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**IN THEIR OWN VOICES:  
SILENCE AND THE FEMALE VOICE IN THE *ORLANDO FURIOSO***

**by**

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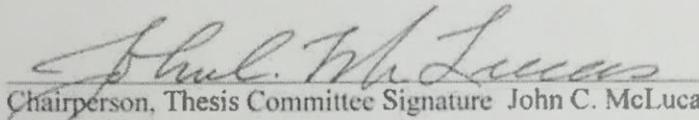
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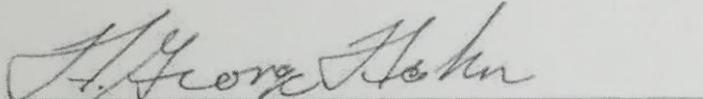
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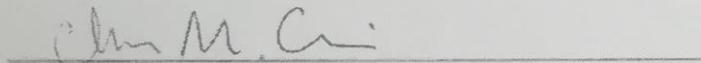
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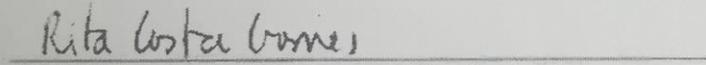
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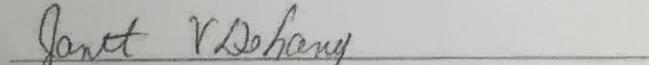
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## Abstract

In Their Own Voices:

Silence and the Female Voice in the *Orlando furioso*

Monica L. Lynch

For women, the rediscovery of classical texts meant that the ideals of silence and chastity became more closely linked in Early Modern minds than they had been before. Imposed on women, these ideals meant that any show of female autonomy or outspokenness was the target of vituperation. In his 1516 - 1532 editions of *Orlando furioso*, Ludovico Ariosto considers this vein of the *querelle des femmes* through his exploration of alternative possibilities of Woman, emphasizing the absurdity of those ideals. Using Guido Waldman's prose edition because of its literal translation, I examine Ariosto's personification of silence and the complexity that the ability or inability to speak adds to his female characters to reveal his criticism of the limits of the *querelle*. Ariosto's characterizations suggest that the relationships between men and women are more complex than scope of the *querelle* allows. Furthermore, by allowing female characters to speak and narrate, Ariosto gives women the voice both to narrate and to "write" themselves into history, giving both sexes equal access to the conversation.

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## Introduction

According to Jacques Derrida, Westerners place too much emphasis on speech because our internal writing, our thoughts, beliefs and desires, can never be fully communicated by the representational system of language that we have created. Yet without that system, without speech, our attempts at communicating our thoughts, reflecting both our public and private identities, would find themselves further frustrated. Though the sounds of our utterances dissipate as we vocalize them, speaking an idea makes it somehow permanent, as if, acting in accordance with the laws of physics, the disturbance the waves create in the space and energy around us writes the messages on our bodies, forever changing ourselves and those who hear us. What is spoken cannot be unsaid. What is heard cannot be unheard. We, as the authors, cannot control how those messages are understood, but the fact that we can speak them gives vent to our needs, our aims, our desires. The unique sounds of our voices give body to our thoughts. As those embodied thoughts gestate in the complicated identity development process, they resonate in the understandings we fashion of ourselves and those that others form about us, shaping our relationships with ourselves and the world and people around us.

In sixteenth-century Ferrara, where art and literature flourished under the Este dynasty, Ludovico Ariosto labored under conditions that threatened to stifle his voice, struggling against his father's aspirations for him, financial worries, and his employer's lack of respect for his writing talents. Unique in the literary tradition both before and since its original publication, the *Orlando furioso* stands as a monument to his determination as an artist who wished to be heard. Sung through the voice of a *cantastorie* who frequently delights in withholding information, sometimes to frustrating

effect,<sup>1</sup> the poem unfolds at his will. When and what his audience knows are at his mercy. Ariosto gifts this persona with the power to allow characters in the poem to narrate long episodes, a shocking technique as the criticism on the *Furioso* attests.<sup>2</sup> Yet other characters are deliberately silenced. Mouths muzzled, characters' identities take form under the influence of those who speak to them, about them, and for them. The narrator, an interesting and unreliable entertainer, often inaccurately suggests that characters are immoral, and, suffering the inability to be heard, their personalities are distorted until the narrator loosens the restraint and gives them voice.

Many critics have tried to determine Ariosto's opinion about women based on the narrator's comments and the exemplars that the narrator holds up for examination. It seems odd that, with so much of the poem being about silence, noise, women, writing, and women writing, no one has examined at length the effects of the narrator's allowing or not allowing women to speak or write in the poem and what that may reveal about Ariosto's stance on the relationships between women and men. Given the shock critics had over the disruptive narrations that dot the poem and the fact that the very first episode is about a woman so silent that even when she is present, we are not sure she is present is narrated by a woman, it seems valid to question the intent and results of the restrictions on women's speech that Ariosto imposed on his characters. In this thesis, I will examine how Ariosto's decisions about when, what, and to whom female characters may speak

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<sup>1</sup> For thorough studies of Ariosto's narrative disruptions, see Daniel Javitch, "Cantus Interruptus in the *Orlando furioso*," *MLN* 95, no. 1 (1980): 66 – 80 and Javitch, "Narrative Discontinuity in the *Orlando Furioso* and its Sixteenth Century Critics," *MLN* 103, no. 1 (1988): 50 – 74.

<sup>2</sup> For thorough studies of the importance of the criticism of the *Orlando furioso* and its key role in shaping subsequent literary criticism see Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

shape his female characters' identities, relationships, and places in society and how those characters reflect and challenge philosophies about women in the Early Modern Era.<sup>3</sup>

Using one of his most common techniques, Ariosto creates parallel characters and episodes, thus balancing his poem with characters and behaviors that sometimes reinforce and sometimes challenge Early Modern conceptions of the nature of women, acceptable gender roles, and the relationships between men and women. This balance, created throughout the poem, suggests that Ariosto believed that society could and should be balanced, that both men and women should have a voice in shaping private and public roles. Adherence to strictly and unfairly imposed gender roles, the *Furioso's* patterns of balance suggest, is dangerous for men, women, and society.

Women's roles had been somewhat freer prior to the shift from feudalism to the centralized government of the modern state. The medieval courtly tradition was generally pro woman. But as governments centralized outside of the feudal lord's castle, aristocratic women's abilities to participate in economic and governmental decision-making were lost.<sup>4</sup> Once domesticated, they were expected to remain silent. They found social and political humiliation when they were not, as Christine de Pisan (1364 – 1430)

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<sup>3</sup> I have consulted three versions of the *Furioso*: Ariosto, Ludovico, *Orlando furioso*, ed. E. Sanguinetie M. Turchi (Milano: Garzanti, 1964); Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* 1, trans. Barbara Reynolds (New York: Penguin Books, 1975); *Orlando furioso* 2, trans. Barbara Reynolds (New York: Penguin Books, 1977); and *Orlando furioso*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Over some forty-five thousand lines, Reynolds' translation of the *Orlando furioso* maintains the *ottava rima* in which Ariosto wrote and tries to embody the sound and the spirit of the original text beautifully. However, I have chosen to use Waldman's prose translation for all English quotations of the poem because of its more literal translation of the meaning of Italian words to align with English meanings. As such, I have omitted line numbers from all citations; rather, I cite canto and octave numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals respectively. Waldman changes the spellings of characters' names; I have chosen to keep Ariosto's original spellings to maintain some sense of its Italian origins.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the 'Querelle des Femmes', 1400 – 1789." *Signs* 8, no. 1 (1982): 5 – 10, 22. For studies on the relation of state formation and the status of women in society, Kelly refers readers to Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965) and Davis, "Women's History in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* (1976): 83 – 103.

would suffer on the streets and at the French royal court in response to her public outspokenness, her writing poetry, and her ability to support herself and her family financially, all paradoxically possible because she received a humanistic education that taught the oppression of women.<sup>5</sup>

But Christine, not to be silenced by society's molding women into members of a group who are "defective in their sex," ushered in a new century by publishing a new kind of writing. Criticizing misogyny and refuting its accusations of women's inferiority in 1399, she ignited the *querelle des femmes*, the written debate over women, their nature, physical, intellectual, and moral, and their positions and roles in society.<sup>6</sup> Christine's early feminist writing kept "her saints and holy women" and Boccaccio's mythic exemplars, Isis, founder of Rome and language, Ceres, founder of agriculture, Minerva, founder of arts, and Carmenta, founder of sciences, busy defending women's intellectual and moral equality in a four-hundred-year battle against texts and ideologies that constricted women's full humanity into one-dimensional images with the intent to keep women subjugated to men.<sup>7</sup>

Together, these forces, the new social, political, and economic systems and the rediscovery of the classical literary tradition, worked to both construct and reinforce the increasingly strict rules of gendered decorum and the changing views of gender identity of Early Modern Italy. But feminists and feminist sympathizers continued to create images of the possibilities for female identity, incorporating historical models of learned women, women warriors, and women rulers to combat the educated yet unhorsed,

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<sup>5</sup> Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory," 5 – 9.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 9-12, 25, 28.

disarmed, and domesticated woman that Baldessare Castiglione had defined as the ideal woman in his *The Book of the Courtier*. Feminists argued that, in earlier times, French women held deliberative roles along with men; Spartan women participated in all public and private matters, and German women, according to Tacitus, held the same places as men in governing home and state. From the fourteenth century, women in command had been “a normal part of European armies.” And contemporary noble women like Eleanor of Aragon, Duchess of Ferrara, who assumed sole command of the city when it was besieged by Venice in 1482, Isabella d’Este, *Marchesana* of Mantua, and Caterina Sforza, Countess of Milan, who took command and fought to maintain rule in her own name, exemplified women’s intellectual and governing powers.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, misogyny and the *querelle* would continue.

Fascinated by the relationships between women and men, as the first line of the poem announces, Ariosto uses the arguments of the *querelle* in *Orlando furioso* to suggest that human nature is far too complex to fit neatly in the boxes that secular literature, religious doctrine, and political powers would place all women. The arguments for and against women serve as an undercurrent, swirling about beneath the swelling and shifting waves that toss his characters around the globe on their journeys to find themselves. Developing his characters from the traditional literary *topoi* of Woman and transforming them from within those conventions, Ariosto undermines the stability of assigned gender identities and roles and thereby implies the absurdity of both classical

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 21-22. On the changing roles of women in society, Kelly refers readers to Deanna Shemek, “Of Women, Knights, Arms, and Love: The *Querelle des Femmes* in Ariosto’s Poem.” *MLN* 104, no. 1 (1989): 68-97 and Barton Hacker, “Women and Military Institutions of Early Modern Europe: A Renaissance,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 4 (1981): 643 – 71.

and Renaissance thinking that would trap both men and women in essentially opposite binary roles.

Chapter one, “Breaking Their Silence,” examines the influence Ariosto’s childhood and early adulthood may have had on the poet’s views on being silenced. Living in a city fertile for developing young artists, Ariosto found the seed planted in him during his adolescence and struggled against a father who wished him to go into law rather than work toward the uncertain future of a poet. Upon his father’s death, Ariosto found his own voice threatened again when he had to give up his classical studies to earn money to support his mother and brothers and sisters. Although he earned employment with the powerful Este family by writing a humorous verse about Ippolito d’Este, he found that the job took him away from his writing more often than he would have liked. Further, his employer, Ippolito, did not look kindly on his employee spending his time on poetry when there was much diplomatic work to be done. It was a tumultuous time not only for Ferrara but for all of Italy, and Ippolito frequently sent Ariosto on dangerous missions to Rome and other city states. So it is not farfetched to conclude that Ariosto felt the weight of external pressures silencing his poetic voice, which would influence his empathy for women who also found themselves unable to speak.

Chapter one further examines the power that the ideal of silence in women had in determining a woman’s moral character, her education, and the consequences of a woman’s not living up to the ideal. Ariosto’s personification of Silence as neither inherently good nor bad destabilizes the link that existed in Early Modern minds between silence and chastity. Moreover, because Ariosto depicts and praises women who do not adhere to the ideal expounded by the conduct books of the era, editors and translators of

the *Furioso* found it necessary to domesticate the poem as a moral guide to ensure its acceptability to their audiences and thus sell successfully. Ariosto's text questions the status quo, writing women as human, equals in virtue and vice, with men, and editors altered the text to align with and support the status quo.

Furthermore, chapter one examines the first character narrator, Dalinda, and the subject of her story, the completely silent Ginevra. By allowing female characters to take over the narration, Ariosto creates a balance of male and female voices among the "disruptive episodes," which become a conversation about the relationships between men and women. Dalinda, the narrator who makes no apologies for her sexuality or her outspokenness, is the catalyst through which change occurs in this episode, allowing the truth to come out and justice to be served. But she also exemplifies the destructiveness that "love" can wreak, when we lose ourselves for it and refuse to see the signs of warning that surround us. Speaking to avenge herself for the cruelty of a lover who did not just abandon her but hired murderers to kill her, Dalinda tells the story of Polinesso's treachery.

The word *crudele*, or cruelty, is an important one in the *Furioso*. Ariosto plays with its dual meaning in Italian. *Crudele* can mean, as it does in English, maliciousness, meanness, and mercilessness. But *crudele* can also describe the seemingly callous actions of one who does not return the love of a lover. Ariosto uses it frequently to describe both men and women who do not requite their suitors' love. However, his first usage of *crudele*, when he describes Rinaldo's attempts to take Angelica against her will, is more in line with the former meaning. Further, he continues to use *crudele* in this capacity throughout the *Furioso* in describing other men who attempt the same with Angelica and

other female characters. In addition, when listing the seven deadly sins in Canto XIV, he replaces *Lust* with *Crudeltade*. *Crudeltade* as a sin implies that not loving is the sin, not vice versa as the conduct books taught. Lidia, who narrates her own tale, reveals that the penalty for the sin of cruelty is an eternity in hell. In Ariosto's hell, men receive a worse punishment for their cruelty in abandoning women than women do, suggesting that, coupled with the alternate meaning, men's cruelty toward women is more vicious because they abuse the power they hold over them.

Ginevra, the embodiment of the ideal Woman, exemplifies the complete effacement of a person who has been wholly silenced and kept out of public affairs as conduct books and sixteenth-century educators of girls taught. Through her, Ariosto invites contemplation about the morality of a society that allows women to be subject to antiquated laws, even when everyone sees the defects in those laws.

Chapter two, "The Saintly Woman," examines the controversial proem to Canto XXXVII,<sup>9</sup> in particular, Ariosto's assessment of Vittoria Colonna and the reasons for which Ariosto praises her. Pamela Benson argues that Colonna becomes the "acceptable face" of women writers through Ariosto's comparing her to the "passive" moon, "reflecting" her husband's glory rather than radiating her own.<sup>10</sup> Through an alternative reading of the same passage, I argue that Ariosto, by metaphorically comparing Colonna to the moon and the sun, characterizes Colonna as androgynous. This androgyny gives Colonna balance. She has both the independence of the Moon goddess, Artemis, and the

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<sup>9</sup> At the heart of this controversy is Ariosto's duplicitous praise of women followed in the same canto by the story of Drusilla and Marganorre, which will be explored further in later chapters.

<sup>10</sup> Pamela Joseph Benson, "The Stigma of Italy Undone: Aemilia Lanyer's Canonization of Lady Mary Sidney," in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers & Canons in England, France, & Italy*, eds. Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 147.

poetic skill of Phoebus Apollo, god of poetry. She rules night and day. Ariosto's further comparison of Colonna to Artemisia praises their ability to raise the dead and immortalize them through their writing.<sup>11</sup>

The comparison of Colonna and Artemisia to divinities as writers of their husband's lives becomes part of Ariosto's satire of the unattainable role model for women in the Early Modern era, the Virgin Mary. By giving Isabella, Drusilla, and Fiordiligi qualities of both Colonna and Artemisia, Ariosto begs the comparison of the attainable role of poet to the unattainable roles that conduct books and religious tracts set for women. Ariosto portrays Isabella as the Virgin saint, with religious and mystical imagery at her entry into and at her exit from the poem. In between, as she narrates her story to Orlando, it becomes clear that she cannot live up to the unattainable model. Her speech to Orlando alone takes her outside of the realm of "saint" as it puts her chastity in question. Her hyperbolized martyrdom implies the absurdity of women trying live according to impossible demands placed on them by society. By illustrating the futility of seeing the world in binaries of power, either submit to patriarchal rule or die to maintain your dignity and reputation, Ariosto implies that men, because they hold the power in society, must learn to listen to the female voice in order to find balance and create a society where women have other choices and possibilities open to them.

Drusilla, Ita Mac Carthy argues, becomes a "divine" woman by nature of her suicide, which removes her completely from social structures that make her a sexual

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<sup>11</sup> For a thorough study of androgyny as the ideal human condition, see Carolyn Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). For close examinations of Ariosto's fascination and concern for androgyny and blurring of gender as the ideal state of humanity in the *Orlando furioso*, see John C. McLucas, "Ariosto and the Androgyne: Symmetries of Sex in the *Orlando furioso*," (Doctoral Dissertation, New Haven, 1983) and McLucas, "Faccio o nol Faccio? Cross-dressing Initiatives in the *Orlando Furioso*," *Italian Culture* XIV (1996): 34 – 46.

object, thereby eliminating any chance of corruption.<sup>12</sup> Through an alternative reading of her character, I argue that Drusilla becomes a saint much in the same way a soldier or son would. By avenging the death of her husband, she fulfills the role that a brother-in-arms or a son would fulfill in battle or vengeance. Drusilla's story runs the risk of being lost if it were left in the hands of Marganorre, much as Ariosto's narrator complains that men have done to great women throughout history. But because a woman whom Marganorre exiled tells her tale, Drusilla's story is written into history. Without these mitigating circumstances, Drusilla would have gone down in history as another scorned woman, viciously exacting her revenge. But the narrator details Drusilla's active defiance of cruelty and oppression, and Bradamante and Marfisa ensure that their remains are ennobled in a "sumptuous tomb" that will tell their tale long after the narrator can no longer speak.

Fiordiligi is unique in the poem in that, although described as "a damsel, in distress,"<sup>13</sup> she is not a damsel in distress. She cries out of the distress that Brandimarte has disappeared, and she is unable to find him. But she does not sit around and wait for a man to solve her problems. She goes in search of Brandimarte, traveling through the world alone without being accosted as other women in the poem are. Fiordiligi never finds herself in the position of having to defend her chastity. Her love affair with Brandimarte is passionate, yet she is never seen as a sexual object by any other characters. Her chastity, however, is beyond reproach and is highlighted further by a parallel story, the story of Giocondo and his wife.

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<sup>12</sup> Ita Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry in Ariosto's Orlando furioso* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2007), 104.

<sup>13</sup> Ariosto, XXIV.53.

Neither Brandimarte nor Giocondo wants to leave his wife behind. While Brandimarte leaves without telling Fiordiligi, who probably would have not only been in total agreement about his helping Orlando but would have gone too, Giocondo asks permission from his wife to go. She grants permission but complains about his upcoming absence for a month while he prepares to leave. Fiordiligi remains faithful to Brandimarte over the span of a year, at least. On the other hand, Giocondo, only a short while later when he returns prematurely, finds his wife in bed with another man. Though Early Modern philosophers believed that a woman's being inside the house was a sign of her chastity,<sup>14</sup> Ariosto destabilizes that ideology with these foils.

Fiordiligi is also given androgynous qualities. In addition to her tearfulness, she is active, resourceful, and eloquent enough with her rhetoric to convince even Rodomonte to do her will: save Brandimarte from drowning in the river. The paladins all respect her, and she becomes an integral part of their group. When Brandimarte dies in battle, she wishes that she had been there to warn him, or protect him by coming between the sword and him. Though Fiordiligi had several options open to her, she follows Brandimarte into death. Through her death, Ariosto implies that Fiordiligi could have made a lasting impact on the world, but did not. Instead, she chooses to die, wasting her talents.

Chapter three, "Powerful Powerless Women," analyzes the various ways in which characters who speak and act from a position of weakness assume power. A discussion of historical women including noblewomen of Italian city states, queens of Europe, and Artemisia as proof of women's abilities to govern for the early feminists leads into an

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1986), 124.

examination of Drusilla's taking control of power in a situation where she had none. The narrator's judgment that assesses less blame for exhibiting "disgraceful behavior" leads to the questions: what is a disgrace, and how much force does it take to mitigate the exhibition of disgraceful behavior?"

These questions lead into Queen Lucina and King Norandino's tale, which is a transformation of the Polyphemus tale in the *Odyssey*. Both king and queen exhibit "disgraceful" behavior. Lucina, as soon as opportunity affords, abandons Norandino. Norandino stays with Lucina but does nothing to free himself and his queen. An interesting character within their tale, which is told by a male character, is the Orcus' human wife. Her willingness to betray the Orcus yet not try to escape herself or help the other women captives escape implies how much pressure women felt to conform to the gender roles constructed for them and the amount of fear women felt for the consequences of breaking social rules of silence and chastity.

Chapter three further examines the judgments that Marfisa makes in Alessandretta, the man-killer island, Marganorre's city. As both judge and enforcer, Marfisa carries out her severe sentences with the intent to right wrongs. Her sister-in-law, Bradamante, is a more fair-minded judge. She pronounces the violent punishments that Marfisa does, but she reduces her sentences, with the exception of one. She and Angelica seem to be the most well-rounded, fulfilled characters in the poem. Bradamante's ability to reason is backed by her martial skill, however, whereas Angelica does not possess the physical strength to overcome her assailants.

Angelica is an educated woman, empowered by her father's education and rearing and the magic ring he gives to her. While it is lost, Angelica is at the mercy of men who

can protect her, but upon regaining the ring, Angelica has no need to use knights for protection. Her ring allows her to move about freely on her own, like Fiordiligi. When Angelica falls in love with Medoro, she breaks her silence, asking him to be her lover. Her outspokenness is rewarded when Medoro returns her love. It is her willingness to speak that empowers her to seize happiness with a lover who escapes with her back to her kingdom where they will rule together as equal partners.

Angelica is also a writer. But, as the poetry of many women writers of the Renaissance, her writing is denied by Orlando. When he eventually concludes that Angelica does love someone else, the knowledge sends Orlando into his madness. He loses the power of speech, becoming a brute. Orlando tries to silence Angelica by erasing her writing from history. Orlando's need to destroy her writing seems paradoxical because the matter of her poetry is love for her husband, the acceptable content for women writers of the Early Modern era. Orlando's destruction is thwarted by the narrator, however, who records all that she and Medoro had written.

In conclusion, it becomes obvious that Ariosto values balance in everything pertaining to relationships between the sexes. He values women who have the courage to risk the *furore* of men who cannot bear to hear their messages for the sake of making art and love. His satire seems to imply that the system that requires women to be silent and chaste, when silence does not inherently mean chastity, and chastity does not inherently mean morally good, and then sexualizes and objectifies them is absurd. But mostly, Ariosto belongs among the early feminists because he views women as human, in all of its forms and meanings, good and bad.

## Chapter 1

## Breaking Their Silence

In 1485, a twelve-year-old Ludovico Ariosto, eldest son of Count Niccolò Ariosto, a man harsh with inferiors, combative with peers, and sycophantic and self-righteous with superiors, moved to Ferrara with his family.<sup>15</sup> It could not have been a more propitious time for a budding young dramatist and poet to live in northern Italy, and few cities could equal Ferrara's favorable culture in encouraging a young artistic prodigy to mature.

The Duke and Duchess of Ferrara, Ercole I and Eleonora of Aragon, were two of the most prominent patrons of the arts of Early Modern Italy, making their city renowned for its arts and culture, and the years between Ferrara's war with Venice and the French invasions were perhaps among the most fruitful of the Italian Renaissance thanks to their support. When Ariosto arrived, Ercole was having the Latin comedies restored and adapted to more contemporary social and cultural conditions. Count Matteo Maria Boiardo, after having broken off his work on the *Orlando innamorato* at the outset of the war with Venice, had returned to Ferrara and resumed work on the poem that would capture Ariosto's interest. Further sparking Ariosto's literary aspirations, the Duke staged the modernized Latin plays in 1486. After witnessing the spectacle, Ariosto began staging his own dramas at home. When his mother and father would go out, he dressed his younger siblings in clothes most suitable for costumes and made them recite lines he had written for them. But his father would have none of it. Wanting his son to become a notary, Niccolò placed Ludovico at the Ferrarese Studio under the tutelage of the chair of

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<sup>15</sup> Edmund G. Gardner, *The King of Court Poets: A Study of the Work, Life, and Times of Lodovico Ariosto* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 8 – 9, 15 – 22. In general, I use Gardner for biographical information unless otherwise noted.

law. So while all of Ferrara sang the praises of Boiardo's new chivalric romance, Ariosto yearned to be free from the work to which his father had consigned him and write his own verses. But, though he despised the work, he dared not openly defy his father's wishes.

Despite the respect he held for his father, Ariosto would not allow his voice to be easily silenced, so it was in secret that he fed his mind with every kind of romance he could acquire. It was in secret that he began writing. Ariosto neglected his legal studies, so much so that, in March of 1492, his father gave him a long lecture in front of his younger brother Gabriele, accusing him of becoming “*uno delli più tristi e dissoluti giovani di questa città.*”<sup>16</sup> Ariosto sat silently, listening to his father's words, and promised increased obedience in the future. After their father had gone, the elder told his younger brother that his father's lecture was excellent source material, and that he, mind occupied with using his father's words to mentally compose character dialogue for a new comedy, had not thought of telling his father that he was innocent. Two years later, Niccolò finally acknowledged his son's talent, stopped insisting that he study law,<sup>17</sup> and left Ludovico to follow the sound of his own voice. The struggle between Ariosto and his father surely influenced his determination to write,<sup>18</sup> but his father's attempt to suppress his voice must also have developed in Ariosto a sympathetic view toward others who found themselves silenced by patriarchal power structures.

When his father died in 1500, Ariosto, left with the care of his very large family, found that circumstances again threatened to suffocate his voice. He abandoned his Greek

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. Gardner's translation: “one of the most sad and dissolute young people of this city.”

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 – 25, 30.

<sup>18</sup> McLucas, “Ariosto and the Androgyne,” 23. McLucas discusses Bloom's opinion in *The Anxiety of Influence* that the struggle between fathers and sons motivates much literary production.

studies and worked hard to keep from being crushed beneath financial burdens.<sup>19</sup> In 1503, Ariosto wrote a verse to Ippolito d'Este, the irreverent and notoriously licentious, though skilled diplomat and military leader, third son of Ercole and Eleonora of Aragon, on his appointment to the see of Ferrara. It appears that Ippolito found the poem's praise of his chastity humorous, for within the year, he had employed Ariosto. Although the employment enabled him to support his family, it was not the patronage for which Ariosto had hoped. Ippolito, scorning poetry, kept Ariosto continually busy with dangerous diplomatic tasks, which, because it was a recurring hindrance to his studies and writing, Ariosto grew to deplore.<sup>20</sup>

When Cardinal Giovanni de Medici was elected as Pope Leo X upon Julius II's death in 1513, Ariosto believed that his long-time friend, whose exile he had made "less harsh and desolate" by reading from early drafts of his *Orlando furioso*, would be inclined to bestow a benefice that would allow him to complete his poem without the distractions that his employment under Ippolito entailed. He was wrong. Despite his reputation for lavish spending on the arts, especially on poets, Leo X bestowed no such honor on Ariosto,<sup>21</sup> leaving him without the steady income that would have allowed him to spend more energy giving life to his voice. Disappointed, Ariosto returned to performing the duties of a messenger, spy, and confidant for Ippolito, and playwright and director of theatrical productions for the Ferrarese court while struggling to find time to write the *Furioso*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 40-41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 46 – 48.

<sup>21</sup> Peter DeSa Wiggins, *The Satires of Ludovico Ariosto: A Renaissance Autobiography* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), xii, 28, 52, and Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 108 – 09.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, *Satires*, 3.

Through the frustrations over the struggles with his father, the financial setbacks, and the political travel that interrupted his writing, Ariosto must have learned the lesson that Daniel Javitch claims is one of the lessons Ariosto teaches with his disruptive and frustrating narrative strategy: the abrupt changes from story thread to story. Javitch argues that Ariosto's interruptions and deviations teach us to accustom ourselves to disappointment and deprivation, thereby learning to postpone frustrated desires with "rational detachment" and avoiding self-destruction.<sup>23</sup> Ariosto's frustrated desire to live the contemplative life of a poet that a patron could have given him did not stop him from writing himself into history, in fact far from it, but certainly the disruptions to his voice deepened his understanding of and empathy for women's speech and writing being severely inhibited by roles thrust on them by figures of authority.

Silence, for most Early Modern conduct book writers and educators of girls, was considered to be the ideal characteristic of Woman. But Woman was also considered to be naturally chatty, so a silent woman meant a submissive woman. While boys were educated to become what Renaissance humanists believed the goal of education to be, "the speaker of words and doer of deeds," girls were educated to be silent.<sup>24</sup> Woman's supposedly inherent irrationality and intellectual inferiority meant that she was capable of neither important nor eloquent speech. Moralists like Juan Luis Vives, who wrote one of the most widely translated and read conduct pamphlets of the sixteenth century, found it difficult to believe that women could have anything of substance to say: "What can an ignorant young maiden chatter so much about . . . Of God, of Our Lady or of the blessed

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<sup>23</sup> Javitch, "Cantus Interruptus in the *Orlando furioso*," 66 – 80 and "Narrative Discontinuity, 50-74.

<sup>24</sup> Joan Gibson, "Educating for Silence: Renaissance Women and the Language Arts," *Hypatia* 4, no. 1, (1989), 22.

weather?”<sup>25</sup> So rather than receiving an education in all three components of the *trivium* in preparation for the active civic lives that boys would lead, girls learned only grammar. Dialectic and rhetoric were unnecessary for those expected to remain silent. Women’s education required them to live the quiet, domestic life and read to their families for pleasure, not irritate public forums with gossip, slander, and incessant prattle or, worse, take “a false opinion . . . [and] spread it into the hearers, by the authority of mastership.”<sup>26</sup> Thus women with the unfortunate privilege to have the intellect and the financial means to receive a humanist education found themselves in a confounding paradox. They could read and write, but speaking and writing, as a form of speech, were forbidden to them.<sup>27</sup> So educated women felt more painfully the sting of the strap immobilizing their tongues and the weight of imposed silence.

Some educated women did find ways to make their voices heard, though often from behind the scenes or in the shadows of the men in their lives. Women with literary ambitions found that the matter of their poetry was restricted by what society saw as acceptable for a woman poet to write. But Vittoria Colonna, whom Ariosto praises in the controversial thirty-seventh canto of his poem, found fame for writing encomiastic poetry dedicated to the memory of her husband, which society saw as an admirable topic for women. And Isabella d’Este, the *Marchesana* of Mantua, though her power and her voice were severely limited, voiced her delight in Ariosto’s poetry and made a lasting impact

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<sup>25</sup> Jeanice Brooks, “Catherine de Médicis, nouvelle Artémise: Women’s Laments and the Virtue of Grief,” *Early Music* 27, no. 3 (1999), 419. Vives is quoted in and translated by Brooks. For a review of the conduct literature of the period, Brooks refers readers to see R. Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: U of Illinois, 1956). I did not consult Vives or Kelso.

<sup>26</sup> Vives, quoted in Gibson, “Educating for Silence,” 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. For the consequences of breaking injunctions to silence for women writers, Jeanice Brooks refers readers to see A. R. Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women’s Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 20 – 28. I did not consult Jones.

on the literary world. Isabella took every opportunity to admire his skill in her letters to Ariosto and to her brothers, Alfonso and Ippolito. Moreover, when Ariosto found himself close to finishing his *Furioso* in 1515, Cardinal Ippolito, perhaps because of her praise of Ariosto, asked Isabella and her husband to send, duty free, 1,000 reams of paper to Ariosto so that he could have his poem printed. She gladly sent what the poet needed, giving significant financial aid in the publication of the first edition of the *Furioso*.<sup>28</sup>

Silence in woman also meant chastity. Conduct literature often linked and conflated garrulity and the sin of sexual excess.<sup>29</sup> Colonna's poetry did not compromise her chastity because she remained faithful to her husband even after his death. But for most topics, a woman speaking was akin to promiscuity. If Woman's private speech was undesirable, her public speech was worse.<sup>30</sup> In his treatise *On Wifely Duties*, Francesco Barbaro writes that decency dictates that "the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs."<sup>31</sup> And Vives' condemnation of women's speech argues that allowing a girl to speak to a boy is to cause them "to burn one for the other" and compares the girl's speech to "the prayers and litanies of hell" where "Satan prepares for them" a place where they will "dance to the sound of his minstrels."<sup>32</sup>

Girls, thought innately talkative and intellectually weak, were believed to be essentially vulnerable to corrupting influences, so educators believed they needed an education that would "strengthen and stabilize" their moral characters.<sup>33</sup> They felt it

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<sup>28</sup> Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 122.

<sup>29</sup> Brooks, "Catherine de Médicis," 419.

<sup>30</sup> Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories," 125.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Brooks, "Catherine de Médicis," 419.

<sup>33</sup> Gibson, "Educating for Silence," 10.

necessary, therefore, to reform the curricula in a second way as well as eliminating two-thirds of the *trivium*. Renaissance education treatises argued for the exclusion of love poetry, romance, and much of the classical, pagan literature. While boys read widely from the classical Greek and Roman texts, the core of a humanist education, to fully prepare to persuade their peers in politics, girls learned their grammar and their virtue from exemplars of silence, submission, and sexual abstinence in scripture and patristics to fully indoctrinate them in proper decorum and morality.<sup>34</sup> If women could quiet their tongues, they could surely pacify their proclivity for sexual promiscuity. So virtuous women were silent women.

The instant success of Ariosto's poem meant that his voice would not be silent among his educated Italian readership. By October 1519, the *Furioso* had done the cinquecento equivalent of going viral. About fifteen hundred copies of the 1516 edition of the *Furioso* had completely sold out. Ippolito, to whom the *Furioso* was dedicated, did not approve of the time Ariosto spent writing, so he added to Ariosto's already heavy workload after the *Furioso* was published.<sup>35</sup> When the Cardinal ordered Ariosto to move to Budapest in 1517, however, Ariosto refused, which Ippolito saw as ingratitude and ended his employment.<sup>36</sup> But by 1518, Alfonso, perhaps realizing the shame of allowing the greatest poet in Italy to find employment in another court, hired Ariosto as a member of his court, where the reading aloud of the *Furioso* was highly esteemed.<sup>37</sup> In a letter penned in 1520, Ariosto discusses just how popular his poem was, complaining that if the bookseller had not sold all of the copies he had on hand, he should return them to him

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> DeSa Wiggins, *Satires*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 126 – 27.

because those were the only copies in Italy left unsold, and that he could sell them “at once” as he was “asked for copies every day.”<sup>38</sup> The 1521 edition was even more popular than the first, having gone through at least fifteen reissues and significantly impacting the development of the Italian chivalric romance. And the third and final edition, originally published in 1532, surpassed the already impressive numbers for the first two editions. By 1540, it had been republished sixteen times in Italian, the first of which comprised an unheard of three thousand copies.<sup>39</sup>

Not only was the poem popular among the masses, it quickly attained canonical status among the learned in Italy. Javitch traces the *Furioso*'s path to the canon. Its affiliation with the canonical texts of antiquity was clear.<sup>40</sup> The second stage of canonization, domestication, or the illustration that the poem conformed to the ethical, religious, and artistic values of its time, took some convincing by those who edited and published the text. The problem was what to do about the female audience and the immorality of many of the characters. To justify the *Furioso*'s use as a moral guide, editors had to make explicit the connections to classical texts that were seen as moral. Some editors chose to ignore or suppress morally problematic sections of the poem, or limit their criticisms of those sections to points of grammar.<sup>41</sup> Most frequently, however,

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 – 47.

<sup>39</sup> Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*, 10. Dr. Christopher Cain drew my attention to another interesting branch this study might take by suggesting that the newly invented printing press might have had some impact on Ariosto's fascination with speaking and writing. There are tensions within the poem between the idea of the poem being “sung” by a *cantastorie* and the obvious intention of the author that the poem was meant to be and would be a printed not an oral poem. An examination of those tensions and the possible impact of the printing press on them deserves more space than this thesis allows.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 – 47. In chapter two, Javitch details the connections between Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and classical texts like Vergil's *Aeneid*, Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, citing Gabriel Giolito, among other sixteenth-century critics, as saying that the *Furioso* “possesses superior didactic value” to the classical texts because of its Christian rather than pagan worldview.

<sup>41</sup> T. G. A. Nelson, “Sir John Harington and the Renaissance Debate over Allegory,” *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 3 (1985), 378.

sixteenth-century editors domesticated the *Furioso* by including moral allegories in marginal or end-of-canto notes. Allegorization of the *Furioso* allowed editors to explain Ariosto's "questionable" material through Christian value systems, showing its exemplary value for both virtues to be followed and vices to be shunned. The *Furioso* entered educational curricula, the third stage of canonization, by the mid-sixteenth century, apparently the only vernacular text to have attained this status,<sup>42</sup> and the 116 sixteenth-century critics increasingly listed Ariosto with "masters" like Petrarch, Boccaccio, Dante and ancient authors like Homer, Virgil, and Ovid. Before the end of the century, the *Furioso* was known to be the most widely read work of modern Italian poetry even outside of Italy.<sup>43</sup>

In 1553, Gabriel Giolito published a Spanish translation of the poem, in the preface of which, he wrote that the poem should be translated into every language so that all nations could enjoy it, followed, in 1543, by an "anonymous and crude prose" French translation. The poor translation left the French less than enamored. The French who could read Italian, like Du Bellay, praised it as highly as Homer's and Virgil's epics. But the fact that a good French verse translation, "packaged" with illustrative annotations like the Spanish ones, slowed the spread of the *Furioso* in France. By 1600, it had gone through another twenty Spanish editions and twenty French editions.<sup>44</sup> Authors began imitating it, writing sequels to it, and adapting it into operas and other stage

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<sup>42</sup> Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*, 6. Javitch cites Paul F. Grendler, "Chivalric Romances in the Italian Renaissance," *Studies In and Renaissance History* 10 (1988): 87 and *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, 1989), 298 as his sources for the inclusion of texts in Italian Renaissance educational curricula. I did not consult Grendler.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-9. Javitch cites Klaus Hempfer's *Diskrepante Lektüren: Die Orlando-Furioso-Rezeption im Cinquecento*, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987), 301-09 as his source for the number of sixteenth-century sources that contain criticism on the *Furioso*. I did not consult Hempfer.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

performances.<sup>45</sup> The English reading public received Ariosto's poem when, as the story goes, Sir John Harington, a favorite and godson of Elizabeth I, translated the tale of King Astolfo and Giocondo for the ladies of the court.<sup>46</sup> When the tale reached Elizabeth, she reportedly affected shock and, as punishment for jeopardizing her ladies' morals, banished Harington from court until he had translated the rest of the poem.<sup>47</sup>

Completed in 1591, Harington's translation contains explanatory notes, illustrations connecting the poem to the literary and moral concerns of Elizabethan society, and end-of-canto moralizing allegories in order to attend not only to the common English concern that comedy and romance could corrupt the morals of men and women, but also to the growing English distrust and fear of the corrupting influence that all things Italian would have on men and women both morally and religiously.<sup>48</sup> Women, widely considered at a higher risk of impressionability, were warned to avoid travel to Italy, Italian art, literature, religion, and anything else Italian, including people, if they wanted to maintain their good reputations.<sup>49</sup> So Harington, most likely knowing that Ariosto's poem's being both risqué in places and Italian would preclude it from ever reaching an English audience, worked closely with printer Richard Field, directing the design of the book, modeling it closely on the Italian 1584 Franceschi and 1556 Valgrisi editions to, as Simon Cauchi argues, produce an Italian book that would be successful in England.

In his translation, he denounces the hypocrisy of the "graue and godly" writings that condemn "Italian toyes" like the *Furioso* as "hurtfull for his soule" and poetry as an

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 and Brooks, "Catherine de Médicis," 428.

<sup>46</sup> Ariosto, XXVIII. 4 – 74.

<sup>47</sup> Although commonly available, the story of Harington's first translation of the *Furioso* is taken from the preface to the online, digital edition of Harington's translation in the UCLA Clark Library's Chrzanowski Collection.

<sup>48</sup> Nelson, "Sir John Harington," 375 – 76 and Benson, "The Stigma of Italy," 146 – 47.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 – 147.

‘inticer to wantonnes.’<sup>50</sup> He argues that Ariosto was a “deuout and deuine writer,” a “benefactor of all studious minds,” and that the *Furioso* was “neither vicious, nor profane, but apt to breede the quite contrary effects.”<sup>51</sup> He adapts the forty-seven engravings strategically chosen from Franceschi edition sometimes to illustrate or highlight Ariosto’s meaning and sometimes to change the interpretation of the original text to fit an English audience’s social and moral concerns more closely.<sup>52</sup> His translation also abridges scenes of extreme violence, cruelty, and suffering, such as cutting large chunks from Rodomonte’s attack on Paris and cutting Orlando’s killing of Isabella’s captors to a couplet.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Harington makes seemingly deliberate changes to Ariosto’s language to alter the meaning from the original Italian so that the poem conforms to his own allegorical explanation of it. In fact, Cauchi states, the wording is so different that, “It can almost be considered free composition,” rather than a translation.<sup>54</sup> These changes alter Ariosto’s expressed ideas, yet they ensured that the book would survive the “stigma of Italy,” as Pamela Benson calls it, the English fear of Italian culture. And his efforts to ensure that the poem could be read as a moral guide and to satisfy the pious who objected to poetry’s and Italian culture’s inherent abilities to corrupt morals were successful, as the *Furioso* became widely read among the literate classes of England.<sup>55</sup> Ariosto’s voice had spread throughout Europe, and with it, his complex portrayal of women.

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<sup>50</sup> Simon Cauchi, “The ‘Setting Foorth’ of Harington’s Ariosto,” *Studies in Bibliography* 36, (1983): 145.

<sup>51</sup> Nelson, “Sir John Harington,” 374 – 75.

<sup>52</sup> Cauchi, “The ‘Setting Foorth’ of Harington’s Ariosto,” 167, 138 – 39, 159.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 141 – 45.

In her study of Sir Thomas Elyot's defense of women, Constance Jordan lists other authors who defend the rights and virtues of women, including Baldassare Castiglione, Lucretia Marinelli, and two publishers of the *Orlando furioso*, Girolamo Ruscelli, and Sperone Speroni.<sup>56</sup> Ariosto's name, however, is conspicuously absent from the list given that most of her list consists of Italians, two of whom were editors and critics of his poem. Perhaps she, as many other critics, believes that Ariosto's portrayal of women capable of great evil or the narrator's vehement disparagement of women precluded him from being numbered among the early feminists. Perhaps because he does not attempt to erase the negative traits of his characters, Ariosto was left out. But, in contrast with religious beliefs that "excluded women from the concept of man in scripture" because they were not truly human,<sup>57</sup> and humanist educators who believed that literary occupations and education were aimed at the cultivation of the "man," not male and female,<sup>58</sup> Ariosto deserves to be on the list because he views women as human.

Ariosto's portrayal of women engaged in the *vita activa* suggests that not only are women as capable of the many active, literary, social, and political roles a man played in his time, but also that their morals fall under the term *human* and the range of virtuous and vicious behaviors that the term implies. Women for Ariosto are no better or worse than men who are also capable of great good and great evil within his poem and without. The connection between women's moral goodness and their silence in the *Furioso* is an interesting study and suggests that, as Ita Mac Carthy notes, the arguments in the *querelle*

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<sup>56</sup> Constance Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women*, in Ferguson, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 377.

<sup>57</sup> Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory," 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

*des femmes* and other literature which espoused silence as the golden mean for women are too limited in their scopes and opinions to explain the complexities of human beings and their relationships with one another.<sup>59</sup> Ariosto's portrayal of women, their public and private speech, and the consequences of their ability or inability to speak imply that Ariosto questioned the wisdom of denying women a voice, including the "feminine" voice within, in matters of morality and what constitutes virtuous behavior.

Foundational in a study of women's speech and the portrayal of women who earn and maintain the reputation of being virtuous and chaste is Ariosto's personification of silence. Through his portrayal of Silence, Ariosto breaks not only the link between Silence and chastity but also scrutinizes the view that a woman's chastity is a measure of her moral goodness, and thus that a woman's silence is a measure of her virtue. Silence, according to the archangel Michael's belief, belongs in "the churches, the monasteries of friars and cloistered monks" where men have taken vows of silence to better serve God and "conversation [is] rigidly banned." But upon his arrival at the monastery, Discord and Fraud quickly "cure" Michael "of his delusion." He discovers that Silence, along with Piety, Tranquility, Meekness, Love, and Peace, has been driven out from where he belongs so that rather than finding the virtues living "amid the divine offices and the mass," Michael instead finds "Gluttony, Avarice and Wrath, Pride, Envy, Sloth and Cruelty."<sup>60</sup>

This discovery is also true of the monastery Rinaldo happens upon while seeking adventure in Scotland. Just as Michael learns that the monastery is the "new inferno,"<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, xi.

<sup>60</sup> Ariosto, XIV.78 – 82.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.82.

Rinaldo, too, finds a “well-appointed abbey” whose monks not only spend “a good part of its substance on offering entertainment to the knights and ladies who passed that way,” but have also dispensed with their vows of silence. These monks, who give Rinaldo enough “choice fare” to sate his body’s hunger,<sup>62</sup> are more interested in courtly matters than Godly ones. Silence it seems cannot remain “on the straight and narrow path” alone. Fraud, with whom Silence sometimes consorts, tells Michael that although Silence has “virtuous propensities” he needs the help of “philosophers or holy men” to continue to dwell among the virtues.<sup>63</sup> Without morally good people, as a monk should be, to keep him among the virtues, Silence forsakes goodness and throws “in his lot with the wicked.”<sup>64</sup> The Scottish monks tell Rinaldo that the “deeds” performed in the woods surrounding their monastery, “like the woods themselves,” and seemingly these monks who are clearly dedicated to gluttony, avarice, and earthly entertainments, are “shadowy.”<sup>65</sup> No one speaks of them, so the shadowy deeds that happen in woods, and elsewhere in the world, are often accompanied by Silence, as Fraud tells Michael. Because Silence has no inherent virtue, Ariosto seems to imply that silence itself is not a sign of inner goodness. Ariosto’s sympathy for female victims of conduct books, which helped to solidify the connection between speaking and wantonness in Early Modern legal discourse,<sup>66</sup> becomes even more evident through the narration of the Ginevra and Dalinda episode.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.54 – 55.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.89.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.89.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.54 – 56.

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, “Catherine de Médicis,” 419.

Paola Caro's examination of Ariosto's narrative technique shows how Ariosto gives primacy to the narrator over the narrative itself in two truly innovative ways. By creating a narrator whose voice, perceptions, and judgments are often at odds with Ariosto's yet who is a conscious intermediary between the narrative and the author, Ariosto creates much of the irony for which he is known.<sup>67</sup> Much less frequently studied is Ariosto's allowing characters to narrate full episodes that fall outside of the main plot. Caro argues that when the narrator gives up narrative control to characters who color their stories with their own personalities, Ariosto reinforces the motifs of "inconstancy and mutability." Through this alternating narrative control, along with the narrative interruptions that caused much disturbance and criticism among his contemporaries and later critics,<sup>68</sup> Ariosto undermines the stability of a continuous narrative, suggesting that nothing around us is stable, so we must learn to balance and stabilize ourselves.<sup>69</sup> But there are other dynamics that these revolving narrators set up. In one respect, Ariosto's narrator does what he says in the proem to Canto XXXVII that men do not do. He writes women's stories, not just the types of idealized Woman like Ginevra, but many possibilities of who women can be if given the space. For all of his mood swings about women, he records their abilities and their achievements, their gifts and their flaws, their humanity.

In another respect, the narrator does what he says in the same proem that women should do. He gives them space to speak, and thus write themselves into his narrative.

Deanna Shemek illustrates how culturally and socially ingrained gender and literary roles

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<sup>67</sup> Paola Lila Caro, "Narrator and Narrative: The Transformation of the Narrative Poem in the Italian Renaissance" (Doctoral Dissertation, Berkeley, 1982), 11 – 12; 165 – 166.

<sup>68</sup> In *Proclaiming a Classic*, Javitch thoroughly examines the popularity and criticism of the *Furioso*, including the major arguments for and against its being a worthy literary text. Two of the most common arguments against the text were its negative moral exempla and its narrative discontinuity, which causes confusion for the reader.

<sup>69</sup> Caro, "Narrator and Narrative," 169-70; Javitch, "Cantus Interruptus" and *Narrative Discontinuity*.

create a tendency in readers to perceive a chiasmic pairing of the four nouns of the first line of the *Furioso*, “*Le donne, i cavallier, l’arme, gli amori*,” wherein *le donne* is linked to *gli amore* and *i cavallier* to *l’arme*, even though it is the most difficult pairing for the brain to make. Easier for the brain, Shemek asserts, would be the first subject with the first object and the second with the second, *le donne* with *l’arme*, and *i cavallier* with *gli amori*, and easiest is pairing binary opposites, women and men and war and love.<sup>70</sup> Yet the most difficult is the most common pairing. I would like to extend her reasoning, to the rest of that sentence: “*le cortesie, l’audaci imprese io canto*.” Including the last two nouns of Ariosto’s list blurs yet another gender line. Constructed gender roles drive us to assume that the *cavallier* will perform both *le cortesie* and *l’audaci imprese*, but Ariosto’s ambiguous pairings imply that his women as well as his knights will perform both chivalrous and bold deeds, and they do. Perhaps the act most audacious that his women perform is breaking their silence.

The narrator, a character who relishes the control he exerts over both his narrative and his audience, relinquishes that control over the span of many octaves to Dalinda, Olimpia, Isabella, Lydia, and the unnamed wife who narrates the story of Drusilla, allowing them space to voice their views and to enter into the conversation that Ariosto develops among the narrators and characters. Pamela Benson argues that Ariosto’s original intention was to suppress the idea that writing was a means for women to escape their “servitude” to men.<sup>71</sup> I do not agree. By allowing women to narrate their own stories, Ariosto has given women agency and voice, thus suggesting that he valued and respected the opinions of women. Mac Carthy’s assertion that the “women in *gestes*” are

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<sup>70</sup> Deanna Shemek, “Of Women, Knights, Arms, and Love,” 70 – 71.

<sup>71</sup> Benson, “The Stigma of Italy,” 4, 20, 26.

stock foils in relation to the ideals of “virginity, chastity, and fidelity” for his “more modern” damsels<sup>72</sup> does not consider the characterization of the narrators of those stories. Mac Carthy’s offering of Ricciardetto and Ginevra as damsels in distress are more fruitfully examined when considering who tells the story. Ricciardetto, androgynous identical twin to Bradamante, as McLucas asserts, “gains his manhood through divesting himself of it.”<sup>73</sup> In publically living as a woman and privately loving as a man, he narrates his love story from a unique point-of-view and implies that he finds happiness because he has found balance of “masculine” and “feminine” within himself. And although Ginevra is the archetypical damsel in distress, Dalinda, the narrator of her tale, is the more interesting and important character in the episode.

The implications of allowing women to narrate their own stories, essentially “writing”<sup>74</sup> their own histories, are bigger than those of the narrator’s fickle mood swings between philogyny and misogyny. The balance of female and male narrators of the disruptive episodes implies a conversation between men and women about the destruction to humanity that occurs when either men or women do not work together to create balance within state, home, and self. Though the stories interrupt the main love story, Ruggiero and Bradamante, and the main war story, Charlemagne’s war with Agramante, together they form a kind of subplot, a debate, that offers no definitive answers but includes the voices of both men and women. When considering that two of the four episodes added to the 1532 edition are narrated by female characters and one by

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<sup>72</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 95.

<sup>73</sup> John C. McLucas, “Faccio o nol Faccio?,” 41.

<sup>74</sup> While I assert that Ariosto “essentially” allows women to “write” their own histories, I must clarify that Ariosto is in fact always in control of the pen. Ariosto creates a fictitious space wherein both men and women can speak. There are some female characters whom Ariosto allows to actually compose within the poem’s context rather than just speak their testimony, which I also examine. But when his women are as I say “writing” or “speaking,” it is of course always still Ariosto writing and “speaking” the text.

a male character, it becomes clear that Ariosto was concerned with allowing both male and female characters to have voice in conversations about both political and familial matters and allowing both the “masculine” and “feminine” have a voice within themselves. In daring to allow women’s voices to balance men’s, Ariosto destabilizes the ideals expounded and taught by conduct books and literary conventions, suggesting that Ariosto truly did believe that women were not only capable of intelligent conversation, but that they should have a voice in both public and private matters,<sup>75</sup> unlike Ginevra who lives in a society that refuses to grant her an identity. Her story illustrates the loss not only to the woman, but also to the men and the societies who deny them a voice.

Ginevra has, without a doubt, attained the unattainable. She is the ideal Woman, trapped in the ridiculous role created in part by the conduct books of Ariosto’s age, which were influenced by the resurfacing of the classical texts, those ancient “laws” imposed on women and literari of the Early Modern period. She is silent, submissive, and most important, virginal. Yet neither her silence nor her virginity, renowned throughout Scotland, can save her from slander and the “cruel and pitiless law of Scotland,” which states that “any woman, whatever her condition, who engages in union with a man, and is not his wife, must be put to death if an accusation is laid against her.” Complete conformity to the prescribed behaviors for women and a law that further states, “And she has no recourse against death unless a mighty warrior come and undertake her defence [sic], maintaining that she be innocent and not deserving of death,”<sup>76</sup> leave Ginevra completely powerless to defend herself against the false accusations of Lurcanio. Though

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<sup>75</sup> Though further discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis, an examination of the character-narrated tales and the conversation they comprise would make an interesting study on its own.

<sup>76</sup> Ariosto, IV.59.

Lurcanio believes his charges are true, we know that Ginevra is innocent because the woman who he thought was Ginevra was actually her chambermaid, Dalinda, bringing her lover up to Ginevra's balcony.

Ostensibly, Dalinda is a damsel in distress. She enters the *Furioso* about to be murdered by two hired thugs, though not very able ones; they run as soon as they spy Rinaldo approaching. But that is the extent of Dalinda's conformity to that role. The narrator places her within the literary convention, and in the same sentence, breaks her out of it, describing her as "tearful and anguished as any woman or maiden, or indeed as any man, could look."<sup>77</sup> Her androgyny sets the stage for the audacious actions she is about to both perform and recount. For over seventy octaves, the narrator gives Dalinda control of the story, during which time she exhibits all of the so-called negative qualities a woman can possess: intelligence, outspokenness, and sexual agency, but not without sympathy. The first of the characters in the *Furioso* to become a narrator,<sup>78</sup> she tells the tale of "Cruel Love's" role in her relationship with the Duke of Albany, Polinesso, a person so "cruel" that the "Sun . . . would avoid sight" of him.<sup>79</sup> In fact, she tells the tale, not to help Ginevra, even though it does, but to relate her indignation at Polinesso's cruelty in abandoning her and in attempting to "slay" her, "the very one whose unique concern is [his] well-being."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.70.

<sup>78</sup> Although Melissa speaks in Canto III to show Bradamante her progeny, she is not narrating a tale.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, V.5 – 7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, V.5 – 7. Nancy Ciccone, "Ovid's and Ariosto's Abandoned Women," *Pacific Coast Philology* 32, no. 1 (1997), 3 – 16. Ciccone argues that the *donne abbandonate* in the *Furioso* come to stand for rhetoric in the hands of a speaker who has no authoritative voice, a vein of which idea I will explore in chapter three. However, neither Ciccone nor I examine Dalinda as such even though she is the first *donne abbandonata* to appear in the *Furioso*.

Ariosto uses *crudele* interestingly and strategically in defining the relationship between silence and chastity as well. In the monastery where Silence used to reside, now live “*Gola, Avarizia ed Ira, Superbia, Invidia, Inerzia e Crudeltade.*”<sup>81</sup> Significantly, as Ariosto lists the seven deadly sins, the new monastic residents who drive Silence out of the holy places, he replaces Lust with Cruelty. Because *crudele* carries not only the meaning that *cruelty* carries in English but also a second meaning, the cold indifference with which someone rejects the love of the poet, Ariosto’s replacement implies that eschewing the pleasures “that all lovers crave”<sup>82</sup> is the true sin, not the lust that drives men and women toward one another. This idea is furthered by the first of Silence’s new consorts upon leaving the monastery: “lovers at night.”<sup>83</sup> Ariosto himself carried on illicit love affairs to which he attached great secrecy.<sup>84</sup> With two illegitimate sons by two different women, Ariosto began a third clandestine affair with Alessandra Benucci when her husband, Tito Strozzi, died. As a condition in Strozzi’s will, Alessandra had to remain single to maintain guardianship of their children and usufruct of their patrimony. Ariosto married her in secret, and they lived in separate houses to conceal the marriage.<sup>85</sup> Surely he held silence as dear as his love affairs, to which he gave great passion.<sup>86</sup>

Ariosto’s own views appear to be reflected in those of Rinaldo when he fails to pass judgment on his own wife by refusing to drink from the chalice for the sake of maintaining the secrecy of her possible extramarital affairs and therefore the love he bears for her. Likewise, Ginevra, whose problems begin when Polinesso ensures that

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<sup>81</sup> Ariosto, XIV.81.4 – 5; Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, trans. Turchi, XIV.81.4 – 5.

<sup>82</sup> Ariosto, I.51.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.89.

<sup>84</sup> Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 261.

<sup>85</sup> DeSa Wiggins, *Satires*, 120.

<sup>86</sup> Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 201 – 02.

“their” secret “love affair” is made public despite her best efforts to conform to the ideal of silence and chastity, escapes Rinaldo’s judgment. Indeed, it is the fact that Ginevra did not “preserve her secret” that Rinaldo finds most distasteful, not her sexual activity.<sup>87</sup>

Ironically, Dalinda, who admits freely that she committed the crime for which Ginevra is sentenced to death, is not judged at all for the crime. In fact, she is the only one who ever speaks about her guilt in breaking the law although she makes no apologies for her choice: “I loved him, I trusted him, and I did not look back until I had brought him to bed with me.”<sup>88</sup> The only hint that she fears consequences for her crime comes upon her arrival back to the city: “Dalinda was afraid to go further, but she kept going, encouraged by Rinaldo.”<sup>89</sup> The connection between her fear and its cause are left unspoken. I disagree with the commonly held assessment that Rinaldo’s opinion that women and men should be allowed equal promiscuity shows Ariosto’s cynicism about sexual inconstancy.<sup>90</sup> Sex is life according to Rinaldo: “*Debitamente muore una crudele, / non chi dà vita al suo amator fedele.*”<sup>91</sup> Rather, it seems Ariosto’s assessment is that sexual intercourse is a part of human nature that should not be denied to one-half of humanity. Through this use of the word *cruelty*, Ariosto breaks the link between silence and virginity and criticizes the philosophy that holds virginity or chastity as the measure of a woman’s worth.

Although Ariosto often uses *cruel* to describe female characters who shun a suitor’s affections and advances, he uses it first not in describing a woman, but to

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<sup>87</sup> Ariosto, IV.63 – 64.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, V.8.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, V.78.

<sup>90</sup> DeSa Wiggins, *Satires*, xxxv.

<sup>91</sup> Ariosto, IV.63.7 – 8.

describe Rinaldo's pursuit of Angelica. As Rinaldo chases her through the forest in Canto I, Angelica, compared to "a baby fawn or kid" that has seen "the leopard's fangs close on his mother's throat, seen her flank and breast torn open" flees in "terror" from "the monster" to escape "the cruel beast's jaws."<sup>92</sup> Rinaldo is cruel not because of his lust, but because he refuses to listen to Angelica's voice and tries to take her against her will as the leopard takes the doe. Six octaves later, the narrator implies that Angelica is a "cruel tigress" because she does not turn "gentle" at hearing Sacripante's sweetly mournful laments that someone other than he had taken her virginity.<sup>93</sup> The narrator convicts Rinaldo of cruelty with the direct comparison. But Angelica's cruelty is merely implied, guilt by proximity rather than direct comparison. Her cruelty in not giving herself to Sacripante is left in question.

In *The Masks of God*, Joseph Campbell argues that Pre-Greek and Oriental cults used the term *virgin* for their priestesses and deities, meaning that they were "not tied by any bonds to a male who must be acknowledged as master."<sup>94</sup> According to Carolyn Heilbrun, this definition was picked up by the Greeks and remained in their goddess Artemis whose influence resurfaced with the classical texts. Ariosto's first usages of *crudete*, his play with its meanings seem to comment on that classical meaning of *virginity*. The juxtaposition of Rinaldo's cruelty in attempting to take Angelica's body against her will and the implication that she might be cruel if she has no sympathy for Sacripante suggests that silencing a woman's voice by stealing her virginity, her ability to have a voice in the control of her own body, is the sin. The imposed silence on women

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, I.34.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, I.40.

<sup>94</sup> Joseph Campbell quoted in Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition*, 9.

then is the sin, not their sexuality. And in passing the judgment on the Scottish law, “*Debitamente muore una crudele*,” Rinaldo doubly condemns himself, once for being “cruel” to Angelica “when she was so enamored”<sup>95</sup> of him and again for attempting to take Angelica’s virginity, her agency, and her voice now that she no longer wants him.

Lidia, another woman given voice to narrate her own story, which takes the sin of *crudele* to its end result,<sup>96</sup> tells Astolfo that she is “condemned” to live in “eternal smoke” in hell for being “obnoxious and spiteful” to Alceste, her “faithful suitor.”<sup>97</sup> Before her story begins, however, she tells Astolfo that hell is “full to infinity” with both men and women, of which there is “no end to those who have deserted wife or husband.”<sup>98</sup> She says it would “take an age” to list all of the women who suffer the same “torture” as she, but to list all of the men “would take even longer.”<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the men suffer “worse” than the women because they have “deceived” women, more “gullible” than men.<sup>100</sup> Men are punished more severely because they prey on those they perceive to be intellectually weaker than themselves. Ariosto’s setting up the balance of guilt for the cruelty of unrequited love supports my earlier conclusion that Ariosto views men and women as equally capable of choosing, or not choosing, a mate, equally human, each capable of love or denying it to those for whom they have none.

Though Dalinda does not apologize for her agency in bedding Polinesso, she does make apology for her part in Polinesso’s plot. Outraged by his cruelty against her, she insists at least ten times that she had failed to see “his deceit” though the “thousand

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<sup>95</sup> Ariosto, I.75

<sup>96</sup> Thank you to Dr. McLucas who pointed out this insight.

<sup>97</sup> Ariosto, XXXIV.11.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIV.14.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIV.13.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIV.14.

signs” that she sees now should have revealed to her “how little he loved” and what truly “lay within his breast” and would have had she not been “so blinded” by the “fire within” her heart.<sup>101</sup> Despite the fact he has “revealed himself in love” with Ginevra and unabashedly asks her to help him with his suit, Dalinda believes that Polinesso will make only a “pretence [sic] of passion” to gain political status and wealth, that he prefers her “to wife,” that he will be her “lover for all time,” and that he will reward the undertaking of such a favor.<sup>102</sup> Despite the fact that, after Ginevra rejects his attempted courtship, Polinesso tells Dalinda that he must “gain mastery” over his desire for Ginevra, Dalinda agrees to costume herself as Ginevra while making love to him so that he can fulfill his desire for her that way.<sup>103</sup> This much she admits to knowing. Her complicity in this much of his scheme reveals Dalinda’s willingness to place herself in the position of courtesan, as it was a common practice for sixteenth-century prostitutes to wear “outrageous costumes” in order to earn higher wages,<sup>104</sup> hoping, perhaps, to gain the lifetime benefice he promised her. The enticement of rising from chambermaid to mistress of the Duke of Albany might be ample reason to agree to help him marry another woman and pretend to be that other woman during their sexual encounters. But earning a living is not the same as setting someone up to be executed for a crime she did not commit.

Dalinda is not unlike the Ariostean narrator. As the narrator blames his madness and bad judgment on the love he feels for his lady, Dalinda too blames love for becoming “quite divorced” from her “true self,”<sup>105</sup> and failing to remember Polinesso’s reputation

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, V.8 – 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, V.12 – 14.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, V.23 – 25.

<sup>104</sup> Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>105</sup> Ariosto, V.26.

as “cruel, proud and mean, evil and false.”<sup>106</sup> Perhaps because the narrator expounds and defends the sometime necessity of lying in the proem to Canto IV, or perhaps because just before Dalinda’s story begins at the end of that same canto, the narrator unconvincingly avers his own truthfulness as he introduces the hippogriff, her explicit and borderline excessive need to swear her truthfulness calls her reliability into question. It may seem hard to believe that she had no “inkling” that her position as Ginevra’s chambermaid is what made her desirable to Polinesso or that she had no prior knowledge of Polinesso’s plan to remove Ariodante as an obstacle in marrying Ginevra.

But her repeated avowals of ignorance could also be evidence of her growing enlightenment, the breaking of Love’s spell, and her disbelief that she had allowed herself to be deceived and used in such a degrading way by such a cruel man for so selfish and vindictive a reason as his not accepting that Ginevra preferred another man over himself to perpetrate so iniquitous an endeavor as to place Ginevra in mortal peril. As medieval Italian armies often placed enemies’ banners upside down in prostitutes’ hands to parade outside besieged rival cities’ gates, signifying both sexual and military conquest of the defeated enemy,<sup>107</sup> so Polinesso stages his theatrical exhibition, holding Dalinda, disguised as Ginevra, up to humiliate and demoralize Ariodante into quitting his pursuit of the princess by revealing to him “just what sort of a whore she is.”<sup>108</sup> In discovering that he had in fact never loved her, Dalinda’s love madness is cured, and it seems as though her repeated claims of innocence are as much about convincing Rinaldo

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, V.87.

<sup>107</sup> Deanna Shemek, “Circular Definitions: Configuring Gender in Italian Renaissance Festival,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1995): 9 – 10.

<sup>108</sup> Ariosto, V.54.

of her innocence in Polinesso's designs as expressing her own disbelief that she had ever loved the evil man.

Whether Dalinda's motive is the loss of money or jilted love, she tells her tale for herself, but, at the same time, she illustrates the absurdity of imposing silence and chastity on women by revealing the imprisonment and self-effacement Ginevra suffers under Scottish law and customs. When Ginevra received the message that Ariodante ended his life because he "saw too much," she takes the news "in dazed horror,"<sup>109</sup> remaining completely silent in public. Upon reaching "the safety of her bed," she has no words of her own to express herself, but merely echoes, "Ariodante's last words." She never speaks. Dalinda says, "Lord, what did she not say and do once she was alone!"<sup>110</sup> It seems as if there should be a question mark at the end of that sentence. What did she not say and do? It is interesting, too, that the question is framed in the negative, as if to say that there were any number of things that she might have said and done, but did not because her society is one in which there is "great sexual polarization," wherein, as Heilbrun argues, "women have no life without husbands and no identity with them."<sup>111</sup>

Further, when Lurcanio makes the accusation against Ginevra of being to blame for Ariodante's death because she had been unchaste,<sup>112</sup> her well-known reputation as "the very model of chastity"<sup>113</sup> does not save her from presumed guilt under the law. Even though the crowd and monks believe that accusation has been made "out of hatred more, perhaps, than for good reason," the accusation is enough to condemn her.<sup>114</sup> Her lover

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, V.58 – 59.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, V.60 – 61.

<sup>111</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 106; Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition*, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Ariosto, V.63.1-2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.62.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.58.

dead, the blame placed solely on her, and the realization that she must now fall under the punishment of the unfair law, Ginevra still does not speak, and her silence exacerbates the injustice perceived by everyone but the king.

Everyone agrees that the law is a bad one and that “the king was at fault in that he could set it to rights but did not.”<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, even though he “believes that the charges must be false,” the king seeks evidence to prove “whether his daughter is rightly or wrongfully to die.” So even if he finds testimony of her innocence, the king intends to carry out the letter of the law by “wrongfully” executing his own daughter. No one asks Ginevra for her side of the story. The king questions her ladies-in-waiting.<sup>116</sup> Even Polinesso, with his reputation for being a liar, is allowed to give testimony on his own behalf despite the fact that everyone believes that Polinesso has “contrived the whole deception.”<sup>117</sup> But Ginevra, forced into silence as the very portrait of the woman conduct books would create, has no agency, no presence, no influence at all over matters that would save her from an unjust accusation and an unjustly written and even more unjustly enforced law. She truly is a non-entity with no means to create an identity under the patriarchal power described by Dalinda and the narrator. Other the other hand, Dalinda’s “immorality,” her outspokenness and her sexual agency, is rewarded. Her ability to speak freely earns her a pardon for the same crime for which the king had refused to pardon his own silent daughter, vindicates her by seeing Polinesso’s cruelty and attempted murder punished, clears Ginevra’s death sentence and her reputation, and grants her permission to leave the country to go where she chooses.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 67.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, V.70.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, V.87.

Polinesso's punishment is an appropriate one. Silence, "much commended for his slyness," is, according to Fraud, now known to hang with "thieves," is "a party to every sort of crime," frequents "Treachery a great deal," and keeps "company with Murder."<sup>118</sup> Polinesso believes Silence is on his side. He tries to silence Dalinda, the only person who could break the silence, and "obliterate all traces of his crime."<sup>119</sup> Polinesso hides the "joy" his fraudulent and cruel heart feels at the sight of Ginevra "in such peril"<sup>120</sup> behind the silence he believes he has created. But after Dalinda reveals the truth to Rinaldo, Polinesso, transfixed on Rinaldo's lance, confesses most of the deception he had plotted. But his confession is cut short, when "half-way through a word both voice and life forsook him."<sup>121</sup> Justly, the liar's voice is silenced and Dalinda, "sickened of living in the world,"<sup>122</sup> chooses life as a nun in a convent in Denmark over living in a society that would favor a man "who works evil"<sup>123</sup> simply because he is a man. Although the convent was one of the few choices open to women during the Early Modern period, Joan Gibson notes that choosing a celibate life allowed women relatively more "psychic freedom" than other choices open to them. So Dalinda is able to choose a life that will afford the most freedom in the world in which she lives, again destabilizing the idea that silence and chastity are measures of moral goodness.

The tension created by having Dalinda narrate Ginevra's story illustrates the damage done to an entire community when women are silenced. Although Dalinda had no thought of trying to save Ginevra, her only care was to save Polinesso and herself, her

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV.86, 89 – 90.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.1.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, V.81.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, V.90.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.16.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.1.

ability to speak endows her with power. That Ariosto gives the servant more power over the events of her life than the princess has over hers is an interesting dynamic, one that implies that agency is better than station when station restricts human fulfillment. Ariosto seems to imply that forced chastity as a feminine gender construct by silencing women's voices is illogical. Moreover, as his relationship with Alessandra Benucci and his characterization of "almost divine"<sup>124</sup> women, as Mac Carthy calls Isabella, Drusilla, and Fiordiligi, reveal, Ariosto seems to imply that women's abstaining from sexual activity after their husbands die is an even more absurd imposition.

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<sup>124</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 104.

## Chapter 2

## The Saintly Woman

Christine de Pisan was the first to wonder, in writing at least, why so many different kinds of men felt it necessary to “think and write so much slander and such blame of women,” and why women had not written in reply to their “vile” accusations.<sup>125</sup> Over a hundred years later, Ariosto concerns himself with the same questions in the proem to Canto XXXVII of the *Furioso*. Despite the female canon from which Ariosto could have chosen exceptional women writers to praise, beginning with Sappho, Pamela Benson argues, Ariosto’s ability to find only one, Vittoria Colonna, is evidence that he valued men’s writing over women’s writing. Further supporting this idea, she says is that Ariosto makes Colonna’s superiority “analogous to the moon” in that it shines more brightly because it receives rays of the sun, rather than active in achieving her own glory so that she becomes a powerful literary voice from a decorous feminine *ethos*, thereby banishing male anxieties. This characterization, Benson continues, praises Colonna more for her similarity with Artemisia, fourth-century BCE Queen of Caria, praised by Ariosto in the same proem, more for her devotion to the memory of her deceased husband, Mausolus, and her chastity in widowhood than for her literary style. Benson argues further that Ariosto’s praise of Colonna, praising her as the “supreme poet” helped to solidify the “acceptable face,” the gendered image, of the female poet, the devoted widow in lamentation over the loss of her husband.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory,” 9.

<sup>126</sup> Benson, “The Stigma of Italy,” 19 – 26.

I find three problems with this reading. First, Benson argues that Ariosto's making Colonna analogous to the Moon makes her "passive and reactive, reflecting her husband's glory" rather than her own.<sup>127</sup> Ariosto does compare Colonna to the Moon:

Just as Phoebus confers more radiance upon his white sister the Moon, and attends to her more than to Venus or Mercury or any other star which moves with the heavens or gyrates on its own; so he breathes more fluency, more sweetness upon the one I speak than upon the others, and gives such power to her lofty words than in our day he has adorned the heavens with another sun.<sup>128</sup>

If the analogous terms as Benson sees them are plugged into the analogy, it is not because the Moon, Colonna and Artemisia, passively receives rays from the Sun, Avalos and Mausolus, that she shines more brightly. Ariosto's analogy says that the Sun, Phoebus, god of poetry, has given preference to Colonna and Artemisia, his "white sister the Moon," Artemis the virgin, implying her independence from men, not her dependence on them for "radiance." Further, it is not that she shines more brightly because the Sun gives her light, but that she shines more brightly than "Venus or Mercury," other female poets, implying that the Moon, Colonna, rules the night sky, the female canon, because her poetic skill is divinely inspired. The gods "breathe" into her "more fluency, more sweetness" than into any other female poet.

Moreover, the narrator says that Phoebus has given "such power" to Colonna's "lofty words that in our day he has adorned the heavens with another sun," giving Colonna equal poetic powers with Phoebus Apollo, or male writers. In giving Colonna "masculine" qualities, Ariosto blurs acceptable gender lines, raising Colonna from the "passive" light of the moon to the active radiance of the sun.

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>128</sup> Ariosto, XXXVII.17.

Secondly, Benson argues that in comparing Colonna to Artemisia, Ariosto reduces her to the “acceptable face” of devoted, lamenting widow. In contrast to Benson’s disdain of that role, Sheila Folliot discusses the widow’s power as a new space in which women could maintain power and autonomy in the Early Modern Era.<sup>129</sup> During this time, Artemisia was known for more than building the mausoleum. She was known for her success as a ruler in her own right after the death of her husband. In refusing to remarry, she maintained autonomy and political power. She led armies, advised Xerxes in his war against Greece, and knew when retreat was the best military option. Both her name and more importantly the choice to maintain her virginity in the pre-patriarchal sense after the death of her husband aligns her with Artemis, the virgin moon goddess. Ariosto’s metonymical association between the two women suggests that Colonna’s “devotion” to her dead husband and the public persona she created allowed her to maintain her own autonomy, just as Alessandra Benucci’s façade of chastity after her husband’s death allowed her to maintain hers.

More importantly, by comparing Colonna to Artemisia, the narrator sets up the contrast between Colonna, a writer who immortalizes herself and her husband, and other women, non-writers who follow dead husbands into oblivion. With her writing, Colonna “is so much the greater in that to rescue a man from the grave is a feat so much more splendid than to bury him. / If . . . other women deserved praise for having claimed burial

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<sup>129</sup> Brooks, “Catherine de Médicis,” 420; Sheila Folliott “Catherine de’ Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow,” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 230.

with their deceased husbands, how much more honour is due to Vittoria who, despite the Fates and Death, has drawn her consort out from Lethe and from the Styx.”<sup>130</sup>

Writing is above all for Ariosto. On the Moon, a place “sacred to Immortality,” swans pluck names from the Lethe and give them to a “nymph” who “affixe[s]” them “round a statue set upon a pillar in the middle of the shrine” so that they “remained on view for all time.”<sup>131</sup> Ariosto likens the swans to poets who see “men of worth” and “rescue” them “from oblivion—crueller than death.” Further, Ariosto’s narrator says that poets are “rare as swans . . . partly because God will not permit too many men of eminence to reign at a time . . . .”<sup>132</sup> Colonna, in her androgyny as sun and moon, is one poet during her age whom God has allowed to “reign.” Later, the narrator describes the fountain that Rinaldo encounters, formed of women being immortalized by male poets. The narrator says that those who “will speak of her to the full,” her being Alessandra Benucci, “will surely assume the worthiest of tasks,”<sup>133</sup> praising the ability of poets to immortalize both female writers and male objects and male writers and female objects, a common theme throughout the *Furioso*, regardless of gender.

Thirdly, Benson suggests that creating the image of the lamenting widow caused women to stagnate. But as Jeanice Brooks illustrates, the lament, a public voicing of private grief, gave women a place where they could assume narrative control without any loss of honor and destabilized the link between woman’s speech and her chastity.<sup>134</sup> Benson herself admits that Colonna’s writings reveal the active creation of a public

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<sup>130</sup> Ariosto, XXXVII.16 – 21.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.16.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.22 – 23.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, XLII.93 – 95.

<sup>134</sup> Brooks, “Catherine de Médicis,” 429, 431.

persona that would counteract the philosophy that “public articulacy in women meant loose morals.”<sup>135</sup> So this “acceptable face” was a step toward women’s independence and their ability to speak in public without social repercussions.

By linking the two women through their laments, Artemisia’s mausoleum, still remembered as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and Colonna’s poetry, still considered some of the best of her age,<sup>136</sup> Ariosto praises women writers who immortalize themselves along with their husbands through their own artistic talents. Benson seems to take issue with the fact that these women chose their husbands as the matter of their art, but she ignores the human condition that causes widows and widowers alike to mourn the deaths of their spouses, each in his or her own way. To read the desire to immortalize good qualities of a beloved spouse as misogynistic seems illogical. The complexity of the human condition and the havoc love can wreak on the most “masculine” men and women are two of Ariosto’s chief concerns, hence *Orlando furioso*.

The comparison of Colonna and Artemisia also functions as a technique to satirize women who choose to end their lives, whether metaphorically or literally, upon their husbands’ deaths by creating parallels among Isabella, Drusilla, and Fiordiligi and Colonna and Artemisia. Ariosto gives each of these three women qualities that Artemisia and Colonna possessed, thus making them, in varying degrees, autonomous writers of their “husband’s” epitaphs and “saintly” women.

Mac Carthy argues that, through their suicides, as Artemisia did when she drank the ashes of Mausolus, Isabella and Drusilla remove themselves from any possibility of being

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<sup>135</sup> Benson, “The Stigma of Italy,” 19.

<sup>136</sup> Brooks, “Catherine de Médicis,” 421.

seen as sexual beings and become “eternal and immutable symbols of ‘femininity.’”<sup>137</sup> I agree that their suicides, along with Fiordiligi’s, cement their “saintly” qualities in that they martyr themselves for the love of their men. But with the idea that they are icons of “femininity,” pure, passive, and submissive, I disagree. Each of these three saintly women is given one or more of the so-called “masculine” qualities that both Artemisia and Colonna possess, disqualifying her as solely “feminine.” Although Ariosto depicts a world existing under that binary ideology that leaves women with no positive space in which they can exist, so that these three women feel they must die with their spouses, his characterizations seem to censure that kind of thinking rather than support it.

Both Isabella’s entrance into and exit from the *Furioso* are accompanied by mystical imagery that seems to set her up as the “paragon of virtue,” the ideal feminine model held up by conduct books and religious tracts, the Virgin Mary. Orlando finds her because of a light that emanates from her, as a halo, “fluttering out from a rock-fissure” at the foot of a mountain at night. Then she is immediately associated with death. Orlando enters the “tomb in which living people were immured,” where he finds “a damsel with an entrancing face” whose beauty, arranged at the center of the spacious cave, turns the “inhospitable” place into “a paradise.”<sup>138</sup> The immediate tension between Isabella’s youth and beauty and her association with death helps bolster her status as the Virgin by making her the “deceased lady,” as Mac Carthy calls it. Though she is not “much over fifteen,” Isabella is placed beyond corruption through death imagery before any corruption can touch her. Throughout her short life, she manages to escape corruption by those who would cruelly take her against her will. Despite threats to her chastity from

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<sup>137</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 104.

<sup>138</sup> Ariosto, XII.22 – 27.

Odoric, into whose hands Zerbino had entrusted Isabella's safe journey, the pirates who save her from Odoric, and Rodomonte, who, at the end of her brief life, unwittingly helps bring about her martyrdom, she remains a virgin, chaste and loyal to Zerbino before and after his death. A martyr for love, her death seals her status as the most pure and loyal woman in the poem, even seemingly overshadowing her morally questionable characteristics between the bookend saintly imagery.

True to his style, Ariosto almost immediately undermines that purely "feminine" image, suggesting the impossibility of a woman being able to achieve, let alone maintain, the ideal level of saintliness, synonymous with chastity, called for in the literature of the Early Modern period. Although she falls silent in Orlando's presence, breaking off an argument with the "old woman," Gabrina, to maintain proper decorum, the narrator subsequently gives her, like Dalinda, the ability and the daring to speak, narrating her history to Orlando even if, as she says, "I have to pay for it with my life."<sup>139</sup> The feminine, "soft melodious voice" with which she relates the events leading to her current burial alive belies the cold, ruthless course of action she had taken to leave her father's kingdom for the sake of love. She tells how she and Zerbino had plotted a deception to allow her to be reunited with him. That deception, her staged abduction, takes her "naked and unarmed" family unawares. When Zerbino's men arrive to "abduct" her, all of her family members are "slain or captured and taken off" with her.<sup>140</sup>

She recounts how a storm leaves the rest of her family "swallowed" by the sea, but these were not her concern. She tells the Count that even though her "clothes and jewels and cherished possessions" had gone to the bottom of the sea with the ship, along with

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.3.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.13 – 18.

her family members, whom she does not mention, she was “quite content” because the sea had left her “hope of rejoining [her] beloved.”<sup>141</sup> Her willingness to sacrifice her wealth, her position as princess of Galicia, and her family’s lives taints her saintly status. But that is not Ariosto’s criticism of her. She justifies her questionable actions, like Dalinda and the Ariostean narrator, saying, “I no longer belonged to myself,” and it is “spiteful Love,” who is to blame.<sup>142</sup> She does not try to hide her guilt in her family’s deaths. Her subjectivity to love and its ability to influence her behavior makes her human. Like so many others in the *Furioso*, including Orlando, love makes her do things she might not otherwise do.

Ironically, if their plan had not gone awry, she would have left her father’s strict rule for an even more restrictive one, Scotland, where she would have lost herself even more completely, like Ginevra her future sister-in-law. But Love had woven “a web of deceptions on the sly” that would thwart all of the actions that she takes in order to be reunited with Zerbino. In showing her humanity in conflict with societal expectations of chastity, Ariosto satirizes not her, but the society that forces her into that unachievable role.

Deanna Shemek implies that Isabella’s choosing suicide as a means of remaining chaste is Ariosto’s way of supporting the patriarchal system that created such a necessity, both that she must remain chaste to be honorable and that she must resort to death to maintain her chastity.<sup>143</sup> While it is true that Isabella’s world is one in which men sexualize women and then judge them based on their chastity, I disagree that Ariosto

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.4 – 7.

<sup>143</sup> Shemek, “Circular Definitions,” 30.

supports the philosophy or the system that enforced it. Isabella finds herself having to resist unwanted advances from Odorico before Zerbino's death and Rodomonte after. After attempts to fight Odoric off, first with rhetoric, then with "hands and feet . . . nails and teeth . . . pluck[ing] his chin, scratch[ing] his hide, and shriek[ing] to the high heavens" fails to stop his advances, Isabella knows that she must be more crafty when faced with Rodomonte's similar will.

Isabella exhibits rhetorical skill in devising her plan. Analyzing her situation and her audience, she makes the conscious, calculated, and deliberate decision to trick Rodomonte into killing her thereby escaping rape and succeeding in following Zerbino into death, which was her immediate reaction to his death before the hermit convinced her to dedicate her life to God. Through her suicide, Ariosto reminds us that her goal is to maintain her virginity, the requirement forced on her as the only means by which she can maintain her honor according to the Early Modern ideal, making her suicide not the passive "feminine" retreat from the world, but an active choice to maintain her dignity and honor. She is a fighter, but she is young, in love, and untrained in martial and rhetorical arts. She is no match for a society that forgives men like Odoric, as Zerbino, her own beloved, does when he finds him, for attempting to steal from women the only measure by which society judges them. She is no match for Rodomonte's physical strength. As Hélène Cixous notes, there is no positive space for women with "masculine" qualities to exist,<sup>144</sup> so Isabella must become, as Edgar Allan Poe later described, "the

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<sup>144</sup> Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 105 – 06.

most poetical topic in the world.”<sup>145</sup> But Ariosto does not support this ideal. He satirizes it by hyperbolizing it.

Just as the narrator contrasts negatively the nobility of a woman who follows her husband to his grave with the nobility of a woman who immortalizes her husband, and thereby herself as the poet, before she dies, so he criticizes Isabella for the desire to follow Zerbino without trying to achieve some immortality, or at least life on Earth: “how wrong she was to tear even her golden curls, ever vainly calling her beloved’s name!” Though she cries his name, her cries will not last. Zerbino’s last words, “I beg and entreat you, my goddess, and if I can command, then I command you: for so long as it pleases God, remain alive . . . Should it later come to pass that you must die, then choose death as a lesser evil,”<sup>146</sup> also create a tension between choosing death and choosing life.

Isabella attempts to reach “the unattainable model, the archetypal, unrealistic one, the Virgin Mary,”<sup>146</sup> but cannot because of the human folly to which she falls subject. She is humanized with her will to be with Zerbino at all costs. As a “goddess” such as “the Moon,” to whom the narrator compares Colonna, Isabella’s light could shine forever if she were to aspire to the more honorable example of writer. But she does not. She begins the process with her devotion to Zerbino after his death. Her vow to keep “possession of his mortal remains” to the extent that “wherever she went, wherever she tarried, his corpse had to accompany her and be with her night and day”<sup>147</sup> associates closely with both Colonna and Artemisia. But her failure to raise a lasting monument to him makes her fall short of their examples. The “long and roomy” coffin, “well sealed

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 104. Mac Carthy notes that the idea of the “deceased lady” had not disappeared well into the nineteenth century as evidenced by Edgar Allan Poe’s statement.

<sup>146</sup> Benson, “The Stigma of Italy,” 20-22.

<sup>147</sup> Ariosto, XXIV.90.

with pitch” that she has made for Zerbino’s remains cannot compare to that which Artemisia had constructed to immortalize Mausolus or to the poetry Colonna writes for the everlasting glory of her husband.

Isabella’s attempts at a more fitting, lasting monument to enable her to save herself and Zerbino from oblivion are prevented because Rodomonte ignores her voice, though she tries her best to use it, forcing her to choose the path of the “lesser evil,” death, over rape. Compelled to comment on Zerbino’s last words: “I don’t believe that he could utter these last words in an audible voice; he ended like a feeble flame dying for lack of wax or whatever it feeds upon,”<sup>148</sup> the narrator seems to be in disbelief that one who loves Isabella as much as Zerbino claims to love her could ask her to end her own young life. The narrator suggests that Zerbino perhaps did not have the “wax or whatever” it takes, the hard-heartedness or envy, to maintain the patriarchal stance that allows women no identity without their husbands.

Ariosto continues his satire of women trying to attain the unattainable saintly role set up by the Virgin Mary through Isabella’s death scene. As Caro notes, Ariosto’s reproduction of epic and romantic hyperbole is tongue-in-cheek,<sup>149</sup> and Isabella’s martyrdom as she “joyfully” offers her neck to Rodomonte, “unwary and perhaps befuddled by the wine,” is reduced to absurdity when he “lop[s] her fair head, once the abode of love, clean from her shoulders,” and “[her] head bounces thrice.”<sup>150</sup> Although the bouncing head hearkens back to St. Paul’s martyrdom, Isabella’s fails to gain the solemnity that Paul’s achieves. Moreover, while Paul’s head produces a lasting

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV.83 – 84.

<sup>149</sup> Caro, 196.

<sup>150</sup> Ariosto, XXIX.23 – 26.

monument with each bounce, Isabella's leaves only the ephemeral sound of her "voice . . . pronouncing the name of Zerbino."<sup>151</sup>

Perhaps the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum*, Isabella's endeavor to achieve the status embodied by the Virgin Mary's superlative model falls short of attaining even that of Colonna or Artemisia, both more realistically attainable exempla. Calling her lover's name, the voice from Isabella's bouncing head recalls the bobbling, severed head of Orpheus. Interestingly, Alcidamas, rival of the sophist Isocrates in the fourth century BCE, credits Orpheus with the invention of the art of writing.<sup>152</sup> This connection between Isabella and the inventor of writing further suggests Isabella's failure to attain the role of poet, thus immortalizing her own and Zerbino's memory. Her bouncing head attempts to finish writing their love story, but its voice can only manage one word and fails to meet its mark. Isabella's life and voice are cut off prematurely because of the impossible social restrictions that make her an outcast if she does not remain chaste, suggesting that Ariosto believed that those social restrictions that kept women from attaining immortality through voicing their ideas were as absurd as a sixteen-year-old girl feeling the need to commit suicide.

It is not until Fiordiligi tells Bradamante about Isabella, her death, and her shrine that Isabella and Zerbino's story is written. When Bradamante defeats Rodomonte, she removes the arms of Charlemagne's knights' from the "mausoleum," leaves those belonging to the Saracens, and hangs Rodomonte's there to join them. With "a fresh inscription"<sup>153</sup> Bradamante records how she had freed the pass from Rodomonte's

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX.26.

<sup>152</sup> Ivan Mortimer Linforth, "Two Notes on the Legend of Orpheus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 62, (1931), 5.

<sup>153</sup> Ariosto, XXXV.57.

misguided attempt at gaining forgiveness for having tried to take Isabella against her will and thus forcing her to trick him into killing her. His guilt was limited, however, to his having killed her, so his penance was lacking, as he took no blame for having created the situation in the first place. Where Rodomonte had inscribed the names of the Saracens he had defeated,<sup>154</sup> Bradamante's finalized the historical record, telling how she had defeated him and why. Having been defeated by three females, Doralice, Isabella, and Bradamante leaves Rodomonte confused. His inability to listen to the female voice, to give it weight, even though he had seen its strength three times leaves him without identity, so he slinks off to brood in a cave for three months. But this is a stillborn baptism. Rather, he emerges still angry and seeks to destroy the happiness of Ruggiero and Bradamante, an act that takes what is left of his life.

In contrast to Isabella's suicide, Drusilla's is collateral damage. The unnamed, "unhappy exile" narrating Drusilla's story explains that Tanacro, the tyrant ruler Marganorre's son, abandons his usual courtesy, bravery, martial skill, and honor when Drusilla and her husband Olindro arrive in his father's city, and he feels that "urge which we call Love," which leads him "astray" and "contaminate[s] and defile[s]" all of the good he had ever done.<sup>155</sup> Immediately after Tanacro uses the "deep silence" of the night to lay ambush and kill Olindro, Drusilla has "no wish to remain alive." She begs Tanacro to kill her as well, "as a kindness," but, because the objective of his plan is to keep Drusilla, he refuses. So she leaps "off the edge of a ravine," but, bruised, battered, and

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX.31 – 39.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.46 – 47.

“skull cracked,” she lives. Tanacro saves her because he does not want to “lose so cherished a prey.”<sup>156</sup>

It is interesting to note that the woman narrating recalls the predator-prey imagery used by the Ariostean narrator in describing Rinaldo’s chase after Angelica in describing Tanacro’s trying to take Drusilla against her will. Further, she ironically uses the language of conduct books in describing Tanacro’s reasoning for wanting to marry Drusilla. We can almost see the narrator rolling her eyes as she explains to Bradamante, Marfisa, and Ruggiero that “a woman so beautiful and chaste deserve[s] the name of wife, not of mistress,”<sup>157</sup> suggesting that her leap had made her economic value increase in Tanacro’s eyes, so that he changes his mind and, rather than use her as he would a mistress, decides he will do her the honor of marrying her. But Drusilla of course wants nothing except to avenge her husband’s murder.

Contrary to Mac Carthy’s assessment that, like Isabella, Drusilla becomes a feminine divinity, Drusilla parts ways with anything “feminine” or “divine.” She takes direct action in doing what any soldier or son would do for a brother in arms or a father. But unlike Orlando who has the strength to avenge Brandimarte’s death, Drusilla must use her wits, “dissemble,” and “lay hidden snares.” She considers many options, but finally realizes that killing Tanacro will require her own death as well, which she willingly gives, “where and how better to die than in avenging her dear husband?”<sup>158</sup> She affects full surrender to Tanacro. Silencing her true feelings, her hatred for her husband’s murderer, she takes on the appearance of the ideal woman, submitting to his will and

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.55 – 57.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.57.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.59 – 60.

doing all that she can to hasten the wedding day's arrival. That day she not only tricks Tanacro into honoring Olindro, having his "tomb suitably elevated on two pillars," but also exacts her revenge.<sup>159</sup> Having drunk the poisoned wine first, she watches Tanacro drain the rest. Then Drusilla drops her "sweet docility," thrusts him away from her, her eyes and face "ablaze," and finally breaks her silence. Drusilla vents her rage, "Am I to be your pleasure . . . No—I must have you die at my hands."<sup>160</sup> She laments her lack of physical strength, "Alas that the manner of your death is not the perfect oblation I envisaged: had I been able to accomplish it as I wanted, it would have been without defect . . . You, I have killed you as best I could, unable to do so as I should have wished."<sup>161</sup> She and Tanacro die, but even in death she remains active, "masculine."

Although she has silenced her own voice, her face verbalizes her satisfaction with her accomplishment: "Speech and life died in her at once; but, dead, the smile still lingered on her face, happy to have punished the cruelty of the man who had wrested her dear husband from her."<sup>162</sup> Drusilla, far from choosing a passive suicide to maintain chastity, actively seeks justice for wrongs done to her and her husband. And in fact, her suicide does not protect her body from defilement as Mac Carthy asserts. Unlike Rodomonte's giving Isabella a shrine, Marganorre, angry at the loss of a second son, "savage[s her] lifeless body . . . rending and battering the corpse"<sup>163</sup> before venting his anger on all of the women in the church.

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.61, 68.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.69, 71.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.72.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.75.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.78 – 79.

Drusilla and her tale of courage might have been thrown away and forgotten had the woman not told her tale. Surely Marganorre would not have preserved her memory in the way the woman in the village does. Olindro's murder would have been quite forgotten, and the laws against women caused by her having killed Marganorre's son would have remained. There would have been no mitigating circumstances to speak on Drusilla's behalf had Marganorre been his sons' biographer. But the woman in the village ensures that the whole tale is remembered, the good and the bad. And Bradamante and Marfisa avenge the desecration by having "Drusilla's remains removed from their present defiled resting-place and laid with her husband's in as sumptuous a tomb as the place could provide,"<sup>164</sup> writing Drusilla and her active defiance of the cruelty she and her husband received at the hands of Tanacro and Marganorre forever into history.

Fiordiligi is set apart from the other women in the poem. Although the narrator describes her as "a damsel, in distress, by the look of her,"<sup>165</sup> she is not the damsel in distress. Her "distress" is caused by the absence of her "faithful lover."<sup>166</sup> And her distress is real. She cries, a lot, on her search for the missing Brandimarte, who has "slipped away without a word" to her.<sup>167</sup> When she chances upon Orlando's arms and horse wielded by Mandricardo, she "silently" weeps "for rage" at seeing them "ill-defended" by Zerbino.<sup>168</sup> With "tears in her eyes," she begs Rodomonte to save Brandimarte from being trapped under his horse in the river.<sup>169</sup> She weeps "on her own account" for leading Brandimarte to Rodomonte and his capture.<sup>170</sup> "Tearful," she relates

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.118.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV.53.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.60.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.89 – 90.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV.73.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.73.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.76.

Orlando's fallen state to Rinaldo.<sup>171</sup> And full of "sorrow," she tearfully relates Brandimarte's imprisonment to Bradamante.<sup>172</sup> But, unlike all of the other crying damsels, Fiordiligi's worth is never measured in regard to her chastity.

Despite the fact that they never speak words of love directly to each other in the poem, Brandimarte and Fiordiligi's love is quite physical and passionately so. Brandimarte "deeply" loves Fiordiligi, adores her "above all else," even "more than himself."<sup>173</sup> When he sees her approaching him in Paris upon her return after her long search, Brandimarte "as soon as he [sees] her, [leaves] the carnage and [becomes] all gentleness again; he [runs] to embrace her. Brimful of love, he [kisses] her a thousand times (or very nearly)."<sup>174</sup> And when they are reunited again in Africa, Fiordiligi, "inflamed with love,"<sup>175</sup> and Brandimarte embrace "and the first kiss [does] not sate his inflamed desire, nor [does] the second or third."<sup>176</sup> But their love is more than physical desire. The most mature love story in the *Furioso*, Brandimarte and Fiordiligi's marriage is also based on mutual respect, which is highlighted further by the comic foil story of Giocondo and his wife.

Ariosto sets up the parallel with the introduction that neither of the two husbands wants to leave his wife. The first of the three times Brandimarte abandons Fiordiligi, "his loyal true-love,"<sup>177</sup> he leaves without a word because he fears she will "oppose his decision" to leave to find the missing Orlando. In fact, "seldom apart from her," he means

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.38.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.33 – 34.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.89, XXXIX.43.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.60.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIX.39.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIX.43.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIX.43.

“to return to her within the day,”<sup>178</sup> but it does not work out that way. Interestingly, when he does not consult that “feminine” side of himself, for they are truly one, he finds himself trapped in Atlante’s palace of illusions for months. Summoned by King Astolfo, Giocondo wants to remain with his wife because he is “attached by such a bond of love” that he cannot “wish for anything she did not wish for.”<sup>179</sup> And he does not leave without her knowledge and permission “(hard though it was)” for Fausto, Giocondo’s brother, to gain it.<sup>180</sup>

Ironically, had Brandimarte told Fiordiligi about Orlando’s needing him, she would likely have not only immediately agreed that he should go but also gone with him to help. She proves her willingness to see that Brandimarte helps Orlando when she witnesses his weapons in Mandricardo’s hands. Watching Zerbino poorly defend them, Fiordiligi wishes that Brandimarte were there because “if ever she found him and told him what had happened, she did not believe that Mandricardo would be flaunting that sword for very long.”<sup>181</sup> She wishes a similar ability to have Brandimarte present, not for herself, but for Orlando while he is *furioso*. Giocondo’s wife, on the other hand, puts up such a pretense of opposition and despair as he prepares to leave, even after she has agreed to allow him to go, that Giocondo regrets agreeing to go. Her eyes “swollen with tears,” she does not eat or sleep and tells him she does not know how she will “endure” his distance from her and “not die of it.”<sup>182</sup> While Fiordiligi’s is a sincere feeling of loss at Brandimarte’s absence, Giocondo’s wife’s is merely an act.

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.88 – 89.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVIII.10.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVIII.11.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV.73.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVIII.12 – 14.

Upon realizing that Brandimarte is missing, Fiordiligi waits faithfully “nearly a month” on the narrator’s first assessment. And when she sets off to find him, it is to relieve “her desire for him,” which was “so sharpened” that she leaves Charlemagne’s encampment “without guides or any company” to find him.<sup>183</sup> Upon her reentry “in distress” and “uttering frequent heartfelt moans” sixteen cantos later, the narrator has expanded the amount of time she had initially waited in Paris for Brandimarte’s return to “six to eight months,” adding weight to her sadness and her faithfulness.<sup>184</sup> Giocondo’s wife, however, scarcely waits thirty minutes, let alone thirty days. After he rides two miles from home, realizes he has forgotten the necklace she had given him, and returns home to retrieve it, Giocondo finds his “chaste and loyal” wife “fast asleep . . . in a young man’s arms!”<sup>185</sup>

Giocondo’s wife acts as a foil for Fiordiligi’s activity outside the home, her speech, and her faithfulness. Early Modern ideologies made silence and chastity homologous to woman’s enclosure within the house,<sup>186</sup> yet these women do not fit those ideas. Juan Luis Vives and Samuel Rowlands suggest, ‘maidens should be kept at home,’<sup>187</sup> because the ‘Harlot’ in her ‘brutish filthynesse . . . doth the streets frequent.’<sup>188</sup> Giocondo’s wife remains at home, yet, before her husband’s side of the bed has cooled, she has found another to keep it warm. Fiordiligi wanders through Europe and Northern Africa and remains faithful to Brandimarte, “the most faithful of all faithful lovers;”<sup>189</sup> he trusts her

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.90.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV.53 – 54.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVIII.

<sup>186</sup> Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories,” 127.

<sup>187</sup> Vives, quoted in Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories,” 127.

<sup>188</sup> Samuel Rowlands, *Uncollected Poems* (1603-1617), 102 quoted in Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories,” 127.

<sup>189</sup> Ariosto, XXXV.37.

and she him. Though Brandimarte “could scarcely have accepted another’s word” about Orlando’s madness, he believes Fiordiligi, “whose word he had accepted for far greater things.”<sup>190</sup> Traveling the world over, “wander[ing] unescorted over hill and dale,” “from sea to sea, from the Alps to the Pyrenees,” Fiordiligi finds “no trace of suspicion between them.”<sup>191</sup> Though she is “fair of face” and lacks the physical strength to fight, which, like the other damsels, makes her vulnerable to attacks, she alone is never forced to defend her body against men’s affronts.

Fiordiligi’s “manner studiously modest,”<sup>192</sup> she knows when to speak and when to keep quiet, uses her words sparingly, and always seems to have the right ones for every occasion. Speaking for the first time in canto thirty-one, she delivers the news of Orlando’s madness to Rinaldo, and her words melt Rinaldo’s heart, “like ice in the sun.”<sup>193</sup> She alone of all women is able to persuade Rodomonte with speech. With her words of love, she softens Rodomonte such that he saves Brandimarte.<sup>194</sup> She convinces Bradamante, who had lost faith in Ruggiero’s faithfulness, that there are men who are faithful lovers.<sup>195</sup> And it is she who “scrutinizes the naked man’s face” and yells, “It’s the count!” upon recognizing him.<sup>196</sup> Not silent or enclosed, Fiordiligi’s worth is measured by other means.

Fiordiligi’s and Brandimarte’s mutual devotion and respect truly make them one, but Fiordiligi is not without self or identity, and she earns the respect of everyone she meets. She becomes an invaluable part of the paladin group, unknowingly continuing

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIX.43.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.89, XXXI.60 – 62, 47, XXIV.53.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX.43 – 44.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.42 – 47.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.73 – 75.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.33 – 40.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.33 – 42.

Brandimarte's mission to find Orlando. Although she is ostensibly looking for Brandimarte, she tracks Orlando, not "lacking in shrewdness and wisdom," with logic and keen observation, and leads the paladins to him. She is Brandimarte's eyes and ears. With "her own eyes" she takes in the "sorry situation" of Orlando's scattered arms and "with her ears she learned more about it" from the shepherd boy who had witnessed Orlando "run amuck."<sup>197</sup> Taking advantage of the time during Rodomonte's difficult climb out of the river after falling in with Orlando, Fiordiligi explores Isabella's tomb, searches it for Brandimarte's arms and surcoat, and concludes he has not been this way because of their absence among all the others.<sup>198</sup> She is Brandimarte's voice. She relates Orlando's story to people who can help him regain his wits. It is she who can trace the path of Orlando's weapons. It is she who can show the paladins where Orlando, in his madness, fights Rodomonte, falls from the bridge, and swims off. She becomes Brandimarte's strength. It is she who ensures Brandimarte's rescue from Rodomonte's tower. And it is she who recognizes the Orlando in Africa, announcing his presence before even Astolfo who had had divine help in being able to recognize the count. Though she dedicates her life and all of her love to Brandimarte, she is the knight errant who saves Orlando by being the gatherer and reporter of information. It is her knowledge that allows the paladins to restore Orlando to himself. Fiordiligi alone possesses immunity to the kinds of physical aggression the men in the *Furioso* aim at women as she moves about of her own free will. She wanders the world with the knowledge that, as one with Brandimarte, she has the strength of her husband, and all of Charlemagne's paladins, within herself to help her ensure that her voice is heard.

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV.73 – 74.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX.49.

Like Bradamante, Fiordiligi is also given the gift of premonition, but hers, unlike Bradamante's, is bad omen. Silently and in "constant dread that her Brandimarte will be torn from her,"<sup>199</sup> Fiordiligi makes Brandimarte's mourning and battle surcoat. Silently, she fills "the heavens with her prayers and laments"<sup>200</sup> as Brandimarte sails away to battle Agramante. Silently and "trembling,"<sup>201</sup> she endures the waiting. That night in her dream vision, she breaks her silence. The dream portents Brandimarte's death, as she wonders why and regrets that "contrary to his wishes," she had "woven and embroidered with her own hand" his surcoat, "bespattered all over with red drops," like blood spatter, when he had "bade [her] make it all black."<sup>202</sup> As in her dream, Brandimarte dies, cutting his voice and his breath at the same time, speaking to Orlando his concern for Fiordiligi: "No less do I commend to you my Fiordi . . ." but before he could say 'ligi' he was finished."<sup>203</sup>

No one wants to speak the "painful" words to Fiordiligi, but the lot falls to Astolfo. Upon seeing Astolfo, Fiordiligi does not need to hear him speak to know that Brandimarte is dead. Fiordiligi's lament is perhaps the most powerful in the whole of the *Furioso*. Her vision dims; her other senses diminish, and she slides to the ground as "one dead." Upon reviving, Fiordiligi, "vainly" repeats Brandimarte's name as she tears at her hair and cheeks. Then "like a woman possessed" running wildly around the room, she begs for a "dagger so that she could stab herself to the heart." Then, more loudly than she has thus far spoken, she shrieks and cries for vengeance, as Drusilla had done silently, against those who killed Brandimarte. That action already taken by Orlando, she wants

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, XLI.33.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, XLI.34.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, XLI.35.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, XLIII.154 – 56.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, XLII.14.

“to attack their corpses and wreak vengeance upon them,”<sup>204</sup> as Marganorre had done to Drusilla. Finally, she speaks the first private words that we hear her speak directly to Brandimarte, “Why did I let you go without me? Never before did your Fiordiligi see you leave without following you . . . I should have saved you . . . Or . . . come between you and avert the blow . . . if I had died in your defence [sic], I could not have spent my life better.”<sup>205</sup>

Her lament over, she never speaks again, and, as in life, Brandimarte and Fiordiligi become one in death. The narrator describes her refusal to leave Brandimarte’s tomb. The narrator describes the building of her cell within his tomb, and her retreat into it. She literally becomes, as Isabella is metaphorically introduced into the poem, a “living” person “immured” within a “tomb.”<sup>206</sup> The narrator describes her disconsolation despite Orlando’s efforts to bring her out of the grave back to the world of the living and her death within the crypt, which she had postponed just long enough to see finished and where she remains, together with Brandimarte.<sup>207</sup> Fiordiligi, her journey through the *Furioso* begun silently, travels, meets people, speaks, earns their respect, shouts her anger at the loss of her love, and finally ends in a willful silent death.

Brandimarte’s death caused Fiordiligi to silence her own voice, which had begun to grow louder. Her “suicide,” Ariosto implies, was a waste of life. Respected by everyone, Fiordiligi could have continued to live, live well, and be of service to other women. Orlando sent “messengers and letters” and even went in person “to fetch her away” from her entombment. In France, she could have collected “a handsome pension” from an

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<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, XLIII.157 – 59.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, XLIII.160 – 64.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII.26.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, XLIII.182 – 85.

attachment to the “suite of Empress Galerana.” Orlando offered to escort her to her father if she so wished. And if she had wished to serve God and other women who might want or need refuge from the world, Orlando offered to build her a convent,<sup>208</sup> where she could have been the ruler of her own space. But she chose none of these. Though typical choices for a woman, become a lady in waiting, return to her father, or enter a convent, these were the top levels, yet Fiordiligi still preferred death, suggesting that the roles open to women were not varied enough to entice a woman to live beyond her husband’s death.

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, XLIII.183 – 85.

## Chapter 3

## Powerful Powerless Women

Although having a voice is empowering, having voice and having influence are not synonymous. Most female characters in the *Furioso* have some measure of their own voice with which to speak, which they use to varying degrees of success in gaining power over their lives. Their success, however, is more correlative to the physical strength and willingness to listen of the characters with whom they interact than with their ability to voice their concerns. And it is not only women who take the weaker position and must make hard concessions to protect themselves from aggressors.

Ariosto's narrator makes what seems an off-hand comment that sums up the point succinctly when the ship carrying Sansonetto, Astolfo, Aquilante, Grifone, and Marfisa is blown into the waters surrounding Alessandretta. The ship's crew, knowing the city's custom that would either leave them dead or enslaved, wants to turn back to sea. Because the women's ancestors had been wronged, abandoned by their lovers, they would not allow any males to live among them until they win the right to become their prince by defeating ten of their husbands in battle and then pleasuring ten of the women in bed in the same night. Each of the knights, of course, believes that his or her victory in the two-fold challenge will ensue. Each faction "hotly argued" its side "until the stronger party so pressed the shipmaster that, much against his will, he had the vessel brought into harbor."<sup>209</sup> Here, the ship's captain and his crew are forced into the submissive role, placing them in the same situation in which Isabella finds herself. Without strength to fight, two choices remain: submit, which in this case they believe will mean death) or die,

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<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.61.

in this case to avoid slavery or dying at another's hands. In the same episode, Guidone, although a match even for Marfisa in battle, cannot overpower the thousands of women on the island, so he must submit to their will, for him a shameful existence as a slave to the women, or die. It is this lack of physical strength and the refusal of the stronger character that places many of Ariosto's characters in a position of acting from weakness rather than strength, forcing them into less than desirable circumstances, decisions, and actions.

Physical strength is not the only perceived weakness women have to overcome. In the both the classical and the Early Modern period, women were under special attack in relation to their "defective" rationality in self-rule. Therefore, because women could not rule themselves, they were considered unable to rule states; thus, as Europe shifted from feudal estates to politically consolidated states, "women were steadily excluded from military, financial, and juridical functions in government."<sup>210</sup> So historical examples of women in power respected for their reason and ability to govern wisely were imperative to the early feminist movement. Early feminists, including Ariosto, had many contemporary, powerful noblewomen from whom to draw example of women's abilities to govern: Eleanor of Aragon, who assumed command of Ferrara during Venetian attacks; Caterina Sforza, who maintained rule of Milan in her own name, and queens, Isabelle of Bavaria, who ruled France during the latter years of the Hundred Years War while her husband Charles VI suffered bouts of mental illness, and Isabella I of Castile, who ruled as an equal with her husband Ferdinand V to increase the wealth and power of

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<sup>210</sup> Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory," 21.

Castile and Aragon.<sup>211</sup> So critics often conclude that Ariosto's inability to produce any such women other than Artemisia is evidence of his misogyny.

Ariosto does produce other such women, albeit, not in the thirty-seventh canto. In Canto XIII, for instance, Bradamante asks Melissa, "Tell me though, enlightened guide that you are . . . just as you disclosed to me so many of my fair male issue years before their time, reassure me now about the women to be descended from me, if there are any who can pass for beautiful and virtuous."<sup>212</sup> Bradamante, the "peerless" hero of the *Furioso*, the hope for the future of the Este line and Italy itself, asks to know of her female line, interestingly, if they will be "beautiful and virtuous." Melissa answers that her female issue will have the mandatory ideal beauty, grace, and virtue, but they will be more than "chaste . . . mothers." They will be "solid pillars and restorers of illustrious houses and splendid realms. For all their feminine attire, they, no less than the knights in their armour, shall be endowed with eminent virtues—mercy, courage, prudence . . ."<sup>213</sup> Melissa goes on to list Isabella and Beatrice d'Este and Lucretia Borgia as the epitome of Bradamante's female progeny, and continues with a long list of others. Where Bradamante asks only for the "feminine" virtues in her progeny, Melissa assures her they will be meritorious for both "feminine" and "masculine" qualities.

Artemisia, as I discussed earlier, is unique in that she is both ruler and writer in one person. Her "feminine" devotion to immortalizing Mausolus is not the only quality earning her a place in history or in Ariosto's poem. Artemisia is a woman who rules from

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<sup>211</sup> John C. McLucas, "Amazon, Sorceress, and Queen: Women and War in the Aristocratic Literature of Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Italianist* 8 (1988), 33 – 55. I exclude powerful women like Mary I and Elizabeth I who ruled in England after Ariosto's death as they would have not influence on his thinking.

<sup>212</sup> Ariosto, XIII.56.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.57.

a place of strength, not of weakness. Like Fiordiligi's ability to earn the respect of those around her, Artemisia earns the respect of not only Xerxes, for whom she worked, but also of the historian Herodotus. Herodotus mentions only Artemisia of Xerxes's captains, finding her strength, her independence in taking control of her city after her husband died, "though she had a young son," and her "youthful spirits and manliness" in going to war a "great marvel." She, "under no compulsion," took on the role of "leader of the men," her five ships reputed second best in the fleet and her strategic advice the best among all of Xerxes's allies.<sup>214</sup> Xerxes chose to ignore Artemisia's advice, to his great loss, as it turned out. The next time she was asked for advice, Xerxes gladly followed it. When the seed of her voice found the fertile soil of Xerxes's ear, giving it the nourishment, the authority, it needed, Artemisia's character entered Herodotus as admirable, not just for a woman, but admirable.

Artemisia's male peers were not so welcoming of her presence, her military prowess, or the esteem Xerxes placed on her and her advice, and she fared worse among later historians as well. As Ariosto's narrator observes that the envy held by women's male peers causes men to slander women or leave them out of history completely,<sup>215</sup> Herodotus explains that Artemisia's peers, "who were jealous and envied her" for the "honor" given her "among the chief of all the allies" by Xerxes, were glad that she gave the advice to retreat rather than attack at sea. They were sure that, for her frank opposition to Xerxes's position, "she would be killed."<sup>216</sup> Of course Xerxes did not

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<sup>214</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.99.

<sup>215</sup> Ariosto, XXXVII.1 – 7.

<sup>216</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.69.

answer this hope they way her peers would have liked, but later historians would aid their cause.

In accordance with Ariosto's narrator's observation, Herodotus never mentions the building of Mausolus' tomb as one of Artemisia's accomplishments, nor does he disapprove of her acting a gender role "quite different from rigidly controlled female" roles of the "Greek model."<sup>217</sup> Later historians, like Strabo and Demosthenes, however, eliminate almost completely her positions in Xerxes's army and as ruler of Halicarnassus, and write about her role in building the mausoleum instead. Many historians today believe that, because of the amount of time it would have taken to build such a structure and the fact that Artemisia only survived Mausolus by two years, Artemisia neither began nor finished the construction of the famous tomb, leaving her successful, historical public role all but forgotten and her fabricated domestic one as her legacy.<sup>218</sup> This change in the direction of her legacy among the history of histories is singular proof of the argument that Ariosto's narrator makes in Canto XXXVII that women's history has been hijacked, so to speak, by the male historians who write about them. Comparatively unbiased according to Dewald, Herodotus preserves an admirable person in history, who happens to be a woman whereas Strabo and Demosthenes preserve the history of a notable woman as the epitome of the "acceptable face" of Woman. Artemisia is the perfect example in history to hold up in Ariosto's argument that emphasizes the importance of a writer.

Whether for her "masculine" or "feminine" qualities, Artemisia is a strong woman presented in a favorable light. Most women in history, however, did not enjoy this

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<sup>217</sup> Carolyn Dewald, "Appendix U. On Women and Marriage in Herodotus" in *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, (First Anchor Books, New York, 2009), 840.

<sup>218</sup> Gregory R. Crane, ed, "Perseus Digital Library," s.v. *Halikarnassos, Maussolleion (Building)*, Tufts University, February 22, 2016, [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).

positive status. Rather, most “act to preserve themselves and those in their care.”<sup>219</sup> Yet their actions, though they would be described as heroic if they had been performed by men, are described in such a way that makes all women seem deceitful and ferociously vicious if given the power to be. Although the act of avenging a wrong to oneself or a loved one was seen as noble in men, when women “reflect the same social values as men of their culture,”<sup>220</sup> it is seen as excessive and ruthless.<sup>221</sup> So it is at times in Ariosto’s poem.

Broadening the public spaces women might fill into the highest levels of society, Ariosto depicts women who hold titles of power, as Artemisia, whose admirable example he advances as the one that Vittoria Colonna has achieved, yet must act from position of weakness due either to actual or perceived physical or intellectual weakness. For instance, Baroness Drusilla decides that her suicide is her best course of action because even if she succeeds in killing only Tanacro, Marganorre, as evidenced by his abuse of her corpse, would have killed her anyway. Ullania, the Queen of Iceland’s ambassador, finds herself “insulted” by Marganorre. Because she cannot defend herself, Marganorre’s men “shorten her clothes” to expose “those secrets which Nature evidently made a point of hiding,” and men have “beaten her and done her other wrong.”<sup>222</sup> Had the three kings protecting her been armed and failed to overpower the guards, she would have been “wretchedly slain.”<sup>223</sup> So she and her two female companions find “forcibly imposed” humiliation and violation instead of death.

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<sup>219</sup> Carolyn Dewald, “Women and Culture in Herodotus’ Histories,” *Women Studies* 8, (1981): 94, 100, 111-2.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 94, 100, 111-2.

<sup>221</sup> Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 44 – 45, 52.

<sup>222</sup> Ariosto, XXXVII.29 – 30.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.114.

The narrator's judgment at the end of the Marganorre episode, "To exhibit one's unseemly parts is, after all, more endurable than to die; furthermore, this and all other disgraces are attenuated if one can say that they were forcibly imposed,"<sup>224</sup> is as ambiguous as discovering a solution to the problem that causes it. The judgment exemplifies the damage done to the character of men, women, and society when one party refuses to take the other's intellectual views or physical needs into account. It also blurs the seemingly binary choice between submit to humiliation or die to remain honorable or chaste. Read with one set of values, the narrator emphasizes sympathy for the women whose dignity is stripped from them by stronger men, forcing them to submit or die. Read with another set of values, the narrator blames women for the "disgrace" of active sexuality. But by assigning no specific gender and broadening what is shameful behavior from exhibiting "unseemly parts" in the first clause to "all other disgraces" in the second clause, Ariosto opens the conversation up to include defining *disgrace* and to what extent is the force imposed and to what extent that force attenuates each particular disgrace. Examination of the kinds of actual power that weaker voices, and therefore "feminized" voices, regardless of social rank, can actually achieve reveals complex dynamics in the human need to have a convincing and respected voice.

Queen Lucina's tale, told by one of King Norandino's "gentleman-at-arms" who had been with them when they were "driven" by a storm to the Orcus' island, is a transformation of the Polyphemus story in the *Odyssey*. Unlike the *Odyssey* in which there are no women either traveling with Odysseus or on Polyphemus' island, Norandino discovers that his wife Lucina has been taken captive by the "horrible monster."<sup>225</sup> He,

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.114.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.26.

“impelled by his frenzied love” at the distressing thought of losing “his bride,” has “no will to go on living unless he rescue[s] her,” so he goes to the Orcus’ cave to find a way to save Lucina. Upon entering the cave, Norandino discovers that the Orcus has a rather human “wife,” “a matron whose face [is] stamped with suffering and sadness.” This wife remains enclosed in the cave, while the Orcus is out with the sheep, along with “women and maidens of every age and condition, plain and fair.”<sup>226</sup> Although enclosed, she is not silent.

When Norandino enters the cave, she speaks to him first. Without being asked to speak she betrays her husband by warning Norandino to leave, but he refuses to leave without Lucina. So she betrays the Orcus again. Whereas in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus contrives the ingenious plan to smear their bodies with fat and cover themselves with sheepskin to save his men and himself, in the *Furioso*, it is the Orcus’ wife who calculates this plan of escape, not Norandino. The Orcus’ wife clearly has intelligence because she comes up with the escape plan, and she knows the Orcus’ schedule. We know she is not chained or locked in the cave in any way because she walks Norandino to the mouth of the cave where Lucina, her ladies, and his men are being held captive. While Mandricardo and Gradasso unchain Lucina from the crag to rescue her, we know the wife sees them because she is able to relate to Norandino in the morning what had occurred the night before. Further, after Mandricardo and Gradasso rescue Lucina, Norandino walks to safety and finds a ship to carry him home on another part of the island. So the wife could easily have escaped several times over, taking with her all of the other maidens, yet she does not.

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.33 – 39.

The wife and the other women choose to remain “prisoner,” as the wife says, because as long as they “do not depart from this cave,” the Orcus will not harm them, but if a woman tries to escape, the Orcus will “exact a heavy penalty—there will be no respite for such a woman: he will bury her alive or chain her up, or expose her to the sun naked on the sand.”<sup>227</sup> That she and the others would remain in the cave and allow Lucina to take the blame for her own plan suggests that she and the other maidens are truly afraid of the punishment that awaits them if they oppose the Orcus’ “law.” Their fear suggests that Early Modern consequences for women who broke silence or left the home were so severe that most women were not equipped to face them. The Orcus, unable or unwilling to eat women, to ingest the feminine, suggests his inability to balance masculine and feminine qualities in himself. Thus, women remain enclosed in the roles thrust upon them, and men become “monsters.” Although the Orcus is the extreme, Ariosto’s depiction of the Orcus as a “monster” who imprisons women and eats men to eliminate all rivals implies that Ariosto saw injustice in a system that constructed and enforced such a social structure.

Lucina, on the other hand, “graceful daughter of the king of Cyprus” and Queen of Syria, has no intention of hanging around with those women in captivity. Though ostensibly present for all of the misadventures of the wedding trip, she does not speak until she discovers that Norandino had not escaped but had come back to rescue her or endure captivity or death with her. She tells Norandino:

For all the misery of my plight . . . it has been no little comfort to me, my lord, that you were not with us when I was taken here by the monster. / However acute my distress at the prospect of dying, my grief would, in the common order of things, have been purely on my own account. But now,

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.40.

whether it is sooner or later that you are slain, your death will cause me greater sadness than will my own.<sup>228</sup>

Although Lucina regrets that Norandino will die on this island along with her, as she does not know yet that women are safe from being eaten, she does not tell Norandino that she would rather die than leave without him. Norandino expresses this idea many times to her, to his men, and to the Orcus' wife, saying "I should sooner die than live in darkness without you, my ray of sun."<sup>229</sup> But, as the Orcus' wife tells Norandino, "her life is not in danger," while his truly is in danger, so his plan of staying in captivity while doing nothing but "ruminating with the rest of the flock" is illogical.<sup>230</sup>

During their attempted escape, the plan to disguise themselves as members of the Orcus' flock seems to be working:

Not one of us did the monster detain until it was timorous Lucina's turn. / Whether it happened that Lucina refused, out of sheer repulsion, to grease herself as we had done; or that her gait was slower or smoother than that of the goat she was to imitate; or that her terror was heightened when the monster felt her rump and she let out a shriek; or perhaps that her hair fell loose—anyway, she was sniffed out: how, I cannot tell.

But Lucina's cover is blown. She is found out. Neither Lucina's gait nor her tresses seem the most likely cause of her failure as these would require sight to discover. Most likely, it is the shriek, her attempt at expressing her disgust at the monster's unwelcome touch, that leaves her taking the blame for the escape of his dinner and "chained perpetually on the prominent crag," from which, "morning and evening, [Lucina] would sign to [Norandino], a look of entreaty on her afflicted face, for heavens sake not to stay

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 50 – 51.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.50 – 51. Interestingly, as Ariosto's narrator calls Colonna the sun, so Norandino calls Lucina a "ray of sun." Coupled with her name, from the Italian *luce* or light, Lucina, like Colonna, is made equivalent to the masculine symbol, the sun.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.62 – 63.

there, as he was placing his life in jeopardy without being able to afford her any help.”<sup>231</sup>  
 He still refuses to leave her because “Devotion and Love” keep him bound there.

But when “two travelers” happen see her chained to the crag, she flees with them without a word or second thought about leaving Norandino behind. Mandricardo and King Gradasso succeed where Norandino has failed for three months. “By a feat of daring” they free her and give her to her father “who was here too,” a fact that seems too strange to be coincidence. Perhaps the earlier escapees managed to get word to her father, who promptly set out to free his daughter, leaving his son-in-law behind. But the unnamed narrator quickly adds, “Good luck rather than skilled tactics enable them to bring this off; they did it early one morning while King Norandino was penned in the mountain cavern, ruminating with the rest of the flock.”<sup>232</sup> So while Norandino sits with the sheep obsessing over his wife’s predicament without coming to any solutions, other men rescue Norandino’s wife, suggesting that he perhaps is not the leader a king should be. He is a sheep, a follower, not a leader.

Once Lucina escapes, Norandino waits for the “monster” to fall asleep, “journey[s] all day and far into the night,” and sets sail on a ship back to Syria “three months” before the telling of this tale.<sup>233</sup> This transformation of the tale places Norandino in the role of Penelope, awaiting Lucina’s homecoming, who because of a wicked storm, is unable to return to Damascus quickly.<sup>234</sup> And while Lucina, as Odysseus, is “lost” safely with her father on Cyprus, which is likened to the land of the Lotus Eaters with its thousands of “fragrant trees,” and the “sweetness” of herbs and flowers meeting “travelers out at sea,”

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.61.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.61.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.65.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.66.

drawing them in where Venus keeps them “until their last hour,” Norandino hosts a “solemn celebration,” as he pines for Lucina.<sup>235</sup> When the narrator makes the further disclaimer that, “What I have told you I have in part witnessed, in part heard from one who lived it all—from the king, who was there from first to last . . . Should you ever hear a different version, just you tell who propounds it that he has his facts wrong,”<sup>236</sup> he seems to say that perhaps Norandino did not act in a kingly manner. Something seems amiss. The knights conclude that Norandino had proven “outstanding love and devotion.”<sup>237</sup> But did he really? The host feels the need to warn Grifone that he may hear other versions of the story, implying that the unnamed narrator betrays a sympathy for Norandino’s “feminized” state, in which, he really has not behaved like a hero. Rather, he becomes a *donne abbandonata* of sorts.

Further raising Lucina’s position in Damascus, Norandino gives Lucina the power to pass judgment and sentencing on women, if not men. For their crimes against Grifone and the townspeople, stealing the prizes meant for Grifone as winner of the tournament, Martano and Orrigille stand trial in Damascus. Grifone insists upon full pardons for them both, “(this, because he dared not plead for Orrigille alone).” But Norandino, refusing to pardon their bad behavior, perhaps because of the embarrassment he feels for his bad judgment in punishing Grifone based on the testimony of liars and thieves, decides that Martano “be flogged, but not put to death.” Orrigille’s fate, however, is postponed, and she is “held until fair Lucina arrive[s]—to whose discretion, whether for good or ill,” Norandino “entrusted her fate.”<sup>238</sup> Ariosto gives Lucina, like Marfisa and Bradamante,

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII.36 – 40.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.67 – 68.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.69.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII.92 – 93.

albeit to a lesser degree, the power to make legal policy, implying that women have the intellectual power to act in these roles if only they are given the opportunity.

The stories of Orontea, Queen of Alessandretta and Marganorre share many oppositional parallels, not the least of which for this study is the fact that the story of Marganorre's vengeance on women is told by a woman while the story of Orontea's vengeance on men is told by a man. Both cities are under the rule of dark and destructive laws written by monarchs who feel betrayed by the opposite sex. Orontea's betrayal comes when Falanto and his men abandon and take all of the riches that she and the other daughters of Crete had stolen from their families when they left home to follow the men, stranding them on an island with no means of support or escape. Marganorre's betrayal is not so much a betrayal as his own failure to see his sons' guilt in their own deaths, one dies when he attempts to kill a man to steal his wife and the other dies at Drusilla's hands when she avenges her husband's murder at his hands. Orontea avenges herself by killing all men who happen to come to the shores of their island and taking their belongings. Marganorre banishes all of the women from his city, who leave and establish a hamlet just outside of the town, humiliates any women who happen to pass his city's walls unarmed, and slits the throats of any women who arrive armed or escorted by armed men.

Orontea, at first left on the shores of the island shrieking and crying to no avail as the *donne abbandonate* in Ovid's *Heroides* do,<sup>239</sup> realizes that her cries, her lamentations, will have no effect on the world, will change nothing, unless supported by strong action. Guidone's narration of the story of Orontea's abandonment and the founding of Alessandretta is sympathetic to Orontea, but not to her cruel law which leaves him

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<sup>239</sup> Ciccone, "Ovid's and Ariosto's Abandoned Women," 4.

feeling effeminate, mostly because he is trapped here where he has no use for weapons or opportunities to prove his “masculinity” or chivalry.<sup>240</sup>

Guidone describes Orontea as having no heart because she judges all men with equal animosity and vengefulness. He does not however depict her as having lost her reason. That she recognizes men’s ability oppress women through their physical strength and wants to prevent its happening is not without reason. Her goal is not to humiliate. It is to ensure women’s autonomy and counteract men’s ability to impose upon women the kinds of rule found in Scotland or in Marganorre’s town. But without a heart to mitigate her judgment, she is cruel and vicious. She goes too far. However, Orontea is not punished. She lives into old age. Nor is her daughter punished. Alessandra softens her mother’s heart a bit, convincing her for the love of Elbanio, Hercules’ son who is stranded on the shores of Alessandretta, to change the law from killing all men to giving them a choice to fight or die.<sup>241</sup>

Marfisa is not one to show mercy. She has been wronged by men; her step-father attempted to rape her. So she, already skilled in arms, grew stronger and perhaps harder. Marfisa’s idea of justice is severe, and her judgments are extreme and rigid. She may have right on her side, but Marfisa cannot comfortably let go of the binary terms of the *querelle* or her role as warrior. For Brunello’s thievery of her arms, Marfisa wants to see him hang. And for his disrespect of her and Gabrina, she leaves Pinabello and his lady without clothes or horse. She takes control on Alessandretta too. The knights want to draw lots to determine which of them will champion their cause, but “sturdy Marfisa” they want to leave out of the drawing because “she was not equipped” to “fulfill the

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<sup>240</sup> Ariosto, XX.63 – 65.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, XX.5 – 62.

husband's role" with ten women in one night.<sup>242</sup> But Marfisa, believing herself up to both parts of the challenge, for "where Nature left her unaided she was confident of making good with her sword," insists on being included in the drawing of lots because it is her "intention that travellers should never more, so long as this world endures, have cause to complain of this city."<sup>243</sup> For Marfisa, this is another wrong that she feels that she must set right.

Although Marfisa's judgment is that the women of Alessandretta should all be slain and the city burnt down, this judgment is not carried out. Astolfo's magical horn is the punishment the women receive for continuing to live under the law that causes men to die or be put into slavery. He did not want to blow it. He waited until he and his companions were under such a heavy rain of arrows that he knew they would not survive before making the decision to use magic. Furthermore, Astolfo did not use the horn to punish the women. He used it merely to escape the island. The punishment is certainly not as severe as that imposed on Marganorre.

In Marganorre's city, Marfisa takes the lead role in restoring justice while Bradamante and Ruggiero defer to her. Marfisa is in charge of toppling the misogynist regime and setting up the subsequent matriarchal society. Her judgments are harsh but fair because the men of the town had shown themselves incapable of ruling. Even though they had been "totally hostile to Marganorre" they were willing to "obeying most readily those they hate the worst" and, hiding their "secret wish," left "one man to be banished, another slain, this one to forfeit his possessions, that one his honor." Marganorre had silenced the men's voices, but, although the men allowed these injustices to continue,

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.73, 67, 74.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.69, 75.

their “heart[s], which [were] silent here,” knew it was wrong and “cried out to Heaven until [they] called forth vengeance from God and the saints.”<sup>244</sup> Although she does not write the new law herself, revealing perhaps a lack of formal humanist education, Marfisa has “the column inscribed with her law, which contradict[s] the one already engraved there to the death and ignominy of womankind.” On the same column where Marganorre’s misogynistic law was carved, Marfisa gives over political and domestic power to the women, and their will be no more killing.

So Marfisa writes the new matriarchal society, which is not so much a punishment on the men of the town, but a judgment made that they were not successful in caring for the town when they were in charge. None of them had been willing to stand up to Marganorre, who deserved punishment for his cruelty to both men and women, although perhaps not as vicious a punishment as the one he received, which included ridicule and torture, and finally forcing him to jump off of a tower. Apart from the treatment of Marganorre himself, who had done dark and horrific things, this episode is not so much female vengeance for male abuse as it is establishing a fair-minded government. Marfisa charges men with swearing “by God and the saints (or by any oath more binding) that he would ever be Woman’s friend, and enemy to her enemies” setting up a dynamic wherein, through Bradamante and Marfisa, the women will rule with wisdom and heart. Not only do Ruggiero and Bradamante allow Marfisa to give the new laws here, but Ruggiero follows Marfisa’s advice in next canto as well.

Despite the fact that neither of them is immune, as Fiordiligi, to attempted male dominance, Marfisa and Bradamante possess the physical strength to overcome

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<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.104 – 05.

aggressions and threats to their persons, which, although they do not have titles of political power, gives them power over political systems. The warrior sisters-in-law are frequently the itinerant voice of justice, the circuit court. Their strength, skill, and magic enables them to defend and enforce their own positions, which are often very different, and as such, they act as foils for each other.

Marfisa's gender lies decidedly toward the more "masculine" qualities. And she defends them vehemently. Rarely is she seen without her armor, which "manly" disguise allows her more possible roles in her society and enables her to act from positions of strength. Marfisa is not alone in realizing the benefits of disguise in trying out different stations in society. Bradamante and her twin Ricciardetto each disguise themselves as the opposite sex to positive effects.<sup>245</sup> But Marfisa is almost all chivalry: valor, bravery, and justice. She views any "femininity" in her character to be weakness. This is not so with Bradamante who acts as a foil for Marfisa. Interestingly, Marfisa takes on the "feminine" role twice in the poem, each time in her more "feminine" twin's, Ruggiero's, presence, once when nursing his wounds and once when she, Ruggiero, and four Chiaramonte brothers are enjoying the spoils of their victory over Ferrau and his mother Lanfusa who planned to sell their cousins Viviano and Malagigi to their enemies, the Maganzans. Marfisa acquiesces to her companions' entreaties to don one of the dresses and other female adornments, which she quickly spurns when playing the role of a noble maiden becomes a problem in maintaining her agency.<sup>246</sup>

When Mandricardo enters the scene and tries to win her in battle, defeating Viviano, Malagigi, Aldigiero, and Ricciardetto, Marfisa scorns the idea. In reply to

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<sup>245</sup> Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition*, 29.

<sup>246</sup> Ariosto, XXVI.5 – 23, 69, and McLucas, "Faccio o nol faccio?," 42 – 44.

Mandricardo's assumption that she "cannot refuse or excuse" herself from being taken by him and given to Rodomonte, "the custom of war must be observed" after all, Marfisa backs her words, "You are badly mistaken. I allow that you would be correct about my being yours by custom of war if one of these men you have overthrown were my Lord or my champion," with an assertion of virginity, "But I am none of theirs; I belong to nobody, only to myself: who wants me must first reckon with me." She orders her pages to bring her arms so she can use her skill in battle. Although Mandricardo is not as easily beaten as most of Marfisa's opponents, she puts Mandricardo to such a fight that even Rodomonte, who acknowledges very little good in women, must acknowledge her strength, creating enough respect in him for her to invite her to fight with them against the Christians. She readily accepts the challenge, more to test her strength against the French paladins in battle than to defend Islam;<sup>247</sup> nonetheless, she need not make rash and desperate decisions because of physical weakness.

Although she too uses disguise to allow herself more freedom in the roles she can assume, Bradamante is more willing to assume "feminine" roles than Marfisa, especially when it comes to fulfilling her destiny as wife to Ruggiero and mother to the Este dynasty. Bradamante is a whole person, more well-rounded and complete than any other woman and perhaps any other person, save her cousin Astolfo, in the poem. She has achieved a worldwide reputation as a valiant and chivalrous knight. And she knows the accomplishments she wants to attain in her future. Turning her attentions toward love, she takes action to achieve her desires, even when it means finding a way to change her father's mind about his choice of husband for her.

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<sup>247</sup>Ariosto, XXVI.73 – 87.

Her accomplishments as a single woman fulfilled, she is the one ready for marriage. Already mature and confident in her abilities to achieve whatever she desires, she waits for Ruggiero to grow up and always defers to him when they face challenges together. She lays her armor down, wears a dress, and runs a household full of servants in obeying her parents, and in waiting for Ruggiero to fulfill his promise to be baptized and come to ask her father's permission to marry her. But the domestic role and the waiting bore her and give her too much time to think. During this episode, her identity begins to crack. Bradamante, her strength exhausted, as other *donne abbandonate*, by grief and jealousy over the rumors of Ruggiero's engagement to Marfisa while awaiting Ruggiero's return, goes through a period of wanting to die. She, however, remembers her power and goes off to fight Ruggiero and Marfisa, her rival whose identity to her as of yet is a mystery, before making that unfortunate decision to commit suicide.

On her way to Arles, Ariosto shows Bradamante as reasoned and creative in her persuasive techniques, not destructive like Marfisa can be. A fair-minded judge, Bradamante is not necessarily looking for revenge, but justice for those not strong enough to find justice on their own. Pinabello's slaughter seems to be the one occasion when Bradamante lets her emotions get the best of her. But unlike others who lose themselves, her momentary loss of self is caused not by Love but by Pinabello's having wronged her family and pushing her into a pit. It is the sign that when she must avenge Ruggiero, she will be capable of doing it.

Against the humanist teaching that "girls need not, ought not, study all three arts of the *trivium*,"<sup>248</sup> Bradamante displays the ability to reason and judge fairly in Tristan's

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<sup>248</sup> Gibson, "Educating for Silence," 10.

castle. Upon her arrival, Bradamante learns of its strange customs of hospitality, which state that any knight wishing lodging within the castle must defeat one who has already earned his bed, and any woman wishing lodging must beat one who has already won a bed in a contest of beauty. Bradamante defeats a knight, earning his bed and his removal from the castle, but upon removing her helmet and loosing her long golden locks, the host proclaims her to have won the beauty contest as well and tries to have the other maiden, Ullania, removed for having lost to Bradamante. Bradamante, having won as a knight first, argues in defense of Ullania, saying, “It does not seem to me that any judgement [sic] can be regarded as mature and just unless an audience has first been given to the interested party, her denials and observations taken into account.”<sup>249</sup> Taking the space to speak her “denials and observations,” Bradamante continues that she won her bed at the castle as a knight and implies that she may not even be a woman: “There are others who have hair as long as mine, but this does not make them women. Whether I gained admittance as a knight or as a woman is evident enough: so why do you want to attribute the female sex to me when all my actions have been a man’s?”<sup>250</sup> Though her argument is clearly sound that she and Ullania should both be allowed to remain, her voice is not strong enough to change the host’s mind.

It is not until she reminds the host “with her concluding remark,” that she possesses strength enough to “sustain [her logic] against him any time he chooses,” that Bradamante wins the “debate,” a bed for herself, and for Ullania.<sup>251</sup> Though her well-reasoned argument is not influential enough in Tristan’s castle to win her position, her

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<sup>249</sup> Ariosto, XXXII.101.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII.103.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII.106 – 107.

skill in battle allows her to act from a position of confidence and strength. She need not resort to “disgraceful” behavior to assert herself against men who would silence her voice because she can back up her own assertions.

Bradamante’s humanist education shows in her ability to temper her emotions and reason when she judges Rodomonte and when she writes to replace Rodomonte’s selfish inscriptions on Isabella’s shrine. Confronting Rodomonte for his twisted “penance” she says, “Why do you make the innocent do penance for your crime, you brute? It is with your own blood that you should placate her: you killed her and the whole world knows it. Far more acceptable to her, then . . . is that I should avenge her by killing you.”<sup>252</sup> But she does not kill him, rather she strips him of his self-proclaimed position as guardian of Isabella’s tomb, false writer of her epitaph, and sends him to free all of the captives he had taken in Isabella’s name. Once he has gone, “[i]n a fresh inscription,” on Isabella’s tomb, Bradamante “set[s] forth how she had freed the pass,”<sup>253</sup> writing her own history, her own feat of strength in battle and erasing Rodomonte’s by removing the arms of Charlemagne’s knights that he had gathered after defeating them on the bridge, hung, and labeled with the names of those to whom they had belonged. Bradamante’s writing, her permanent voice sets Rodomonte’s wrongs against women right.

Bradamante encapsulates the issue of voice with and without power within herself. The narrator shows Bradamante to be a wise matriarch. When it comes time for Ruggiero to return to the Saracen army in order to “protect his honor” from the “shame and discredit” of leaving it unguarded, Bradamante does not put up a fight, for “had she stubbornly insisted on his staying with her, she would have given clear evidence either of

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<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.42.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXV.52 – 57.

paltry love or of scant wisdom.”<sup>254</sup> Bradamante knows her power, but is not corrupted by it. Rather, she does her duty “by not obliging him to stay with her as she could have done by constant entreaties. If he did not satisfy her now, he would another time.”<sup>255</sup> She knows that in giving a little, she will gain a lot. She seems to understand balance.

Like Bradamante, Angelica, soon-to-be Empress of Cathay, is a whole person. Empowered by her father in preparation to inherit his empire, Angelica loses some of her agency with the loss of her magic ring, so she finds herself in a position to which she is unaccustomed, a position of weakness. Angelica’s inability to fight physical battles requires her to travel with those who can protect her from male aggression, but this method of travel carries unfortunate side effects. First, she must circumvent the truth. She must lie to keep her protectors with her as long as possible, but she never lies outright except by omission of the fact that she does not love them or intend to marry any them. The diversity of knights and kings who come from the East, the Levant, and Europe to serve her implies Angelica’s ability to speak multiple languages, which she seems to be able to use to communicate with her protectors. She, like Orlando, who, as narrator says, can pass for a native in the East because he speaks the languages so well, must be speaking a variety of languages. But as the “knowledge of languages . . . signified only a woman’s charming accomplishments, not her authority”<sup>256</sup> in Early Modern Europe, Angelica’s ability to speak languages fails to give her the authority to stop them from taking her against her will. Rather they label her unchaste because she needs men’s protection and cruel because they all desire her virginity, in both senses of the word, but

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<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVII.116, XXXVIII.3.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXVIII.6

<sup>256</sup> Gibson, “Educating for Silence,” 19.

she refuses to it, in both senses of the word, to any of them. But the recovery of her ring allows her to regain what is rightfully hers, the same power that Fiordiligi seems to possess naturally and that Bradamante and Marfisa gain through physical strength. Able to travel alone thanks to the invisibility the ring affords her, Angelica seeks her way home, without being at the mercy of men, to her empire where her voice is respected.

When she happens upon the mortally wounded Medoro, her further empowerment is revealed as she recollects “the surgeon’s art which she had acquired in India (where it appears that this skill is noble and worthy and highly esteemed, a skill transmitted from father to son rather than acquired by book-learning) . . . .”<sup>257</sup> Given a father who takes the time to teach his daughter ancient lessons in healing arts that are usually reserved for sons, Angelica’s medical wisdom gives her a place from which she can act from confidence. But it is not confidence that causes her to decide “to treat him with the juices secreted by herbs.”<sup>258</sup> Love causes Angelica to remember her learning.

As Medoro heals under her care, Angelica’s passion for him increases every day. As she falls deeper and deeper in love, she tries to maintain the decorum of silence. But love will not allow her to remain silent, and “If she was not to die of longing, she would have to help herself without delay.” Medoro was nearly completely recovered from his injuries, and “it was clear to her that there was no time to wait until she was invited to take what she craved. So, snapping the reins of modesty, she spoke out as boldly with her tongue as with her eyes and asked for mercy there and then—which he, perhaps unknowingly, conceded to her.”<sup>259</sup> Too empowered by the confidence in the identity

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<sup>257</sup> Ariosto, XIX.20.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.20.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.38

formed under a caring father to remain silent, Angelica voices her passion and finds happiness, the only pure happiness in the entire poem. Medoro and she each give of themselves willingly to the other and become wholly fulfilled people and exemplify the most mutually respectful partnership between the sexes in the poem, with perhaps the exception of Bradamante and Ruggiero, once Ruggiero matures.

Furthermore, Angelica does not lose her identity after her marriage. She decides when “they had tarried” on their honeymoon “all too long.” Angelica holds the power to “place on Medoro’s head” the crown she holds by right. And escape Europe to the exotic Orient, a noble yet fictitious place where they can respect each other and work together to rule as equals, perhaps too perfectly to exist in Europe, the real world.

Before they leave for the East, however, they spend their honeymoon writing, among other things. Medoro’s verse is at the center, the entrance, the threshold of the cave in which the newlyweds spend their days and on the walls and window sills of the inn where they spend their nights in pleasure. Angelica’s writing is in the margins of the love grotto, surrounding Medoro’s verse. Like Colonna’s husband, Medoro is at the center of Angelica’s writing; he is the core of her art and expression. The matter of Angelica’s writing, like that of Colonna, expresses her love and devotion, consisting of *Angelica* and *Medoro* connected by “love-knots.”

When Orlando happens upon the love paradise, he recognizes her handwriting, having seen her script “a hundred times.” Orlando “had only to look closely at the letters to be sure that they were formed by the hand of his goddess,”<sup>260</sup> yet he cannot, will not believe that she loves another, even in her own handwriting. To Orlando, what she voiced

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<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIII.102.

in writing before is unimportant compared to these two words. Yet these words Orlando cannot believe; he refuses to believe. That she acted upon her own desires he tries to deny. When Orlando reads the love poetry by Medoro, it becomes more difficult to deny Angelica's written messages of love, happiness, and fulfillment, and "The harder he sought for rest, the worse the misery and affliction he procured himself—every wall, every door, every window was covered with the hateful inscriptions."<sup>261</sup> But when the herdsman tells the tale of the two lovers who had inscribed their messages of love all over the woods and shepherd home, Orlando cannot bear to have her writing exist. He cannot allow her to be part of history if it isn't he who is at the center of her expression. Like the jealous men whom the narrator describes in the proem to canto thirty-seven, Orlando attempts to destroy her writing, erase it from history. He rips up the trees on which she had carved her love, piling them on top of each other, trying to ensure that those hated messages would not be read by future generations.

He loses all reason in trying to destroy Angelica's voice, which he did not want to hear, losing his own power of speech when he realizes Angelica loves someone else, transforming him, in the Renaissance view, from human to brute.<sup>262</sup> Orlando silenced in his fury and jealousy, violates the acceptable "value system" for women's writing that Colonna had solidified when she created the persona of the widow in lament.<sup>263</sup> Within Angelica's character, Ariosto depicts the tensions created by expanding educational opportunities for women without a corresponding expansion of acceptable social roles for educated women. Angelica, despite her education and birth, has no authoritative voice,

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<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIII.117.

<sup>262</sup> Gibson, "Educating for Silence," 13. Gibson notes that in the Renaissance view, speech distinguished the human from the brute.

<sup>263</sup> Dr. McLucas shared this insight in a discussion with me about this topic.

yet she is a woman in control of her own life who is able to find happiness because she is willing to speak and face the consequences of that speech. Her silence never redeems her. It is only when she breaks her silence that we see her as a complete human being, neither cruel nor promiscuous, neither truthful nor mendacious. When she speaks, we see the unfairness inherent in a society that expects women to maintain a silence that merely enables men to convict them of whatever crimes of which they choose to accuse them without affording them any rewards for maintaining it.

## Conclusion

In a poem as “noisy” as the *Orlando furioso*,<sup>264</sup> it seems only natural that, true to his style, Ariosto would balance the noise with silence. As I conclude and think about all of the silences that I omit because of the space constraints of this thesis, I realize that I have only just begun to mine the poet’s wisdom on the implications and importance, the necessity and absurdity of silence. While his portrayal of Silence suggests that outward shows of silence cannot measure inner goodness or vice versa, Ariosto himself seemed to seek and never find the silence in which he longed to compose. Still, Ariosto breaks the connection between silence and virtue in women, illustrating that silence can be a sign of both virtue and vice. Silence, actively chosen can be a vital part of human growth. But the imposition of silence on others, Ariosto seems to imply, is *crudele* and deforms society as well as the women silenced.

In a moment of clarity, Ariosto’s narrator says that Silence spreads “a thick veil of mist” everywhere, bringing “some singular property” that makes “everyone deaf and blind.”<sup>265</sup> When one half of the population is silenced, everyone is deaf and blind; humanity is out of balance. Women’s necessity to voice their needs and desires is illustrated when Isabella tells Orlando about her plight even though she knows that she will “have to pay for it with [her] life,”<sup>266</sup> and when Lidia says that Astolfo’s offer to take her “reputation” back to the “lovely light of day” is such a “gift” that “appeals” to her “so strongly it drags the words out” of her, “though to speak is irksome and tiring.”<sup>267</sup> Ariosto’s female characters know that their speech will cause them suffering, but to many

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<sup>264</sup> Eduardo Saccone, “Figures of Silence in the *Orlando furioso*,” *MLN* 107 (1992), 36.

<sup>265</sup> Ariosto, XIV.97.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.3.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIV.10.

of them, the consequences are worth the risks. Lidia wants to be remembered in the “light of day” because to not be remembered, to have no voice is a worse hell than the “dense smoke” that causes her “eyes constantly [to] water.”<sup>268</sup>

By giving women voice, Ariosto seems to imply that both women and men are equally imperfectly and perfectly human. He counts them equally chaste and unchaste. Each sex is equally unfaithful and faithful. Each sex can be *crudele* in matters of love. Each sex can seek revenge for a perceived wrong. For Ariosto, it seems that balance is key. For every faithful spouse, Ariosto illustrates an unfaithful one. For every unfair judge, like Orontea, Ariosto creates a fair one, like Lucina. For every unfair law, like the one in Scotland, Ariosto presents a hero like Rinaldo to set it right. For every woman who is not strong enough to bear the consequences of speaking out, like the Orcus’s wife, Ariosto depicts another brave enough to risk the *furor* of men who cannot bear to hear their messages for the sake of making art and love, like Angelica. Giving both male and female characters the voice to bring each other back into balanced existence, Ariosto manages to tame the unwieldy world of the *Furioso* and, if only tenuously, rescues it and the men and women who inhabit it from the dangers to society and self that disparity precipitates.

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<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXIV.43 – 44.

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