'd'alta meraviglia piena' (XXIX.44.8); Dudone, Astolfo, Brandimarte and Oliviero, 'maravigliosi di quel fiero' (XXXIX.38.4); and the narrator himself who chooses

adjectives like 'solenne' (XXIX.50.5), 'miraculosa' (XXIX.50.7), 'stupende' (XXIX.57.1) to describe his maddest actions. Astolfo, in charge of his salvation, is the only one feeling 'maraviglia' and 'pietade' (XXXIX.46.8) at his sight. Such use of hyperbolic adjectives is part of the orchestration. To recall once again Aristotle's *Poetics*: 'awe (to *thaumaston*) is pleasurable (*hedu*): witness the fact that all men exaggerate (*pantes prostithentes*) when relating stories, to give delight (*karizomenoi*)' (1460a 15); the marvellous is generated by making addition to a verisimilar story in order to improve it and make it more pleasurable.⁹² As I have mentioned in I.2, the idea of 'exceeding', or going beyond something set, was also present in the treatise *On the Sublime*, where *thaumaston* was linked to *paradoxon* (35.5: '*thaumaston d'omos aei to paradoxon*'). This is the feature of Ariosto's marvellous: Orlando's frenzy is imbued with paradoxical and magical elements so as to stage a human reaction to love, which is verisimilar in its deep nature because it is shared by all men, even by the author, but is paradoxical in its literary expression. This is the role of Ariosto's *phantasia*, to inflate human natural occurrences (sometimes through the aid of magic) to make them more visible and therefore more understandable.

Orlando's recovery is part of this picture too. The possibility of healing appears by what is at first perceived as chance, but soon named as providence, as St John explains to Astolfo in XXXIV.55.3-8. The lunar sequence is the main preparation for it, as we will later see. Before healing the exemplary knight, Ariosto wants to take us to the moon to talk about poetry and knowledge. We then

⁹² This passage will be very important for Tasso's reflection on the marvellous and the 'eccesso de la verità'; see his *Giudicio sovra la 'Gerusalemme' riformata*, I.33-36.

have to wait until canto thirty nine to have Orlando back in shape. His coming to his own senses is depicted as a miraculous rebirth which reminds us of Dante the pilgrim on the shore of ante-purgatory, when Virgil washes his face with dew and girds him up with a reed; it is a prodigious moment because the reed is reborn immediately after it is picked, crowned by Dante the poet's sigh: 'oh maraviglia!' (*Purg.*, I.134). Astolfo seven times dips a beast-like Orlando, feet and hands tied up, into the sea, before dispensing the wits stored in the cruet to him. After Orlando inhales it all, Ariosto exclaims: 'maraviglioso caso! | che ritornò la mente al primier uso' (*Fur.*, XXXIX.57.5-6). All of the elements combine to create a sort of religious emotion: the number seven, bringing to mind the seven days of creation; the sea as baptismal water; the action of inhaling, which recalls God's creation of Adam in Genesis 2.7 in reverse ('and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life'); the awakening as from a sleep, which in the Scriptures is a frequent preamble to divine revelation. Also, we know from Astolfo's voyage to the Earthly Paradise that the 'official' origin of his madness is divine punishment for having yielded to his passions and deserted the battle field: 'E Dio per questo fa ch'egli va folle' (XXXIV.65.1).

The magic atmosphere is also inspired by Orlando's reaction to his healing. As usual, wonder calls on wonder. In fact Orlando too wonders at himself:

Come chi da noioso e grave sonno,
[...]
ancor si maraviglia, poi che donno
è fatto de' suoi sensi, e che non dorme;
così, poi che fu Orlando d'error tratto,
restò maraviglioso e stupefatto.
Fur., XXXIX.58.1;5-8

As Bigi points out, line eight is an exact copy of line eight in XXXVI.26 where Ruggiero admires Bradamante's ardour in the duel against Marfisa.⁹³ This lightens the symbolical bearing of the scene and suggests that Orlando's providential coming to his senses is no less a wonder than the human virtue displayed by Ruggiero's wife to be. The major cause of wonder here is the paladin having his own senses restored and opening his eyes to the world as if for the first time. In fact he does not understand what is happening and stares at himself and at the people surrounding him speechless as a newborn baby ('e non favella'):

pur pensando riguarda, e non favella,
 come egli quivi e quando si condusse.
 Girava gli occhi in questa parte e in quella,
 né sapea imaginar dove si fusse.
 Si maraviglia che nudo si vede,
 e tante funi ha da le spalle al piede.
Fur., XXXIX.59.3-8

Orlando's awakening even recalls an Edenic situation ('And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked'; Genesis, 3.7) especially since the parallel that could be drawn is with Adam and Eve having tasted the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Here again is a similar situation: Orlando used to be wise; because of a woman he has lost his intellect; thanks to Astolfo, who ends up on the Terrestrial Paradise and on the moon because of divine will, he regains his reason ('Poi che fu all'esser primo ritornato | Orlando più che mai saggio e virile, | d'amor si trovò insieme liberato'; *Fur.*, XXXIX.61.1-3). The original state of harmony once corrupted by a desire for further knowledge is brought in as an ideal state which is as unattainable as Orlando's traditional figure of a 'perfect

⁹³ See Bigi's note at *Orlando furioso*, XXXIX.58.8, p. 1623.

paladin'. Once in love, Orlando increasingly takes on human aspects. There were already signs of corruption in Boiardo's image of Orlando in love. The inevitable consequence is erring, of which he becomes the utmost symbol in the *Furioso*. As it emerges in the second *Satira*, 'folle' is for Ariosto a deviation from a socially accepted path.⁹⁴ It is also something shared by everyone, even if people are not aware:

Ma chi fu mai sì saggio o mai sì santo
che di esser senza macchia di pazzia,
o poca o molta, dar si possa vanto?
Sat., II.148-150

'Macchia di pazzia' is on the same level as Orlando's 'passato errore' of which he becomes aware once he is healed (*Fur.*, XXXIX.60.8). With the term 'saggio' Ariosto picks up the same adjective that introduces Orlando in the opening of the *Furioso* ('d'uom che sì saggio era stimato prima'; I.2.4).

There is an underlying movement which forms a 'wheel of wonder'. If the path of philosophical knowledge is conceived as a straight line, Ariosto's path can be figured as a wheel. The classical movement, as I have depicted in the previous sections of this work, goes from ignorance to knowledge, in the middle of which wonder plays an active role as intermediary. In Ariosto the story starts from a point A, where Orlando is wise; it then achieves a point B where Orlando goes mad because he cannot reach the object of his love quest, and becomes ignorant; point C is when Astolfo, acting on behalf of Providence, retrieves Orlando's wits;

⁹⁴ 'Questa opinion mia so ben che folle | diran molti, che a salir non tenti | la via ch'uom spesso a grandi onori estolle'; *Sat.*, II.142-144 (my italics). This is also found in Petrarch, *De Ignorantia*, 179, p. 288, where the author is making the point that people consider him mad and ignorant because he believes in something (God) far from the dominant Aristotelian tenets.

point D sees Astolfo almost magically re-establishing the initial order and Orlando being wiser than ever, returning to A. The levels of wisdom at point A and point D coincide, since there is no hint in the text that could make us interpret point D as superior to A. Orlando's 'furore' is not medium of a divine revelation, as it would be if it adhered to Neoplatonic philosophy. The peculiarity of Orlando's route is that the initial stage is not ignorance, but a literary image of a perfect paladin, due to be corrupted by his entry into reality during the *Furioso*; and that the object of the quest is human love, fickle and subject to emotional changes. Original knowledge, and not a perfected version of it, comes back once the individual has rid himself of it as the initial object of his quest. But this is only possible thanks to Astolfo's cruet, which plays a very similar role to natural magic, not to Orlando's merits (as I mentioned in chapter I.4, p. 51).

The 'vaso' that Astolfo collects on the moon and that heals Orlando reminds of the *Erbolato's* magic Elettuario, which is described as a 'picciolo vasetto'. The charlatan in chapter five says:

Questo picciolo vasetto ha in sé rinchiuso la continova sanità e
lunghezza della vita umana, e maggiore che non può concedere la
difettiva natura.
V.74-77

Such vases or cruets were in fact used to store medications and draughts. 'Senno' is, then, stored as an antidote, and it is in fact called 'medicina' by St John (XXXIV.67.5). The fact that it is kept on the moon and is surrounded by a magic halo, though, puts into question the very nature of reason, considered by the same standards as a portentous medicine and for this mocked in its inerrability. Finding

a therapy on the moon also sets the episode within the discussion on astrology as curative science, questioning its credibility.⁹⁵

However, unlike cruets containing herbs or medications that come from the natural world, Astolfo's cruet contains something whose origin is in the same corrupted body that needs to be healed. That is, the therapy is not to be found in the external world but in the inner world. But part of Orlando's (inner) self has left him, and has been providentially collected by, or perhaps I should say it has been attracted by, the well known (outer) magnetic lunar power. There is outward and inward movement related to Orlando's madness. In canto twenty three the moon cruet is anticipated by the simile of Orlando's pain being enclosed in a vessel:

L'impetuosa doglia entro rimase,
che volea tutta uscir con troppa fretta.
Così veggian restar l'acqua nel vase,
che largo il ventre e la bocca abbia stretta;
che nel voltar che si fa in su la base,
l'umor che vorria uscir, tanto s'affretta,
e ne l'angusta via tanto s'intrica,
ch'a goccia a goccia fuore esce a fatica.
Fur., XXIII.113.1-8

In a hidden allusion to sexual frustration, this octave mentions 'vase' at line three, a Latinate form for 'vaso' (which is derived instead from vulgar Latin): a container with a large body and a narrow neck that does not allow the liquid to pour out easily.⁹⁶ Orlando is the vessel and his pain is the liquid trapped in it. When finally Orlando lets go of his rage and 'apre le porte al duolo' (XXIII.124.8), he starts

⁹⁵ On this topic see Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita*. See also Marina Beer: 'Che le ampolle fossero un luogo abituale di permanenza per gli spiriti era noto in corte a Ferrara, dove il mago e astrologo di Ercole I, Carlo Sosena, ne teneva chiuso uno appunto in un'ampolla'; M. Beer, *Romanzi di cavalleria. Il 'Furioso' e il romanzo italiano del primo Cinquecento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1987), p. 98.

⁹⁶ Bigi's commentary on 'vase' at XXIII.113.3 (pp. 996-7) reports F. Agno, *St. Fil. It. XII* (1954), pp. 319-20: 'Latinismo su vas-vasis (trattato come maschile), mentre "vaso" deriva dalle forme del lat.volg.'.

crying and behaving wildly as if he was no longer himself. His wits stream out together with his tears. We next find a similar 'vaso' on the moon, there named 'ampolla'.⁹⁷ The term 'vaso' will come back during Orlando's recovery: 'Aveasi Astolfo apparecchiato il vaso | in che il senno di Orlando era rinchiuso' (XXXIX.57.1-2).

Characters in the *Furioso* follow love as a natural inclination, as if truth resided in the *otherness*. But if truth resides in the otherness, it is as unfathomable as the *other* is intrinsically. Wisdom may be seen as a safe inner option; the only problem is that wits do not seem to stay in this inner dimension to which they belong but wander around like the *Furioso's* characters. Hence life appears to be a continuous following of these wits scattered in different places. If Orlando is fictionally lucky to have Providence send Astolfo to retrieve his wits, it is not the same for Ariosto. As the poet playfully states at the beginning of canto thirty five, his wits are with his lady ('se ne va *errando*'; 2.7, my italics) and nobody will rescue them. But at the end there is no need of rescuing anybody since the poet himself does not seem to be seriously concerned about this loss (as seen in Ficino's *El Libro dell'Amore*, but also according to a courtly model of love, this is part of the lovers' game); the only solution will be going to pick them up himself with a kiss, if granted permission by his beloved. Only in this case would the situation result in a balance.

There are other love patterns appearing in the *Furioso*. The story of Ruggiero and Bradamante bears a happy ending, notwithstanding Ruggiero's

⁹⁷ 'Ampolla' is also the container of the magic liquor that the hermit uses in canto eight to make Angelica unconscious (VIII.48.2).

deviant behaviour, first with Alcina and then with Angelica, both understood as (different) kinds of enchantresses. While his infatuation for Alcina is due to a charm, his passion for Angelica in canto eleven is real. To fall under the name of madness in the eyes of the narrator, is now not the passion itself but the very option of rejecting it ('pazzo è se questa ancor non prezza e stima'; XI.2.8). Jossa interprets the apparent contradiction between love as a natural inclination, and therefore positive and to be followed, and love as 'insania' (XXII.1.3), in terms of an achieved awareness of the necessary presence of the irrational in human life.⁹⁸

Ariosto concepisce insomma il discorso sull'amore come un discorso sulla verità, nel quale, proprio come in amore, tutto è possibile, non tanto grazie al miracolo e alla magia, quanto grazie all'ingegno e alla finzione: persino i sessi possono confondersi, perché la verità non è univoca e l'esperienza è aperta.⁹⁹

Characters in the *Furioso* do not mind the agents behind events, do not voluntarily enquire about causes.¹⁰⁰ Orlando does not investigate why or who decided for him to come to his senses again; he is completely oblivious of what has happened to him and immediately works towards pursuing new valorous deeds. Ariosto suppresses from the beginning every occasion his characters might have for intellectual investigation. Putting his characters on a stage, he lets us watch. He comments on them, he addresses us readers. In doing so Ariosto foregrounds a further dimension that belongs to the text but is not subjected to its rules: the dimension of interpretation. In Dante this was guided through the poet-pilgrim presence, in and out of the poem; the fourfold method of interpretation that the

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ariosto*, pp. 51-52.

⁹⁹ *Ariosto*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ On this, for example, see also *Fur.*, XLII.66.5-7.

reader was implicitly asked to apply to the *Commedia* was an active part of the story, and of the reading, with the pilgrim reflecting and addressing the readers' concerns. In the *Furioso* the author is present as the weaver-poet who finds himself in the characters he takes on stage, now sympathizing with them, now scolding them as he could scold himself. The process he first enacts himself is that of interpretation.

What St John tells Astolfo on the moon is part of this central discourse:

E se tu vuoi che l' ver non ti sia ascoso,
tutta al contrario l'istoria converti[.]
Fur., XXXV.27.5-6

The stress is on the reception: 'tu', 'ti', refer to Astolfo and to the readers of the *Furioso*. This passage requires an active participation in the reception of a text: first an act of will and second an act of re-reading, or interpreting a text, which should tell the truth, but which is also an expression of interpretation since it has been written by man. One interpretation is pitted against another. But every interpretation requires a certain degree of intellectual honesty towards oneself for being constructive; a misguided interpretation can lead to failure.

The episode of Orlando reading Angelica and Medoro's love inscriptions in the woods represents the tragedy of interpretation: Orlando's interpretation of them is far away from the truth because Orlando wants to see them for what they are not, and in doing so he deceives himself.

Va col pensier cercando in mille modi
non *creder* quel ch'al suo dispetto *crede*:
ch'altra Angelica sia, *creder* si sforza[.]
XXIII.103.5-7 (my italics)

Here is staged the negation of the natural instinct of 'credere' by a reason ('pensier') which leads the paladin to pursue the safest immediate option; but Orlando knows that it is false, and in fact he is described by Ariosto as 'mesto' (XXIII.107.1) from the beginning. When the interpretation is not even believed by the interpreter, that is fraud. Orlando uses the term 'note' in his speech to indicate Angelica and Medoro's writings of love: 'Conosco io pur queste note: | di tal'io n'ho tante vedute e lette' (XXIII.104.1-2). Ariosto contrasts 'note' to the 'fraude' (104.6) that Orlando is weaving himself while he does not want to believe them to be true:

Con tali opinïon dal ver remote
usando fraude a se medesimo, stette[.]
XXIII.104.5-6

Drawing a parallel between 'note' and 'fraude' (an association expressed also by Dante's episode of Geryon in the *Commedia*), Orlando deceives himself, not accepting unforeseen events coming up in his life, which in a broader sense stand for multiplicity. His interpretation is self-deceit. Orlando's interpretative activity leads him to madness because his affects prevail over reason. A very short time is enough for him to regress to a situation when the previously much regarded balance between reason and passions, of which Orlando used to be an example, is lost. But this happens because Orlando is not willing to accept his discovery, his freshly gained knowledge.

Tre volte e quattro e sei lesse lo scritto
quello infelice, e pur cercando invano
che non vi fosse quel che v'era scritto;
e sempre lo vedea più chiaro e piano[.]
XXIII.111.1-4

Orlando is reading and re-reading Medoro's lines, as when one tries to unveil the core of a discourse. But he is trying to find evidences to the contrary (and in fact adding a further veil), an activity which seems to anticipate St John's paradoxical statement on historical truth. In the following octaves Orlando oscillates between what reason tells him and what instinct suggests, as condensed by these two lines:

Poi ritorna in sé alquanto, e pensa come
possa esser che non sia la cosa vera[.]
XXIII.114.1-2

But the narrator soon comments that 'Poco gli giova usar fraude a se stesso', (XXIII.118.1), as he had already commented with regards to Alcina's magic wiles ('che sua fraude non le giova'; VII.74.8). His self-deceit is then unmasked by the story narrated by the shepherd in the attempt to sooth and entertain Orlando. It is the precious stone that the shepherd shows as being presented to him by Angelica in order to throw Orlando into despair. The above passages articulate Orlando's paradoxical process of learning: reading first, then interpreting, followed by doubting. After this, reality comes in to prove one or the other hypothesis. Two levels of experience are interweaved: one textual, which coincides here with the factual, and one subjective adhering to one's own 'credenza'.

Another episode staging the role of a personal 'credenza', but this time in a positive frame, is that of Rinaldo and the golden goblet in canto forty three.¹⁰¹ Rinaldo refuses to drink from the goblet which has the power to tear the veil of fiction and let the drinker know whether he or she is a cuckold. Rinaldo justifies himself by saying that there is no use in differentiating between truth and opinion:

¹⁰¹ The episode is read by Ferroni as an example of the role of 'credenza' as opposed to the traditional idea of truth; 'L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia', pp. 90-91.

Pensò, e poi disse: 'Ben sarebbe folle
 chi quel che non vorria trovar, cercasse.
 Mia donna è donna, et ogni donna è molle:
 lasciàn star *mia credenza* come stasse.
 Sin qui m'ha il *creder mio* giovato, e giova:
 che poss'io megliorar per farne prova?
 XLIII.6.3-8 (my italics)

Non so s'in questo io mi sia saggio o stolto;
 ma non vo' più saper, che mi convegna.
 XLIII.7. 3-4

The chiastic position of 'mia credenza' and *creder mio*' right in the middle of line four and line five is noteworthy. In the previous canto the knight host, while handing the goblet to Ruggiero, has uttered the following words:

Se vuoi saper se la tua sia pudica
 (come io *credo* che *credi*, e *creder* déi;
 ch'altrimente far *credere* è fatica,
 se chiaro già per prova non ne sei)[.]
 XLII.102.1-4 (my italics)

The *adnominatio* at line two picks up a similar one in canto nine, as Bigi's commentary highlights (p. 372):

[...] per quel ch'apparea fuori,
 io *credea* e *credo*, e *creder credo* il vero,
 ch'amassi et ami me con cor sincero.
 IX.23.6-8 (my italics)

In its turn line seven looks back to canto thirteen of Dante's *Inferno* when Dante, entering the suicides' woods, is confused at hearing voices coming from the trees and says: 'cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse'(XIII.25). The episode of Pier della Vigna is introduced by the repetition of the verb 'credere' differently conjugated, which ushers in the marvellous atmosphere that imbues the whole canto.¹⁰² At this point Virgil intervenes to stop the disbelief and encourages his pupil to experience

¹⁰² See my discussion in chapter II.2, p. 84.

for himself what is going on, in order to anchor the marvellous in the reality and the historicity carried by the *Commedia*. In Bigi's reading, 'l'impiego della famosa annominazione dantesca vale soprattutto a sottolineare, e insieme stilizzare, la ironica consapevolezza della scarsa consistenza di quel *credere*, di quella fiducia così insistentemente proclamata'.¹⁰³ At the same time, all we have belongs to the sphere of such 'credenza' and Ariosto does not put forward any other truth. And in fact Ferroni suggests that Rinaldo's refusal of a knowledge that is revealed to be harmful to the self is the utmost lesson of the poem:

Le due storie del nappo e del dottor Anselmo (che non sono affatto degli inserti marginali e disimpegnati) esemplificano in maniera assai sottile i danni che derivano da tutti i tentativi di voler superare lo schermo della "credenza", di voler raggiungere un'assurda "certezza": tentativi che non fanno altro che raddoppiare la follia, creando nuove catene di illusioni, di inganni, di magie.¹⁰⁴

Rinaldo is called by the narrator 'il buon Rinaldo' (XLIII.9.1): refusing to know, he does not follow Orlando's path of jealousy. His opinion is mindful. Rinaldo's 'credenza' wilfully contrasts magic, even when magic is presented as leading to truth. Rinaldo's host declares that he regrets having himself drunk from the goblet, when the enchantress Melissa offered it to him, having found out what he never would have wished to know about his wife. In his account of the story, Melissa calls the goblet 'un vasello | fatto da ber, di virtù rara e strana' (XLIII.28.1-2); the vessel also appears several times as 'vaso' (XLII.102.6, XLII.104.3, XLIII.5.8, XLIII.30.1), a term which naturally sends us to the other 'vaso' from which Orlando unconsciously inhales in canto thirty nine. But unlike Orlando, Rinaldo is

¹⁰³ Bigi's commentary at IX.23.7, p. 372.

¹⁰⁴ Ferroni, 'L'Ariosto e la concezione umanistica della follia', p. 90.

master of his own actions and refuses to undergo a magical transformation. The option for him would be either discovering truth through magic or avoiding magic for this kind of purpose and being content with his own 'credenza'. The difference between what is revealed by magic and one's own opinion depends on a grounding in reality. Whatever objective truth's face could be, one's own interpretation of truth is always preferable to others' interpretations, because life is what one makes of it. This anticipates that freedom of erring stressed by the *Satire*.¹⁰⁵ Rinaldo considers the option of benefitting from magic, but finally he understands that he does not want such kind of truth to be revealed. Life is built on 'contracts' between people (like marriage, in this case), but it does not seem to matter if these adhere to an objective truth or not; they are, however, what forms human society.

The analysis of the magic marvellous together with admiration and the human marvellous has allowed us to identify a key element in the *Furioso*: the path of wonder here does not lead to a traditional idea of *scientia*, even when it is framed by positive values. It is always open to erring and involves hermeneutics. We find this in admiration, in magic, in human things. The space of 'error' is right within and it is to be accepted. Ariosto shatters the rigorous distinction, set by western philosophy, between truth and error, or *episteme* and *doxa*, to put it in Plato's terms. What stays is experience, which the *Furioso* represents in its absolute

¹⁰⁵ See for example *Satira* II: 'Ma chi fu mai sì saggio o mai sì santo | che di esser senza macchia di pazzia, | o poca o molta, dar si possa vanto? | Ognun si tenga la sua, questa è la mia: | se a perder s'ha la libertà, non stimo | il più ricco capel che in Roma sia' (vv.148-153).

traits.¹⁰⁶ The discourse on 'credenza' finds further development on the moon, when it is set within a wider discourse on poetry.

III.3 A Multifaceted Moon: Mutability and Speculation

According to Aristotle all things above the moon were eternal and unchangeable; all things below were subject to change.¹⁰⁷ This separation persisted in western culture until the first scientific revolution in Europe towards the end of the sixteenth century. Since Galileo's earliest telescopic observations (published in his *Sidereus Nuncius*, 1610), men have continued to master their knowledge of the skies. After the first blurred images, which allowed one's own imagination to work together with the eyes to see on the moon hills and seas similar to the terrestrial ones, more studies developed and a modern lunar theory was born with Newton's *Principia* (1687).¹⁰⁸ Before then, two main currents of thinking about the relation between earth and moon can be discerned. The Aristotelian paradigm considered the moon and the earth as completely different bodies, the earth

¹⁰⁶ 'Credete a chi n'ha fatto esperimento' says the narrator in *Fur.*, XXIII.112.3.

¹⁰⁷ See Aristotle, *On the Universe* I.2.392a 1 (p. 627); *Physics* VIII.6 (pp. 432-434); *On the Heavens* I.3 (pp. 449-451).

¹⁰⁸ See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *A World in the Moon: A Study in the Changing Attitude toward the Moon in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Northampton, MA : Departments of Modern Languages of Smith College, 1936); see also *La luna allo specchio. Rappresentazioni, simbologie e metafore seleniche nella letteratura e nell'immaginario*, ed. Nadia Minerva (Bologna: Pàtron, 1990), and especially Gianguido Piazza's essay 'La luna della Luna. Metafore, congetture e scoperte della moderna astronomia planetaria', pp. 13-34.

inhabited and the moon uninhabited; other writers, including Heraclitus, Democritus, Xenophon, and Pythagoras, entertained the idea of an inhabited moon. The latter idea made its way to the Renaissance via the fantastic lunar travelling in Lucian's *A True Story* and *Icaromenippus*.¹⁰⁹ The moon has always been seen ambiguously, and seemed to reflect men's desires, hopes, failures and critiques. Its mutability dictates ebbs and flows, fertility cycles, human moods, growth and death.¹¹⁰ Due to such characteristics, Nadia Minerva defines the moon as earth's 'demanding double' ('un "doppio esigente') in the literary imaginary:

il rapporto terra/luna non è mai improntato ad un'assoluta alterità o ad un' assoluta analogia.[...] La luna, come lo specchio, produce assimilazione e straniamento, complicità e rivalità, identità e opposizione, proiezione e assorbimento.¹¹¹

And we will see that the *Furioso's* moon has a similar function, making the moon a symbol of a 'double' level of knowledge.

The moon has been described by Ficino in his *Theologia Platonica* as a middle term ('media'), mediating between clarity and obscurity:

In the order of the bodies what is completely clear [*lucida*] is a star above the moon, what is completely murky [*obscura*] is the air, and in between is the moon [*media luna*].¹¹²

The moon is then defined 'lucida partim, partim obscura'. For these mixed and intermediary qualities the moon was chosen by Ariosto to be a decisive point in the *Furioso*. Ariosto stops the rapid course of his poem to represent the moon and

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Nicolson, p. 36 for an account on classical sources.

¹¹⁰ See Landino's commentary on *Par.*, I. 13-15: 'La Luna [...] concede virtù di piantare et generare et agumentare e corpi'.

¹¹¹ Minerva, *La luna allo specchio*, pp. 10-11.

¹¹² Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, ed. James Hankins, and William Bowen, transl. Michael J.B. Allen and John Warden, 6 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001-2006), I, I.V.5, p. 67.

the fickleness of life. Astolfo does not reach beyond to the realm of the unchangeable, but stays in the realm of change which belongs to men. What he finds when he steps on the extreme top margin of the sublunary world is time, which is in fact change. It is a very dense moment in the *Furioso*, and the longest passage that can be considered contemplative and speculative. Therefore, it represents an essential part of the discourse on wonder and knowledge. Under the sun life goes on with its encounters and its battles. But the moon brings deferral of these activities, as appears from canto fifteen:

l'ombre avean tolto ogni vedere a torno
sotto l'incerta e mal compresa luna;
quando alla ròcca Orril fece ritorno,
poi ch'alla bianca e alla sorella bruna
piacque di differir l'aspra battaglia
fin che 'l sol nuovo all'orizzonte saglia.
Fur., XV.74.3-8

Grifone and Aquilante have been unsuccessfully fighting against the enchanted Orrilo. When Astolfo arrives, the sky is darkening and the two women on behalf of whom the two knights are battling decide to defer the fight until the following morning. It is now time for resting under the rising moon, for eating and for conversing (XV.76-80). The moon marks a change in time.

Under the moonlight Astolfo and St John fly above the Terrestrial Paradise: 'come la luna questa notte sia | sopra noi giunta, ci porremo in via' (XXXIV.67.7-8). The episode of Astolfo on the moon is full of literary echoes, firstly Dantesque ones, which we should explore before approaching the conclusion of our discourse

on Ariosto.¹¹³ Both Dante and Ariosto, or rather their characters, fly to the moon in their respective poems; their presence up there is temporary and passing, in the same way as their lives are, after all, on earth. These are the first two journeys to the moon in Italian (vernacular) literature, and they are inevitably interconnected. I will show how the landing on both lunar landscapes is connected to expressions of wonder and I will highlight the different sorts of knowledge to which this wonder leads. Looking back at Dante's flight, Ariosto asserts his own poetic world and transforms its relationship with transcendence.

According to the medieval astrologer Guido Bonatti, whose *Liber astronomicus* was well known (and also often criticized) both in Dante's and in Ariosto's time, when the moon is out, and especially when it is full, it is a time for unconcealing hidden secrets that had been veiled by the moon's concealment by the sun; it is a time of revelation.¹¹⁴ Dante's moon is full at the time he enters the forest in the opening of the *Inferno* (as we know from *Inf.*, XX.127), and according to medieval astrology it was still considered as full when Dante lands on it at the beginning of the *Paradiso*. Ariosto's moon is represented instead as horned, therefore either crescent or waning (XVIII.183.6; XXXIV.68.4).¹¹⁵ The moon in both

¹¹³ On the idea of the moon in Dante and Ariosto, see amongst others Massimo Scalabrini, 'Il cigno senz'ali. L'idea di Dante nell' *Orlando furioso*', *Schede Umanistiche. Rivista semestrale dell'Archivio Umanistico Rinascimentale Bolognese*, 2 (1994), 67-78; Aaron Parret, 'Theology of Transcendence: The Translunar Journey in Dante and Ariosto', in *The Translunar Narrative in the Western Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 25-36 ; with regard to linguistic issues see Segre, 'Un repertorio linguistico e stilistico dell'Ariosto: la *Commedia*', in *Esperienze ariostesche*, (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1966), pp. 51-83.

¹¹⁴ See Richard Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 31. Bonatti, together with Micheal Scotus and other diviners, is put by Dante in Hell (see *Inf.*, XX.116-118). Bonatti's works were well known at the Este Court; see Vasoli, 'L'astrologia a Ferrara', p. 477.

¹¹⁵ For information regarding the full moon in medieval astrology see Kay, p. 293 (n.60). With regards to Ariosto's moon, Gennaro Savarese rather talks about 'spazio dell'impostura'; see his

Dante and Ariosto bears a revelation and a discourse on mutability, although the two play a different role in the two texts. In Dante's *Paradiso* the revelation comes from Beatrice and develops around three long speeches: the first comes as a confutation of erroneous opinions on the nature of the lunar surface; the second is an explanation of the stars' influence; the third concerns a discourse on the broken vows to God.¹¹⁶ In the *Furioso* the revelation comes not only from St John, who reveals to Astolfo where Orlando's cure is to be found and also poetry's and history's falsehoods, but from Ariosto too who, revealing the nature of his veil, points at the problematics linked to writing and discloses his own poetics. Dante's and Ariosto's lunar episodes share the unveiling of previous erroneous interpretations. The difference lies in the role that the two authors attribute to such unveiling, as I will show.

The changeability of the moon is an ancient concept, already acknowledged by the Bible: 'Stultus sicut luna mutatur' (Ecclesiastes, 27.12), 'a fool changeth as the moon'. Ficino's *De vita triplici* also gives an example of the belief related to the influence of the moon (and of other planets too) in the Renaissance, quoting Galen: 'There is a certain saying of the Egyptians, that the Moon marks the affections from day to day, both for the sick and the healthy'.¹¹⁷ Probably also because of these reasons Ariosto sent Astolfo there to retrieve the cure for Orlando's madness, a cure which turns out to be an awareness, through contemplation of

essay 'Lo spazio dell'"impostura": il *Furioso* e la luna', in *La corte e lo spazio. Ferrara Estense*, ed. Giuseppe Papagno, and Amedeo Quondam, 3 vols (Roma: Bulzoni, 1982), III, pp. 717-737, where the author also gives an account of theories on the moon at Ariosto's time.

¹¹⁶ As Kay notices, 'the Moon is the only planet where revelations are made by Beatrice herself'; *Dante's Christian Astrology*, p. 31.

¹¹⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *The Book of Life*, transl. Richard Boer (Irving, TX: Spring Publications, 1980), III.10, p. 115.

past life, of this worldly fickleness. Under the sign of change I will now read Ariosto's flight starting from its relationship with Dante's ascent.

III.3.1 Dante's Flight and Ariosto's Flight

According to classical mythology, the moon shares the same goddess as the forest, which is the first landscape that we encounter both in the *Commedia* and in the *Furioso*. In the first canto of the *Inferno* Dante the pilgrim is lost in the 'selva selvaggia e aspra e forte' (I.5), and we know that the moon was full then; in the first canto of the *Furioso*, Angelica rides through the 'alta selva fiera' (I.13.7) in her attempt to escape from Orlando and Rinaldo. The forest is traditionally depicted as a place of erring and confusion, which Angelica chooses to enter, and in which Dante the pilgrim finds himself lost. The forest in the *Furioso* is also connected to Orlando's madness: it is in fact the place where Orlando finds out about Angelica and Medoro and where he unburdens his rage. Under the sign of the same goddess madness is generated and healed.

In Horace we find Diana, the goddess of the hunt and of wild things, referred to as 'diva triformis' (*Odes*, III.22.4), according to the different places with which she used to be associated: earth (Diana), heaven (Luna) or the underworld (Hecate/Proserpina).¹¹⁸ In the *Commedia* Dante refers to the goddess as Proserpina,

¹¹⁸ See also the entry 'Diana' in George Lemprière, *Classical Dictionary* (London: Bracken, 1994), pp. 228-229 for classical references and a detailed account of Diana's different functions in the Greek and Latin world. For an explanation of the different names attributed to the moon see Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum*, IV.16; Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods (I-V)*, ed. and transl. Jon Solomon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 468-475.

‘la donna che qui [in *Inferno*] regge’ (*Inf.*, X.80), as ‘Delia’ (*Purg.*, XXIX.78), and as ‘Trivia’ (*Par.*, XXIII.26). Ariosto too honours this tradition in Medoro’s invocation to the moon in the *Furioso*:

O santa dea, che dagli antiqui nostri
debitamente sei detta triforme;
ch’in cielo, in terra e ne l’inferno mostri
l’alta bellezza tua sotto più forme[.]
Fur., XVIII.184.1-4

Cesare Segre notes that Ariosto here uses a similar expression to Dante in *Inferno*, where the same manifold nature is attributed instead to God: ‘O somma sapienza, quanta è l’arte | che mostri in cielo, in terra e nel mal mondo’ (XIX.10-11).¹¹⁹ Rather than journeying to the sun, as Dante does, Ariosto stops on the moon, which appears at sunset. Unlike Dante, Ariosto chooses to stage his fantastic flight in the realm of temporal power, which was associated with the moon by Dante’s *Monarchia*, rather than in the realm of spiritual power, symbolized by the sun (*Monarchia*, III.4.3,17-21).

The moon is for Dante the first step into heaven, and unlike Ariosto, only the first stop among others. Its reached because of Dante’s passing beyond humanity (‘trasumanar’; *Par.*, I.70), which occurred when he looked into Beatrice’s eyes while in the Terrestrial Paradise, intensifying his desire to see God. The wayfarer realizes what is happening thanks to Beatrice’s words:

Tu non se’ in terra, sì come tu credi;
ma folgore, fuggendo il proprio sito,
non corse come tu ch’ad esso riedi.
Par., I.91-93

¹¹⁹ *Orlando furioso*, ed. C. Segre, p. 1337 (n. 173). Dante and Virgil are in the Malebolge after Geryon has carried them there.

Despite its miraculous nature, Dante's ascent must not be cause of wonder, because the pilgrim, after his purification in the Lethe and in the Eunoè in the last canto of *Purgatorio*, is now just following his natural course; as a flame tends upwards, he is going back to his original 'home', that is heaven. This is how Dante finds the moon:

Beatrice in suso, e io in lei guardava;
e forse in tanto in quanto un quadrel posa
e vola e da la noce si dischiava,
giunto mi vidi ove *mirabil cosa*
mi torse il viso a sé[.]
Par., II.23-26 (my italics)

Sight ('guardava') allows Dante to progress with his flight upwards ('vola'), a flight whose fluidity is expressed by the anaphoric coordination in lines 1-3.¹²⁰ The attention moves from Beatrice to the moon: first described in vague terms as a 'mirabil cosa', the moon physically attracts ('mi torse') Dante's look. Since Dante still cannot understand where he is, nor what that 'marvellous thing' is, Beatrice explains that it is 'la prima stella' (*Par.*, II.30), the closest one to earth. Only now does Dante describe it for us:

Parev' a me che nube ne coprisse
lucida, spessa, solida e pulita,
quasi adamante che lo sol ferisse.
Per entro sé l'eterna margarita
ne ricevette, com'acqua recepe
raggio di luce permanendo unita.
Par., II.31-36

Dante gives us a picture of the moon as a receiving body, almost a maternal figure, a womb. Its first characteristic is 'lucida', that it is able to receive and reflect light;

¹²⁰ Already in the *Purgatorio* the poet had established the relationship between desire and flight: 'ma qui convien ch'om voli; | dico con l'ale snelle e con le piume | del gran disio' (IV.27-29). In the *Paradiso* there is the highest concentration of terms belonging to this semantic sphere.

the verb 'recep' ('to receive') rhymes with the following two other Latinate verbs 'concep' ('to conceive', both in physical and figurative sense) and 'repe' ('to penetrate'), as Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi points out in her commentary on lines 35-36. Matter penetrated by light is a medieval metaphor for the Virgin Mary.¹²¹ Dante stresses the importance of the interpenetration of bodies (see also *Par.*, II. 37-42) and this reference to the maternal figure, bearer of Christ, highlights the key element in the *Paradiso*: the Incarnation of Christ, God reborn as man to fill the distance between human and divine.¹²²

After Beatrice reveals to Dante the true nature of the lunar spots, not due to difference in matter but in reflected light (*Par.*, II.145-148), the 'specchiati sembianti' appear to him as an image reflected in water. This confuses Dante who at first turns his head backwards, trying to locate the original figure being reflected, not realizing that there is no mirrored image but only the reflected semblances themselves. The theme of the mirror frequently recurs in the lunar cantos; it is also present in Beatrice's elucidation of the lunar spots (the experiment of the three mirrors: *Par.*, II. 97-105). But the images are not just reflections. Beatrice reveals in fact how they are 'vere sustanze' (*Par.*, III.29). The mirror, so frequently associated with the moon for its capacity to reflect the sun's light, plays a chief role here. It is on the moon in fact that identity and difference are

¹²¹ See Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 112; see also Bosco-Reggio's commentary on lines 34-36, reporting an anonymous medieval sequence with a similar image: 'sicut vitrum radio | solis penetratur | inde tamen lesio | nulla vitro datur | sic immo subtilius | matre non corrupta, | Deus Dei filius | sua prodit nupta'.

¹²² The frequent references to Dante as a child ('fante', 'fantolin') in the *Paradiso*, as we have seen in chapter II.6, represent the pilgrim's rebirth in God. We can consider this image of the moon receiving his body as the first physical picture of his rebirth.

discussed. The same reflecting nature of the 'first star' is shared by the spirits coming to visit Dante (from the Empyrean, in fact, they do not 'inhabit' the moon).

Among the 'specchiati sembianti' conversing with Dante, there is Piccarda. She was a nun who could not uphold the commitment to the sacred vows because of her brother's abduction of her from the convent. Her weakness in life consisted in failing to resist the force which made her break her vows. The association of human frailty and the moon is highlighted by Landino's commentary on the passage: 'La influentia della luna è dare mutatione de' beni temporali agl'etherni et dagli etherni a' temporali'.¹²³ As pointed out by Gabriele Muresu in his essay entitled 'Piccarda e la luna', the moon's influence is both negative and positive: it is, in fact, symbol of mutability but also of the contemplative life.¹²⁴

Both the theory of the lunar spots and Piccarda's words in canto three, point in one direction: the relationship between the one and the many, between the individual and the world. This can be inferred from various episodes: the penetration of the bodies ('com'acqua recepe | raggio di luce permanendo unita'; *Par.*, II.35-36); the lunar spots being the result of different intelligences responding to God's love ('Da essa vien ciò che da luce a luce | par differente, non da denso e raro; essa è formal principio che produce, | conforme a sua bontà, lo turbo e 'l chiaro.'; *Par.*, II.145-148); Piccarda's words of praise about unity and difference in heaven ('chiaro mi fu allor come ogne dove | in cielo è paradiso, *etsi* la grazia | del

¹²³ 'La luna è frigida et humida et pianeta feminino, et induce virginità et castità alle femine, et a quella le inclina. Et per questo fingono e poeti che Diana, la quale significa la luna, fussi sempre vergine et accompagnata da nymphe vergine. Il perchè el poeta finge trovare in quella l'anime delle femine vergine et caste'; Landino on *Par.*, III.25-27.

¹²⁴ See Gabriele Muresu, *L'orgia d'amore. Saggi di semantica dantesca (quarta serie)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2008), pp. 308-330.

sommo ben d'un modo non vi piove'; *Par.*, III.88-90), in contrast with her life experience when her own will (her religious vows) has been violently opposed. Through these Dante presents, as Barolini emphasizes, a picture of multiplicity in unity: 'this is the attitude that will inform the *Paradiso*: the difference God made cannot be in vain, *differentiae frustra esse non possunt* [Dante, *Questio de aqua et terra*, 71]'.¹²⁵ At the same time, Barolini adds, 'this is an attitude with which Dante will struggle throughout the *Paradiso*, since it also accounts for the spectre of disunity in the realm of unity' (p. 182).

Dante on the moon plays on the borderline between himself and 'the other'. A similar topic is brought up by Ariosto's moon which can be seen as a 'double' of the earth, but differently involved in the 'reflection' process with respect to Dante's. If Dante the character is not even aware of his own rising, Astolfo is indeed. St John explicitly tells him that he is about to take him on a journey:

Gli è ver che ti bisogna altro viaggio
far meco, e tutta abbandonar la terra.
Nel cerchio de la luna a menar t'aggio,
che dei pianeti a noi più prossima erra,
perché la medicina che può saggio
rendere Orlando, là dentro si serra.
Fur., XXXIV.67.1-6

The cure for Orlando is to be found on the closest planet to earth, without the need to stretch up to Dante's Empyrean. Dante's 'cure' involves a spiritual 'trasumanar'. Ariosto's does not. Still, it is an 'altro viaggio' which involves leaving the earth completely. But the first thing that Astolfo does, once landed on the moon, is to draw a parallel with the earth:

¹²⁵ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 182; see also pp. 178-193 for a discussion on identity and difference in *Paradiso*, and especially on the moon cantos.

Tutta la sfera varcano del fuoco,
et indi vanno al regno de la luna.
Veggon per la più parte esser quel loco
come un *acciar* che non ha macchia alcuna;
e lo trovano uguale, o minor poco
di ciò ch'in questo globo si raguna[.]
Fur., XXXIV. 70. 1-6 (my italics)

As Simonetta Bassi has noticed, Ariosto 'sketches the moon according to classical literary models' paying 'scant attention to the immediate concerns of natural science'.¹²⁶ The moon is described as 'regno', 'loco', a place more or less like the earth. There are not lunar spots and no rays of light softly shining through its transparencies. After two hundred years the moon looks more like steel than a gem. The hardness of its surface remains unvaried, as according to Aristotelian physics, although the comparison changes. 'Adamante' in Dante's *Paradiso* II.33 is by critics unanimously interpreted as 'diamond', but the Latin *adamas* indicates generally a hard material, like iron or steel, and also diamonds, hence figuratively anything inflexible, lasting.¹²⁷ In Petrarch's *Africa* the moon's horns are described as adamantine: 'cornua de fusco sinuans adamante' (III.108). What makes Dante's moon 'mirabile' is the fact that, although so hard, it welcomes Dante within as a beam of light. Ariosto's moon looks like steel and it is presented with an ordinary naturalness.

¹²⁶ Simonetta Bassi, 'The Lunar Renaissance: Images of the Moon in Ludovico Ariosto and Giordano Bruno', in *Science and Literature in Italian Culture from Dante to Calvino*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello, and Simon Gilson (London: Legenda, 2004), 136-153 (p. 136).

¹²⁷ See 'adamas' in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*; and also Benvenuto da Imola's commentary (1375-80) on *Par.*, II.32-33: 'Est enim adamas lapis durissimus parum crystallo obscurior, coloris tamen lucidi fulgentis: qui lapis penetrat ferrum et caeteras gemmas, et est modicae quantitatis, ita ut non videatur excedere quantitatem avellanae; et quod mirabile est, si superponitur magneti ligat magnetem, et non permittit trahere ferrum'.

The *Furioso's* moon quietly accompanies Orlando's frenzy: after Medoro's fond invocation to it, the moon shows herself to brighten the night allowing Medoro to attempt the rescue of his king from the battle grounds, while all the others are asleep. The moonshine re-veals the way ('mostrami ove 'l mio re giaccia fra tanti'; XVIII.184.7).¹²⁸ This episode leads to Angelica running into Medoro, wounded, and their consequent falling in love, which then causes Orlando's madness, for which a medicine will be found on the moon. In the 1516 edition Ariosto originally wrote that the moon 'parea di vetro in altra parte' (70. 5), and he kept the glass reference also in the following 1521 revised edition ('altrove come vetro').¹²⁹ In the 1532 edition, though, he decided to eliminate 'vetro', perhaps considering it after all too rich in echos of the past and perhaps too fragile. In the second canto of the *Furioso*, Atlante's palace is also made of steel ('tutto d'acciaio avian cinto il bel loco', II.42.7; 'di sì forbito acciar luce ogni torre, | che non vi può né ruggine né macchia', II.43.1-2); as is Rodomonte's suit of armour ('chiaro acciar'; XVII. 11.2); and Caligorante's net ('avea la rete già fatta Vulcano | di sottil fil d'acciar, [...]'; XV.56.1-2). Steel is a durable, hard ('durissimo acciar'; XLIII.49.4), heavy ('di fino acciaio di buona somma greve'; XIV.103.2) shiny material whose qualities are mentioned with regard to defense and conservation in the *Orlando furioso*. The Dantean moon 'com'acqua' (*Par.*, II.35) becomes here 'come un acciar', impenetrable. The divine image yields its goddess-like attributes to war-like ones.

Dante's moon reflects a divine world in the hand of God; Ariosto's reflects man's

¹²⁸ As often in night journeying; in Fracastoro's *Syphilis* (III.102-120) the moon is invoked by the fleet in a moment of difficulty to grant them the sight of land.

¹²⁹ 'Orlando furioso' secondo l'edizione del 1532 con le varianti delle edizioni del 1516 e del 1521, ed. Santorre Debenedetti, and Cesare Segre (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1960), p. 1192. On these variations see also Savarese, 'Lo spazio dell'"impostura": il *Furioso* e la luna', pp. 725-727.

world struggling between preservation and change, as becomes clear the further Astolfo is taken around by St John, and as I am now going to show.

III.3.2 ‘Doppia meraviglia’

We have seen Dante’s moon described as ‘mirabil cosa’; Ariosto shifts the wonder from the singularity of the moon to the relationship between moon and earth, and in doing so he makes wonder double:

Quivi ebbe Astolfo *doppia meraviglia*:
che quel paese appresso era sì grande,
il quale a un picciol tondo rassimiglia
a noi che lo miriam da queste bande;
e che aguzzar conviengli ambe le ciglia,
s’indi la terra e ‘l mar ch’intorno spande
discerner vuol; che non avendo luce,
l’imagin lor poco alta si conduce.
Fur., XXXIV.71.1-8 (my italics)

The double wonder Astolfo experiences opens a comparison of the two ‘countries’ (Ariosto defines the moon as ‘paese’ at line two). The ‘maraviglia’ is in fact for both the perception of the moon’s greater dimension compared to how it is perceived on earth (vv. 2-4), and for the dimness of the earth which, not reflecting as much light as the moon does, is hard to see from high above (vv.5-8). The rhyming ‘maraviglia’ | ‘rassimiglia’ | ‘ciglia’ enforces the importance of sudden similarity at sight. It is also a recurrent rhyme in Dante, where it functions to connect sight and intellectual enquiry. Illustrating the nature and the role of such ‘doppia meraviglia’ will allow me to reach the climax of Ariosto’s speculation as played out on the lunar surface. I will now look at the relationship between

Astolfo's 'doppia meraviglia' and some possible sources that could have influenced such an expression, in order to highlight the peculiarity of Ariosto's discourse.

When Eugenio Garin edited in 1965 some of Leon Battista Alberti's unpublished *Intercoenales*, a new source of the lunar episode was identified in the dinner-piece entitled *Somnium* (in book IV).¹³⁰ There Libripeta, thanks to an expert in the art of magic, travels to the place to which dreamers fly. The description of such a place shares a great deal with Ariosto's depiction of the moon. Among other numerous similarities, for which I refer you to Segre's essay 'L.B. Alberti e L. Ariosto' (1966), I will highlight the moment when Libripeta says it is worth admiring rivers, mountains, meadows, all appearing marvellous there:

*Multo magis miranda ea sunt quae in illis provinciis conspexi:
flumina, montes, prata, campos, monstra aspectu stupenda,
dictuque ac memoratu incredibilia.
Somnium, vv. 32-34 (my italics)*¹³¹

The atmosphere here is very different from Astolfo's arrival on the moon, although the two travellers share a reaction of wonder. Libripeta's narration is rich in fantastic elements and focuses on the oddities in a way that reminds us more of Lucian's *Vera historia* and *Icaromenippus*. In fact thanks to the new translations from the Greek by humanists like Lilius Tifernas, Rinuccio Aretino and Alberti himself, Luciano's works spread considerably in the middle of the fifteenth

¹³⁰ E. Garin, *Intercenali inedite* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1965).

¹³¹ See C. Segre, 'L.B. Alberti e L. Ariosto', in *Esperienze ariostesche*, pp. 89-95. For other sources of the lunar sequence see the classic study of Pio Rajna, *Le fonti dell'Orlando furioso*. *Ricerche e studii* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1900), pp. 545-546.

century and exerted a notable influence.¹³² In the inventory of the Este library, dated 1495, a period when Ariosto resided in Ferrara, there appears a vernacularization from the Greek of the *Vera historia*, attributed by some to Nicolò Leonicensio (1428-1524); the manuscript became very popular at the court of Ferrara.¹³³

The fantastic travelling of the *Vera historia* teems with marvels: even in the text itself, the hearing of the many adventures awakens a huge wonder in the old man living in the whale's stomach, who, when listening to the account of them by the main character also swallowed by the whale, is said to be 'hyperthaumasas'.¹³⁴ Such a hyperbolic term is reminiscent of Libripeta's 'multo magis miranda' and Astolfo's 'doppia meraviglia', so that one wonders whether Alberti and Ariosto had this in mind when writing about their characters' journeys. The Latin translation (ca. 1440) by Lilius Tifernas reports 'is vero admiratus supra modum', while the vernacular version reads 'lui meravelgiato grandemente'.¹³⁵ When Luciano's character lands on the moon he observes strange and beautiful things ('kaina kai paradoxa'; p. 275), like people being born from men carrying their

¹³² See David Marsh, 'Lucian in the Quattrocento', in *Lucian and the Latins: Humour and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 1-41; and Emilio Mattioli, *Luciano e l'Umanesimo* (Napoli: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1980). For Lucian as a model in the *Furioso* see Marinelli, 'The Laughter of Lucian: Astolfo as Christian Menippus', in *Ariosto & Boiardo*, pp. 166-195.

¹³³ On this see Maria Gabriella Strinati, *La 'Vera historia' di Luciano. Un volgarizzamento dal greco del secondo Quattrocento* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 2005).

¹³⁴ Lucian of Samosata, *Lucian*, ed. and transl. A. M. Harmon, K. Kilburn, and M. D Macleod, 8 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961-1979 [v. 1: 1979]), I, p. 290.

¹³⁵ But see Strinati, *La 'Vera historia' di Luciano*, p. 50: 'negli inventari estensi relativi al periodo preso in esame [mainly during Ariosto's residence in Ferrara], per quanto ho potuto appurare, non è testimoniata l'esistenza di manoscritti o libri stampati della versione latina di Tifernate'. Therefore Ariosto must have read the vernacular version only. Marsh argues that a passage from the *Somnium* dating 1430s suggests that Alberti may have read the work despite Tifernas' translation appeared only around 1440; see *Lucian and the Latins*, p. 192.

children in the calf of the leg, and people having removable eyes. Unlike the landscape created by Ariosto, everything on the moon seems to be as far as possible from earthly costumes, including food and drinks (people there eat frogs and drink air), the idea of beauty, and so on.

Another example of a paradoxical journey to the heavens is recounted in the *Icaromenippus*, where the moon plays the minor role of a resting point on the way to Zeus. Menippus stops by and gazes down on the earth (12), which is seen as much smaller than the moon and hard to recognize, as Astolfo similarly experiences. Menippus is amused by the new perspective he has just acquired on his fellow men (adulterers, plotters, litigants, usurers, beggars, etc.) and laughs at their varied and dubious activities on earth. The moon even speaks to him (20-22) lamenting the philosophers' claims about her physical nature and disproving their theories about absence of life there. Both the *Vera historia* and the *Icaromenippus* contain attacks against the philosophers who in Lucian's view confuse experience with their discordant theories. Ariosto seems to pick up the mood of Lucian's satire but without attributing to Astolfo any intellectual strife. The strife is rather brought to life by St Jonh's speech, as we will soon discuss.¹³⁶

Unlike the intellectually aware Menippus, Astolfo's attitude is described by Santoro as that of a tourist, devoid of any attempt at rational inquiry: he is interested and amused, he marvels and asks explanations about what he sees, but

¹³⁶ Also, scholars agree to take the *Vera Historia* as the source of the episode of Ruggiero swallowed by the whale in Ariosto's fourth canto of *I Cinque Canti*.

he never attempts to draw conclusions.¹³⁷ Santoro observes that since the beginning of his adventure on the Terrestrial Paradise Astolfo is full of wonder: ‘connotato costante del paladino, anche in questa nuova avventura, è la *maraviglia*, l’ingenuo stupore (da turista in vacanza) di fronte a cose grandiose, inusitate e sconcertanti’ (p. 239). In fact the following expressions refer to Astolfo: ‘e quindi e quindi il bel paese ammira’ (XXXIV.52.4); ‘attonito riman di maraviglia’ (XXXIV.53.2); ‘fece maravigliare il duca assai’ (XXXIV.57.6). Such sentiments of wonder may first appear as linked to the divine nature of the ascent (‘O baron, che per voler divino | sei nel terrestre paradiso asceso’; XXXIV.55.3-4). But the landscape reached through the miraculous ascent shares several characteristics with the classical literary *topos* of the Edenic garden, featured in Ovid, Dante, Petrarch and Poliziano among others; it is not unusual, and not really part of wonder in its archetypal sense.

The climax of wonder is reached during Astolfo’s reaction of ‘doppia maraviglia’, its unique occurrence in the *Furioso*.¹³⁸ It is genuine in its double cause, especially since it immediately draws a connection between moon and earth rather than fantastically departing from it. It is also expression of a recurrent pattern in the poem: a reaction of wonder that does not usually come alone but tends to be choral, as already mentioned, in order to allow a shift of perspective

¹³⁷ Cf. Mario Santoro, ‘La sequenza lunare: una società allo specchio’, in *Ariosto e il Rinascimento* (Napoli: Liguori, 1989), pp. 237-262; see especially pp. 239-240.

¹³⁸ See Raffaele Manica for some brief considerations on this reaction of wonder: ‘Si tratta inoltre di una meraviglia ben diversa sia da quella legata alle fatagioni e parzialmente imposta al poema come *deus ex machina* dal Tasso. [...] Più vicina, si direbbe, alla riflessione gnoseologica che farà G.B. Vico: “la meraviglia è figliuola dell’ignoranza; e quanto l’effetto ammirato è più grande, tanto più a proporzione cresce la meraviglia”’; R. Manica, *Preliminari sull’Orlando furioso. Un paradigma ariostesco* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1983), p. 108 (n. 20).

from the watcher to the watched and vice versa. In canto XXXIV.71 Astolfo is on his own and he is not duelling, but is visiting a new land with the aid of providence, namely St John the Evangelist. The wonder comes from a doubling of the perspective, as usual; watching something familiar as the earth from a distance lets the object become unfamiliar. It could be the principle behind the modern 'uncanny', in which the familiar is perceived as unfamiliar creating disorientation, except that Astolfo does not suffer any disorientation. He is not even interested in exploring the surroundings, as Ariosto soon clarifies: 'Non stette il duca a ricercare il tutto; | che là non era asceso a quello effetto' (XXXIV.73.1-2). He knows he is just a means and he plays a passive part not to divert his newly assigned mission.

Although this moon is not an absolute alterity as it was in the Middle Ages, it is still one kind of otherness. On the *Furioso's* moon there is no need of being 'received', because the landing is pretty straightforward. The repetition of 'altri' by anaphora in octave 72 gives the reader the image of 'another' land, 'other' than earth, with 'Altri fiumi, altri laghi, altre campagne | [...] | altri piani, altre valli, altre montagne' (XXXIV.72.1,3). After marvelling at the alterity, Astolfo is immediately led by St John to the valley of the lost things, which echoes Alberti's *Somnium* ('adsunt namque illic convalles montium, ubi res amisse servantur'; 63-64). A similar anaphora is used again when the poet lists along six lines (vv.1-6) various ways men lose their wits:

Altri in amar lo perde, altri in onori,
altri in cercar, scorrendo il mar, ricchezze;
altri ne le speranze de' signori,
[...]
et altri in altro che più d'altro aprezze.
XXXIV.85.1-3,5

The double wonder is part of this alterity that is found on the moon. The essence of this alterity is not as important as the fact that it exists and needs to be acknowledged. Like Menippus, Astolfo finds a variety of human instances; but unlike him, Astolfo finds it on the moon itself and he is not immediately aware of the significance of such a visit. Everything Astolfo finds out on the moon needs to be explained by St John who acts as his guide and interpreter.

For her fickleness and her cycles (and for its being associated with the feminine) the moon was believed to be *locus Fortunae*.¹³⁹ In the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Poliphilo is taken by Logistica to observe a marvellous garden made of glass from the top of a tower, in order to explain the meaning of such a marvel. The first among the seven towers in the garden-labyrinth represents the moon. On this tower there are cruets conserving the future lots:

In quella prima torre [...] sta un antichissima urna dove si conservano e si traggono le sorti [sortitia&promptuaria urna], ornate di sette lettere greche così come vedi: THESPION, stipata di fatali futuri [fatali melli].
H.P., 125 (vol. II, pp. 144-145)

As Marco Ariani points out, the moon is the place of the *fortuita*, that is, where the lots are distributed to each soul at birth.¹⁴⁰ If there is any direct connection

¹³⁹ See Michael Scot: '[Luna] dicitur dea fortune per causam' (*Liber Introductorius*, 3, 104rb; quoted in Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology*, p. 25). Micheal Scot's *Liber Introductorius* was known in the Renaissance and present in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's library; see Pearl Kibre, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p.94. The analogy between moon and fortune is also in Dante's *Paradiso* XVI.82-84, where the two terms appear in a rhyme: 'e come 'l volger del ciel de la luna|cuopre e discuopre i liti sanza posa,|così fa di Fiorenza la Fortuna'; 'fortuna' and 'luna' also appear in rhyme in *Inf.*, VII.62,64.

¹⁴⁰ On the symbology of the glass garden and of the moon in *H.P.*, 125, see Ariani's notes in *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, pp. 734-736. Ariani also quotes Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1,19.17: 'luna Tyche, quia corporum praesul est quae fortuitorum varietate iactantur' (p. 736). The episode derives from Ammianus Marcellinus, where Adrastea rules over the 'urna sortium' (Ariani, p. 732).

between the *Hypnerotomnachia Poliphili* and the *Furioso*'s moon (in Alberti's *Somnium* there is no reference to cruets), it is in an inverted context.¹⁴¹ Ariosto's cruets contain lost wits, something coming from the past. Colonna's cruets are rather filled with the future. Ariosto considers the past as something to be preserved, and the future as something open, still to be created, not bound by astrological influence. The future in the *Furioso* does not live in cruets, but rather in poetry, as I have discussed in III.1.2; only the swan-poets can lift the yarns' name plates to the temple of Immortality and grant a future to the past and the present.

The association between the moon and fortune is also present in Ariosto, but it does not constitute the main focus of Ariosto's lunar discourse. The human occurrences that Astolfo sees piled up in the lunar valley can be divided into three groups: either they are lost because of human fault, or time's or fortune's:

[...] mirabilmente era ridotto
 ciò che si perde o per nostro diffetto,
 o per colpa di tempo o di Fortuna[.]
 XXXIV.73.5-7

Ariosto's moon is not only Fortuna's realm, as the narrator makes clear:

Non pur di regni o di ricchezze parlo,
 in che la ruota instabile lavora;
 ma di quel ch'in poter di tor, di darlo
 non ha Fortuna, intender voglio ancora.

The Greek inscription on the cruet ('THESPION') is an *hapax* whose translation is debated, but it is seen as referring to an oracular context (Ariani, p. 734).

¹⁴¹ The connection between the two texts is also suggested by the name and the role of Ariosto's Logistilla in canto ten of the *Furioso*, which so closely resemble that of Logistica. Both Logistica and Logistilla symbolize a reason that is admired in its beauty and grace, but it is also contradicted by the instincts. Poliphilo in fact in the end chooses *voluptas* over Logistica (*H.P.*, 138-139); similarly Ruggiero, although instructed by Logistilla on how to rein the hippogryph (symbolizing unruliness), will let his own instincts prevail at the sight of the naked Angelica in Ebuda, and as a result will lose the hippogryph (*Fur.*, XI.1-14).

After this statement, Ariosto starts listing the various occurrences stored, such as fame, lovers' tears, vain desires, and so on. Among the three causes of loss, 'nostro diffetto' is the most poetically relevant: it is the first element of the three, and it is at the end of a line, not only concluding the two preceding rhymes ('effetto' at line two, and 'istretto' at line four) but also carrying an alliteration in 'tt' that runs along the endings of the first six lines of octave seventy three ('tutto', 'effetto', 'condutto', 'istretto', 'ridutto', 'diffetto'). Interestingly, the only items that Astolfo is allowed to retrieve are his own wits and Orlando's, which have been lost not because of Fortuna but because of 'nostro diffetto', as if to say that while fortune is out of human control, and therefore irretrievable, wits are not.

On the one hand, the steel moon preserves these human instances; on the other hand, the moon's intrinsic changeability is not a solid guarantee. Astolfo's retrieval, in fact, is not a permanent one. As the wheel of fortune goes up and down, so does Astolfo: one moment he is miraculously lifted to the moon, one moment he is down again, and, as the *Furioso* hints at (XXXIV.86.7-8) and as the *Cinque Canti* narrate, in another moment he will lose his wits once more due to another 'error', namely the passion of love (see IV.56; and IV.74.5-6: 'quella protezion tutta levando, | che san Giovanni avea già di me tolta').¹⁴² The *Furioso's* moon stages an oscillation between loss and recovery, expressing the belief that every loss can be recovered and every recovery can be lost again. The up and

¹⁴² On the depiction of Fortune and her wheel see Boethius, *De Consolatione*, II.1-2, pp. 176-184. On Astolfo as recipient of Fortuna see Santoro, 'L'Astolfo ariostesco: "homo fortunatus"', in *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, pp. 185-236.

down movement expressed by the relationship between moon and earth represents the instability and the alterity linked to the nature of man, of time, and of fortune as a sometimes concurrent and sometimes rival force in life. Such a movement is reminiscent of Ariosto's third *Satira*, which narrates the fable of people climbing a high mountain in the vain attempt of catching the moon ('la ineguale | luna'; *Sat.*, III.214-215) from its summit; such a mountain represents 'la ruota di Fortuna' (*Sat.*, III.229) where the mob thinks to reach quietness but attains nothing.¹⁴³ The attempt to interrupt any sort of movement (whether man's, time's, or fortune's) leads inevitably to an impasse.

Nicola Gardini, in his *Rinascimento*, likens Ariosto's moon to a museum.¹⁴⁴ In his opinion the importance of the lunar episode resides in the staging of the most characteristic and authentic activity of Renaissance thought, that is, the contemplation of what has been lost: 'così la luna ariostesca, con tutti i suoi oggetti dispersi, tra cui il senno di Orlando, è un *alicubi*, una metafora dell'antico, la perdita per eccellenza. La luna è un museo' (p. 86). As Gardini observes, this reflects a humanistic aesthetics which considers antiquity as something marvellous and which found a grand artistic expression in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (as I have mentioned in I.3). I would like to quote a passage from this text which describes Poliphilo reaching a spectacular architectonic ruin that kindles his admiration:

¹⁴³ On the fable's sources see Cesare Segre, 'La favola della luna (Ariosto, *Sat.*, III, 208-31) e i suoi precedenti', in *Book Production and Letters in the Western European Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Conor Fahy*, ed. Anna Laura Lepschy, John Took, and Dennis E. Rhodes (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1986), pp. 278-283.

¹⁴⁴ See Gardini, *Rinascimento*, pp. 83-89. Marcello Turchi also likens the lunar valley to a 'mostra', although within a different discourse; see *Ariosto o della liberazione fantastica*, p. 319.

Senza mai più saziarmi di ammirare ora l'una, ora l'altra bellissima, smisurata opera, dicevo tra me: 'Se i frammenti della sacra antichità, le rovine, il loro sgretolarsi e perfino le loro schegge ci inducono a una stupefatta meraviglia [stupenda admiratione] e, nel contemplarle, a goderne, cosa accadrebbe se fossero integre?'

H.P., 59 (II, p. 76)

There is a sense of longing for a 'whole' that no longer exists and that is compensated for with admiration. As we have seen, a similar *admiratio* was directed by Dante towards the divine, for the same sense of longing for the whole. As a consequence of the shift of the conception of such a whole, wonder also has been reallocated. The object of contemplation becomes a ruin. Worldly objects in their inevitable decay are these ruins. The world itself is a ruin, if the past rules in the imagination. The only way to preserve it, to push it towards the future, is through poetry, written to reach posterity.¹⁴⁵ As in Alberti's dinner piece, the only item missing from Ariosto's museum is madness, because it is kept alive on earth.

But Ariosto's discourse is not only limited to the admiration of a ruinous past. When Astolfo sees the cruets filled with people's wits he wonders again. He does not wonder only at the miraculous conservation, which was actually already in Alberti's *Somnium* (67-69), where Libripeta finds a portion of his own brain that had been stolen from him by a treacherous old lady he was once in love with; but he, unlike Astolfo, is not allowed to retrieve it. The English knight marvels for another reason:

ma molto più maravigliar lo fenno
molti ch'egli *credea* che dramma manco

¹⁴⁵ On the Renaissance belief in the role of history and poetry as ways of preserving the past see Gardini's chapters 'Il tempo e le cose' (pp. 81-98) and 'Lo storico e il poeta' (pp. 120-151), in his *Rinascimento*.

non dovessero averne, e quivi dénno
chiara notizia che ne tenean poco;
che molta quantità n'era in quel loco.
XXXIV.84.4-8 (my italics)

Line four recalls Libripeta's reaction of wonder ('multo magis miranda') at the fantastic lunar landscape. The novelty in Ariosto is that Astolfo does not wonder at marvellous features of the place where he has arrived, as Libripeta does, but at the discovery of the amount of wits possessed by people who were thought to have none: what is believed to be so on earth does not correspond to what is witnessed on the moon. Again, as in the instance of 'doppia maraviglia', wonder originates in the perception of a difference. This leads to the confutation of a common 'credenza' ('ch'egli credea'), which is here substituted by a revelation, which is a re-interpretation of earthly opinions based on the discovery of alterity. And Astolfo's lunar visit concludes right after the full expression of the vital force of such interpretation through St John's final speech, in which the discourse on poetry's relationship with truth and fiction climaxes.

If Alberti's *Somnium* included amongst the lost things also liberal arts and ancient Latin works, Ariosto does not. Through St John's final words, Ariosto expresses an attack against the claims of truth of history and poetry, disciplines that for humanist culture are meant to be the only means of salvaging the lost past. The attack immediately follows cardinal Ippolito's eulogy, in its turn preceded by Ariosto's ironic comments on his own lost wits. St John's speech happens symbolically by the river Lethe. Rather than giving voice to another lament for antiquity, the author of the Gospel and of the Book of Revelation, at once historian (handing down memories) and prophet (disclosing the future), warns against the

dangers of writing (especially quoting examples from epic poetry), not sparing Homer and Virgil. His famous sentence 'E se tu vuoi che 'l ver non ti sia ascoso, | tutta al contrario la storia converti' (XXXV.27.5-6) hints at the inestimable value of the process of interpretation, as I have already mentioned in III.2, in order to distinguish the real poets, compared to 'cigni' (XXXV.22.1), from sycophants, called 'corvi', 'avoltori', 'mulacchie' (XXXV.20.1,2), pervading the courts. But it also refers to poetry in general in its role of representing reality. The process is similar to that declared by Lucian at the beginning of his *Vera historia*: 'I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar' (p. 253). The two statements do not share a similar background, since Lucian is parodying poets, historians and philosophers for confusing myth and reality. Lucian presents a picture of poetry and philosophy as mendacious in their claims while composing himself a piece of literature which at the end lacks the verve of a truly inspired composition; it works as an exercise. His main interest was, in fact, history, to which he dedicated a treatise, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit*, that delineates history writing as a mirror of reality.¹⁴⁶ This conception of pure mirroring cannot obviously work alone in literature whose contribution, as demonstrated by Horace, should rather be to please and instruct, not just to reflect something existing. 'L ver' seems to be quite an ambitious aim for Ariosto who, as I have shown several times, does not manifest great interest in revealing one truth above the others, but rather in exposing parallel dimensions of experience.

¹⁴⁶ See Gardini's considerations on this in 'Luciano e l'ideale dello specchio', in *Rinascimento*, pp. 139-141.

The discourse on falsehood is picked by St John just after mentioning Time. Good poets have the power of defeating Time, as the allegory of the swans teaches. Poetry can transform past into future and hail to immortality (XXXV.16.1), as I have discussed in III.1.2. Sometimes though something is lost in translation and the future ends up not coinciding with the past. This is caused by historical and poetical interpretations, that is, human intervention, often promoting eulogy above facts for the sake of patrons without whom history and poetry could not even circulate. Overturning history ('tutta al contrario la storia converti') figuratively coincides with the experience on the moon, depicted as the reverse side of the earth, that, in fact, teaches us about what we miss in our terrestrial existence. Pulling names out of the river Lethe does not necessarily mean preserving a univocal meaning. There is no univocal meaning intrinsic to them that could be kept anyway. Everything that is human, hence subjective, recoils at objective truth claims, so it cannot be considered as an absolute truth. In all this Ariosto is playing with us the same role that St John is playing with Astolfo: he is guiding us through an otherwise obscure territory.

Since Orlando cannot be the interpreter of his own life, St John steps in and acts through Astolfo, guiding the reader through as if he was Ariosto himself. The intrusion of the narrator's own voice from the very beginning makes him an active part of the lunar episode. In fact he intervenes in the first person to explain what kinds of lost things are kept on the moon ('non pur di regni o di ricchezze *parlo*'; XXXIV.74.1; my italics) and he merges with his public saying 'e vi son tutte

l'occorrenze nostre' (XXXIV.81.6; my italics).¹⁴⁷ Both John and Ariosto are different kinds of guides with respect to Virgil, or Beatrice, and Dante: firstly, the authority of the guides of the *Commedia* is sealed by unreserved faith in the divine mission they carry out, and secondly Dante the pilgrim is receptive and engaged in the intellectual process in a way that Orlando and Astolfo are not. At the same time, John and Ariosto share with Virgil and Dante the fact that they are writers. But Ariosto, rather than revealing the truth below the narrative veil like Dante, uses his writing for another purpose. He reveals the concealing veil through the same tools that he denounces; as writers, both Virgil and Dante and John and Ariosto (among all the others) are not immune to the attacks of falsehood connected with history and poetry.

The only reaction to such an apparent paradox seems to be found in the conclusion of Saint John's speech. Not in his words, in fact, but in its face:

Così dicendo, il vecchio benedetto
 gli occhi infiammò, che parveno duo fuochi;
 poi vòlto al duca con un saggio riso
 tornò sereno il conturbato viso.
 XXXV.30.5-8

At first the rhyme 'riso' | 'viso' may remind us of Dante's *Paradiso*, where Beatrice's *riso* is a recurrent way of expressing divine harmony and an encouragement for the pilgrim to progress towards God, and, in fact, is often found in rhyme with 'paradiso' (i.e. *Par.*, XV.34). But again, the *Furioso's* 'riso', despite appearing on the face of a blessed soul, does not lead to metaphysics: it functions as a way of

¹⁴⁷ Gardini suggest that Ariosto draws a parallel between himself as a writer and St John in the following lines: 'gli scrittori amo, e fo il debito mio;|ch'al vostro mondo fui scrittore *anch'io*' (XXXV.28.7-8; my italics); that 'anch'io' would then seem to be shared personally between John and Ariosto; see Gardini, *Rinascimento*, p. 88.

balancing the irrational forces within man and to allow narration. The way to deal with perturbation is through a *wise* smile ('saggio riso'). And that is what Ariosto does, cutting off the conversation and returning to narrate about Bradamante. Astolfo in canto thirty eight will be seen already descended onto the Terrestrial Paradise in the process of leaving the skies. After a moment of passionate invective, reason comes in again and transforms everything that was said before in a smile which precedes further fictional events. But this is not an uproarious laughter swiping away the seriousness of the discourse. Such a smile reminds rather of Boethius' verses 'Duces serenus aevum | ridens aetheris iras' (*De Consolatione*, II.4.19-22), the prompt to lead a serene life, smiling at the angers of the skies. The solution is offered by the same narration that has been presented as a veil on reality, because it is the only possible form of 'free' and transparent action in our world, given the fact that it openly admits its craft. It is the triumph of poetic metaphor over self-deceiving claims of an unattainable univocal realism, the triumph of the double dimension over the single: madness and sanity, earth and moon, passionate invective and wise irony, and John as Ariosto's double. The 'doppia maraviglia' opens up the terrestrial dimension, adding to it another level: not a metaphysical one, which would send man up to heaven and therefore outside daily problems, but one right within itself which elevates it to its potency.

The *Furioso* is a poem that teaches us to accept our passions as part of the variety of the world, and to deal with them with lightness of spirit while looking for a 'cure'. 'Orlando impazzisce perchè per lui tutto deve restare come prima,

mentre tutto è cambiato', states Raffaele Manica.¹⁴⁸ Nothing is invariable: circumstances are not because man is not. Thinking that the world is invariable and attempting to pursue one view only leads to madness. If such a unitary and codified conception of the world was possible in the past, where after all the *Furioso* is set, that is no longer possible after the sunset of the Quattrocento.¹⁴⁹ That explains the lunar setting of Ariosto's speculation. The 'doppia meraviglia' leads to a lunar knowledge, which is changeable, fortuitous and subject to time and decay. As Manica underlines, the moon is the place of the 'alterazione prospettica', of relativization of thought: 'è il nostro punto di osservazione a determinare le cose, non la qualità dei corpi, la cui sostanza non si altera'.¹⁵⁰ The image of the mirror then comes in useful again: in its physicality the moon mirrors the earth, but its essence is imbued with wits rather than madness. It is complementary to earth. The significance of this lies in the rejection of a system which involves only one dominant trend of knowledge and supports critical opinions. Corrado Bologna comments on the duplicity conveyed by the *Furioso*:

Là dentro [nel *Furioso*] s'è imparato non il *logos*, ma il *mythos*, detto dalla voce che insegna come scaturisce l'Ordine dal Disordine senza eliminare mai nessuno dei due momenti, né l'*apollineo* né il *dionisiaco*, e invece imparando ad armonizzarli in un gioco leggero, rapido, esatto, visibile, molteplice, solido/consistente.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Manica, *Preliminari sull'Orlando furioso*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ 'All'epica cortese di Orlando si contrappone trionfale la soggettività lirica dei due amanti, espressa proprio nella forma di poesia amorosa. [...] Angelica e Medoro non hanno commesso niente di così sbagliato di per sé: semplicemente, hanno rotto, dalla prospettiva di Orlando, il patto cortese'; Gardini, *Per una biblioteca indispensabile. Cinquantadue classici della letteratura italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011), pp. 196-197.

¹⁵⁰ Manica, *Preliminari sull'Orlando furioso*, p.34.

¹⁵¹ Bologna, *La macchina del 'Furioso'*, p. 188.

We do not need to discover ‘‘l ver’, *the* truth, because there is not only one. The frustration of mainstream philosophical inquiry is then not to be regarded as a failure, but rather as a profit. The indictment is a tool of knowledge in itself, casting light on experience and personal interpretation.¹⁵²

We can then consider Ariosto’s poetic knowledge as a moment of wonder when the individual is oscillating between reason and affects, such as in Patrizi’s simile of the Euripus. We have seen that Ariosto’s wonder, unlike Dante’s, does not flow into *admiratio*, a still moment of contemplation. Trying to identify a discourse on knowledge in the *Furioso* is like following a labyrinth. The only interpretative tool the reader has, at the end, is accepting to linger in the time of wonder, caught by Ariosto’s tapestry in a perpetual oscillation between reason and passions. There we are free to fluctuate between one point of view and the other, in the ebb and flow of the Euripus, lulled by the inconstancy of our own *ingegno*. The anonymous treatise *On the Sublime* connected the marvellous to paradox. Ariosto’s poem embodies this union. The speech of the Evangelist, who disseminated that the Word was made flesh (John, I.14) and was said to be the man through whom all men might believe (‘ut omnes *crederent* per illum’; John, I.7, my italics), tells us not to believe in what is apparent, but to pursue new views, ‘altri fiumi, altri laghi, altre campagne’ (*Fur.*, XXXIV.72.1). He takes us to the moon, a steel world apt to preserve safely what is past in order to interpret our present lives.

¹⁵² Cf. Zatti: ‘la dissacrazione è fondamentale strumento di conoscenza’; ‘Il cosmo, la corte, il poeta’, p. 145.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has illustrated the close link between wonder and poetic knowledge, focussing especially on Dante's *Commedia* and on Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. I have shown how wonder can be differentiated from the field of the marvellous, but I have also shown their interaction. Shifting attention from wonder to the marvellous and vice versa has allowed me to disentangle two interweaving dimensions active during the discussion of a literary text: wonder, which characterizes the reaction of the subject (both the author and his characters) to the surrounding world; and the marvellous, characterizing the text, which is the response to such a world. Wonder is related to the subject, that is to the inquiry, and the marvellous to the reception of the product of such inquiry. Studying the dimension of wonder consists of fathoming the author's realm of inquiry as manifested through the features of his text; features capable of originating further wonder in the reader. My position allowed me to consider literature as a unique instance of unfading wonder: a wonder that does not yield to the claims of a purely rationalistic idea of knowledge, but is a crucial moment of poetic speculation that in its very nature builds upon a dimension in which the process of journeying and exploring is valued more than attaining set objectives. To wonder,

as Joseph Pieper has suggested, is to be *in via*.¹ This has proved valid in the analysis of both Dante's and Ariosto's poems.

The first chapter of the thesis began by presenting wonder's philosophical roots. Rediscovering wonder's link with philosophy restored wonder to its original environment and showed how wonder is to be discussed within the realm of speculation, not simply of rhetoric. I showed how some of the issues of classical philosophy resurface in conceptions of wonder during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I first considered medieval *mirabilia* and *admiratio*, from which Dante's *meraviglia* stems, in their connection to pagan and religious sources. I then provided some background necessary to understand the cultural shift that led to Ariosto's Renaissance 'liberation of wonder', as I call it. The instances of wonder that I isolated in the period between Dante and Ariosto reflect changes in the conception of the object of wonder, which descends from the divine sphere to the human. In the conclusion to this chapter, I quote from Patrizi, a philosopher belonging to a culture subsequent to both Dante's and Ariosto's. He defines wonder as a movement that mediates between passions and intellect, creating a permanent oscillation out of which reality is investigated. Such a movement of wonder, which Patrizi likens to the Euripus, is precisely what I observed in action in both the *Commedia* and the *Orlando furioso*.

I began my research by looking at Dante because he was the first poet to engage fully with the vernacular *meraviglia* and to put it at the centre of his poem. Isolating the most significant occurrences of *meraviglia* and *ammirazione* in the

¹ See Pieper, *Leisure, the basis of culture*, p. 136.

Commedia opened a field of research which, given its complexity, would still deserve further attention. Some four years ago, Franco Ferrucci noticed:

A parte qualche rapida e solitaria intuizione è sfuggito alla critica che lo stupore e la sorpresa sono i sentimenti dominanti nell'opera poetica e narrativa di Dante, e sono anche quelli che travalicano nell'animo di chi legge – e il lettore innamorato del nostro autore se n'è accorto assai più dei suoi frequentatori professionali.²

Nothing major on Dante and wonder has been published since then. My analysis in the second chapter of the thesis aims to fill such a gap, although it does not intend to provide an exhaustive picture of wonder in all three *cantiche*. I selected passages from Dante that manifest the kind of wonder I intend to pursue both in this chapter and in that of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. If, with regard to Dante's poem, one could assert the apparent prominence of wonder in its various manifestations (*meraviglioso, stupore, meraviglia, ammirazione*), its signs are not as prominent in Ariosto. To my knowledge, no critic has ever investigated the role of *meraviglia* in the *Orlando furioso* at all; a number of remarks have been made on the poem's more readily evident *meraviglie*, which in my opinion are to be understood not as an end in themselves but in relation to the message with which the whole poem is most concerned. Hence I decided to reassess such marvels in the *Furioso*, and I isolated Orlando's madness as the most intense expression of what I called the 'human marvellous'. Interestingly, I found the *Furioso*'s most striking occurrence of wonder right on the moon ('doppia meraviglia'), in an episode central to Orlando's recovery. The lunar sequence provided an important connection to the *Commedia*. On Ariosto's moon I found wonder leading to

² Ferrucci, *Lo stupore e l'ordine*, p. 273.

speculation as in the case of Dante's wonder; and although the speculation active in the *Commedia* is of a different sort to that in the *Furioso*, my thesis has shown how an analysis of wonder in the two poems can bring to light aspects that are in an open dialogue with each other.

At the beginning of my research I received a few warnings about the ambitious scope of the project that I was about to undertake. Why consider two of the greatest authors of Italian literature *at the same time*? Why Dante *and* Ariosto? I must admit that it has not always been an easy task. The first difficulty arises from accommodating in one thesis the different mentalities of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. A second challenge is the infinite depth of the two poems: one is never sure of reaching the bottom of an issue because every issue looks different from a different angle. Thirdly, there is an intimidating volume of secondary literature to confront. Nonetheless I believe in the importance of a comparative approach in order to reflect on the value in time of the message intrinsic in literature. Looking at wonder in Dante and Ariosto led me to cast new light on themes that are diachronic, and to reconsider them in their connection to the poems' speculative drives.

The themes that I discussed in chapter II and chapter III have been presented according to the following rationale: the marvellous in its relationship with the 'face' of the text; the 'face' of the text in its relationship with the gnoseological discourse that the text voices; the gnoseological discourse in its relationship with wonder; wonder as a subjective reaction to the unknown present

both in the characters of the text, at the level of the plot, and in the omniscient author, at the level of the weaving of the story (*techne*).

Dante's marvellous emerged as strictly connected to the discourse on truth in the *Commedia*. We have seen that intellectual wonder has no life in Hell, which is full of ignorance, darkness, and extreme passions. Dante's *Inferno* appears materially through its monsters and its monstrous punishments as a pre-wonder moment of stasis. There are no openings for wonder in Hell, as there is no way to God for the sinners. The situation is dominated by the marvellous as an effect to which man is subject. But Dante, linking his marvellous to a discourse on historical truth (*mirum verum*), redeems the marvellous that comes from the pagan tradition and makes it Christian, that is, something, which can be used to access God's realm and is a manifestation of God's laws. Dante's infernal *meraviglioso* functions to give his language a body anchored to a reality made of errors, sins and punishments, which all men share; the awareness gained in Hell is the basis for moving out of it. Only after this stage can inquisitive wonder succeed and lead to knowledge on which to build the *Paradiso's ammirazione*. We have seen that Dante's wonder is allowed in *Paradiso* only when it is one way, that is, when it is directed towards the divine. Hence Dante makes it flow into an *admiratio* pouring on the image of Christ, human and divine; in doing so not only does he merge the experiences of the three *cantiche* but also the human and the divine spheres so that at the end of his journey what is human is also divine and what is divine is also human. For this reason the *Commedia* is an eloquent example of how the different facets of wonder can manifest in different phases of the process of inquiry,

retaining the essential characteristic that I outlined in chapter I: wonder's 'tidal' movement, embracing both passion and intellect, which Dante interprets throughout the *Commedia*, is an oscillation between the human and the divine until their ultimate confluence. The final vision, however, is destined to last for a finite fraction of time and will finally send the individual back to his mortal sway.

The marvellous elements of Ariosto's world tend rather to refer exclusively to the fraudulent aspect of composing a text. I have shown this through an analysis of the metaphor of weaving in the *Furioso*, and through disentangling the fantastic and the human aspect of the poem's *meraviglioso*. However, we have seen in chapter III that for Ariosto, as for Dante, the revelation of the ambivalent aspects of representation functions also as a preamble to a reflection on knowledge and truth. Unlike Dante, Ariosto cannot make his marvellous an expression of the divine; he makes it a 'fantastic' expression of the manifoldness of human lives. Ariosto's world is still under the same God as Dante's; but God's presence is no longer believed as determining nor to be understandable as it used to be in the Middle Ages. Even God's punishment in the shape of Orlando's madness, in the poem shares more with magic, that is chance, than with religion. Ariosto's discourse is anchored to the discovery that took place during Astolfo's journey above the earth: there is nothing else on the moon but a new point of view of the earth, that is to say, there is no univocal truth to which to be subjected. Wonder in the *Furioso* has descended from the higher spheres to the earthly ground; during its descent, wonder has lost its link to divine truth and acquired a full terrestrial existence made of ambiguities and contradictions. While lifting Dante's veil would

lead to truth, Ariosto's veil does not reveal anything else but its own threads, which, as we have learnt on the moon, are nothing but human lives.

Finally, wonder has emerged from both poems in its essential characteristics of medley and paradox. If Dante found in Christ the utmost expression of *admiratio*, Ariosto's climax of wonder is reached through the lunar 'doppia meraviglia'. Both the figure of Christ and the moment of 'doppia meraviglia' share a 'double' nature: while in the first instance the double involves the human and the divine, in the second instance the look at the divine practically involves a rebound towards the human. The two moments reflect the needs and the aspirations of two different cultures. St John's speech, which enacts the *Furioso's* revelation, contains no reference to divine matter. John presents himself as a writer, first of all, and talks about literature as a redemptive activity from the point of view of a man. I have shown the *Commedia* staging a tension between wonder as it was expressed naturally by the pilgrim and wonder as controlled by Virgil and Beatrice, and directed towards the divine as the only licit recipient. The *Furioso* is a pure manifestation of natural wonder. There is only one instance when St John, at the conclusion of his final speech, pronounces a negation of wonder:

Non ti maravigliar ch'io n'abbia ambascia,
e se di ciò diffusamente io dico.
Gli scrittori amo, e fo il debito mio;
ch'al vostro mondo fui scrittore anch'io.
Fur., XXXV.28.5-8

Having informed Astolfo with a striking view on history and literature, John seems to be pre-empting a reaction of wonder from the wayfarer, a reaction, however, which Ariosto does not manifest. There is nothing marvellous in the

revelation itself. Once more Ariosto presents the episode on the moon as another face of earthly discourse. 'Non ti maravigliar' is then one of the many elements that send back to earth inviting the reader not to wonder at the moon as a symbol of the divine sphere but as one revealing the terrestrial. After all, John, a writer himself, simply performs his duty ('e fo il debito mio'), that is, of revealing that history and literature are ambivalent interpretations that can bear contrasting claims of truth. His 'debito' is towards man. This is the poet's task: revealing 'the other side' of things, as part of the natural and not of the supernatural, for man's benefit.

Both Dante and Ariosto heartily believe in the redemptive power of literature. While Dante's poem needs to be guaranteed by God in order to be perceived as truthful, Ariosto's is itself a guarantee of a message of multiplicity where truth appears as multifaceted as earthly existence is. For Dante truth coincides with harmony between man and God's order; for Ariosto truth coincides with the awareness that harmony on earth, that is, between individuals, is not always given, but can and ought to be sought, to avoid falling into the excesses of solipsistic passion. I consider wonder as reflecting the oscillation between the self and what is unknown of the surrounding world, which, independently of the results attained, will always thrive in man's relationship with what he is not.

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